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Effects of Communication Disorders on Children's Development

Brinley Rosenberger

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## EFFECTS OF COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

### **Abstract**

This senior capstone research project examines the different forms of literature in regard to the effect of communicative disorders on children's development. The paper discusses the implications of communication that influences a child's development, such as personal development, social development, and academic success. It analyzes the different factors associated with communicative disorders, including the environmental and biological aspects. This capstone also emphasizes the importance and awareness of children's communication disorders and further investigates how teachers and parents could provide support these children. The findings reveal that effective intermediation can help support and aid children in overcoming communication difficulties and avoid negative repercussions and enable children to overcome the developmental obstacles and help them to reach their full potential.

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## **Introduction and Background**

The prevalence for the need of speech and hearing clinics and professionals in the speech pathology field arose in the mid 1960's. The first speech therapy program originated at Colorado State University and showcased a study involving school aged children. The study analyzed the development of speech disorders within children. This study started the movement and comprehension that professionals within communication and speech were necessary for children's development. Communication disorders were first categorized within special education, before becoming its own individual program. Speech-language pathology became a necessity during World War II. Soldiers came back from war with traumatic brain injuries, needing to relearn the language skills they had lost. In the 1960's, the advancement of linguistic understanding allowed speech-language pathologists to expand their knowledge regarding developmental delays and communication based disorders.

Communication proves to be an essential part of our everyday lives. We use it to communicate our ideas, feelings, information, and form bonds with others. "Communicative competence represents the most fundamental of educational outcomes—for communication lies at the basis of all that we do" (Kleinert, 2020, p.36). Understanding that communication is important within the lives of children and their educational attainment is essential in understanding disorders within communication. Communication has four main components which can provide the reasoning of why communication is so important within our lives. The first is described as process. Process is a component that is used in order to evaluate information. The second factor of communication is the basis of understanding. This aspect of communication uses an individual's prior knowledge in order to perceive and interpret information. Next is sharing, this revolves around communication with others and sharing ideas. The last component is meaning. This implies the importance of

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understanding context and the message revolving around the communication. All these factors center on the relationship we have with language and communication. When a child has trouble with one of these factors, they may possess a communication disorder. A communication disorder is defined as a disorder that affects an individual's ability to understand, perceive, or apply the necessary skills to engage with others using speech and language skills. A child that is impacted by a communication disorder may demonstrate trouble communicating with others, problems with certain speech sounds, or difficulties with word choice, word order, and sentence structure (Children's Hospital, 2020).

The development of language within children starts as soon as six months. Communication starts as babbling and cooing. These young children are learning to communicate by watching their care-givers mouths and the way they speak. By nine months, children start to understand words and sounds at a better rate. By age three they can start playing with symbolic language and their minds start to form abstract ideas. These children can form sentences, are able to understand language better, and speak more clearly. As defined in a text, "Language also can be expressed and understood in other ways—for example, by reading, writing, and signing" (Rosenbaum, 2016, par. 1). If children are unable to communicate through writing, reading, or signing they may be negatively impacted throughout their education and life. Language may be a complex force within a child's life, but better understanding language can help examine how communication disorders originate within a child. Understanding the conventional development of children is imperative for a speech pathologist to comprehend how communication disorders can impact children throughout their development. There are many different types of communication disorders. My research questions will discuss the various types of communication disorders and the effects they have on children.

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The primary research question I seek to analyze is; *how do communicative disorders affect children's development?* A few secondary questions to be answered will be, *what does research say about the effects of communicative disorders on children's development? How do communicative disorders influence the development of a child in terms of speech, language and hearing? What are some of the indicators of communicative disorders in children and how do teachers assess the disorders? How do communication disorders affect learning and performance in the classrooms and outside of the classroom? How do teachers and language pathologists collaborate to support children with communicative disorders? Are there resources available to provide support to children with communicative disorders in their learning?* The purpose of this paper is to understand communication disorders and how they impact a child's life. It will also explore how teachers can positively influence children with communication disorders and their educational experiences.

### **Literature Review**

In order to answer my research questions, this section analyzes literature that reflects the questions I proposed within the introduction. This section will discuss the formation of speech difficulties within children and how they are influenced inside and outside of the classroom. It will also examine the different factors associated with communication disorders and how they form in children.

