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RESEARCH

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Impact of Shared Ethnicity in Building Effective Relationship: A complete Literature Review on Higher Education Context

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Abstract

Harkavy and Zuckerman (1999) argue that, effective partnership within higher education sector has a great impact on building the sustainable economic growth, building knowledge economy that would results in employment creation to the greater society. Similarly, a partnership could promote racially and ethnically diverse players in higher education. This could facilitate an appropriate bond between institutional and learners' achievements. Since many higher educational institutions recruit students from diverse cultural background shared ethnicity could really break the distance between the students and teachers and bring them closer for academic success and would improve the social skill and knowledge among the learners. The main objectives of this research is to conduct a literature review to determine the perceived value on the shared ethnicity among the students and teacher in a higher educational setting, evaluate the impact of shared ethnicity on building effective educational relationship and provide appropriate recommendation on how to improve the effective relationship beyond the ethnicity

Keywords: shared ethnicity, effective relationship, higher education

Introduction

It seems the higher education sector does not always hold the appropriate academic culture that foster teaching and learning. For example, in United Kingdom the academic culture is not always explicitly patronise the incomers from around the globe (Wenger, 2000). In view of this, most international students tend to find it difficult to adapt to the existing UK culture. The factors could be evidenced from the varied demographic cultural differences and also from the perceptions. It could also be a result of the unawareness of the cultural differences from the academics and learners. The common varied factors could be counted as the age, race, learning expectations and communication conventions.

As a results, proposed study attempts to find out about the factors that influence the learners in higher education. Again, it intends to measure the impact of shard ethnicity and their impact on effective relationships. This will be achieved through literature reviews. The proposed study may enable the author to identify possible factors likely to promote effective relationships among teachers and students by examining the impact on their performance.

In addition, the secondary data will be generated from the higher educational institutions in the UK. Thus, higher educational colleges will be used as a case study.

Literature Review

The impact of the Teacher-Student Relationship on academic performance.

The impact of the teacher-student relationship with a shared ethnicity evidenced a lower level of conflict and supports a higher degree of closeness with a limited amount of inter dependency, which alternatively results in higher level of academic performance. According to Taylor (2010) the shared ethnicity results in developed social skills, promote educational achievements and supports students to build self-esteem. Klem and Connell (2004) rather think that shared ethnicity helps reduce the dropouts from the class and cooperate in engage learning. It seems Taylor's view on shared ethnicity is very convincing compared to Klem and Connell view on this issue since, he highlighted on how shared ethnicity can help learners to develop social skills and build self-esteem. Shared ethnicity allows more emotional attachments among the learners where they feel motivated and engaged in solving complex problems easy and understand better compared to others. A research done on elementary students in 2014 by McCormick & O'Connor showed that, the teacher-student relationship links their higher achievement on class unit grades and also reduces conflict by improving the overall academic achievements. It also convinces that both the research from Taylor and McCormick are more focus on academic achievements and learning using the concept of inclusiveness.

Behaviour theory, application and perception development

There many behaviour theories but of them were discovered to be important to the current study known to contribute behaviour development and management. These include attachment theory, social cognitive theory and self-system theory. All these theories help to explain the nature and application of behaviour of the learners in various perspectives utilizing their intellectual thinking on relationship and academic achievements.

Attachment theory

The attachment theory explained well by Bowlby (1969) stating that, the students uses their relationship with the adults (here: teachers) to prepare and organize their experiences. The theory seems more appealing to the current research, which would help establishing the relationship rapport among the teachers and students by building a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

Social cognitive theory

The social cognitive theory states that the students develop the skills through the practice and fellowship from the behaviour performance of the adults they observe. They tried to create and model of creature within the perceptual mind where they feel secure with the people they thought their principle model. This theory helps developed the social behaviour and mostly impact on the improved communication skills.

Self-System theory

According to Harter (2012) explained the self-system theory is about by analysing the importance of motivational factors, which developed through the basic psychological needs. These factors persuaded with crave of competence, autonomy and relatedness. The sub-theory of competence refers to the desire of capable feeling among the students with their academic works. Where the word autonomy suggest the choice option and the ability of make decisions. Finally, the relatedness refers to the attachments of the social feeling with the close connection among the teachers and peers. Concluding the study of behaviour theory the author have established that, a shared ethnicity and the valued practice managed to meet all these desires from the students and thus creates a healthy academic environment.

