

Research in Early Childhood

An evaluative study into the provision of bilingual children in an early years setting.

“How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an additional language?”

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Abstract

A small-scale interpretive study was conducted to evaluate current practice for supporting children with English as an additional language in an early years setting. Two parent questionnaires and three practitioner questionnaires were used along with a focus group with the practitioners. Data found the setting should consider their induction procedure for children with English as an additional language and should take time to teach families about age-related outcomes. Furthermore, practitioners should value their instincts and knowledge of their key children when identifying the speech and language needs of children with English as an additional language.

Introduction & Rationale

In the United Kingdom, there are over one million school aged children who speak 360 languages between them (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, (NALDIC) 2018). More specifically, in 2013 there were 612,160 children in England whose first language was known or believed to be other than English; 18,545 of those children were living in the South West and 4,742 were living in Bristol (NALDIC, 2018). Undoubtedly, these statistics will have an impact on how many bilingual children attend an early years setting. Although it appears there are no official statistics at this time, it is probable that they are mirrored in the early years sector. Therefore, early years practitioners are expected to plan for inclusion in accordance with Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Early Education, 2012). This involves tracking the development of bilingual children and developing strategies to close any gaps in attainment. In 2011, less than half of children in Bristol whose first language was one other than English were achieving a good level of development (NALDIC, 2015). In a growing multicultural society, this highlights the significance of understanding how the development of bilingual children is promoted in an early years setting. More specifically, it emphasises the importance of early intervention and therefore, this is the rationale underpinning this research. In addition, the setting where this research will take place have collectively identified an area for development in the support for children whose first language is not English. Consequently, this research aims to understand how bilingual children in the setting are supported, particularly their speech and language development. Thus, the proposed research question for this project is; ***How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an Additional Language?***

Scope and Limitations

It is intended that this research will be short, over a period of around four months and will be carried out on a small scale. It will be conducted in a private, day care setting in South Bristol and will be limited to that setting therefore it will not be generalisable (Thomas, 2017). Thomas (2017) discusses generalisability as making judgements or predictions based around personal experiences. As this research will use a small sample size, the evidence it will produce will not be wide or in-depth enough to draw conclusions about the entire early years sector. In addition, this research is not generalisable as it involves the study of people; who behave in different ways and can be influenced by their personal interests or friendships. Therefore, the same research may produce different results in another early years setting. It is important to consider this when making conclusions towards the end of the research project.

Participants of this research will be early years practitioners who work at the setting and parents of children with English as an additional language. This research aims to assist the setting to ensure provision for children with dual languages is fully inclusive. This research will also benefit the staff of the setting through identifying areas of strength and increasing their confidence. It is also intended that this research will be used as evidence in the settings quality improvement plan.

Literature Review

The acquisition of language for children

Before beginning a research project of this nature, language acquisition must be considered. It is essential to understand how children develop speech and language in order to identify a child who may be facing a challenge. According to Chomsky (1965, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016), children have an in-built mechanism which enables them to obtain language. He names this the language acquisition device (*LAD*). Chomsky (1965, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016) suggests that all children are born ready to learn language and the LAD enables children to develop the language in their environment and quickly apply fundamental rules for language (Beresford & Coughlin, 2016). Following Chomsky (1965, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016), Bruner (1983, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016), a cognitive theorist, developed this idea further but suggested the role of the adult is significant in aiding language acquisition. He created the idea of the language acquisition support system (*LASS*) and discussed how meaningful interactions between adult and child encourages the development of vocabulary. For example, interactive games such as peek-a-boo provide a baby with the opportunity to learn how to take turns as it has a similar structure to conversation (Morrison, 2002). Furthermore, when the adult provides a commentary of the situation, the baby is able to learn concepts as well as language (Morrison, 2002). Moreover, recent research has discovered that it is the interactions between the child and adult that has the most influence on a child's language rather than the words they hear (Roberts, 2018). The research suggests that the amount of exposure to conversational turn-taking at a young age is related to verbal skills in later years (Roberts, 2018). This highlights the

importance of providing a language-rich environment and introducing babies and children to meaningful interactions such as peek-a-boo from a young age.

