The Impact of Speech and Language Difficulties on Teaching and Learning in a Dubai International School

تأثير صعوبات النطق واللغة على التعليم والتعلم في إحدى مدارس دبي الدولية

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
M.Ed. Special Needs Education

Faculty of Education

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May 2011

DISSERTATION RELEASE FORM

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all staff of BUiD who helped me during the course of my M.Ed. It was a wonderful learning experience which provided me with valuable insights and raised my levels of professional understanding and awareness. This would not have been possible without the help of the scholarship programme and the individual student attention which I received.

On a personal level I thoroughly enjoyed being part of such an innovative and supportive learning environment. BUiD encapsulates the true meaning of life-long learning. Special thanks to Dr. Eman Gaad for her passion, enthusiasm, friendly and caring nature, and high standards of excellence, which provided the impetus for all my work.

I would also like to thank Alma Clancy for her time and commitment in sharing her opinions and for her invaluable editing and proof reading skills. Your technical understanding of the English language really is a wonderful talent.

To Tania Blatti, thank you for making this experience such an invigorating and productive one. I never felt any question was too small and you were always there to lend your help and support. Thank you for showing me another side and helping me to think in alternate ways.

For my family and friends, thank you for showing me the right road and keeping me on it. Your genuine interest and understanding has made this possible over the past three years.

To John, thank you for always encouraging me and not allowing me to make too many excuses!

Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of speech and language difficulties on teaching and learning in a Dubai international school. It provides an overview of how speech and language develops from infancy through to adolescence and possible communicative difficulties which may arise. It investigates teacher confidence and professional knowledge with regard to teaching children with speech and language difficulties in a mainstream setting. It ascertains the level of managerial awareness and support with regard to policy and structures in place to cater for the needs of children with speech and language difficulties. A review of current practices and procedures to support children with speech and language difficulties is aligned with best practice in accordance with current literature and research findings. Recommendations are made with regard to pre-service and continued Professional Development in the area of speech and language difficulties and transparency with regard to enrolment of children with Special Educational Needs. Greater collaboration between parents, staff, the Ministry of Education, professional support bodies and the wider community is advocated. Further research with regard to the how children with speech and language difficulties are supported in private schools in Dubai, is recommended.

خلاصة

تركز هذه الدراسة على تأثير الصعوبات في النطق واللغة في التعليم والتعلم في مدرسة دبي الدولية، وتقدم لمحـة عامـة عـن كيفيـة تطـور اللغـة والكـلام مـن مرحلـة الطفولـة إلى مرحلـة المراهقـة مـن خـلال التواصـل والصعوبات المحتملة التي قد تنشأ.

تبحث هذه الدراسة ثقة المعلم ومعرفته المهنية فيما يتعلق بتدريس الأطفال الذين يعانون من صـعوبات في النطق واللغة، كما تبحث مستوى الوعي الإداري والدعم فيما يتعلق بالسياسة والهياكل القائمة لتلبية احتياجات الأطفال الذين يعانون من صعوبات في النطق واللغة.

بالنظر في الممارسات والإجراءات الحالية لدعم الأطفال الذين يعانون من صـعوبات في النطق واللغة نجدها تتماشى مع أفضل الممارسات وفقا لنتائج البحوث الحالية. تم تقديم توصيات فيمـا يتعلق بفترة مـا قبل الخدمـة والتطوير المهني المستمر في مجـال الكـلام والصـعوبات اللغويـة والشفافية فيمـا يتعلق بالتحـاق الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة.

تنصح الدراسة بضرورة زيادة التعاون بين أولياء الأمور والمدرسين ووزارة التربية والتعليم وهيئـات الدعم المحترفة والمجتمع الأوسع، كما توصي بالقيام بمزيد من البحث فيما يتعلق بكيفية دعم الأطفال الذين يعـانون من صعوبات في النطق واللغة في المدارس الخاصة في دبي.

Abbreviations

AAC	Alternative and Augmentative Communication
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APD	Auditory Processing Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAP	Communication Aids Project
DCD	Developmental Coordination Disorder
DLD	Developmental Language Delay
DP	Deputy Principal
DSIB	Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
ESL	English as a Second Language
FS	Foundation Stage
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
I.E.P	Individualised Learning Plan
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
LASS	Language Acquisition Support System
LS	Learning Support
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
PD	Professional Development
PLI	Pragmatic Linguistic Impairment
SEN	Special Educational Need
SIMS	School Integrated Management System
SLI	Specific Language Impairment
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
U.A.E	United Arab Emirates

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Overview

We, as humans, are essentially social beings who strive to communicate our wants and needs in culturally appropriate ways. We use language as a tool to convey our deepest thoughts, rationalise the world around us, and establish meaningful bonds with others. Language forms the basis of sophisticated interactions which lead to deepened understanding of life's simple and most complex processes. Speech acts as a catalyst in the formation of relationships and patterns of behaviour. Speech and language as the foundation of human interaction is essential for maintaining and developing stable societies. Together speech and language act as a uniting force which links people and helps them to work in harmony, understanding each other and synchronising their ability for greater good.

From a Vygotskian perspective all humans learn through social interaction Vygotsky (1978). This social interaction is facilitated and exemplified through the use of appropriate speech and language. Infants enter our world without speech or language, but with an innate ability to interact through primal reflexes and a pre-disposition for visual stimuli, Messer (1994). Typically the physical and cognitive processes necessary for efficient communication are pruned during infancy. This occurs through adult infant interaction and stimulation of the infant's nervous, motor, and cognitive system. Infants are socialised for communication by interactions with their care givers. According to Chomsky (1965) infants will begin to acquire swathes or chunks of speech within the first two years of their life providing there are no physical or sensory impairments. Tilstone and Layton (2004) drew from Bruner's Taxonomy of Early Intentional Communication (1983) to describe how correct modeling of speech and language conventions lead to the development of efficient forms of communication, from which the infant can begin to acquire new knowledge and rationalise the world around them.

We are all unique individuals who stem from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Although child development specialists can provide an overview of typical language development, there is no definitive course towards the acquisition of speech and language, or its subsequent use.

Speech and language development is intrinsically embedded in the cultural practices of a society and is further influenced by the complex idiosyncratic relationship between care-giver and child, Bruner (1983). Therefore it is very difficult to identify and isolate abnormalities in the development of speech and language patterns and its emergent use.

As speech and language plays such a pivotal role in the development of one's social and cognitive abilities it is essential that care givers, medical practitioners, early year's practitioners and policy makers are aware of possible deficits in language acquisition. They must acknowledge and create subsequent mediation for children who present with physical or cognitive deficits which impede speech and language development. Alternatives must be provided at the earliest possible stage to help children overcome barriers to full and effective communication.

It is with this in mind that the researcher chose to investigate the topic of speech and language difficulties from an educational perspective. Mercow (2009) explained how speech and language difficulties experienced by children in an educational setting can have a detrimental effect on a child's social, emotional and cognitive development. A child's self-esteem and academic confidence is dependent upon their ability to achieve in all aspects of school life and realise their full potential.

From the researcher's experience and observations, over a ten year period in mainstream schools, a pattern emerged of children displaying forms of speech and language deficits which were never formally acknowledged or understood. A typical scenario involved a child who experienced increasing levels of academic failure and frustration towards a system which did not make allowances for their individual needs. This transcended into unproductive behaviour and difficulty maintaining positive relationships with adults and peers. Teachers grew increasingly perplexed with the underachieving and seemingly disinterested child who they were no longer able to help. Parents, in-turn, became disenchanted with an educational service that appeared to magnify the child's difficulties and demoralise their spirit.

The issue of speech and language difficulties experienced by students is increasingly more relevant in today's global economy as culture transcends boarders and international education becomes the

status-quo. Not only do some students have to deal with speech and language difficulties but many are also trying to contend with additional languages and educators from varying cultural backgrounds and ideologies. East and Evans (2001) reported that understanding the nuances of how additional languages are communicated and received is a daunting task for any child, especially those already struggling to use and interpret their own language.

Teachers must be afforded all possible support in the detection and screening of speech and language difficulties. This should include support from school management, parents, and external agencies involved in assessment and intervention of speech and language difficulties. It is important to gauge teachers' knowledge, hunches and opinions in relation to speech and language difficulties and to formulate recommendations, where appropriate, to maximise teaching and learning in multi-cultural international schools.

The focus of this study will be on:
- Identifying forms of speech and language difficulty and how they impact on teaching and learning
- Assessing and analysing teachers awareness and experience of speech and language difficulties
- Identifying processes and practices already in place, and those of best practice, to help children with speech and language difficulties maximise their potential

1.2 Rational and Context of this Study
The focus of the study is a private international school in Dubai, a part of the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E). It was chosen as an appropriate location due to its multi-cultural and multi-lingual context. The study endeavors to investigate speech and language difficulties experienced by children and how these difficulties effect teaching and learning. The school in question has a wide and diverse student population from over 80 different countries. This demographic is representative of many educational institutions throughout Dubai and the world. Teachers are presented with a diverse student body irrespective of their geographical location. They need to be equipped to teach heterogeneous groups of learners using a variety of teaching styles. As such, it is essential that teachers are aware of the complex nature of speech and language difficulties which can arise. An

international school setting encompasses a wide and diverse student demographic and is a realistic reflection of school life today.

The international school setting brings an added dimension of students with English as a Second Language (ESL). Learning through a second or third language brings its own complexities beyond the limitations of this study. The presence of ESL students provides the researcher with considerations regarding the identification of speech and language difficulties. Distinctions need to be made between students with speech and language difficulties and those learning through an additional language. In the context of a multicultural learning environment it is important for teachers to be able to distinguish between ESL and a speech and language difficulty. As such, this study may hold merit in relation to how speech and language difficulties are mediated in an international school context. Transferability of findings and recommendations may be possible upon the completion of further research within an international school context.

As the nuances of speech and language are so complex, children often fall between the cracks in terms of identification and assessment. Many children do not come with official paperwork to substantiate their slow academic and social development. On the other hand they can exhibit worrying signs of academic failure and, or, social exclusion. It is with this in mind that educationalists in Dubai and elsewhere should investigate the topic of speech and language difficulties further in order to best provide for the academic and social challenges experienced by some of their students. This study will endeavor to analyse the difficulties faced by children and teachers alike and serve to provide a platform from which discussion, policy and meaningful change may occur.

1.3 Organisation of Chapters

The study will begin with a literature review to identify current research trends in relation to speech and language difficulties. The researcher will outline some physiological causes of speech and language difficulties along with patterns of typical language development. Issues surrounding identification, assessment and intervention will be reviewed along with problems and obstacles which prevent accurate diagnosis and therapy. Co-morbidity of speech, language, gross motor, cognitive, psychological, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties will be highlighted.

The way in which children who experience speech and language difficulties perceive themselves will be presented along with the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Effective and efficient practices for teaching children with speech and language difficulties in an inclusive setting will be outlined. To reinforce the context of the study relevant local studies and current literature derived from countries of the Arabian Gulf shall be explored and reviewed.

The research methodology chosen for the study draws from the quantitative and qualitative fields. A mixed method approach is favoured in order to maximise and strengthen data quality. The results and discussion section will present and analyse the findings of the research through discussion and graphical presentation. Finally recommendations may be made where appropriate based on the findings of the literature review, the socio-cultural context of the study and the results of the collected data.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to outline the theoretical context of this study with reference to current literature and studies in the field of speech and language difficulties. It is essential to review current research in order to build a comprehensive framework of the complexities involved. Reviewing past studies may highlight successful interventions which are applicable in the context of this study. Analysing previous studies enables both the researcher and the reader to understand the nature of the topic and how it impacts on teaching and learning. For the purpose of the review, speech and language difficulties will be explored under the following headings to create a reference from which comparisons can be drawn at a later stage.

The topics of interest are:

- The cognitive processes involved in learning, communication and socialisation
- Speech and language difficulties during children's formative years of development
- Identifying unusual patterns of speech and language development
- Assessing speech and language difficulties
- Co-morbidity of speech, language, gross motor, cognitive, psychological, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- How do children with speech and language difficulties perceive themselves in an educational setting?
- Augmentative and alternative communication
- Effective and efficient practices for teaching children with speech and language difficulties in an inclusive setting
- Relevant local studies and current literature derived from countries of the Arabian Gulf

2.2 The Cognitive Processes Involved in Learning, Communication, and Socialisation

There are numerous theories of how infants and young children develop the ability to communicate effectively and use language as a tool to interact with their environment and others. Educational theorists have differing ideas as to how and why young babies begin to communicate with their surroundings and engage in tentative communication before the emergence of formal language structures.

Messer (1994) reviewed evidence surrounding an innate disposition for social interaction. The evidence suggested that children display a preference for human faces over other visual stimuli and respond more to adapted adult speech models, which adults employ for talking to children, over adult to adult speech. This evidence suggests that babies and young children are orientated towards human social contact which may develop during pregnancy and is present at birth. The evidence leads us to believe that babies are either innately prepared for social interaction or demonstrate social responsiveness shortly after birth.

The issue of intentionality with regard to interpersonal communication is very important when dealing with individuals experiencing a physical, sensory or cognitive deficit or delay. Based on children's physical sensory abilities and innate capabilities to demonstrate communicative skills, Bruner (1983) emphasised the role of inter-subjectivity in the development of social interaction. He believes that primary inter-subjectivity is a feature of an infant's first year of development and secondary inter-subjectivity develops from this when the two conversation partners focus their joint attention on some feature beyond themselves.