Shared Ethnicity in Building Effective Relationship

In the search of academic theory and literature the author referred to the literature from Tiberius (1994) who proposed the similar theory, which equally supports fostering the effective relationship through motivation approach, self-disclosure and readiness of attention with the engagement of ability. However, in this literature it was clearly mentioned that, these variable and or elements are intrinsic but not mandatory for building effective relationship, which was again supported by Bicki (2008) that the effective relationship depends upon on the emotional attachment among the teachers and students. The study of Tiberius and Bicki both could be suggestive to the current literature, which also reveals the truth from the attachment theory. The theory from Haidet and Stein (2006) suggested that, the effective relationship and the academic achievements largely depend upon the primacy of the emotional development by the students.

The concept of this value and the truth was also revealed through the building of community truth for the community of practice by Lave and Wenger (1991) who also pointed that the truth of the learning and the formulation of the effective relationship derived the teacher figure and also responsible to offer adequate and appropriate support to the learning engagement.

The shared ethnicity is discovered to be very important in building effective relationship the examination conducted. For example, Dee (2004) reveals that, there is somewhat a relationship of the shared ethnicity among the teachers and students to develop effective relationship. For the purpose of this an earlier attempt was made by Devine et al. (2002) and also by Dovidio et al. (2002) to explain the "discrimination by educators" where the authors considered the value and consequence of ethnic and or racial differences as an academic performance indicator.

Similarity Attraction Theory/Paradigm

Byrne's (1971) similarity-attraction theory suggests that, the individuals are attracted with the similar ethnicity on developing effective relationship. In another note, Rhodes (2005) recommends that, on youth mentoring the shared ethnicity and similarity on the cultural endorsement enhance the relationship by creating a hidden bond among them.

This theory from Byrne (1971), which was later, extended by Clore and Byrne (1975) by introducing another theory called reinforcement-affect model. The reinforcement-affect model is based on the assumptions, which includes the following: The reward system improves the stimuli, Positive feeling enhances the personal association, the individual association largely depends on the likings and disliking's of the individual

Validity, Reliability, Conformability and Trustworthiness of this research review

It has been evidenced from various research that it hard to believe and present a trustworthiness of a qualitative research. It is thus an important part of the research to create a base for the research validity, reliability, Conformability and trustworthiness. However, it is not impossible to ensure such with some basic steps. The validity of the research could easily be established using a detail research context. The credibility of this research would be ensured with the internal validity, which includes, the assurance of cross-examination of the actual intentions. These could easily be established by using a triangulation approach. In this paper the author would also consider establishing a familiar demographic selection of the participants for data collection using a random sampling.

The transferability of the research findings would be ensured using the external validity. The author would use an external validity approach to measure the impact of the shared ethnicity on the student's leanings and performance. It study would also consider some alternative study which would cross referenced to measure the existence of another valid factors on building effective relationships. To ensure the dependability of the data the author intended to collect and analyse similar type of data from different sources. The Conformability is largely relied on the achievement of the research objectives. In this research the author's entire work is relied on the achievement of the objectives, which is the purpose of the research.

Recommendation

Shared Ethnicity seems to have a positive impact on the student's academic attainments. On one hand ethnic diversity found to have negative effect on building trust and solidarity and on the other hand, ethnic diversity can stimulate creativity among students. This can create positive energy to strengthen the incentive to adopt the instructional language and culture and can reduce the feeling of ethnic identification and the consequences it may generate. The paper recommend to crate an emotional attachment and social bonding using the concept of inclusive practice which alternatively would provide an safe environment to enrich the teaching and learning. The paper also recommends creating a mentor-mentee relationship where the mentor being a community worker (as a distinct separate role from being a teacher) assists the learner to become responsible and apply self-recognition on his/her academic achievement.