The role of the adult in language acquisition

Vygotsky (1978, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000), another cognitive theorist, discusses the role of the adult in scaffolding children's learning. He states that social experiences form how a person thinks and interprets the world and developed the Zone of Proximal Development (*ZPD*) to describe the area between what a child can achieve on their own and what they can achieve when an adult facilitates their learning (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Vygotsky (1978, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) claims the child is able to reach their full potential and exceed their present development with the assistance of an adult. Alongside parents, this highlights the important role of early years practitioners in the development of the language of children in their care. In addition, Bruner (1983, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) also claims that the role of the adult is key in assisting the child to achieve more than they can on their own. For example, in the development of language Bruner (1983, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) argues that the adult is able to encourage active use of language rather than merely exposing the child to language. This is done through careful modelling from the adult, meaningful questioning and cueing the child in to discussion (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). However, this requires skill and demands adults to be knowledgeable around the subject of speech and language. This illustrates the need for practitioners to be trained in this area.

Challenges facing early years practitioners

Research from Mroz and Hall (2010) demonstrates limited speech and language training for early years practitioners which has resulted in a decline in staff confidence. Communication and language skills underpin all other areas of learning (Pascal, Bertram and Peckham, 2018). Additionally, it features heavily in the early years curriculum as a prime area of learning (Early Education, 2012) therefore, it is essential that staff are equipped to facilitate children's learning in order to promote better outcomes. In addition to lack of training and low self-confidence, early years practitioners are increasingly encountering children who are learning multiple languages. The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (*NALDIC*) (Institute of Education, 2009) states that the number of children for whom English is an additional language rose by 25 per cent in England from 2004 to 2008. Understanding language development and the important role it plays in all areas of development, it is essential that early years practitioners consider how to support, celebrate and expand learning for bilingual and multilingual children. This is illustrated by Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2007) who found that the communication between bilingual children and their teacher has considerable impact on the quality of their relationship. Therefore, it is imperative that the early years practitioner encourages interaction and communication with the child to enable stronger attachments to develop. In turn, this could help the child to feel more relaxed and thus, the child is willing and able to learn language.

Bilingualism, Multilingualism and English as an Additional Language

There are many different terms and abbreviations such as, bilingualism, multilingualism and English as an additional language (*EAL*) used to describe children who speak or are learning more than one language. Without in-depth training (Mroz & Hall, 2010) available for early years practitioners to discriminate between the terms, it is clear to see why they may feel overwhelmed and unconfident to work with those children (Mroz & Hall, 2010). Macrory (2007) discusses consecutive and simultaneous bilingualism and the distinction between the two. She claims that consecutive bilingualism applies to children who acquire an additional language after the age of three. Simultaneous bilingualism is described as the acquisition of two languages at the same time before the age of three (Macrory, 2007). Furthermore, Macrory (2007) implies that any guidance about bilingual children that is available for early years practitioners is focussed on EAL. She suggests that this indicates English is not well established and may be in the early stages of development. Macrory (2007) illustrates a lack of information to support children who have acquired two or more languages since birth; simultaneous bilingualism. However, as the age of the children at this setting are between 6 weeks to 5 years it is likely their bilingual children are developing simultaneous bilingualism. Although a child with simultaneous bilingualism may be developing any two languages, the setting this research is focusing on have previously determined that for their children, English is the second language (EAL). For this reason, combined with the overwhelming statistics regarding the number of children with EAL (Institute of Education, 2009), this will be the focus of this research.

Attainment in children with English as an additional language

According to Pascal, Bertram and Peckham (2018) children for whom English is an additional language are more likely to begin school with a delay in their language. They suggest that good literacy development is related to securely developed understanding of spoken language. This highlights the significant role of the early years practitioner and the setting as a whole in laying the foundations for language development. Furthermore, findings from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (*EPPE*) (Sylva *et al*, 2003) report claim that children with EAL make greater progress when they attend a pre-school provision than white UK children or those for whom English is a first language. This demonstrates the influence of an early years setting. It illustrates why it is so important to support bilingual children and why they should be embraced.

