

Barriers and Facilitators to the Identification and Support of Children with Developmental Language Disorder

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Abstract

Objectives: Approximately 7,6 % of children have Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), one of the most common neurodevelopmental conditions, negatively affecting understanding and use of language, and, consequently, academic achievement, social relationships, mental health and employment in adulthood. However, children with DLD are rarely identified due to a “hidden” and complex nature of DLD. Guided by implementation science, our study investigated, for the first time, barriers and facilitators to the identification and support of children with DLD in Georgia, a resource-constrained country with limited research and practice infrastructure related to language development and disorders.

Methodology: We conducted focus group interviews with doctors and Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) (n=20). Using the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), we developed a list of topics that guided focus group discussions.

Results: Findings showed that key obstacles related to timely identification and support of DLD include limited awareness and knowledge of DLD, negative local attitudes, an absence of national strategy, a shortage of SLTs, and the lack of adapted resources and funding. Key facilitators include the master’s program through which Georgian SLTs receive training, recent trends in early intervention, and professionals’ desire to change the situation. Based on the findings, we developed a DLD context assessment checklist, DLD-CAT, to quickly identify barriers and facilitators in systems. Researchers in other countries can use the checklist when they plan to conduct a similar study.

Discussion: Overall, our study contributes to the understanding of language difficulties and how children with language difficulties are served in resource-constrained and underrepresented languages and settings. Our findings revealed the pressing need of work to improve the DLD field in Georgia. First of all, linguistic research on typical and atypical acquisition of the Georgian language is pressingly needed. There is also a need for updated national policy and guidelines, enhancing professional collaboration, involving parents in facilitating communication between professionals (e.g., teachers and SLTs), need for better public awareness and better training, access to international expertise and the pressing need for culturally and linguistically adapted language assessment tools. Other countries can also benefit from the knowledge generated from this study, because many of the identified factors influencing service delivery are universal.