Speech difficulties can form through genetic or environmental aspects. Determining whether a child's communication disorder is genetic or environmental can demonstrate the treatment styles required to diagnose children with different communication disorders. The environment and influence of parents or guardians is extremely important within a child's language development, as described by Davenport & Holt (2019) in that, "the child's response to communication reinforces parents' engagement and communicative behaviors, including the quality of language" (p. 31). The

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causes of communication disorders can be affected by different factors. These factors include developmental and biological. Developmental disorders are defined as disorders that arise during the developmental stages in one's life. An example of developmental communication disorders includes problems such as brain development complications or exposure to toxic substances during pregnancy. Communication disorders can also be biological. Biological disorders are defined as factors that are influenced through an individual's genetic makeup or biology. Communication disorders that are biological are usually influenced by gene complications (Children's Hospital, 2020, par. 7). Analyzing these two different factors that influence communication disorders can better demonstrate how society should expand its knowledge to better assist children with communication disorders. The different types of communicative disorders found in children are as follows. Mixed receptive-expressive language disorder is categorized as a child's inability to understand spoken language and speaking. This type of disorder influences a child's receptive and expressive area of speech. The receptive aspect of communication involves the child's ability to understand information. The expressive side of mixed receptive-expressive language disorder includes the ability for a child to put their thoughts into words or sentences. This could be due to developmental delays. Expressive language disorder is categorized as a child's difficulties with speaking and may also include developmental delays. Speech-sound disorder includes a child's inability to express words understandably. This type of disorder impacts children by the child having difficulty speaking certain word sounds or words. The fourth disorder is childhood-onset fluency disorder. This disorder is categorized as stuttering or other language difficulties. Stuttering is a disorder that can start in childhood and last throughout adulthood. It can have an adverse impact on a child's confidence, resulting in a lack of social skills and an inability to relate to other individuals. Another communicative disorder is social communication disorder. This disorder

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results in a child having trouble with both verbal and nonverbal communication (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2020). This type of communication disorder can affect a child's reading comprehension skills and social abilities. This provides the child with a weakness in pragmatics and reading competency. Communicative disorders prove to be essential in understanding children at a social level. Social issues of children that have been diagnosed with communicative disorders are that they struggle with participating in social settings, developing peer relationships, achieving academic success, and performing in the workforce.

The diagnoses of these disorders often arise when a teacher or caregiver notices developmental delays or an inability to accurately communicate. Communication disorders are often then referred to speech-language pathologists. Speech pathologists are individuals that are considered experts in communication. They inquire about different factors such as speech sounds, language, literacy, social communication, voice, fluency, cognitive communication, and feeding and swallowing. Speech pathologists also share their findings with teachers, medical professionals, and other individuals that are included within a child's life. Medical advice is especially important for speech pathologists to verify that the disorder the child is facing is not related to any underlying health issues. Speech language pathologists are usually the professionals that diagnose school-aged children with communication disorders. The symptoms associated with communication disorders can differ from child to child, but prominent signs demonstrated through a child include being non-verbal and not speaking at all, limited word choice, and trouble with identifying objects or understanding certain tasks (Children's Hospital, 2020). The diagnosis often provides viable insight about which communication skill the child is struggling with.

There are many ways that intervention can be implemented in order to help children dealing with communication disorders. An online article discusses that, "Nearly one in 12 children ages 3–



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17 have had a disorder related to voice, speech, and language or swallowing” (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2015, par. 1). Only half of these children ages 3-17 get intervention for these disorders. Establishing an understanding of the prevalence within school age children proves to be beneficial to the critical need for early intervention. As stated by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, “7.7 percent of children with a communication or swallowing disorder, speech problems are most prevalent (5.0 percent), followed by language problems (3.3 percent), voice problems (1.4 percent), and swallowing problems (0.9 percent)” (2016, par.1). Approximately one third of children with communication disorders exhibit several of the above disorders. The benefits of providing intervention to children with communication disorders is that they begin to have better articulation, improvement of swallowing, reduction of disorders such as stuttering, allows children to be better understood, and helps reduce anxiety while increasing confidence. Articulation disorder is defined by The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) as “atypical production of speech sounds characterized by substitutions, omissions, additions, or distortions that may interfere with intelligibility” (2015, par. 5). This determines that children with communication disorders may not produce speech sounds that teachers, parents, or peers can coherently understand. Children diagnosed with communication disorders are often diagnosed with other issues. Issues that could arise if children’s communication disorders are not properly managed include poor confidence, mental and behavioral problems, and alienated social experiences.

My literature review section allowed for a better understanding of the prevalence of communication disorder within children and allowed for me to examine the different types of communication disorders. My next section will look at the method and procedures regarding my research.