Identifying a need for support through early intervention

Understanding that children who have EAL have a potential risk of language delay (Pascal, Bertram and Peckham, 2018) illustrates the importance of early intervention. Allen (2011) discusses early intervention as policies or programmes which support children aged 0-3 years and underpins future learning. In his report, Allen (2011) states that it is the first three years of a child's life which create the foundations for learning, and it is when early intervention is positively implemented that the child can meet their full potential. This demonstrates the significance of early identification for children who may need additional speech and language support. Early years practitioners have an integral role in early intervention as they often spend so much time with the child. Challenges can arise when trying to

identify a child with speech and language difficulties where the child has EAL (Mistry and Sood, 2015). Often the child may experience a silent period or may demonstrate other signs which could suggest a language delay such as, lack of peer interaction or looking confused when they have been asked to do something (Mistry and Sood, 2015). However, these signs are also a typical stage of language acquisition for the learner. Therefore, it is clear to see why children with speech and language difficulties remain undetected (Mroz & Hall, 2010). This cements the need for research in this area. Moreover, National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (*NALDIC*) (2009 cited in Mistry and Sood, 2015) report found that there is often no clearly identified criteria for identifying the language needs of pupils. This demonstrates the difficulties that practitioners are confronted with and reveals why confidence is low. It is the responsibility of skilled practitioners to work closely with the child and their family, track the child's development and highlight where expected progress is not evident. The practitioner must then take steps to implement an early intervention programme to support the development of the child. Therefore, the question for this research project is; ***How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an additional language?***

Methodology

This research project took place in a small private nursery in South Bristol. Due to the small sample size of this research, the results are not generalisable (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). This research was a qualitative study using an evaluative approach. Qualitative research in its simplest form is concerned with collecting data through words, opinions and photographs (O'Leary, 2017). Often named interpretivism, qualitative research produces data which can be analysed in detail and is open to the researchers interpretations (Thomas, 2017). In its detailed approach, this type of research is particularly beneficial within early years sector as it enables the voice of both practitioners and children to be considered (Thomas, 2017). Qualitative research adds depth to analysis in a growing early years environment which is increasingly adopting an evidence-based approach to practice (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). In comparison, quantitative research involves seeking numerical data and is associated with logic and reason (Brown, 2016). Often named positivism (Thomas, 2017), O'Leary (2017) claims that researchers using this search for a singular answer. As this research was concerned with evaluating what the staff do to support bilingual children, it was based around the behaviour and actions of people. Therefore, there was not one singular answer as humans are unpredictable and behave in different ways (Thomas, 2017). As a result of this, the data is rich and supports deep analysis and therefore, qualitative research using an evaluative approach emerged as the most appropriate technique to suit the research question.

In addition, the researcher considered their ontological and epistemological perspective. Ontology, the study of being and what exists, challenges the researcher to think deeply about what they are looking at and question the different ways it can be viewed (Newby, 2014; Thomas, 2017). It involves

reflecting on the behaviour and whether it can be altered or changed dependent on interactions, rewards or other variables. In addition, it involves examining the data from another perspective which takes environmental factors such as time of day, routine and social expectations into consideration (Thomas, 2017). This research related to the practice of the adults who work at the setting and it was the current practice of the setting which was studied. As a result, questionnaires were used to obtain varying perspectives and data collected has been analysed against current research and literature.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge and how we know it to be true and valid encourages researchers to challenge the idea of knowledge (Newby, 2014). It involves reflecting on research findings to consider how it is known to be true (Newby, 2014). For this research it is important to understand that as qualitative data has been collected, the results are open to interpretation. Therefore, in considering epistemology this research cannot be generalised and is limited to the context of the setting.

This research was carried out using an evaluative approach. Needham (2016) discusses an evaluative approach as making a judgement or evaluating the effectiveness of a programme. Therefore, this research involved examining current practice around the support for children who speak multiple languages, in particular the identification of children who require speech and language intervention. The aim was for the research to feed into the planning and practice of the setting as well as informing the settings quality improvement plan. An evaluative approach was chosen because the area of study, identifying speech and language difficulties in children with EAL, had already been identified as an area of development in the quality improvement plan for the setting. Therefore, it was logical to evaluate current practice as opposed to action research where change is implemented first and then evaluated (Newby, 2014). Thus, the research question that was chosen for this project was, ***How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an additional language?***

