Parental beliefs on their ability to support child language development

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Abstract

This study examines parental awareness regarding their role in their child’s language development. The parents participated in a parent-based language intervention project (SPRINT) during which they received information about language development in young children, available in video materials that could be accessed on-line during the intervention period. Before and after the intervention period, the parents received a questionnaire targeting their attitudes towards the impact that their daily language interaction with the child might have. Earlier studies have shown that parents have major impact on their children’s language development (Girolametto, Pearce & Weitzman, 1997; Buschmann, Jooss, Feldhusen, Pietz & Philippi, 2009; Buschmann, Jooss, Rupp, Dockter, Blaschtikowitz, Heggen & Pietz, 2008), however, they have not addressed directly the parental beliefs. The results indicate that a majority of the parents change their beliefs concerning children’s language development after the intervention. More than 60 % of the parents answered that their participation gave them further insight in how to support their child’s linguistic and communicative development. Implications for speech and language pathologists and other professionals working with parent-based interventions are discussed.

Introduction

Parents have major impact on children’s speech development. By using supportive strategies parents can influence their children to use more complex syllable shapes, expand the amount of different speech sounds, (Girolametto, Pearce & Weitzman, 1997) and to use more different word combinations (Girolametto & Pearce, 1996). Such supportive strategies could for example be; using highly concentrated presentations of target words without requiring responses (Girolametto et al. 1997) and using prosodic exaggerations (Panneton, Cooper, Abraham, Berman & Staska, 1997).

Previous studies have shown that parents of children with a developmental language delay, who have knowledge about how to adjust to their child’s developmental language level, can establish coherence in conversation between their child and themselves (e.g. Van Balkom, 2010). One study has shown that the incidence for specific language impairment can be reduced by intense parent-based intervention (Buschmann et al. 2008). Therefore, early efforts should be regarded as important and one should not “wait and see”. Another parent-based intervention directed to children with speech delays, showed results in reduced symptoms of the delays (Buschmann, Jooss, Feldhusen, Pietz & Philippi, 2009).

It is invaluable that parents know what strategies to use when it comes to aid and support their children’s development (Roberts & Kaiser, 2011). Parental beliefs regarding their children’s development is described as “if beliefs about development influence parent’s behaviour, then beliefs are an important key to understanding variation in childrearing practices” (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). One should therefore assume that parental beliefs about child language development influence children in an inevitable strong way.

This study investigates whether parents of children aged 24 and 30 months, taking part of a parent-based intervention, are aware of their ability to support their child’s language development, and if the intervention can contribute to that awareness. The hypothesis is that parents’ beliefs on their ability to support child language development will increase after taking part of the intervention material.
Method

Participants

The subjects, who participated in the longitudinal language intervention project SPRINT\(^1\), had randomly been selected in four groups, three test groups and one control group. This study applied the two test groups that had answered the questionnaire both pre- and post-intervention. The subjects were 188 parents from Stockholm area, both men and women. In total, parents of 108 children, both girls and boys born 2008, participated. At least one parent in each family had Swedish as a native language.

Material

To find out if, and to what extent, parents change their beliefs about their ability to support their child’s language development after taking part of a parent-based intervention material, two questionnaires were used: one pre- and one post-intervention. The statements in the questionnaires were both positively and negatively posed and concerned parental beliefs, knowledge and ideas about their child’s language development, communication with children and child speech. The pre-intervention questionnaire consisted of 22 statements. The post-intervention questionnaire consisted of 33 statements, where the 22 first statements were the same as in the pre-intervention questionnaire. The following 11 post-questionnaire statements concerned the intervention, e.g. thoughts regarding the intervention material. Also, post-questionnaire statements were posed to find out if the subjects had been taken part of the intervention or not. The questionnaire was designed in Likert scale with seven possible options from “I totally agree” to “I totally disagree” with “I neither agree nor disagree” in the middle, and a separate space for comments connected to each statement.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to both parents in each family participating in the SPRINT project, either personally at SPRINT project information meetings or by mail. Each parent answered the questionnaire separately, voluntary and non-anonymous. The answered questionnaires were sent in to the researchers by mail. The materials have been processed confidentially. The subjects’ children were at the ages 24 or 30 months at the time they filled in the pre-intervention questionnaire, and the post-intervention questionnaire was filled in 6 months later. The questionnaires were distributed to 224 parents. Response rate for pre-intervention questionnaire was 84%, and for post-intervention 44%. The 7 possible responses to each question ranked from (-3) to (3). “I totally disagree” was ranked as (-3), “I disagree” as (-2), “I partially disagree” as (-1), “I neither agree nor disagree” as (0), “I partially agree” as (1), “I agree” as (2) and “I totally agree” as (3). In this study, four statements of the questionnaires, listed below, were analysed.