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### **Methods and Procedures**

The study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services randomly selected participants based on family that completed the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. These surveys are conducted annually and collect information regarding health topics. These surveys can help the general population and health professionals by providing the information they need in order to provide adequate support and intervention for children. Methods of my research revolved around finding accurate data that analyzed several different factors. The first factor was how many children have communication-based disorders. In order to find this research, I decided that I needed to acquire the data from a source that is relevant and reliable. I chose the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association because this organization sees communication and speech as a human right. They specialize in many aspects within communication such as the disorders discussed within my paper. They were able to provide the number of children in 2015, that have struggled with communication disorders and how many children get treatment for their communication disorders

### **Problems and Limitations**

Due to the Corona Virus pandemic that occurred within the time period of my research project, I was not able to conduct the extensive amount of research regarding my topic. This includes factors such as teacher surveys, speech pathologists surveys, and interviews with parents of children that have communication disorders. I believed these interviews and surveys would have allowed me to gain positive insights regarding communication disorders and its impact on children's development. Due to the fact that I was unable to conduct any research, some of my research questions remain un-answered. This includes my secondary research question such as;

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what are some of the indicators of communicative disorders in children and how do teachers assess the disorders? How do communication disorders affect learning and performance in the classrooms and outside of the classroom? How do teachers and language pathologists collaborate to support children with communicative disorders?

Although I was unable to examine and analyze my own research, I was able to examine the research completed by others. These findings are incorporated within my paper as a way to better understand the topic of how children develop when they possess a communication disorder.

### **Research and Findings**

My main research inquiry is how communicative disorders affect children's development throughout their life. The statistics revealed from my research demonstrate that many children need speech and language intervention in order to aid their academic success. Early intervention proves to be essential in helping children with communication disorders.

The research I conducted also examined the importance of intervention for children with communication disorders. It is common for Speech-Language Pathologists to be involved within a child's learning, if they suffer from a communication based disorder. Other individuals that can help children that have communication disorders include parents, teachers, other caregivers, and even the child's peers. As defined by McCauley & Fey, Speech-Language Pathologists commonly help children, "the actual implementation of the intervention may rest in the hands of other competent communicators who are taught to carry out activities and use procedures deemed helpful to the child's attainment of intervention goals" (2017, p. 13). Intervention at an early stage of development is also important in treating children.

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There are many different reasons that parents should consider early intervention. Firstly, it helps prevent the disorder from further establishing. Like a habit, it is much easier to fix a speech impediment earlier rather than later. Prevention of the disorders can provide for better outcomes for the child. Secondly, it can help eliminate an already established communication disorder. For example, if a child struggles to articulate specific speech sounds and is not corrected for the error then that child is going to struggle for an extended period of time. If the difficulty of speech is eliminated, the child's disorder may be too. Thirdly, modification and remediation can also provide support for children with a communication disorder. Remediation and modification implement the improvement of communication skills and help aid a child's development. Remediation also allows the prevention of other problems within a child's life such as behavioral problems. The fourth factor of intervention is teaching strategies to help children compensate for their disorder. These strategies allow for a child to use functional tools to reduce the frustration associated with a disorder. An example of this is a child that is non-verbal using different styles of communication such as pictures or sign language. These strategies can provide children with the tools to use while developing a long-term plan for their disorder. The fifth aspect of intervention is modification of the environment. It is acknowledged that a child's environment contributes to their academic and personal successes. This factor influences children through facilitating the child's competence to communicate. This includes aspects such as the reduction of background noise or eliminating visual distractions (U.S Department of Health & Human Services, 2020).

Many caregivers are the first individuals that recognize a child's speech difficulties. Yet, some children are diagnosed with a speech disorder once they start school. Many teachers can see children within a social setting and can recognize that there may be developmental delays regarding speech. Some of the common signs that are within a teacher's purview and can be used to

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distinguish communication issues are: children being unable to follow directions when asked, rarely participating in class, tendency to use filler words such as “umm”, or has trouble putting together coherent and understandable sentences.

As mentioned, children with communication disorders are more likely to struggle with social interactions. Research conducted by the Society for Research in Child Development analyzed preschoolers with communication disorders and compared them to children of the same age that do not have communication disorders. This study assessed these two different groups through play and social competency. The authors concluded that children that have communicative disorder are less likely to engage with their peers and thus produce better social intercommunication. These children are also less likely to communicate during non-play activities (Guralnick, 1996). This inability to communicate with peers and adults influences a child’s development throughout their education. Children that struggle early in their education also continue to struggle as they grow. This social disconnect with other individuals can continue well into adulthood. The inability to communicate may result in further issues. Children may become overly frustrated with their disorders and start to develop other behavioral issues. A behavioral issue that can arise in children with communication disorders is ADHD.