During the research it was important to consider the reliability and validity of data once it had been collected. Thomas (2017) describes validity as the extent to which the methods of data collection answer the research question. He claims reliability is concerned with the degree to which the data collection methods produce consistent results. In order to maintain reliability and validity in this research project, data collection methods were piloted with early years students. This enabled questions to be adapted to make them as effective as possible in answering the research question. It also supported consistency during data analysis. In addition, enabling practitioners and parents to answer their questionnaire anonymously has supported the validity of the data. For this reason, data collected was less likely to produce prestige bias (Newby, 2014). Prestige bias occurs when respondents alter the way they answer questions in order to give a reply they think the researcher is looking for, rather than an answer that is most truthful (Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, the structure of questions within the questionnaire were also designed to reduce bias. Open questions were used to enable free expression from respondents and leading questions were avoided. For example, rather than asking parents, '*what is the value of bilingualism*' which leads the respondent to assume there is value in bilingualism the question read, '*explain your thoughts on the value of bilingualism*'. The phrasing of questions such as this is significant in reducing a biased response (Thomas, 2017). Considering bias and how this can influence data demonstrates reflexivity. Reflexivity relates to the influence of the researcher and the knowledge, beliefs and assumptions they bring to the research either consciously or unconsciously (Roberts-Holmes, 2018; Attia & Edge, 2017). In this research, reflexivity was demonstrated by recognising and acknowledging these factors and the potential impact they can have in shaping data. As a result of this and to strengthen the validity of the data collected the process of triangulation was adopted. Triangulation refers to a process whereby the researcher seeks different sources to confirm the validity of the evidence (Newby, 2014). For example, in this research data was gathered from three different sources; parents of children at the setting, practitioners using a

questionnaire and practitioners using a focus group. Therefore, the research question for the project was, *How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an additional language?*

Methods for data collection

Primary data for this research has been collected from participants. This involved three practitioners of the early years setting and two parents of bilingual children who attend the setting. Parent participants were selected by the days they attend the setting to enable the best time management for the project; this is known as convenience sampling. Roberts-Holmes (2018) discusses sampling as the process for selecting participants. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants based on accessibility (Newby, 2014) and is particularly suitable for small-scale research. However, this means the results cannot be generalised (Newby, 2014). Another suitable sampling method which could have been considered for this research is purposeful sampling. This involves the researcher choosing the participants which represent a good example of what is being investigated (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). For example, it was possible for participants to be selected specifically if their child has or had a speech and language difficulty. However, the disadvantage of this type of sample is that it could be seen as the research deliberately choosing the participants to answer the research question more effectively (Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

The sample method for practitioner participants was self-selecting; all practitioners nominated themselves to take part. Newby (2014) argues as participants nominate themselves to take part, they are likely to be the most interested in the issue and therefore, their views may be one-sided. It was important to consider this during the analysis and conclusion section of the research. Two of the

practitioner participants are bilingual and the other is an experienced early years teacher. This produced varying perspectives to the research and enhanced and deepened the data collection. All participants were invited to complete a questionnaire which aimed to gather qualitative data. To avoid the difficulty of taking practitioners out of their nursery ratios for interview, questionnaires were chosen for this research. Additionally, they were less time consuming for busy parents to complete therefore it was anticipated they would be more likely to be returned for analysis. As questionnaires are versatile, they enabled the use of structured questions but also allowed for more open questions that required more explanation (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, a more detailed response was obtained. Alongside questionnaires, practitioners were asked to join a focus group which was conducted during their working hours; this was audio recorded for analysis. A focus group was chosen for this research because practitioners can respond and develop their own argument and it can develop confidence amongst practitioners (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Furthermore, secondary research was gathered using literature. This enabled primary data to be analysed alongside recent, relevant research and this supports the validity and reliability of the data.

Ethical Considerations

This research respected and adhered to the guidelines as defined by the British Educational Research Association (*BERA*, 2018). All participants were fully briefed, and informed consent was obtained before any research began (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). This included written consent which demonstrated the expectations of the participants and their rights throughout the project. It also illustrated their right to decline the offer of participating. Participants were made aware of anonymity and that coded names would be used in data collection to enable appropriate withdrawal from the project if necessary (Thomas, 2017). Participants were made aware who the project would be shared with and that all data will be destroyed after submission. A full copy of the final project was available to all participants. Data was shown to participants throughout the project for approval to confirm it was factually accurate. This was particularly important before the analysis stage of the research. In addition, participants were made aware of their rights to withdraw at any time up until submission of the project. All data remained on the same password protected laptop. The data from the project was used to inform future planning and recommendations made as part of the settings quality improvement plan.