Statements used for analyses:

- 13 “It gets more important the older the child gets that you as a parent stimulates your child’s language development”
- 18 “As a parent you can inhibit your child’s language development”
- 25 “I have been watching the SPRINT film material”
- 26 “My participation in SPRINT has gained me further insight in how I as a parent can support my child’s linguistic/communicative development”.

Statement 13 and statement 18 (see statement list above) – both presented in both questionnaires – were chosen for analysis as they were considered to describe how the parents felt about their ability to support/not support their child’s language development through stimulation and inhibition. The answers were analysed through a Paired Sampled T-test.

To find out whether the subjects had taken part of the intervention DVD, statement 25 from the post-intervention questionnaire was chosen for analysis. Additionally, post-intervention statement 26 was chosen for analysis, as it was considered to describe if the intervention material had given them further insights about supporting child language development. The answers were analysed through a Correlation analyse. Statement 26 was analysed to show median and frequency
for each option of answer. All tests were executed in IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results

The t-test of statements 13 and 18 (see statement list above) showed a non-significant correlation between the pre- and post-intervention answers. Result of the Paired Samples Test is shown in Table 1. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the answers pre- and post-intervention.

Table 1. Paired Samples Test of statement 13 and 18, pre and post. A value less than 0.05 are significant (2-tailed). Degrees of freedom are 79. T-value is represented by t.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 pre &amp; post</td>
<td>1.745</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 pre &amp; post</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bivariate Correlation Test compared the 97 answers at statement 25 and 26. The results showed a Pearson correlation at 0.606 that was significant at a 0.01 level (2-tailed). 36% of the variance in the dependent variable (statement 26) is explained by the independent variable (statement 25), that means that 36% of the variance was covariance. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the answers from statement 25. The total number of answers to this statement was 98.

Statement 13 “It gets more important the older the child gets that you as a parent stimulate your child’s language development” can be interpreted in different ways, which enables answers that can be hard to interpret. The answer “I totally disagree” can be interpreted as the parent thinking it is more important the younger the child is, or as it is equally important at all ages.

Statement 25 aimed to investigate if a parent had watched the film material with seven options to answer, from “I totally disagree” (-3) to “I totally agree” (3). The answering options do not demonstrate if or how much the subjects have watched the film material. Therefore, the option (-3) were interpreted as that the subject had not watched the DVD at all, the options between (-2) and (3) were interpreted as the subject had watched a small amount to a large amount of the DVD.

Statement 26 was used to investigate the reason of the results. This statement is designed in a concrete way which makes it easy to understand, and therefore it is quite safe to draw conclusions from the responses of the subjects. The frequency of the answers in this statement was highest in the option “I totally agree” which was 31% and 60.8% answered more positively than “I neither agree nor disagree”. These results indicate that most
parents believe that the project have gained them knowledge about how they can support their child’s language development. The parents that did not answer positively on statement 26 may think that they already have this knowledge. It can also depend on that their participation did not gain any further insight because of the contents in the project. The covariance between statement 25 and 26 indicates that the subjects have gained further insight because of the participation in SPRINT.

The results can be interpreted as most parents having needs for this kind of information concerning children’s language development. Therefore, the film material from SPRINT could be an idea handing out at children’s clinic, to parents with children at a certain age. Parent-based intervention is also positive from a national economy view, since this method of treatment could be more economical compared to individual therapy (Buschmann et al. 2009).

The information about how to create a developmental and stimulating communication with children spread by the intervention film, will hopefully lead to increased parental awareness about their major impact on their child’s language development. This knowledge will hopefully lead to applications of these strategies, and from a bigger view minimize the problems for children with speech/language impairments who need professional help, since studies have shown that parent-based interventions have this ability (Girolametto & Pearce, 1996). The knowledge about parents having benefits from interventions containing information concerning children’s language development may in a long-term lead to more interventions aiming to influence parental beliefs about children’s language development. The knowledge that parents having use for interventions with this aim, could also be useful for speech and language pathologists and other working groups where parental stimuli is a big part of the process of treating children.

References


Notes

1. SPRINT project (2009) is a longitudinal language intervention project. The intervention was a DVD including lectures concerning child language and examples of how language promoting conversations may look like. The parents recorded conversations with their child, and reported the child’s vocabulary continuously.