ADHD is known as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This type of disorder impacts children by persistent lack of attention, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity that can influence a child’s school, home, and social life (Beitchman, 2006, p. 128). Communication disorders can lead to ADHD through the child’s getting overly frustrated by not being able to communicate and therefore lacking the attention needed within the classroom. As mentioned by Bertin, “children with ADHD are at risk for articulation disorders, which affect their ability to produce letter sounds appropriate for their age. Beyond that, they also commonly have differences in fluency and vocal quality when

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speaking” (2020, par. 2). Understanding the relationship between ADHD and communication disorders can better allow experts to comprehend the required treatment needed to positively impact children. Some children with communication disorders are often diagnosed with psychiatric disorders as well.

Psychiatric disorders are categorized as conditions that affect an individual’s mood, thinking, and behavior. A research study found that, “29% of the pure speech-disordered children were psychiatrically ill, whereas 45% of the speech-and-language disordered children and 95% of the pure language-disordered children were psychiatrically ill” (Cantwell & Baker, 1985, p. 117). It is important to understand other disorder associated with communication disorders because it demonstrates how children are impacted throughout their life. Essentially children with communication disorders can be strongly affected by other disorders that can have negative implications on their lives.

The development of a child, regarding aspects such as speech, language, and hearing, influence their ability to learn and grow within their education. It is important to understand that when a child has a communication disorder their speech, language, and hearing can be impacted. When children start elementary school, they have already started to develop listening and speaking skills. These skills allow for children to possess the necessary tools needed to acquire principles for understanding reading and writing. Speech, language, and hearing significantly impact a child’s learning. All of these factors relate to communication and allow children to participate in interactive and active communication with peers and adults. Children that are actively involved in their learning and are able to diligently communicate are more likely to succeed within the educational system.

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A developmental implication that can result from communication disorders within children is a decrease in their literary abilities. Literacy is an essential aspect of a child's development because it provides them with the tools needed to better understand the world around them and enforces a sense of creativity. Language provides children with essential tools needed to read and write, ultimately influencing their academic capabilities. If a child struggles with verbal communication the struggle continues within written communication and comprehensive language. The communication tools learned through childhood, influences individuals into adulthood.

My research proves that the understanding of communication based disorders is essential in providing children with these disorders the help they need to succeed in their education. It was found that if children do not receive the intervention they need, they may struggle throughout their life. Communication disorders influence a child through social implications, behavioral issues, and limited educational success. My next paragraph involves some recommendations that I believe parents and educators can use in order to positively impact children.

### **Recommendations**

This research allowed me to understand how teachers can positively affect children that struggle with communication disorders in the classroom. The understanding of children with communication disorder is extremely important. Having these children feel valid and integrated within their learning can better prepare them for success. Children with communication disorder ultimately have speech problems and are often misunderstood because of their inability to correctly identify speech sounds and words all together. These children often mispronounce words, which enables them to struggle with communication. Allowing teachers to recognize that all communication and speech disorders vary in severity and characteristics is essential in providing

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the support needed for these children to succeed. Children with communication disorders often have different responses toward their disorder. This includes lack of awareness of their intellectual abilities, emotional detachment resulting from being overly frustrated or becoming socially withdrawn (Dodds, 2005). Some of these children possess the need for extra help with factors such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Overall, the lack of awareness of communication disorders within children can produce a negative influence with a child's academic success.

One major way teachers can help these children is with interactive communication that is uncomplicated. Interactive communication is defined as a form of communication that uses different art forms, machine interactions, and human interactions. This form of communication is quite modern and has become more prevalent with the introduction of technology in the school setting. Interactive communication is a collaborative tool that provides children from different cultures, intellectual abilities, languages, and disciplines to be able to communicate. It is essential for educators to understand that some children may need different means of communicating. This could include technology and other forms of communication such as sign language. I believe that teaching sign language within the classroom can provide an all-inclusive learning environment and help students that are non-verbal or struggle with communication feel more accepted and included. Another way that teachers can impact children with communication disorders is consulting with speech-language pathologists. These professional can provide teachers with the tools needed to help children with communication disorders succeed within their classroom. These relationships are extremely important in providing effective activities and assignments that can better help children with these disorders. I believe that teachers and speech language pathologists should collaborate in order to accurately provide children who have a communication disorder with the tools they need for academic success.



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### **Conclusion**

To conclude, communication is an essential part not only in classroom relationships, but as a social implication as well. When children are unable to accurately communicate with adults, peers, or teachers it hinders the child's ability to learn within the classroom. This can also extend beyond classrooms and can hinder many other aspects within an individual's life. These communication-based disorders can negatively impact children if intervention is not accurately involved. Communication disorders can produce social inadequacies, other behavioral problems, and academic struggles. Recognizing and understanding communication disorders can be beneficial as a teacher and a parent. Providing the support and tools needed for children with communication disorders to succeed within an academic setting, is important in providing children with the validation they deserve.

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