As this was an evaluative study, further considerations were made towards practitioners attitudes and views about the research. Evaluative research is concerned with studying current practice therefore, practitioners may have been disinclined to participate or may have had negative ideas about it (Williamson, 2012). Comparable to an inspection by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (Williamson, 2012), an evaluative study aims to discover and assess current standards (Williamson, 2012). However, Williamson (2012) questions whether quality can be measured and indicates it is not ethical to judge professional practice against predetermined standards such as those set by Ofsted. Therefore, considerations were made to encourage professional reflection

between practitioners. The findings of the research were discussed during a staff meeting and recommendations were suggested. Practitioners then had the opportunity to make their own suggestions and a plan was formulated to decide how to utilise the findings effectively. Williamson (2012) states that change must happen through a process of reflection and review over time.

Findings

The majority of children at this setting with English as an additional language are over three years old. See *Figure.1*

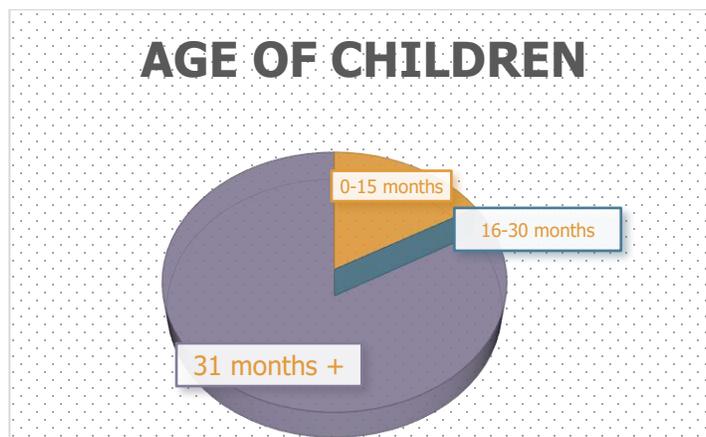


Figure.1

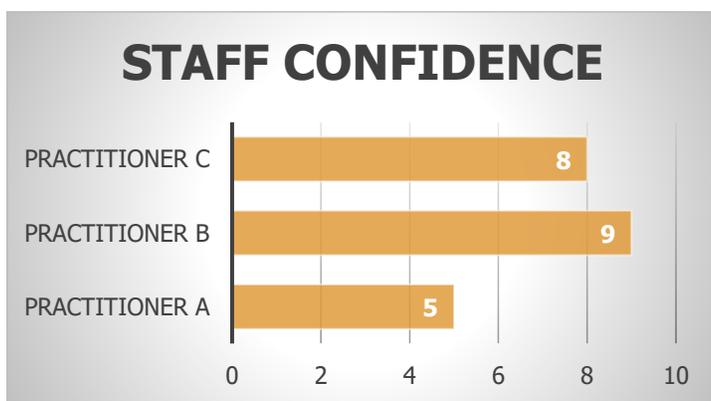


Figure.2 (0=Low staff confidence 10 = high staff confidence)

Practitioners confidence in identifying children with EAL who may need speech and language intervention was varied. See *Figure.2*

90%

The number of participants who identified singing songs in a child's native language as a positive strategy for supporting children with EAL.

Figure.3



Words practitioners used to describe possible behaviours of children with EAL who may require speech and language intervention. See Figure.3

Songs and Books

in the child's home language are things families would most like to see at the setting

Attachment

was seen as an important factor is supporting children with EAL

"Attachment is important"

"Having an attachment....having that initial bond so they feel comfortable. Once they've got that confidence it will help their language come along"

Practitioners recognised partnerships with families as significant in supporting the speech and language development of children with EAL

"Once parents are on board, they can do things at home"

"I don't think parents realise what we do"

"There's only so much we can do"

"Take what we say more seriously"

Staff feel undervalued by families in their role as Early Years Practitioners

When given a choice, families chose

management or the settings

SENDco (Special Educational Needs

Coordinator) as the professionals they would approach in the setting if they had concerns about their child's speech and language development.