Bruner stresses the importance of biology and culture in the development of communication skills. Socio-cultural factors are also highlighted in the emergence of intentional communication. Bruner's Taxonomy for Early Intentional Communication (1983) includes:
- Initiation for behaviour regulation
- Initiation for social interaction
- Initiation for joint attention

Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart (1998) provide a taxonomy, based on the work of Bruner, for describing a progression towards intentional communication functioning. They identified three levels of pre-intentional behaviour. These include:

- Reflexive, indicating an involuntary response to some internal state or external stimulus
- Reactive, suggesting a voluntary response
- Proactive, the earliest indications of goal directed behaviour

Effective communication relies on the presence of fundamental principles, as outlined by Tilstone and Layton (2004). This is adopted from Bruner's Taxonomy for Early Intentional Communication (1983). 'A' and 'B' represent two people engaged in communication.

- 'A' having a reason to communicate
- 'A' understanding the aim of the communication
- 'A' being willing and wanting to communicate
- 'A' having relevant knowledge and understanding of communication skills
- 'B' understanding the aim of communication
- 'B' sharing modes of communication with A

Communication is achieved when individual 'B' understands the meaning that 'A' intended to communicate.

Weighing heavily on these theories of communicative development is the idea of social interaction as a premise for the development of more complex structures of communication and language. Communication is scaffolded by more able partners and correct conventions and protocols of socialisation, are modeled through the interaction of both parties. Infants gradually become aware that their actions have an impact on those around them. This further stimulates their abilities to communicate and provides motivation for interaction with others, thus enabling them to develop more complex communicative structures.

In contrast to Bruner's idea of communication developing through social interaction, Piaget's view of development, described by Tilstone *et al*, (2004) indicates the cognitive foundations for social interaction but de-emphasises the role of other people. He refers to a child's emerging sense of 'I'

during the sensory motor phase of development which impacts their desire and need to communicate effectively. Young children begin to exercise personal autonomy as they develop a greater sense of self-awareness. He believes imaginary or symbolic play is essential for the development of language and the ability to communicate meaning. Bruner also considers the centrality of symbolic thinking in creating effective language skills.

Unlike Bruner and Piaget, Vygotsky (1987) believed that intentionality is expressed through interactions between the care-giver and infant. It first presents itself inter-personally, when the child learns that certain actions elicit responses from others, they then develop powers of communication which become intra-personal. This development, according to Vygotsky, is based on the internalisation of cultural exchanges between the infant and their care giver, which creates meaning and a purpose for communication.

For communication to develop along normal lines it is important that sight and hearing are not impaired. Lewis (1987) described the behaviour of infants who were born blind and drew attention to the fact that they appear less communicative than sighted babies. It was also reported that they are less likely to initiate vocal exchanges. These findings lead us to believe that all the senses are intrinsically linked and contribute towards the development of effective communication skills.

The development of communication requires skills in a variety of areas as described by Tilstone *et al* (2004). The components of proficient language include:
- Phonology, referring to speech sound systems of individual languages
- Semantics, the linguistic term for meaning negotiated through words and utterances
- Grammar, the way in which words are changed to convey specific meaning
- Use of language, relating the function and context of how language is used

Children begin experimenting with these elements of speech through sounds and labeling. Debate surrounds whether children acquire words in isolation or instead develop swathes of language, or 'chunks', as described by Chomsky (1965). He believed children are biologically programmed to acquire language and possess a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which operates, in structural-functional terms, in isolation to cognitive processes.

Bruner (1983) supports this view from a social constructivist perspective in which he believes all learning occurs within the context of social exchanges. He proposed the notion of a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) based on similar principles to that of Chomsky. Both theorists believe that words are not formed in isolation but rather are contextually based within larger chunks of language. Meaning is then derived and transferred from socio-cultural exchanges between parties.

It is clear from an analysis of current literature that theories surrounding the cognitive development of language and communication skills have not changed dramatically over time, but instead have evolved in favour of a holistic look at the socio-cultural context in which we live. Theorists have differing opinions in light of their personal and academic views regarding human development but ultimately their opinions complement and build upon one another.

2.3 Speech and Language Difficulties during Children's Formative Years of Development

Speech and language difficulties occur for a number of reasons. They may be transient and temporary or prolonged and severe. Speech and articulation problems are associated with physical difficulties, ranging from hearing impairment, muscular problems, neurological injury causing varying degrees of Aphasia, illness and biological difficulties such as cleft palate. Speech and articulation can be delayed due to a Developmental Language Delay (DLD), or lag which can rectify itself in time. Young children can also experience dysfluency, whereby they hesitate or repeat phrases, during their initial years of language development.

According to Balkkom, Verhoeven and Weerdenberg (2010) speech and articulation is mainly concerned with phonology, morphology and syntax which are considered the structural aspects of language and are attributed to having primary effects on language and communication. Phonology, morphology and syntax, are concerned with the sounds and utterances which comprise unique language structures and when correctly formed create understandable words and phrases to convey meaning.

In addition to speech and articulation difficulties, research discusses communication and language difficulties which focus on pragmatic and socio-linguistic skills. Pragmatics, as described by East and Evan (2001) refers to how language is used in different situations and how feelings are conveyed. Socio-linguistic skills refer to the role of conversational partners and turn taking during communication. It also includes the ability to convey thoughts and meanings in culturally appropriate ways at the correct time. Pragmatic and communication skills are categorised as having secondary effects on speech and language. They are not as readily identifiable as speech and articulation problems.

The nature and cause of pragmatic and socio-linguistic problems is not easily understood and as such makes them quantifiably more difficult to identify, assess and mediate. These problems are usually attributed to genetics, socio-economic status, general learning disabilities, Specific Language Impairments (SLI) or developmental disorders and delays. Their effect can be very pervasive and lead to secondary language impairments and co-morbidity of symptoms associated with other disabilities which will be discussed further.

2.4 Identifying Unusual Patterns of Speech and Language Development

Unusual patterns of speech and language development in children present themselves in a variety of ways. The most obvious of these is a lack of speech, articulation and engagement in reciprocal, conversational activities. Paasche, Gorril and Strom (2004) outlined physical, behavioural, speech sound, articulation, voice and fluency problems which can be expanded as follows:

Physical and behavioural difficulties:
- Opened mouthed position, breathing through the mouth
- Excessive drooling resulting from a weakness in the tongue, jaw and or lips
- Limited swallowing and chewing abilities
- Lack of eye contact
- Frequent upper respiratory infections
- Poor oral motor coordination
- Lack of babbling as an infant

Characteristics of problems with articulation and speech sounds:

- Distortion of standard sound
- Substitutions of one sound for another
- Omissions of sounds that should be present
- Irrelevant sounds

The child's voice may be unusual due to a difference in the quality, pitch or intensity. The child may have difficulty with fluency due to hesitation, repetition, prolongations, stuttering or stammering.

With regard to language (comprehension) difficulties, Paasche *et al* (2010) identified physical, behavioural, receptive and expressive language difficulties. These characteristics are numerous and often overlap within themselves and with those of speech and articulation difficulties. Some of the more obvious indicators include:

- Frequent ear infections
- Being hyperactive or hypoactive
- Having poor motor coordination
- Lacking eye contact
- Becoming easily frustrated and distracted
- Poor attention span
- Poor meta-cognitive skills
- Delayed pre-academic and academic skills
- Performing better on non-verbal tasks

According to studies conducted by Mecrow (2009) in relation to the impact of speech and language difficulties on future academic, personal and social development, it is imperative that parents, educators and clinical support staff identify these early signs of speech and language difficulties in order to create a purposeful form of intervention and support where necessary.

2.5 Assessing Speech and Language Difficulties

Assessment of speech and language difficulties is complex and multi-faceted. The success of intervention programmes depends heavily on early identification, accurate diagnosis, and the implementation of appropriate therapy (Blackman, 1999). Assessment needs to be conducted by a speech and language therapist (SLT), clinical psychologist or medical practitioner in conjunction with the child's parents, the child and any relevant adult who deals with the child on a regular basis, for example a nursery attendant, child-minder or teacher. A multidisciplinary approach is favoured in order to utilise, maximise and share expertise and information.

Assessment can be formal and standardised or informal and adaptable depending on the situation and the nature of the speech and language difficulty. Assessment can be conducted through standardised cognitive tests, verbal and non-verbal activities, profiling of social, personal and behavioural history, analysis of structured and unstructured interactions, review of developmental history, observation and specific speech and language assessment tools. The assessor needs to take account of the contributing factors and any secondary effects of speech and language deficits on the subject before formulating a diagnosis.

As noted in the characteristics of language impairment (2.3), infants often fail to achieve developmental milestones at the appropriate time and are delayed in gross motor functioning. There are specific correlations between children who fail to crawl and those who experience language and communication problems at a later stage. This information can be used as a useful tool in the holistic assessment of a child exhibiting speech and language difficulties. A thorough review of the child's developmental history needs to be recorded in order to identify developmental delays or lags which may be a result of, or cause, further linguistic difficulties.

According to Dyck and Piek (2010), children rarely satisfy diagnostic criteria for only a single disorder. Children who meet the criteria for a Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) typically also meet the criteria for a communication disorder.

Within the parameters of a pragmatic, socio-linguistic difficulty lie the specific language impairments of receptive and expressive language disabilities. According to Dyck and Piek (2010)

they can occur in isolation, together or as current thinking leads one to believe, within the realm of a pervasive language or developmental difficulty. In Dyck and Piek (2010), results indicated that an early deficit in one part of the brain may have subtle effects on other parts of the developing brain, even when cognitive scores fall within the range of normal cognitive ability. Therefore the concepts of dual and pervasive disabilities, along with secondary language impairments are important points to consider in light of assessment procedures and derived outcomes.

Bishop and McDonald (2009) conducted a study to identify language impairment in children, combining language test scores and parental reports. They concluded that test scores are useful in identifying SLI but should be used in conjunction with parental reports and the context of the child's socio economic and cultural status.

A recent development in the identification of speech and language difficulties is the introduction of the language screening instrument 'SNEL'. It was designed and piloted by Luinge, Post and Goorhuis-Brouwer (2007) for the identification of speech and language difficulties in children aged one to six years. The aim of the study was to improve the referral of 'at risk' children for further assessment and diagnosis. The relevance of this screening tool lies in its efficient and easy administration. It consists of a dichotomous questionnaire directed at parents to create a holistic picture of the child's linguistic development.

The SNEL test made screening quick and efficient and allowed for disparities in relation to screening children through a second language as opposed to their mother tongue. This tool may prove very beneficial in the international context of the present study where over 90% of students are being taught through a second language. As it is aimed at an age range of one to six years, children who are experiencing speech and language difficulties will be identified at the earliest possible stage, which will increase their chances of successful intervention.

According to Mayeux and Kandel (1999) and Stromswold (2000), it is imperative that speech and language difficulties are identified at the earliest possible stage and appropriate intervention programmes are established. This will help to minimise subsequent negative effects as the neurological system of speech and language develops during the first years of life.

SLI associated with pragmatic and socio linguistic functioning is less obvious to detect and usually manifest itself through literacy, social and behavioural difficulties in school aged children. A study conducted by Botting (2007) found correlations between SLI and low levels of comprehension. As comprehension requires inferential and higher order thinking skills similar to those needed for sophisticated forms of communication, correlations can be made on the basis of low levels of achievement in specific comprehension tests. This aspect of language skill according to Botting is much less salient in formal tests of language than morphology and syntax.

Botting introduced the 'Narrative' exercise as a useful screening tool in older children. Parallels were also drawn with low achievement levels in creative thinking and writing and SLI. The study identified that morphological errors were still evident at 11 years which supports well established research by Leonard (1998), Rice, Wexler and Cleave (1995) and Conti-Ramsdan (2002) that verb and general syntax based difficulties are a core characteristic of SLI. These findings will have particular relevance in relation to the educational context of the present study. Teachers need to be aware of these findings in order to maximise detection of speech and language difficulties within their classrooms.

2.6 Co-morbidity of Speech, Language, Gross Motor, Cognitive, Psychological, Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Co-morbidity of systems relates to the connections between various aspects of development. Research suggests that areas of development such as speech and language, gross motor functioning, cognitive ability and social emotional development are intrinsically linked and have a symbiotic relationship. This theory has important repercussions for educators in relation to assessment techniques and specific diagnosis of difficulties.

One of the main characteristics of mild, moderate, severe and profound cognitive difficulties is reduced and limited communicative functioning as described by East *et al* (2001). A study conducted by Ketelaars, Cuperus, Jansonius and Verhoeven (2010) indicates a high correlation between Pragmatic Language Impairment (PLI), using language in context, and behavioural issues. They recommend that early assessment of pragmatic competence may also provide possible

indications for the presence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD).

Research conducted by Lum, Gelgic and Conti-Ramsden (2010) concluded that SLI is connected with working memory, declarative and procedural memory deficits. Overall the study indicated multiple memory impairments in specific language impairment. Awareness of this information could prove very beneficial for teachers and parents alike who struggle to pinpoint the nature of a child's difficulty.

Further studies by Daal, Verhoeven and Balkom identified a link between SLI and deficits in short term memory and information processing. Both of these call for specific neuro-psychological intervention but very often can go undetected in the presence of more troublesome and overt difficulties in the form of disruptive and challenging behaviour.

Confusion exists between terminologies employed by practitioners from varying fields. Quite often a medical practitioner will approach assessment and diagnosis of a communicative difficulty from a different perspective to that of an educational psychologist or speech and language therapist. A study by Dawes and Bishop (2009) found disparities between terminology used to describe Auditory Processing Disorders (APD) and SLI. Some practitioners use different labels for the same thing which leads to problems with diagnosis, intervention programmes and sharing expertise and knowledge among disciplines.

Literacy problems are often underpinned by inadequate oral language and comprehension skills. Westwood (2004) recommended that literacy intervention programmes should emphasise oral and aural language skills in order to compensate for a lack of previous learning experiences or SLI. Input in intervention programmes from an SLT is also advised. Westwood further describes research by Hoien and Lundberg (2000) in which connections are drawn between a sub type of dyslexia and innate language disabilities. As described in Section 2.4, Botting highlighted correlations between low levels of comprehension and SLI. This correlation is more noticeable in older children who struggle with inferential and higher order thinking.

2.7 How do Children with Speech and Language Difficulties Perceive Themselves in an Educational Setting?

It is important to consult research in relation to how children who experience speech and language difficulties view themselves. Understanding how a child views their own difficulty can help when tailoring an intervention plan to meet their needs. Children with speech and language difficulties experience academic and social failure more often than typically developed children. This can damage their self-image and lead to negative thoughts and feelings.

Botting and Resing (2007) reported that children with communication impairments appeared to have less well developed self-concepts and are more at risk of being bullied by their peers. Associated personality and behavioural problems can then manifest which detract attention from the underlying problem. Brooks (2007) found that levels of frustration experienced by children with speech and language difficulties lowers self-confidence and self-esteem. This in turn leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy as children retreat from the communicative and social domains to internal states of mind where constant communication is not necessary. Withdrawal from regular communication compounds the issue further and can lead to psychological and behavioural difficulties. By trying to avoid the difficulty, children can inadvertently make it worse.

Markham, Laar, Gibbard and Dean (2009) conducted a study into the perceptions of children with speech and language difficulties into their quality of life. They make recommendations about how to increase supportive and caring interventions which would maximise a child's positive experiences and talents in order to boost their self-belief and confidence. This positivity would increase the chances of successful intervention in other areas.

2.8 Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) relates to methods of communication that can be used by anyone who finds communication difficult due to limited speech or processing difficulties. Specific visual or auditory tools and devices can be used to 'add to' (augment) or replace (alter) means of communication. AAC can aid understanding as well as improve expression. It can be highly technological or simple and practical. AAC can be unaided, relying on

facial expressions and bodily gestures or aided, depending on additional equipment ranging from low to high tech.

East and Evans (2001) emphasised the point that accurate assessment of needs and adequate trialing of AAC are essential for success. They recommended that pupils and support staff be afforded adequate time and training in the use of new equipment and there should be room for review, modifications and alternative solutions. They recommend that every school should have a 'Communication Policy' which covers AAC and that technicians and funding should be available where necessary.

In 2002 the U.K. government identified the need for AAC and introduced the Communication Aids Project (CAP). It aimed to help students with communication difficulties by providing technology and funding to help them access the curriculum through the use of AAC. Local authorities set up multi-agency assessment teams which initiated and implemented plans to assess and cater for the needs of students with speech and language difficulties. This project ran until 2006 but its legacy of local authority assessment teams and policy still remains.

AAC could prove beneficial in the context of the current study with increased use of visual and auditory aids to simplify communication and understanding in the classroom. If teachers are aware of the positive impact of AAC, they may be more likely to choose an alternative or additional teaching tool to enhance learning.

2.9 Effective and Efficient Practices for Teaching Children with Speech and Language Difficulties in an Inclusive Setting

Researchers give many suggestions about how to meet the needs of students with speech and language difficulties. Most of their recommendations are drawn from the principles of communicative teaching and learning. Educators utilise the environment and maximise opportunities for successful interaction with the student, engaging them in purposeful guided activities. Central to recommendations made by Paasche *et al*, (2004) are the concepts of assessment, modeling, repetition, AAC, student choice and positive reinforcement.

East and Evans (2001) incorporate a whole language approach in which circle time, games and aural activities are central to promoting positive language experiences and communication in a fun and natural setting. Birkett (2003) emphasises the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), checking for comprehension, eye contact and utilising the services of SLT's and teaching assistants to pre-tutor children.

A study conducted by Gunther and Hautvast (2009) highlighted the importance of using contingency management (behavioural management programmes) to enhance articulation therapy for children with speech and language difficulties. It is based on Bandura's Cognitive Social Learning Theory (1997) and is an incentive based model of learning and reinforcement which demonstrates improvement in phonological abilities and speech articulation.

Stringer and Lozano (2007) recommended increased teacher training and awareness to improve screening, referral, assessment and pedagogical practices within the classroom. They believe that simple pedagogical changes could improve success rates for children with speech and language disorders which would have pervasive impacts throughout the curriculum and for the child's social, personal and emotional development.

Letts and Hall (2003) and Sadler (2005), quoted by Stringer and Lozano, found that the majority of teachers, even at pre-school level, had not received any training in normal or delayed speech. They lacked essential training in the detection of abnormal speech patterns and communicative deficits. They believe the only frame of reference teachers possess is to compare student's linguistic capabilities. This can create further problems as children are deemed to demonstrate seemingly adequate functional linguistic skills where in fact they are struggling to process language and express themselves. They recommended that teachers need to compare students against developmental norms, not just peer referencing.

This topic is particularly important in light of the current study as students are being taught through ESL, which can distort teacher's perceptions and points of reference further. Stringer and Lozano (2007) recommend close collaboration with SLT's and increased pre-training of teachers to

alleviate this deficit in their general understanding and knowledge of speech and language difficulties.

In accordance with the recommendations of Stringer, Lozano and Mecrow (2009) an 'enhanced consultative role', model to improve the service provision and educational experiences of children with speech and language difficulties is favoured. They believe a multi-disciplinary approach should be promoted in order to maximise and share expertise. This would involve all parties working collaboratively from the early stages of child development to provide efficient and timely services to alleviate the impact of speech and language difficulties. In the context of the current study, faculty members, management, parents and external bodies could work in collaboration to maximise the opportunities for successful intervention.

2.10 Relevant Local Studies and Current Literature Derived from the Gulf

Sourcing and accessing relevant local studies and publications from the Gulf region and Dubai in particular, is problematic due to the limited availability of statistics and research. Very little research exists, based solely on the private education system in Dubai. Gaad (2011) provides insight into the soci-culural barriers to inclusion in U.A.E private schools which are applicable in the context of this study. These insights will be discussed later in this section. Also there are some useful articles and studies which shed light on the unique socio-cultural elements at play in relation to the educational structure and development of educational services. The U.A.E is classified as being an emerging or developing nation. It comprises of mainly ex-patriot residents and a small proportion of nationals.

A study conducted by Eapen, Zoubeidi, Yunis, Gururaj, Sabri and Ghubash (2006) attempted to conduct the first large scale community based epidemiological study of the prevalence of developmental delays among three year olds in the U.A.E. As developmental delays are associated with pervasive developmental difficulties and communication difficulties this is a useful comparative to begin with. The study conducted by Eapen *et al* (2006) focused exclusively on nationals to the exclusion of all ex-patriots. They found a rate of 8.4% which correlates with similar findings in other developing nations. According to the 2005 census Dubai comprised of

20.1% nationals, Ministry of Economy (2006). Figures recorded in 2009 indicated 16.5% of people living in Dubai were nationals, Gaad (2011). The school in question has an average of 15% nationals with up to 30% in some classes as recorded in the school's data base known as School Integrated Management System (SIMS). The rate of 8.4% of developmental delay among the three year old nationals may be somewhat disproportionate in relation to the situational context of an international school. However it does act as a possible indicator of percentage difficulties experienced by the children in this study.

A study conducted by Randeree and Gaad (2008) identified that although the U.A.E has the second highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Gulf, it is the lowest in terms of GDP spent on education. The U.A.E and Dubai in particular, has a very unique educational structure. In Dubai the education network is dominated by private institutions which are not directly regulated or financed by the Ministry of Education (MOE). According to statistics released through the MOE Strategy Plan 2010-2020, there are 145 privately operated schools in Dubai implementing 17 different curricula. Private schools serve fifty eight percent of the country's school going population. These schools are self-financed and as such, their budgets are regulated and controlled at the discretion of the officiating board. Quite often these institutions are profit driven which does not lend itself to investment in resources or human capital. Accordingly, identification of special needs education, resources and training is not high on the agenda for policy makers and management bodies.

In conjunction with this, Gaad (2011) noted that the private education sector in the U.A.E operate a culture of overt exclusion in relation to special needs. Her research highlighted that schools are profit driven and fear social stigmatisation in relation to students with Special Educational Need (SEN). She outlined how private schools often adopt the belief that they have no students with SEN and as such students with SEN remain undetected within the school, receiving little or no formal support. Alternatively some private institutions adopt a policy of acceptance towards differently able students who in turn pay additional fees to receive the necessary support. Both approaches are deemed exclusionary and go against the aims and objectives of Federal Law No. 26 (2006) In Respect to Rights of Persons with Disability. These findings by Gaad are particularly pertinent in light of the situational context of this study in a private international school in Dubai.

Gaad (2001) reported that the public system caters for nationals only and provides special needs facilities, including free school placement under the direction of the Department of Special Education. Children with an IQ of less than seventy five are offered free access to their local Centres for Preparation and Rehabilitation for the Handicapped. The terminology in itself is exclusionary and reflects a general lack of understanding on behalf of policy makers in catering for the needs of children with SEN, including those with speech and language difficulties.

Arif and Gaad (2008) conducted a systems analysis of the U.A.E general education system. This research also examined the alignment in the sub system of educating those with SEN. They recommended that modifications were needed in relation to assessment and monitoring procedures for children with SEN. They also noted that additional resources were required. These recommendations, based on the public sector, could also be applied to the private sector in relation to the provision of services for students with SEN.

There is extensive research conducted by Gaad (2011), Gaad and Thabet (2009), Gaad (2006), Gaad (2004) and Alghazo and Gaad (2004) in relation to the inclusion of special needs students in mainstream classes. It focuses on societal attitudes towards inclusion of children with SEN and suspected barriers towards full and purposeful inclusion. There is a consensus throughout the literature that increased awareness and education is needed on the part of policy makers to inform good practice and initiate change through education and understanding. Exposure to diversity through hands on experiences could challenge societal beliefs with regard to the potential for educating people with special needs. Systems need to be installed in order to integrate and include those with special needs in everyday life and education.

Steps have been taken by the government in relation to protecting the rights of people with disabilities through the ratification of Federal Law No. 26 (2006) In Respect to Rights of Persons with Disability. Provisions are made for fair and equal access for all children to educational services regardless of disability or educational need. Private schools are obliged to comply with this law but there is no regulatory body to enforce the law. This has a direct impact on the context of this study as schools in Dubai are not compelled by societal or governmental pressure to comply with regulations as provided for by Federal Law No. 26 (2006).

Positive moves towards regulating inclusion of students with SEN in private mainstream schools occurred in 2010. The Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau, DSIB, under the auspices of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, KHDA, included provision for SEN and inclusion of all learners as an additional standard in their inspection criteria. It is hoped that this will provide some impetus for the implementation of meaningful inclusive practices.

The MOE encouraged further research and investigation through their Education Strategy 2010-2020. Objectives included in this student centric education plan are provisions for student equality including the assurance that students with additional needs receive extra and individualised support to integrate them in the educational system. Changes in curriculum delivery and assessment are recommended in the form of emphasising practical activities and vocational training. Group work and collaborative assessment are also encouraged. There is a recommendation for increased training of educational staff in the field of special needs and AAC. All of these initiatives will be important in light of the unique socio-cultural context of this study.

According to Gaad (2011) the integration of student with SEN extends to the integration of governing bodies responsible for the implementation of inclusive practices and SEN provision. Currently, responsibility for SEN provision, planning and policy reform is under the auspices of the MOE and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). Until recently the Ministry of Health (MOH) was also responsible for the care and education of some children with SEN. Gaad calls for the uniformity and integration of all departments if cohesion and consistency is to become a feature of SEN reform within the U.A.E. Without cohesion and uniformity successful integration and service provision will be unlikely or a best problematic.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Approach and Research Design

A mixed method research approach was adopted to facilitate the acquisition of relevant data in relation to speech and language difficulties. Quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry were identified as useful tools in the systematic gathering and collating of necessary information. From the initial planning stages a positivist and interpretive approach were favoured in order to maximise the potential and scope of data collection.

Selected methodologies drawing from the quantitative field included:

- A multiple choice, short answer questionnaire to survey the general teaching faculty
- A structured interview with senior management

These quantitative methods produced statistical data which was analysed and interpreted in the results and discussion sections of this study. Rigid analysis of the data, in conjunction with grounded theory and qualitative results, helped to create a concrete foundation upon which valid inferences and conclusions were drawn.