Analysis

Role of the Early Years Practitioner

It is clear the Early Years Practitioner plays a significant role in supporting the speech and language development of children with EAL. Staff confidence to identify children with EAL in need of speech and language support varied according to practitioners experiences. It related to the practitioners own knowledge of Development Matters (Early Education, 2012), knowing who to talk to in the setting about their concerns and was dependent upon which language the child spoke. Bilingual staff felt they were able to empathise more with children for whom English is not their first language. This contradicts research by Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2007) who claim communication between bilingual children and their teacher has considerable impact on the quality of their relationship. It appears bilingual staff and bilingual children share an affinity to one another and as a result, bilingual staff acknowledged it is easier for them to identify bilingual children who may require speech and language intervention.

Practitioner B (Questionnaire) - "As English is not my first language, I feel it's easy for me to identify when a child has difficulties as I have experienced them."

However, although staff confidence to support children with EAL appeared high, the main reason practitioners felt they were unable to rate themselves as '10' on the confidence scale was due to lack of training. Mroz and Hall (2010) state limited speech and language training for early years practitioners has prompted a decline in staff confidence. Therefore, this demonstrates that practitioners confidence to identify speech and language difficulties in children with EAL is influenced by a lack of training, but it

is not defined by it. Practitioners demonstrated strong knowledge of their settings procedures for supporting children who are not meeting expected developmental outcomes and spoke confidently about strategies they have in place which enables them to identify speech and language difficulties in children with EAL. The most noticeable influence on practitioners confidence appeared to be the view they feel their families have of them.

Practitioner 2 (Focus group) – "I don't think parents realise what we do. They just think they just come here, play and go home."

It is clear there is an underlying feeling of frustration and feeling undervalued from all the practitioners. Although practitioners recognise and value the important role that families take in their child's language acquisition, practitioners would like families to have more knowledge of Development Matters (Early Education, 2012) and the age-related outcomes for communication and language.

Families

Contrary to the idea expressed by practitioners that families do not understand the early years curriculum; one parent expressed,

Parent 1 - "Bilingualism develops the brain and is found to build an effective link with language."

This suggests families have more knowledge of how language develops than practitioner believe and therefore, families may have an understanding of how to support it. In addition, families considered the monitoring of their bilingual child's speech and language development to be a joint effort between themselves, the key carer, the setting SENCO and the management team. However, if the family had concerns about the child's speech and language development, they would only approach the setting SENCO or the management team.

This evidence demonstrates inconsistency from families and practitioners and a lack of understanding of each other's' role in the support of children with EAL. Educating families about their provision for children with EAL may lead to practitioners feeling more appreciated by their families. Practitioners have a duty to learn more about their families and gauge how much they understand about what the setting does. Moreover, the setting as a whole must consider how it signposts families if they have concerns about their child's speech and language development. Vygotsky (1978, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000) states the assistance of an adult is key in a child's development therefore, this illustrates the importance of family and setting partnership.

Expectations of the child

Evidence suggests there are expectations of the children at this setting to meet the communication and language criteria of Development Matters (Early Education, 2012). Where a child is not meeting age-related outcomes, practitioners recognise it as an indication a child may need additional support.

Practitioner 1 (Focus group) – "They're not meeting the certain....criteria we would expect them to for their age....and then that would obviously flag it up."

Pascal, Bertram and Peckham (2018) discuss attainment gaps of children who have EAL which illustrates why the setting monitor and track children's communication and language development. In addition, practitioners also highlight the importance of forming strong attachments with their key children. It is evident practitioners believe attachments are crucial to successful development for children in all areas of learning, not only language. During the focus group, practitioners implied secure attachments between the key carer and the child enables the child to feel comfortable and thus, have confidence to speak in the nursery environment. Practitioners also discussed the importance of taking

time to truly know the child to be able to understand whether the child is shy and choosing not to speak or if they are genuinely struggling with language acquisition. Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2007) state communication between bilingual children and their teacher has considerable impact on the quality of their relationship. Undoubtedly, practitioners recognise the significance of the key carer – child relationship and make every effort to establish a strong bond particularly with children for whom English is an additional language.