The qualitative methods identified as suitable included:

- Informal meetings with class teachers, Learning Support (LS) team, specialist staff and parents
- Analysis of school practice through participant observation
- Review of school policy and documentation including the findings of the LS Review Committee
- A case study
- Inter-active sessions between the researcher and subject through the use of play and art therapy to elicit a learner centred perspective of understanding

Explanation of research methods chosen for inclusion in the study with justification of their relevance are outlined in the following section. Difficulties encountered while accessing information and unforeseen obstacles are highlighted to provide a holistic overview of the research process. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

3.2 Research Tools and Rational for Selection

The researcher in this case conducted the study from an inside perspective. This enabled ease of access to personnel, case study candidates, and questionnaire respondents. The researcher was immersed in the school and maximised opportunities to source information and observe practices. It proved beneficial in many ways, but also posed difficulties which needed to be carefully navigated in order to ensure efficiency and comply with ethical considerations.

Time limitations were not a major factor as the researcher was able to conduct interviews during free periods and mutually agreeable times with senior management, the LS team, class teachers' and parents. Access to case study candidates was available when requested and organised without difficulty.

3.2 (a) Teacher Questionnaire

A standard questionnaire (Appendix One) was selected as a tool to investigate research question number one:

Are teachers aware of speech and language difficulties among their pupils and what previous experience or training do they have in relation to pupils with speech and language difficulties?

A questionnaire was deemed most advantageous for surveying the general teaching body of 60 teachers. It was chosen as the most time efficient and practical way of gauging the general consensus of the staff. One to one interviews, or research led questionnaires were discounted due to the time constraints it would place on participants. Group led discussions were considered, but not used due to the difficulty in accurately recording the ideas and opinions of the respondents. The researcher was keen to retain anonymity, so as to gain a true reflection of the candidate's ideas and

experience, as opposed to what they felt they should say. As such, an anonymous questionnaire was administered in two group sessions, comprising of 29 and 30 teachers respectively. The researcher sought permission to administer the questionnaire during whole school staff meetings in order to maximise the number of responses and also to be personally available to candidates requiring clarification on any items in the questionnaire.

The researcher sent prior notice via email to the faculty explaining that they would be asked to complete the questionnaire during the staff meeting and gave a brief explanation of the study and rational for their participation and inclusion. Candidates were encouraged to meet with the researcher in advance if they wished to seek further clarification regarding the study. On commencement of the meeting, the researcher briefly outlined the purpose of the investigation and gave a short explanation of speech and language difficulties with respect to pupils and their learning.

The researcher rotated around the hall and answered some procedural questions when requested. Careful attention was given to the Arabic speaking staff. They completed the questionnaire in a group under the guidance of their coordinator, so as to alleviate any language comprehension problems. This group took slightly longer than other groups to complete the questionnaire, but they were very obliging and willing to participate. The researcher collected all completed questionnaires at the end of both sessions and followed up with teachers in absenteeism by sending an email and delivering questionnaires (n=3) by hand the following day. One of these teachers returned a completed questionnaire following a verbal request. Total number of completed questionnaires was sixty.

3.2 (b) Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview, (Appendix Two) was conducted with senior management in order to investigate research question number two:

To what extent do school management and policy support the learning needs of children with speech and language difficulties?

The researcher chose to conduct a semi-structured interview, as senior management was already known to the researcher on a personal and professional level. The researcher was conscious of the delicate nature of the interview and did not wish to adversely create a defensive or protective stance from management in relation to school policy and practices. Instead, an open discussion was conducted with feeler and lead questions to promote honest and open responses.

Members of senior management were approached personally and a verbal overview of the interview was explained, in advance to them. This was then formalised through emails and an appointments process with the principal's personal assistant. A written account of the purpose and nature of the interview was also sent to senior management for their reference, three days prior to the meeting. The researcher endeavored to maximise positive participation by allaying any fears or apprehension through total transparency in relation to the intent and purpose of the investigation and interview.

The interview was conducted in the principal's office and lasted forty minutes. To begin with, the responses were slow and minimal with little reference or opportunities for further discussion. The researcher chose questions to engage senior management and develop their responses by focusing on their personal experiences of teaching children with speech and language difficulties. This created a more relaxed and open discussion. It which later developed into areas of school policy, staff professional development, school funding and resources, a vision for the future, socio-cultural factors unique to the geographical context of the study and recommendations for future progress. The researcher recorded the responses by writing notes on a pre-designed answer template for ease of use and to minimise interruptions to the conversation.

3.2 (c) Informal Meetings

Informal meetings were conducted with the LS team, class teachers and parents, (Appendix Three) to investigate research question number three:

What practices and procedures are in place to identify, assess, and cater for the needs of children with speech and language difficulties?

Informal, as opposed to semi-structured or structured interviews, were chosen due to their flexible nature. The researcher was conducting the investigation from the inside and as such, needed to retain the status-quo of relationships between staff members. In order to maintain the delicate balance between researcher and co-worker, informal and ad-hoc meetings were seen as the most efficient means of investigation. Informal interviews helped to alleviate undue pressure which may have been felt by the LS team, class teachers or parents in relation to discussing school policy.

Participants were very forthcoming and helpful during all discussions. Participants provided follow-up documentation and statistics when requested. The researcher compiled valid anecdotal notes from the descriptions provided and logged opinions and hunches of the interviewees pertaining to their daily activities.

A delay occurred in relation to the receipt of policy documents and assessment material, but with gentle and persistent reminders from the researcher, both verbally and via email, all information was received within the required time frame. The delay in receipt of the documents was primarily due to the time of year at which the study was conducted. Teachers and administrators were over burdened with reporting and extra-curricular activities, which were encroaching on their time. The researcher was mindful of the advantageous position in which the research was being conducted and expressed due appreciation of all assistance received, regardless of delays during the investigation.

Due to the ad-hoc and informal nature of some discussions with faculty members, there were difficulties faced in relation to the accuracy of transcribed notes and recording of all relevant information. The researcher also faced a dilemma in relation to how much information to include from an ethical point of view. As an insider collecting data, the researcher was conscious not to manipulate or distort information, which often came from normal discourse outside the realm of research and investigation.

3.2 (f) Documentation Collection and Analysis

A thorough examination of previous related studies and literature was conducted before the practical aspects of the research project were undertaken. A key feature of the researcher's choice of topic was associated with the availability and suitability of current relevant literature. The researcher exhausted all available means of sourcing information, documents, books, articles and journals. The most useful resources were both educational libraries in Dubai and Ireland and also online access to relevant material.

The researcher utilised all human resources by conversing with university personnel, colleagues and fellow varsity members. Advice was sought from previous researchers and time was spent examining previous related studies within the field of social science and research e.g. Gaad and Thabet (2009), Randeree and Gaad (2008), Eapen, Zoubeidi, Yunis, Gururaj, Sabri and Ghubash (2006), Gaad (2006), Gaad (2004), Gaad and Alghazo (2004) and Gaad (2001). Books, journals and articles were easily available through libraries and online. Access to these sources of information did not pose any problems.

The researcher acknowledged that documentation analysis and collection is a process that has no definite end and, as such, continued to research and select relevant data throughout the course of the study and the report writing phase. The most difficult part of the investigation was identification of useful and pertinent information, without stepping outside the parameters of the study, or exceeding the time frame for completion. This was carefully managed by the researcher, who continually revisited the research questions and assessed the relevance of information gathered.

The most useful information gathered was discussed in the literature review section of this study. The researcher compared and contrasted recommended best practice, from current literature, with everyday procedures and practices within the selected school.

During the course of the study the LS Review Committee finalised a report for senior management with recommendations to enhance services provided by the department (Appendix Four). The report was a valuable source of information in relation to current practices and procedures. It

outlined problematic areas for the LS department and offered suggestions as to how they could improve the provision of service. The report findings in conjunction with other research evidence helped in the triangulation of data.

The student portfolio and reports of the case study subject facilitated another avenue of investigation which helped to identify notable trends and observed phenomena (Appendix Five-Seven). The inconsistent nature of record keeping and the reliability and accuracy of internal school assessments limited this part of the research.

3.2 (d) Case Study

The case study provided focus and direction for the investigation of practices and procedures in relation to speech and language difficulties. The researcher endeavored to use the case study as a means of providing further insight into the daily practices and routines within the school. Through the case study, the researcher investigated identification and assessment practices, worked closely with the LS and the ESL teams, monitored daily practices and routines, evaluated the effectiveness of interventions and reviewed progress and reporting procedures.

Following careful negotiation with the LS team and class teachers, a child called Andreas (a pseudonym) was chosen. Andreas's case gave a realistic view of the complexities faced by educators when dealing with a child experiencing communication difficulties. His profile as a second language speaker is common within an international school setting and, as such, transferability of findings are deemed high in relation to the usefulness of this study for other educators and researchers. With this in mind, the researcher identified the valuable nature of Andreas as a subject of consideration within the case study.

Ideally Andreas and the school faculty would benefit from his inclusion in the case study. By including Andreas in the study, his profile would rise within the school. Raising a child's profile within an educational environment can lead to increased awareness among staff which in-turn leads to increased understanding about the needs and abilities of the child. When awareness of a child's needs and abilities are highlighted, opportunities for additional support and intervention are more

likely. In conjunction with appropriate recommendations and a careful tactful approach, this could improve the quality and provision of services for the child.

Accordingly Andreas was selected for inclusion in the study and written permission was sought from his parents. The nature and purpose of the investigation was explained to them along with their consent to withdraw from the study at any stage, without adversely effecting his position within the school. In mutual agreement with the school, Andreas's parents would receive a detailed account of recommendations made in relation to his educational provision. On permission of the parents, the researcher and class teacher spoke to Andreas informally and sought his permission to spend time watching him work in order to think of better ways to help him learn. He was happy with this arrangement and agreed.

3.2 (e) Participant Observation

Andreas was observed on a number of occasions in a variety of settings. These observations were conducted to investigate how an ESL child with speech and language difficulties is catered for within an inclusive international school setting. The researcher wished to investigate the practices and procedures in place and their usefulness with regard to teaching and learning in a real context. The findings from these observations are presented in the results section and analysed in the discussion section of this study.

The researcher worked closely with the class and subject teachers to build a profile of Andreas. His parents also provided much needed background information during informal discussions, regarding Andreas's developmental and educational history.

Due care was taken not to upset the normal routine of the school day and all observations took place following verbal or email confirmation of consent from the teacher in question. The researcher did not impose on the teaching time and sat passively during lessons, away from the children, taking notes and observing quietly. The researcher did not converse with the students or seek their attention. This was deemed an appropriate course of action so as not to create an artificial or 'Hawthorn Effect', as highlighted by Elton Mayo's experimental investigations Smith

(1998). The researcher wished to encapsulate a true reflection of Andreas's educational experiences (Appendix Eight).

On a different occasion, outside of class time, the researcher spent individual time with Andreas in the presence of an accompanying adult. The researcher engaged Andreas through the medium of play and art while informally seeking information to capture a learner-centered perspective of what school life is like for an ESL child with speech and language difficulties. During these sessions, Andreas was asked to describe his experiences at school and give examples of things he found most enjoyable and helpful (Appendix Nine).

Analysis of current practice through participant observation assumed a more ethnographic stance, with the observer becoming part of the learning environment by interacting with Andreas. It enabled fluid analysis of the learning environment and helped the researcher to identify surrounding influences and triggers which are further discussed in the discussion and recommendations section of this study.

A limitation of this research method included the effect of the researcher's presence on the activity as previously mentioned with regard to Elton Mayo's 'Hawthorn Effect'. Another obstacle was recording data while 'in the field' and collating vast quantities of narrative, in order to quantify and interpret the setting and events which proved problematic at times. On reflection a checklist should have been devised pertaining to the intended observation focus and used in various structured and unstructured settings to capture a multi-dimensional perspective of interaction.

Through the implementation of these research tools, a holistic and comprehensive picture of speech and language difficulties was formed. Triangulation of results will attempt to build a firm basis, from which conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

A full examination of ethical considerations was undertaken by the researcher before consent to participate was sought from the respective participating bodies.

Ethical considerations included:

- The role of the inside researcher
- Conflict of interest
- Pre-disposed bias
- Fair explanation of the proposed study
- Rational for inclusion within the study
- Informed consent of parent and child
- Access to relevant conclusions and finalised report
- Possible adverse effects of participating in the study
- Retaining anonymity among participants

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

4.1 Introduction

This section will outline the findings of the quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry undertaken during the study. Results will be presented in the following order to provide a clear picture of all relevant data:

- Teacher Questionnaire
- Semi Structured Interviews and Informal Discussions
- Documentation Collection and Analysis
- Case Study and Participant Observation

4.2 Teacher Questionnaire

A copy of the teacher questionnaire is available in Appendix One. The research population comprised of primary teachers who stem from multicultural backgrounds and are all resident in the U.A.E. English is the language of communication, however not all participants are native English speakers. Sixty completed questionnaires were received. Participants were divided into male and female, class level and years of teaching experience in order to contextualise the data (Figure 1).
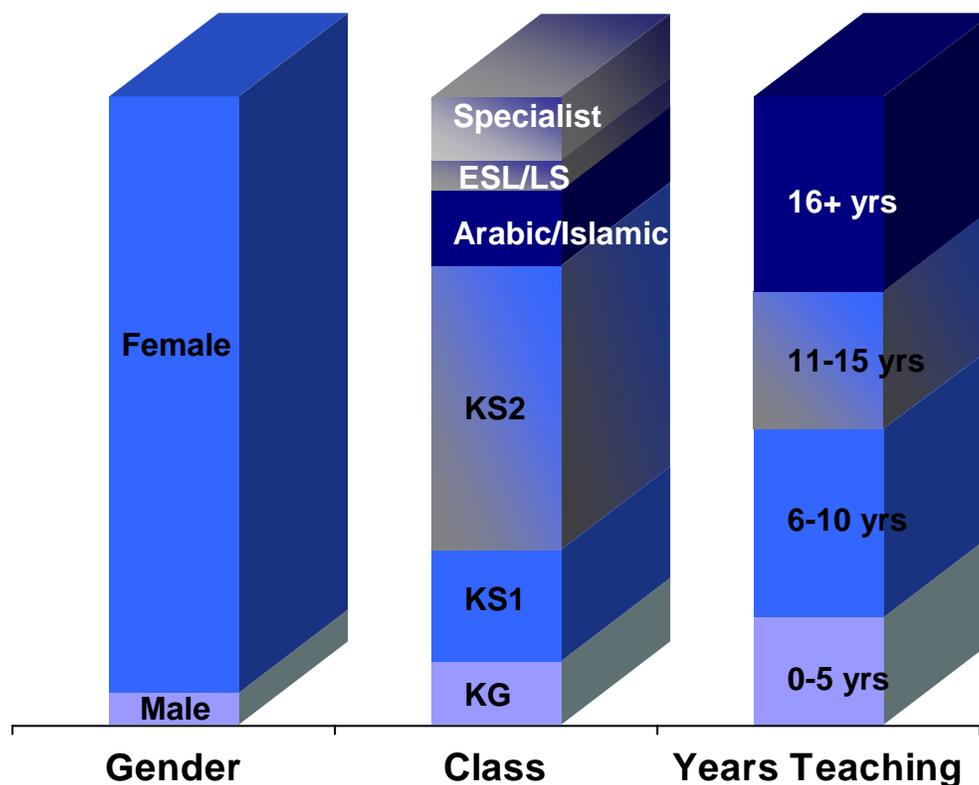

Figure 1: Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

ESL: English as a Second Language; LS: Learning Support; KS2: Key Stage 2; KS1: Key Stage 1; KG: Kindergarten

The majority of respondents were female, the majority of whom worked within the KS2 department. There was a wide range of teaching experience.

Question four, an open ended question, was designed to assess teacher's definition of speech and language difficulties. These responses were coded and graphed for ease of analysis. Fig. 2 groups the responses and displays them as a percentage. Answers will exceed 100% as multi-coding was allowed.
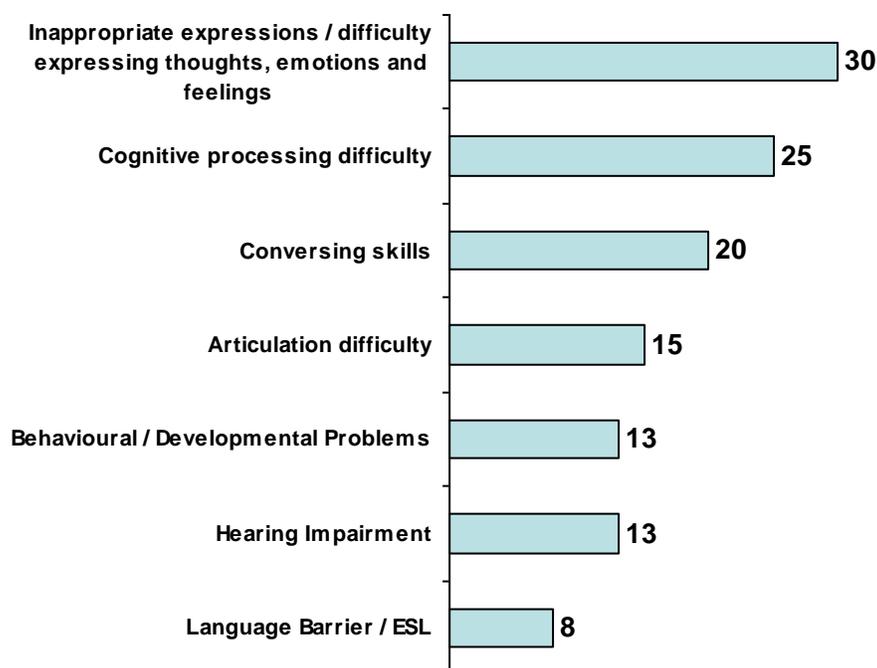
Figure 2: Teacher's Definition of Speech and Language Difficulties

Teachers provided a wide range of definitions for speech and language difficulties. Fifty percent of respondents focused on the socio-linguistic and pragmatic aspects of speech and language difficulties while only twenty eight percent related speech and language difficulties to physical disability.

In answer to Question five, relating to whether teachers received any pre-service training in speech and language difficulties, 20% responded Yes, (n=12) and 80% responded No, (n=48). Cross referencing of answers led to a notable trend towards pre-service training and a position within the LS or ESL team.

Question six of the questionnaire asked teachers if they had any Professional Development (PD), since joining the school, in relation to speech and language difficulties. 97% (n=58) responded No, while 3% (n=2) responded Yes. When asked to specify the nature of the PD, one teacher reported that she participated in management training regarding effective communication with adults in the workplace.

Question seven asked teachers whether they received support from external professionals in relation to teaching a child with speech and language difficulties. The data demonstrates that 97% (n=58) of teachers had not received any support while 3% (n=2) had.

Question eight surveyed whether teachers felt confident teaching a child with speech and language difficulties. The responses are displayed in Fig. 3 below:
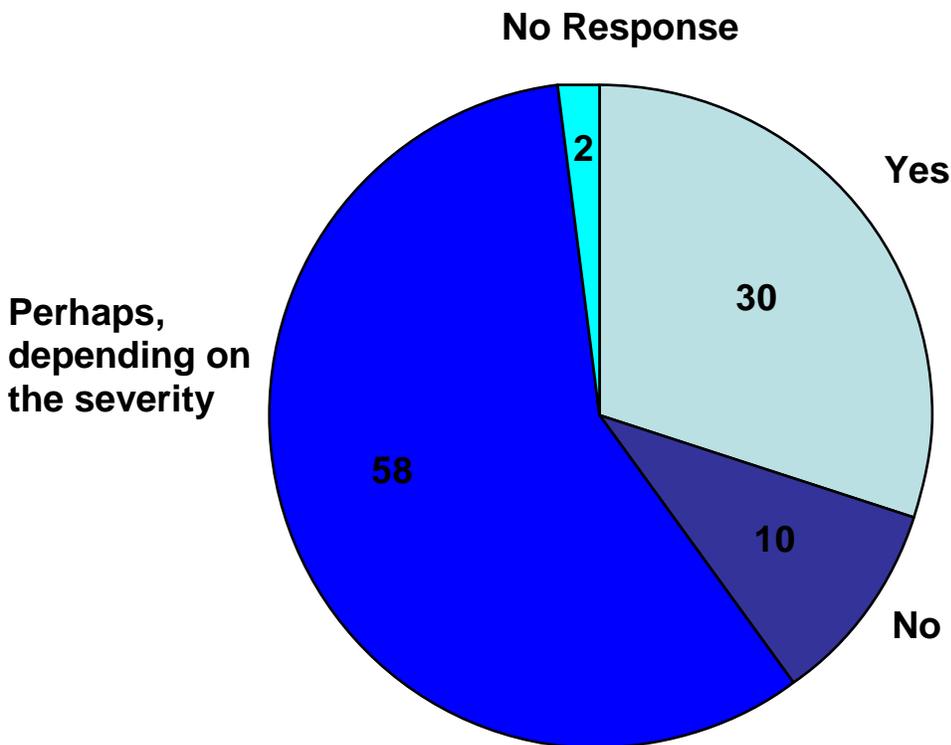
Figure 3: Levels of Teacher Confidence in Teaching Children with Speech and Language Difficulties

The most notable trend is that 88% of staff members are willing and confident to include children with speech and language difficulties. They are pre-disposed to the idea and feel confident in their teaching ability depending on the circumstances.

Question nine asked teachers to rate their level of knowledge with regard to speech and language difficulties. (Fig. 4)
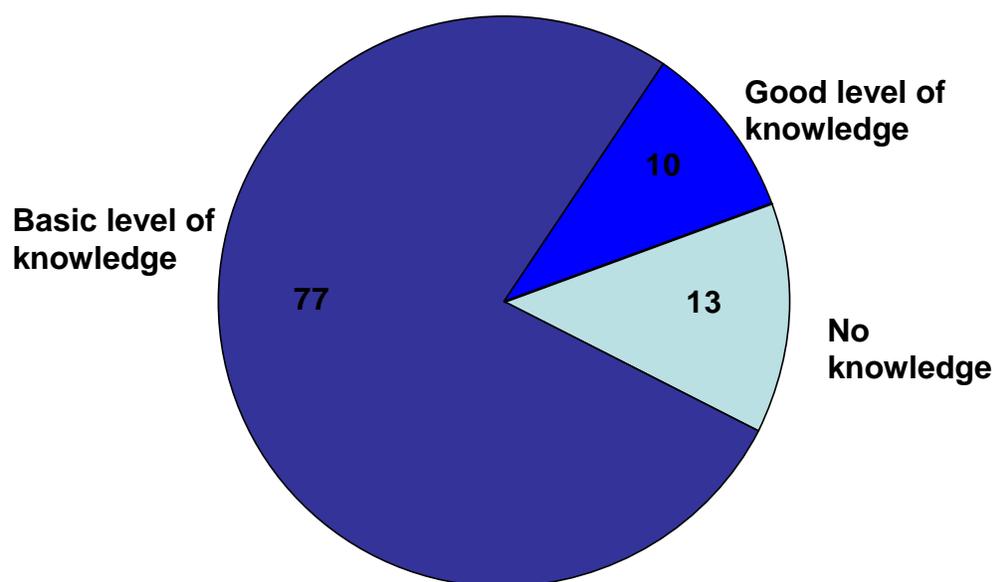
Figure 4: Teacher Knowledge in Relation to Speech and Language Difficulties

Eighty seven percent (n=52) of teachers had a basic to good level of understanding. This reflects their high confidence rates and good general awareness of speech and language difficulties as demonstrated by responses to Questions four and five.

Question 11 surveyed to what extent teacher's felt speech and language difficulties impact on teaching and learning in the classroom, the responses are displayed in Fig. 5 below:
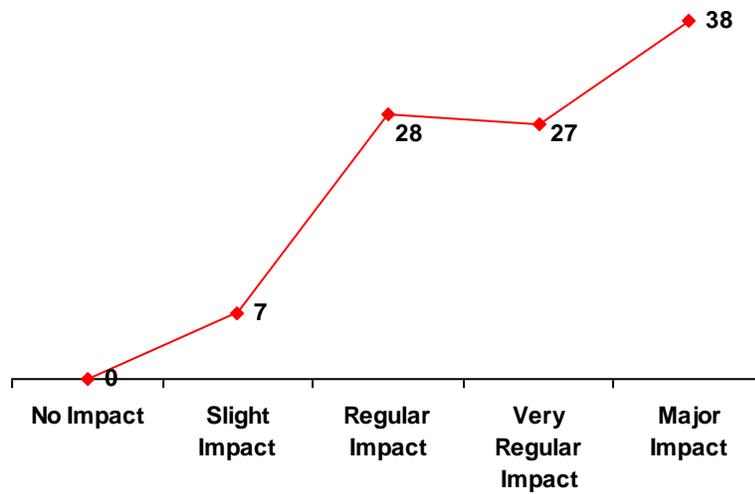
Figure 5: Impact of Speech and Language Difficulties on Teaching and Learning

The line graph displays a trend towards regular to major impact of speech and language difficulties on classroom interactions. The data suggests teachers are aware of the impact on their classes and acknowledge the presence of speech and language difficulties in daily activities.

Question 12 asked teachers if they would feel comfortable using AAC during their lessons. Fig. 6 below displays the responses
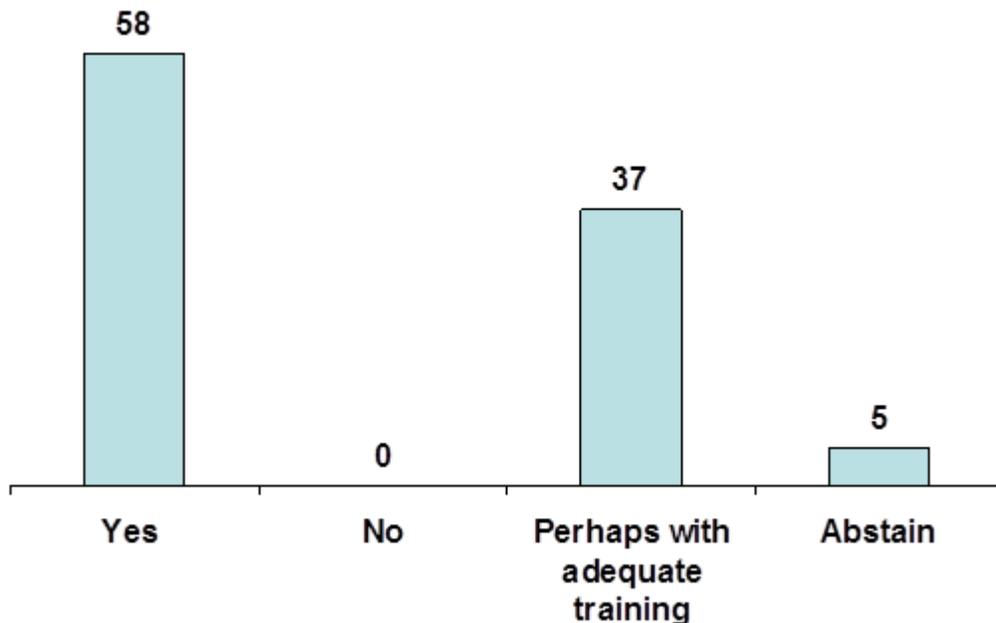
Figure 6: Levels of Teacher Confidence in Using AAC

The bar graph displays a trend towards the inclusion of AAC within lessons to assist teaching and learning in the classroom. A response rate of 95%, (n=57), towards the inclusion of AAC, concurs with previous positive responses made by the teaching faculty in relation to their own levels of confidence and willingness to include children with speech and language difficulties.