Strategies

Strategies for encouraging language acquisition at this setting appear to be fully embedded and practitioners have sound knowledge of the strategies they provide. Practitioners offered an extensive list of their strategies which include: using key words in the child's first language and displaying them around the nursery, books, speaking slowly, giving the child time to process the information, visual cues and pictures, signs including Makaton, language lessons and celebrating cultural festivals which are important to the child. However, when given a choice families would most like to see books and songs in the child's home language being used at the setting. This demonstrates a simplistic view to supporting bilingualism which is further illustrated by Morrison (2002) and Bruner (1983, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016) who imply meaningful interactions have the most influence on a child's language. This connects to the practitioners ideas of important attachments.

Knowledge

The overarching theme of this research is knowledge. Practitioners feel pressure to have knowledge of the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) and to have ideas in place to support bilingual children who may be

struggling with language acquisition. They feel this requires specific training which they currently have not had access to. Despite this, it is clear practitioners have solid understanding of behaviours a bilingual child may display if they were struggling with language acquisition; using their own personal experiences and following the procedures of their setting. In addition, practitioners would like families to have a similar understanding of the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) to enable them to make observations of the child's communication skills at home. However, although knowledge of the adult appears to be key in identifying speech and language difficulties in children with EAL (Vygotsky, 1978, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000), this cannot be achieved without the child feeling safe and developing a strong attachment to their key carer. This strengthens Morrison (2002) and Bruner's (1983, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016) idea that meaningful interactions between child and adult are most significant.

Conclusions & Recommendations

To conclude, the research question for this study was *How do practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with English as an additional language?*

From the evidence shown, the role of the adult is crucial in communication and language development for all children (Vygotsky, 1978, *cited in* Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000; Bruner, 1983, *cited in* Beresford & Coughlin, 2016). Therefore, children's attachments to their key carer is vital and this is recognised by the setting and the practitioners. In addition, language development for children with EAL is complex and they appear to be at a disadvantage when they begin school (Pascal, Bertram and Peckham, 2018). This reinforces the valuable role of the early years practitioner and the setting in supporting the communication and language skills of children with EAL.

To encourage language development for children with EAL, practitioners feel they should be adequately trained and have some knowledge of speech and language development. Research from Mroz and Hall (2010) found this led to low confidence of practitioners. However, it is clear practitioners demonstrate sound knowledge merely through their own experiences and through knowing their key children. As a result, practitioner confidence was not found to be low.

There is a clear procedure and strategies in place for identifying and supporting the speech and language development of children with EAL, although it is evident families are more simplistic; only asking the setting to provide songs and books in the child's first language. This research intended to evaluate current practice in an early years setting to determine how practitioners identify speech and

language difficulties in children with English as an additional language. From the evidence collated, it is clear practitioners identify speech and language difficulties in children with EAL by following procedures implemented in the setting. The setting applies a thorough procedure for identifying attainment gaps for all children, not just those for whom English is an additional language. This includes monitoring and tracking all areas of learning against the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) and reporting any concerns to the setting SENDco (*Special Educational Needs / Disability Coordinator*). Statistics produced by NALDIC (2015) identified low levels of development for children with EAL in Bristol. However, the settings well-defined process for identifying gaps in attainment and practitioners solid understanding of this procedure demonstrates their commitment to improving outcomes for children with EAL. Moreover, practitioners understanding of the importance of developing secure attachments and encouraging meaningful interactions illustrate they are fully equipped to support the speech and language development for all children in their setting.

To inform the quality improvement plan for the setting, the following recommendations have been made:

- **More research is needed into the positive impact of bilingual staff on children's speech and language development**
- **The setting should take steps to educate families on age related outcomes within the EYFS (Early Education, 2012) for communication and language development**
- **The setting must invest in more books which are relevant to the home languages of the children in their setting. In addition, the setting must take steps to talk to their families to learn songs in the child's home language**
- **An extensive induction for children with EAL should be established which identifies key words in the child's home language and should provide an opportunity to share information about what the family do at home to support the child and what the setting will plan to do**
- **A leaflet or poster should be displayed for families to signpost them if they have concerns. This will include the child's key carer as the first point of contact, followed by the setting SENDco and then the management team**

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