Question 13 aimed to identify how many children a teacher had previously taught at the school, which they suspected as having a speech and language difficulty. Sixty eight percent believed they had taught between 1-10 children with suspected speech and language difficulties. Fifteen percent reported that they had taught 11+ children with suspected speech and language difficulties. Cross referencing places the majority of Arabic, Islamic and Specialist teachers within the 11+ group. This trend indicates that the greater the number of students per teacher, the higher the incidents of suspected speech and language difficulty. A positive finding of this research indicates an awareness and acknowledgment, by teachers, of some student's speech and language difficulties.

Responses to Question 14 of the questionnaire indicate the level of support received by teachers from colleagues in relation to children with speech and language difficulties. Fig. 7 below displays the results.
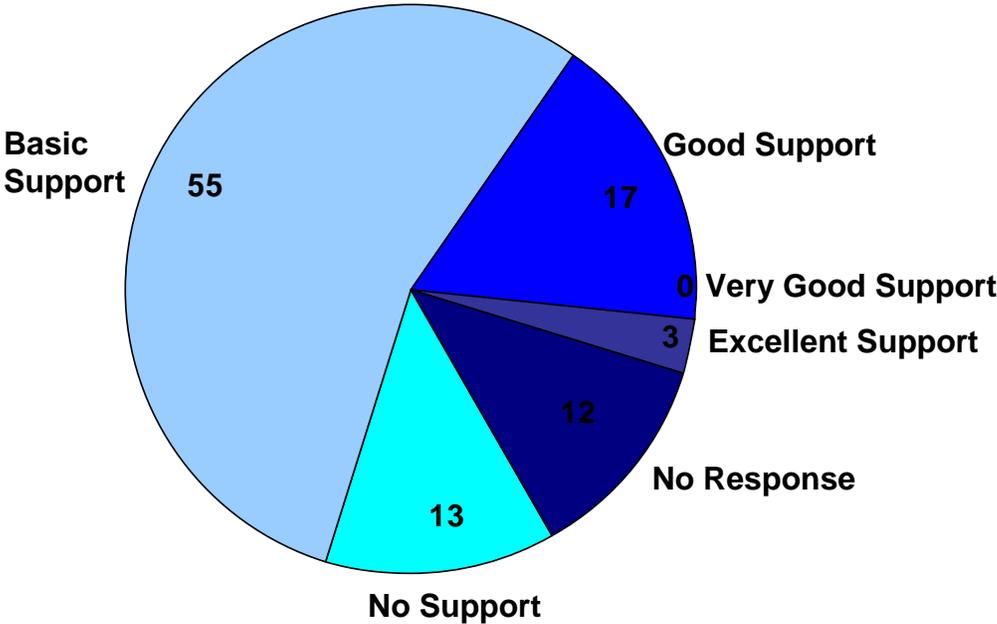
Figure 7: Levels of Support Received from Colleagues in Relation to Children with Speech and Language Difficulties

The data reflects that 75% of staff received basic to excellent support in relation to children with speech and language difficulties. Comparing results of external and internal support networks, an identifiable trend lends itself towards internal support networks in relation to teaching children with speech and language difficulties.

Question 15 indicated that 48% (n=29) of teachers had taught a child, at the school, whom they suspected of having speech and language difficulties. Forty eight percent (n=29) responded that they had not. Two percent (n=2) expressed that they were unsure if the child had a speech and language difficulty. Of the 48% of positive responses, 24% (n=7) reported that the child had an

Individualised Education Plan (I.E.P). A notable trend from the data indicated that no Specialist, Arabic or Islamic member of staff was aware of the presence of an I.E.P. Seven percent of respondents (n=4) queried what an I.E.P was.

Thirty seven percent (n=22) of respondents indicated that they worked collaboratively with other staff members to meet the SEN of children within their class. In contrast to this, 75% of respondents felt they had received basic to excellent support from senior management and the LS department, with 55% stipulating basic support.

4.2 Semi- Structured Interview with Senior Management
A record of semi-structured interviews is found in Appendix Two. Interview notes were used as an aid to memory. The researcher endeavored to identify the support structures and guidelines in place to help teachers and students deal with speech and language difficulties.

Senior management was asked if there was any child with speech and language difficulties attending the school. They were not aware of any child who was diagnosed or suspected of having a speech and language difficulty. They had a vague idea of one child in Year Four who had been assessed that week by an external psychologist but were unsure of the details. The researcher was referred to the school nurse, Deputy Principal (DP), class teacher and LS department for further details.

With regard to policy, management said there was no written policy in relation to the enrolment of children with SEN. They discussed a screening process which takes place prior to enrolment and reported that children are admitted to the school on the basis of this initial screening test and interview. Some children are excluded from enrolment following initial screening due to poor language ability or lack of student readiness. Senior management explained that screening is conducted by the Foundation Stage (FS) teachers and the DP.

For additional information on practices and procedures, the researcher was referred to the LS / ESL Coordinator with regard to samples of screening tests and assessment and to Curriculum Coordinators and the DP for policies on literacy and assessment. Studies by East and Evans (2001)

refer to a 'Communication Policy' in relation to speech and language difficulties. Management reported that there was no such policy in the school.

When asked if the school was adequately resourced to cater for children with speech and language difficulties they replied that it was and indicated that high tech AAC was not required within the school. They outlined the presence of low-tech AAC in all classrooms in the form of visual aids and the availability of literacy software within the LS Department. The researcher was referred to the LS department for examples of this.

Senior management was asked about the perceived barriers towards successful inclusion of SEN within mainstream, private schools in Dubai. Management felt that socio-cultural and economic barriers existed. They felt people lacked general understanding and knowledge in relation to screening, assessment, and intervention programmes which they deemed necessary for successful inclusion. They noted that appropriate professional support services were not in place and as such schools were not equipped to deal with students who have severe speech and language difficulties. An example of the absence of educational psychologists was given. Also, a lack of available funding for SEN was reported. The interviewee explained how this had a negative impact on the provision of specialist support services including the allocation of specialist posts in relation to SEN.

Senior management had no recollection of PD in relation to SEN and did not envisage any. It was explained that they would not receive the funding for such PD, as it was not deemed an immediate priority.

Senior management was asked what they envisaged for the future of the LS Department. They outlined the future appointment of a LS Coordinator whose duties would be separate from those of the ESL coordinator. Management indicated that they were actively recruiting to fill this position for the next academic year. They identified a need to restructure the department by aligning teacher qualifications with the needs of students. It was reported that there was no relation between the specific qualifications of a LS teacher and the allocation of children in relation to their SEN.

4.3 Informal Discussions with LS Coordinator and Class Teachers

Informal discussions were held with the LS / ESL team and class teachers to build a picture of the processes and practices in place to help children with speech and language difficulties. Notes recorded during discussions and email correspondence act as an aid to memory (Appendix Three)

Information gathered during informal discussions indicated that identification of speech and language difficulties occurs from teacher referral based on classroom observations and interactions. Children with SEN who are enrolled in the school are not routinely identified through the general admissions procedure. There is however a section in the English entrance exam whereby the supervising attendee can indicate possible ESL or LS status of the candidate. The LS team is not notified of children with SEN prior to their acceptance and admission to the school. This concurs with the views expressed by management that there is no policy with regard to admission of children with SEN. The LS / ESL coordinator indicated that 85 children attend some form of LS and that only one percent of these are in need of or have had an external assessment.

When a child is identified by the class teacher as having an additional educational need, they are required to fill out a LS referral form including student details and reason for referral. A consent form is then sent from the LS team to the child's parents requesting permission to assess the child. When permission is granted, the child is withdrawn for one or two periods and assessed by a member of the LS team. They use informal and standardised tests. If the child is assessed as having a SEN warranting intervention, a follow up letter is sent to parents seeking their approval for the provision of LS services.

There is no specific program to tackle speech and language difficulties within the LS department. Children who exhibit speech and language difficulties will receive LS provision if they are:

- firstly, identified by their class teacher as having an additional learning need and
- secondly, achieve significantly lower than their counter parts on general standardised tests for language and comprehension

If children with speech and language difficulties are identified by their class teachers and do fulfill the criteria for LS provision then they are placed in small heterogenous groups organised by grade

level. They attend LS classes between one and seven times a week for forty minutes periods. There is no distinction between the SEN of the child and the qualification or expertise of the LS teacher when places are assigned in specific LS groups.

Each child attending LS has an I.E.P. They were introduced for the first time during the course of this study. I.E.P's were written by the LS teacher using an I.E.P writer program on the SIMS data base. Some teachers received a completed I.E.P during review periods, which were sent home with report cards.

Teachers reported that they discussed issues during free periods, networked informally with the LS team, and modeled good practice from the experience of others.

The acting LS Coordinator with joint responsibility for ESL stated that she was over burdened with the level of administrative duties covering both departments. She highlighted the fact that she was not specifically trained in SEN but was an ESL specialist. She felt that separating responsibility for both departments would lead to improved service provision. Separating the roles would facilitate increased sharing and dissemination of expertise and knowledge among staff. As a result of separating the roles more time could be spent completing administrative duties, identifying areas of professional development, liaising with management, parents and teachers.

4.4 Documentation Collection and Analysis

The researcher found a distinct lack of related local studies, but was assured by the presence of alternative local studies in the realm of SEN, which provided good insight into the unique socio-cultural background of the study. There were no statistics available in the public domain, in relation to SEN within Dubai's private education sector. National and local press provided a view of the current situation regarding implementation of SEN policy and reform within Dubai (www.thenational.ae).

On an empirical level, documents were sourced with some delay. A review of written policies highlighted the absence of an SEN enrolment policy and a 'Communication Policy'. Literacy,

numeracy, assessment, positive behaviour and health and safety policies did exist, some of which were being reviewed, in line with DSIB recommendations.

The researcher identified the absence of an assessment data bank to track attainment scores. Assessment scores were translated into grade scores ranging from one to seven for the purpose of writing bi-annual progress reports for parents. The mathematics and English departments were in the process of establishing longitudinal tracking procedures. The researcher was given access to a local network server, SIMS, which was in the initial stages of implementation and use. The researcher was allowed access to other documentary evidence being piloted in line with new tracking and assessment procedures e.g. student portfolios and I.E.P's (Appendix Five)

4.6 Case Study Analysis

Analysis of case study findings reveals that Andreas was initially categorised as an ESL child. A copy of his initial assessment is found in Appendix Six. Originating from Greece, Andreas was admitted to the school without any previous educational history. Andreas's mother did not speak English and his father had very limited English. Andreas was admitted to Grade Four and participated in intensive ESL lessons. His behaviour became increasingly disruptive both in the classroom and during break times. He experienced great difficulty socialising and was unable to follow normal social conventions and classroom practices. Andreas was increasingly excluded from classroom life as he was unable to complete the prescribed tasks. According to his teacher, he spent most of his time engaging in busy work like tidying the room or completing jobs for her.

Andreas made slow progress during ESL lessons. He lacked basic knowledge of the English alphabet and was described during the initial assessment as a complete beginner by his ESL teacher. The LS / ESL coordinator reported that Andreas made slow progress but that they were not overly concerned until his behaviour in class was so problematic that he was unable to function in his normal lessons. Andreas was excluded from music due to this disruptive behaviour but did not express any remorse about this. When Andreas failed to progress along the normal stages of progression for typical ESL children, his teachers began to query whether there was an underlying condition prohibiting him from achieving.

Andreas's teachers requested to speak with his parents several times. Meetings were delayed due to the fact that Andreas's father travelled for extended periods with work and his mother did not speak English. After much persistence from the ESL department and Andreas's class teacher, his father did attend a meeting to discuss his lack of progression and difficult behaviour. During the meeting Andreas's father explained for the first time that Andreas had been diagnosed with a speech and language difficulty three years previously. Staff immediately requested a copy of this report (Appendix Seven).

The psychological report with recommendations pertaining to Andreas's assessment was not given to the school until eight months after his initial enrolment. The report was translated from Greek to English and teachers found it vague and ambiguous. The class teacher urged his parents to have him reassessed to further establish the nature of his speech and language difficulty but they refused. Andreas's teacher noted that his parents had not completed the recommended speech and occupational therapy in line with the recommendations of the report.

Following discussion within the ESL and LS department, it was suggested that Andreas would continue within the ESL department for a second year rather than attend LS lessons. This was deemed the most advantageous solution for Andreas to provide consistency and create a sense of belonging. In line with school policy, Andreas was not retained in Grade Four and instead progressed to Grade Five. No additional provision was afforded to Andreas. His class teacher recommended a shadow teacher be employed, but management was unwilling to do this as it was not school policy to employ individual learning assistants. The school does employ a shared teacher's assistant to facilitate with administrative duties within the grade. It was not deemed a priority for her to work directly with Andreas.

4.7 Participant Observation

Anecdotal notes for participant observation and play / art therapy sessions are found in Appendix Eight and Nine. Andreas was a pleasant and receptive child who was not concerned by the presence of another adult in the room during non-participatory observations and participant observation workshops.

During class time he did not converse with other children or participate in the speaking and listening activities. Andreas used nonverbal means of seeking attention from others and showed very little interest in what the class was doing. He busied himself looking around, moving around the room and scribbling.

At lunch time Andreas wandered around the play area. He sat by himself eating his snack and observed those around him. He did not participate in games with other children. Andreas investigated his environment by looking under seats and into plants.

Andreas drew a simple picture with little detail during an Art / Play participant observation session. He spoke in disjointed sentences. His English vocabulary was basic and grammatical structures incorrect. Andreas said he enjoyed ICT lessons but would prefer to be at home.

The researcher noted that Andreas became physically agitated during times of transition which were unstructured. Andreas's behaviour was most disruptive and confrontational when he felt under pressure or confused e.g.: carrying out a sequence of tasks, working independently, preparing for a new phase in a lesson.

Andreas's parents reported that he was aggressive with his siblings at home and did not like going to school. He cried when he was asked to do something he did not want to do and was very stubborn. They said Andreas did not tell them what was happening in school.

4.8 Findings of the LS Review Committee

During the study a review of LS practices and procedures was initiated by management in line with DSIB recommendations for future development. The LS / ESL coordinator and support teachers conducted the review and produced a document which highlighted departmental strengths and areas of concern. (Appendix Four)

Recommendations were made to improve service provision and enhance the learning process. They highlighted a trend by classroom teachers in the upper grades to refer children with behavioural problems as a means of removing them from the class to limit disturbance. The LS review

committee recommended that all teachers be reminded of the role of LS, the referral system and the entry and exit criteria for students. They requested training for all staff in how to use and access the I.E.P writer on the SIMS system. A LS / ESL handbook was suggested as a means of introducing new staff to the department and familiarising them with its aims, objectives and practices. The review body highlighted a need for increased collaborative planning with subject coordinators, LS staff and class teachers to facilitate continuity in lessons.

Finally the LS Review Committee highlighted the need for greater transparency during the enrolment of new students. They recommended advance notification of all relevant personnel when a child with SEN is enrolled the school. They acknowledged that this will rely on more rigorous pre-assessment procedures and greater transparency on behalf of parents and school management. The process would include communication between the Registrar's office, previous schools the child attended, management, staff and the child's parents.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Review of Research Questions

This study focused on three main areas of investigation, which were divided into three identifiable research questions. Research questions are linked to results and the significance of these findings are analysed and discussed. The transient international demographic of the school may provide an opportunity for transferability of results within the domain of international schools. Upon further research recommendations made within the study may be applicable in similar institutions worldwide.

Research Question Number One Asked:

Are teachers aware of speech and language difficulties among their pupils and what previous experience and or training do they have in relation to pupils with communication difficulties?

Findings from the questionnaire and informal discussions with teachers suggest that teachers do have a good general knowledge of speech and language difficulties. It is clear from the responses that teachers are aware of speech and language difficulties. Question four provided a wide range of definitions in relation to speech and language difficulties. This demonstrated an understanding that this is a complex and multi-faceted issue, which impacts on all aspects of a child's development. Answers to Question five indicated a low rate of pre-service training in relation to speech and language difficulties. This leads one to believe that teachers' existing knowledge of speech and language difficulties was achieved through practical experience and collaborative discussion with colleagues.

Encouraging trends show a willingness to cater for children with speech and language difficulties within mainstream classes. Teachers identified a need for collaborative support, training and resources to effectively meet the needs of children with speech and language difficulties.

Research Question Number Two Asked:

To what extent do school management and policy support the learning needs of children with speech and language difficulties?

Results of semi-structured interviews with management and a policy review reveal no awareness of or reference to the enrolment of children with SEN in the school. This concurs with Gaad (2011) who highlighted that some private schools chose not to acknowledge those with SEN or in this particular case speech and language difficulties. The absence of a Communication Policy was noted.

Management expressed concern regarding the lack of available funding in relation to SEN. They felt PD in this area was not deemed a priority and would not receive the required funding. This reinforced the findings of the questionnaire in relation to PD for speech and language difficulties. Teachers reported that they had not had any PD in relation to speech and language difficulties while at the school.

Management identified socio-cultural barriers to inclusion, which in their opinion prohibited meaningful inclusion of children with SEN in the foreseeable future. They did not identify any student as having a speech and language difficulty at the school and referred the researcher to the school nurse and LS department. They believed the school was well resourced to cater for the needs of all children and indicated that high tech AAC was not required within the school.

Disparities were highlighted between the amount and level of support received by teachers in relation to children with speech and language difficulties in their class. Results showed that teachers did not receive support from external professionals and instead received advice or shared ideas with colleagues including the LS team on an informal basis. Additional LS was provided outside the classroom on a withdrawal basis. The disparity between external and internal support networks may suggest a consultative role on behalf of management and the LS team as opposed to a facilitative, collaborative one.

Research Question Number Three Asked:

What practices and procedures are in place to identify, assess and cater for the needs of children with speech and language difficulties within the school?

Results reveal that initial identification is inadequate and ineffective. Access to information including relevant personal history of students is problematic. The chain of communication with regard to the enrolment of new students is ineffective.

The LS team and class teachers explained and gave examples of the screening process, assessment tools, record keeping, new tracking procedures, interventions and curriculum support offered to children with suspected speech and language difficulties. It was apparent that children experiencing speech and language difficulties usually fell into a multi-disciplinary field of needs and support services. Speech and language difficulties rarely presented in isolation and were usually accompanied by behavioural and social difficulties as was evident in the case of Andreas.

Results reveal that initial identification is inadequate and ineffective. The chain of communication with regard to the enrolment of new students is ineffective. Access by teachers to information including relevant personal history of students is problematic. The registrar's office does not liaise with class teacher s or the LS department. Academic records from previous schools are requested but not required for enrolment at the school.

Assessment of students with speech and language difficulties occurs through standardised testing by the LS team upon referral from the class teacher. Children who fall significantly below their cohort on age related standardised language and comprehension tests are accepted into the LS programme, following parental consent. LS time is provided on a withdrawal basis with an indication that in class support is basic. There is no LS provision for children who score within typical cognitive norms on standarised tests for language and comprehension. The narrow criteria for the provision of LS may preclude appropriate support for children who need it most.

Case study findings show that Andreas was enrolled in the school with no previous academic records or awareness by the school of his pre-diagnosed speech and language difficulty. This

highlighted a deficit in the enrolment process which calls for greater transparency on behalf of parents without the fear of exclusion from the school. Andres's parents omitted to inform the school of his SEN. He presented initially with difficulties associated with ESL but, on further investigation, was deemed to have a speech and language difficulty which was impeding cognitive and social development. Eight months of teaching and learning time was wasted due to a lack of communication and transparency between Andreas's parents and the school. A culture of full disclosure without fear of rejection needs to be established if the school genuinely wants to cater for the needs of students with SEN and speech and language difficulties in particular. Successful dissemination of information relies on collaboration of all involved and effective time management.

Students who are identified by their teachers as having a suspected speech and language difficulty are referred to the LS team by their class teachers who fill out a referral form. This form contains basic personal history of the child and a brief overview of the main concerns. Following parental consent children are assessed using standardised and informal test of language and comprehension. Those who fall significantly below their cohort on age related standardised language and comprehension tests are accepted into the LS programme, following parental consent. LS time is provided on a withdrawal basis with an indication that in class support is basic. There is no LS provision for children who score within typical cognitive norms on standarised tests for language and comprehension. The narrow criteria for the provision of LS may preclude appropriate support for children who need it most.

5.2 Recommendations
The following recommendations focus on the school and are envisaged to enhance the systems already in place. Strengths of the current system include:
- a diverse experienced and willing team,
- the LS referral form used by classroom teachers,
- the initiation of I.E.P's and
- the report findings of the LS review committee.

5.2 (a) Managerial Support and Guidance

The following recommendations endeavor to enhance managerial support and guidance in relation to speech and language difficulties. They may help to strengthen the chain of communication. Increased collaboration can facilitate the dissemination of information and create clear guidelines which management and staff are accountable for. Areas in need of review and further development include:

- Specific reference to the enrolment of children with SEN in the school enrolment policy
- The creation of a 'Communication' policy, recommended for all schools in studies conducted by East and Evans, 2001.
- Greater communication between the registrar's office, LS department and general teaching staff
- Funding for AAC and training on how to make the best use of it
- Promotion and facilitation of continued professional development in relation to speech and language difficulties
- External links with educational support services to include the MOE, educational psychologists, occupational therapists, SLT's and family support services.
- Facilitation of a parental support network for parents of children with speech and language difficulties

5.2 (b) Identification and Assessment Procedures

Recommendations to improve the identification and assessment of speech and language difficulties include, but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive enrolment procedure to include communication with previous schools, the provision of previous educational reports and personal developmental history of the child
- Review of the screening test used prior to enrolment to include items for assessing speech and language proficiency
- General screening of all new students accepted to the school using the SNEL diagnostic tool specifically designed for second language learners.
- Professional development courses for the identification of speech and language difficulties

- Mediation of tools, used to identify and assess students, who function within typical age related cognitive norms but may experience speech and language difficulties.

5.2 (c) Teacher Training and Professional Development

As outlined in the results section, teachers have a good understanding of speech and language difficulties and their impact on teaching and learning. Additional professional development will enable the school to improve the provision of services and quality of teaching and learning for all students, not just those with speech and language difficulties. To build upon the existing knowledge of staff, the following professional development is recommended. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- the physical, developmental and socio-cultural causes and effects of speech and language difficulties
- identifying speech and language difficulties in school aged children
- promoting effective practices for developing speech and language within the classroom
- differentiating curriculum objectives and activities focusing on oral language, communication and comprehension strategies
- using AAC within lessons
- creating and implementing I.E.P's

5.2 (d) Strategies to Enhance Teaching and Learning

Recommendations to enhance teaching and learning for children with speech and language difficulties include, but are not limited to:

- Greater collaboration between the LS department, class teachers, Arabic / Islamic and specialist teachers in relation to identification of needs, planning, assessment, tracking and reporting procedures
- In class support from members of the LS team
- Dedicated planning and review periods
- Efficient management of teaching assistants to directly support children with speech and language difficulties

- Greater use of low and high tech AAC within all lessons
- Access to external support agencies
- Access to all records and reports received by the school in relation to a student's personal, educational and developmental history
- Appropriate breaks and supervised recreational environments for children who need to withdraw from the class for short periods of time

5.3 Societal Influence

For meaningful changes to occur schools need the support of the MOE, MOSA, MOH and the community as a whole. The following recommendations are made with a view to developing societal networks and creating cohesion among government bodies in Dubai. Recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- collaboration between medical and educational professionals, societal statisticians and policy makers
- intensive and prolonged social media campaigns to raise awareness of the rights of all children to equal educational opportunities
- meaningful implementation of Federal Law No. 26 2006 across public and private schools
- further development of community support services for children with SEN and their families
- regulation of assessment and intervention services provided by cognitive psychologists, educational psychologists, behavioural therapists and SLT's
- a review of tertiary educational services in light of children with special educational needs to include vocational and skills training
- provision for pre-service teacher training to include the effect of speech and language difficulties on teaching and learning
- the creation of professional links between teacher training colleges and medical / linguistic institutions

5.4 Limitations of the Study

In light of the discussion and recommendations the following limitations should be noted.

- Lack of local and empirical policies, statistics and documentation

- Sourcing information in a timely manner

- Lack of standarised procedures for tracking and assessment of student progress within private international schools

- The effect of the researcher's presence during information gathering sessions

- Accurate recording of data during informal discussions and observation sessions

- The amount of data to include from an ethical point of view as an inside researcher

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study provided an overview of speech and language difficulties and how they affected teaching and learning in an international school context. This study was motivated by the researcher's awareness of difficulties experienced by students which can go undetected and lead to secondary behavioural, social and cognitive difficulties. The researcher wished to investigate this topic in an attempt to create awareness and discussion among educators, academics, policy makers and parents.

Findings of the literature review enhanced the readers understanding of the complex nature of speech and language difficulties and provided a platform from which the study was conducted. The findings include the following summarised ideas:

Difficulties with language arise when the basic sound components i.e. phonology, fail to develop. Phonological awareness and competence, syntax and morphology form the basis of language use and effective communication. In conjunction with this, certain communicative skills need to be perfected including pragmatic and socio-linguistic conversational abilities. These skills can be affected due to neuro-linguistic programming deficits, physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments. Developmental delays and disorders also impact on one's ability to communicate and use language effectively. Disorders such as ASD referred to in the Literature Review can create real difficulties for children and adults who otherwise possess the necessary physical and cognitive abilities to communicate, but lack particular socio-linguistic and pragmatic skills.

Quite often children are categorised as having a literacy, social, emotional, behavioural, or gross motor difficulty without due care and attention being given to the fact that they exhibit language and communication deficits. As subtle differences in language and communication are very hard to detect, it is often the overriding factors of disruptive behaviour, low literacy development, or lack of co-ordination that receive most attention and intervention. At the root of the problem however can be a linguistic processing problem which the child, already abreift of these skills, is unable to articulate or express.

Identifying, acknowledging and connecting these difficulties is essential for accurate diagnosis and meaningful intervention. Medical practitioners, SLT's, clinical psychologists and educators need to be aware that assessment data can present correlations between dual and multiple deficits in the areas of language, gross motor, cognitive and social, emotional behavioural difficulties. The problem for assessment and intervention is identifying these secondary and associative deficits, rather than focusing on just one main cause or difficulty.

Standardised tests of language, cognition and reading, such as those employed by the school at the center of this study are numerous and detailed. Each assesses varying aspects of speech and language use. Results need to be carefully deciphered in relation to all relevant personal and background history. Recommendations for further assessment and review should be considered in all cases. Results and statistics should be viewed with caution and interpreted responsibly to provide a fair and realistic picture of the child's strengths and needs. As Bishop and McDonald (2009) reported, test scores in isolation can often be misleading and at times, contradictory to other assessment data. Assessment scores should only be used in conjunction with other relevant data to provide a holistic picture of the child's developmental history and academic progress.

An international school was chosen as a suitable setting to conduct the study due to its multicultural demographic, representative of Dubai. Research was conducted to ascertain teacher's levels of understanding in relation to speech and language difficulties. This led to further investigation into the practices and procedures in place to identify and cater for the needs of pupils with speech and language difficulties. A review of school policy and practice, faculty discussions and interviews, a case study and questionnaires enhanced the overall frame of reference from which results were drawn. Triangulation of results led to the formation of robust constructs from which recommendations were made.

The results and recommendations led to the following conclusions in relation to speech and language difficulties:
- Effective and efficient practices for teaching children with speech and language difficulties primarily focus on purposeful, informed pedagogical instruction.

- Teaching children with speech and language difficulties is no different from teaching any child, as every child has their own specific learning style and individual needs.
- Teachers need to assess the needs and strengths of all their students regardless of their communicative ability. Therefore it should not be seen as a daunting or impossible task for educators to modify their teaching and learning experiences to fit the needs of their students, including those with speech and language difficulties.

In the context of the current study, teachers, management, parents and external bodies may continue to work collaboratively to maximise opportunities for successful intervention. Teachers expressed their willingness to cater for children with speech and language difficulties. They acknowledged the presence of speech and language difficulties among their students and requested increased training, support and resources. They felt this would help them to maximise efficient teaching strategies and develop a multi-disciplinary approach.

It is recommended in this study that management could:
- prioritise PD in relation to speech and language difficulties
- develop specific policies in relation to SEN and speech and language difficulties to enhance accountability
- pursue the creation of support networks across all domains.

For the purpose of validating results and transferability of findings, it was necessary to focus on the location of the study. Private international schools in Dubai possess a unique socio-cultural landscape which directly impact policy and practice within the school. Research observations concluded that the issue of access to education for children with speech and language difficulties is reflective of a more salient issue relating to the socio-cultural class distinctions which permeate throughout the private education system in Dubai. Exclusion of children with special needs due to disability may not be possible in the future due to the presence and enforcement of Federal Law No. 26 (2006), but obstacles will remain in relation to school fees and socio-cultural exclusion.

Limitations of this study include the lack of available statistics for SEN in the private education system in Dubai. As a developing nation research does not exist on the percentage of SEN students

in Dubai's private schools. Institutions are reluctant to publish this type of information due to social stigmatisation and fear of student repatriation. Without basic statistics in relation to the prevalence and type of SEN within private mainstream schools, it is difficult to quantify the scale of the issue. At best, one can refer to international norms. Inconsistent record keeping within the school was deemed a limitation of the study. Record keeping and tracking was not consistent throughout the school which led to problems in sourcing reliable evidence of student attainment and progression.

Policy makers and informed practitioners may utilise this and other available information to inform future practice and identify gaps in the provision of services and training. It is imperative for the MOE, MOSA, MOH, schools and the wider community to further develop support agencies within Dubai.

6.1 Further Research

Additional research would increase the availability of statistics and information in relation to SEN, including speech and language difficulties, within the private education system in Dubai. This research could focus on:

- the number of children officially diagnosed with SEN and speech and language difficulties who receive private mainstream education in Dubai
- the number of children who receive LS intervention and for what reason
- time allocated to LS intervention and the manner in which it is provided i.e. in-class or withdrawal
- the cost of providing LS and who incurs the cost
- the role of support agencies including the MOE, MOSA, MOH and private medical, educational and behavioural psychologists
- enrolment policy in relation to children with SEN and speech and language difficulties

This further research will help to guide and support schools in their drive towards meaningful inclusive practices. The resulting effect will enrich learning opportunities for all students and enhance practices and procedures already in place.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One

Teacher Questionnaire

Appendix Two

Semi Structured Interview

Date: May 15th 2010

Time: 1.15 – 1.45

Location: Principal's Office

Present: Senior Management Team / Researcher

1. Can you tell me of your experience teaching children with speech and language difficulties?

As a teacher I did not have a lot of direct experience teaching children with speech and language difficulties until I became involved in a reading recovery programme. During this phase of my career I began to notice subtle differences in how children leaner or failed to learn. I became more aware of the difficulties were students were experiencing and was able to spend additional time trying to think of ways to help them. Before this I feel I was unaware of what signs to look for.

2. Are there any children with speech and language difficulties at this school?

No, I am not aware of any. We don't have any children with speech and language difficulties here. There are a few children with specific learning difficulties but you would have to talk to the Learning Support Coordinator or teachers for specific details. I know of a student in Year Four who was assessed recently but I'm not sure of the details. You will have to talk to the class teacher of you want more details.

3. Is there a 'Communication Policy'

No, there isn't. We do have policies in relation to Student Enrolment, Health and Safety, Assessment and Curriculum.

4. Is there a reference with regard to the enrolment of children with SEN in the Enrolment Policy?

No, as far as I am aware there is not. It does not need to be written down as children with SEN do not come to this school. There are other places for them to go to.

5. Have you ever had Professional Development in relation to Speech and Language Difficulties or Special Educational Needs in general?

Not since I have been here, we wouldn't get sanctioned for it. Not as far as I can see.

6. What do you envisage for the future of the Learning Support Department?

Next year we are hoping to employ a new Learning Support Coordinator and separate the current role from English as a Second Language. It should help with administrative duties and the efficiency of the department as a whole. I would like teachers within the department to be assigned according to their specialization and to focus on particular students depending on their area of need.

7. What do you feel are the major stumbling blocks towards successful inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs in private schools in Dubai?

I think there needs to be much greater support from external agencies who the school can call upon for referral and professional advice without financial penalty. In other countries there are structures in place whereby schools can seek professional guidance and assessment. We have nothing here. I don't think they (school governors) feel it is important and do not wish to spend any money on the matter.

Appendix Three

Informal Discussions with Learning Support Coordinator and Class Teachers

Date: May / June 2010

Time: Free Periods / Incidental Meetings

Researcher: How do you identify students for LS?

LS Coordinator: We have a system in place of teacher referral. Usually the teacher comes to us and expresses a concern. We ask them to fill in the referral form and then take the child for some basic assessment. If we feel the child is in need of LS we will inform the parent sad n seek their consent.

Researcher: Are you notified in advance of new students with SEN?

LS Coordinator: No, any information we receive usually comes from the class teacher and perhaps the parent if they are willing to talk to us.

Researcher: What type of assessments do you administer?

LS Coordinator: We have a mixture of standardized tests for language comprehension, reading age, word recognition, auditory processing, visual discrimination, reasoning and inferential skills.

Researcher: How do you decide if the child is in need of LS?

LS Coordinator: It is a mixture between teacher input and academic success. If the child is unable to cope with their class work and is falling behind their peers considerable then they are considered as a candidate for LS. We do find however in the higher grades, teachers generally want to get rid of the disruptive students from their class and as such refer them to the LS department.

Researcher: What do you find the most difficult about your role?

LS Coordinator: I am not trained in LS as I am an ESL specialist. I do not have the time to dedicate to both departments and carry out my daily teaching duties. I other LS teacher do help and we tend to work very well as a team but it is difficult to cover all aspects of the role due to time constraints.

Researcher: Are there any external agencies that you liaise with?

LS Coordinator: No, but some of our students do seek psychological and speech and language assessments which they pass along to us. This usually happens through the teacher if they have a go relationship with the parent.

Researcher: What type of support do you receive from management in relation to children with SEN?

Class Teacher: Sometimes we talk about specific children if I bring them to their attention. It is very difficult to get any information on children who move from to our school form other schools. Usually they arrive with no paperwork what so ever.

Researcher: Do you receive support from the LS department?

Class Teacher: Yes, we talk about specific children but I do not see them a lot as they have their own classes to teach.

Researcher: Where do you get your ideas on how to deal with students who have SEN?

Class Teacher: I watch what other teachers are doing and I talk about strategies in the staff room or with the teacher next door if I am struggling with a child. Sometimes we discuss things in our Grade Meetings with the Grade Coordinator or the Deputy Principal.

Researcher: Are the parents helpful in providing additional information with regard to assessment and developmental history?

Class Teacher: It depends, sometimes if their English is good and you see them often they will tell you otherwise they prefer to keep to themselves.

Researcher: What happens to children who fail to progress academically and are failing socially?

Class Teacher: Things are very difficult for them in school. Generally they are isolated and spend a lot of their time in other classrooms to minimize disruptions. Sometimes if it is really bad they will be encouraged to leave as the school cannot cater for them.

Appendix Four

LS Review Document

Appendix Five

Sample I.E.P

Appendix Six

Andreas's Assessment

Appendix Seven

External Psychological Assessment for Andreas

Appendix Eight

Informal Discussions with Teacher Regarding Andreas and Observational Notes

Date: May / June 2010

Researcher: When did you become concerned about Andreas's academic and social progress?

Teacher: Andreas joined the class as a new student from Greece in September. He had no English and his parents spoke very little English. Andreas struggled to integrate into the class due to the language barrier and odd behaviours which he exhibited. Andreas often became agitated with other students and did not know how to relate to them. He struggled to communicate and preferred to be by himself than play with the other children. I thought this would pass when his language sills improved but he became increasingly disruptive and was constantly seeking my attention through negative behavior.

Researcher: Did you try to contact his parents?

Teacher: Yes regularly but his mother does not speak English and his father is away a lot on business. I felt they were trying to avoid me a lot of the time. I know Andreas does not tell them what happens at school.

Researcher: How does the LS department help you?

Teacher: They take Andreas every day for ESL. This is really the only time that he is actively engaged in learning. When he failed to make any progress with them we began to investigate was there an underlying cause for Andreas's defiant behavior and lack of progress.

Researcher: What did you find out?

Teacher: After a lot of discussion it became apparent that Andreas had speech and language difficulty which was being masked by his ESL status. His father reluctantly told us that he was assessed in Greece three years previously and diagnosed with a speech and language difficulty. We requested a copy of the report but it took a long time to come as they had to translate it from Greek. When we did receive it, it told us very little. Now we want Andreas to be assessed again, here in Dubai. The parents are not interested and did not follow the recommendations of the previous report which stated Andreas was to receive speech and language therapy.

Researcher: What do you think Andreas needs to help him cope better in school?

Teacher: I have told management that Andreas should have his own shadow teacher for next year otherwise he will fail. They will not agree to this as it is not school policy and has never been done before. I think he should be reassessed too and I would like to speak to the person who is compiling the report.

Anecdotal Notes / Observation

Andreas busied him-self by the radiator moving objects up and down the metal bars during a whole class speaking and listening activity.

He sought the teacher's attention by pulling at her and pointing towards the door indicating that he wanted to go to the toilet.

At break time Andreas wandered the corridor while he was supposed to be outside with the other children.

Andreas pushed in front of a class mate to find a position in the line.

He grabbed a pencil from another child before a written activity was to begin.

Andreas disrupted the music class and his music teacher returned him to class.

Appendix Nine

Art / Play Therapy Notes

Time: June 2010

Present: Andreas, Class Teacher, Researcher

Andreas was quiet and calm during the session. He was very obliging and followed the researcher's directions to draw his favourite picture without hesitation. He drew a picture of a boy playing outside. There is only a little detail in the picture but he was able to label most of what he included using single words to name or describe them.

Andreas was asked what he liked most about school and he said P.E. When asked what he didn't like he said writing and made a sad face.

Andreas smiled when we talked about Greece and pointed to where it was located on the map. He became excited and said 'I will go'

The researcher directed Andreas's attention towards a story book and he listened carefully as his teacher read the words and pointed at the pictures. Andreas appeared to be enjoying the individual attention from his class teacher.

Andreas matched pictures of objects with opposite meanings e.g. hot / cold, big / small and copied what his teacher said. Andreas's teacher noted that on a one to one basis Andreas was very compliant and that he would benefit from more of this type of work if she has the time to spend with him. Again she reiterated the need for a shadow teacher who could organize and complete these activities with him.