Conclusion

The research has considered some valid theory already established to create the baseline for the current research, which primarily includes: behaviour theory, the relationship factors theory, similarity-attraction theory and so on. The significance of the research would focus on the learning of the paradigms of the affect and relationship. The authors believe that, there would be massive findings on the relationship tracking and academic learning's, which might provide a new dimension on the research findings. The intension of this research is to create a demonstration on the impact and suggests how to establish such string relationship among the educational settings to improve the performance. The authors also considered the motivational approach which helped the learners to create the self-disclosed readiness and assist establishing effective relationship. The motivational approaches combined with the emotional attachment which was considered crucial while building effective mentor-mentee relationship. While analysing the emotional attachment the authors agreed that the effective relationship and the academic achievements largely depend upon the primacy of the emotional development by the students. The concept of this value and the truth was also revealed through the building of community truth for the community of practice. The authors also believed that the truth of the learning and the formulation of the effective relationship derived the teacher figure and also responsible to offer adequate and appropriate support to the learning engagement.

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The Rhetoric of PDP in Higher Education: A Gender-Neutral Discourse?

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Abstract

Personal development Planning (PDP) has become a central feature for students in higher education and is linked to employability. This has come about as the result of an awareness that in a globalized education and workplace market, students need to be more competitive in developing and marketing their academic and other skills. However, this inner-directed process has spawned a discourse of voluntarism that dissolves engagement with political issues such as the gender implications of programmes of study and associated careers. This paper argues that a gender-neutral focus on the 'person' can potentially lead to the maintenance of inequalities for career pathways for men and women. This conceptualization is compared with that of work-life balance which, in effect, is taken as applying more to women than men, but which is formulated within gender-neutral discourse.

Keywords: personal development planning, gender, higher education

Introduction

This paper considers the ideological effects of recent discourse concerning personal development planning (PDP) in higher education (HE). Whilst on the face of it this discourse may seem personally liberating, with the aim of engaging students and developing them as independent learners and career planners, there are a number of problematic issues that follow from this inward focus on personal reflection. The root of this is the inherent voluntarism in such a focus and the concomitant dissolving of wider political matters that impact upon the individual into an intrapsychic world. Whilst PDP may appear gender-neutral, it is argued that this is a discursive veneer that covers over the problematic nature of gendered notions such as the 'independent learner', 'graduate attributes' and a gender-divided labour market.

The discourse of PDP is now entrenched in policy initiatives at national and trans-national level in higher education. There is an increasing emphasis on encouraging students to engage in PDP, both in an academic and vocational sense. This is taken as developing independence in students so that they can become more autonomous learners and career planners (Wilson-Medhurst, 2005a; Wilson-Medhurst, 2005b). Meanwhile in the world of work there has been a raft of 'family-friendly' policy initiatives that encourage people to attain a degree of work-life balance (WLB). The intention here is to afford employees the opportunity to achieve a degree of balance between their personal and professional lives, especially given the increasing emphasis on flexible working patterns (Kelloway, Gottlieb and Barham, 1999; Gershuny, 2000). This is now all the more relevant in a post COVID-19 environment in which flexible working is likely to become much more common.

It is also possible to trace an increasing trend towards decision-making as being located 'down' at the individualized sphere of personal choice. This perspective has most notably been advocated by Ulrich Beck in terms of a transition in the nature and experience of risk

and representing a “categorical shift” with respect to the individual and society (Beck: 127). In this risk society ‘old’ collective forms of identity have replaced by ‘new’ identifications that are rooted in individual actions. Beck traces this shift back to the 1970s and argues that the Fordist era of production and wealth distribution, in which economic and political interests were bound up with the desired ends of full employment and high standards of welfare and healthcare, ran into problems. Beck reasons that negative outcomes such as rise of mass unemployment, industrial pollution and nuclear hazards effectively created a schism in the institutional structures associated with Fordism and ushered in era preoccupied with the problem of insecurity and risk. In the risk society perspective, citizens are now individually accountable for themselves and their economic opportunities. Thus, Beck notes that the traditional place of family ties and class has given way to secondary agencies and institutions which ‘stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets’ (Beck, 1992: 131).

This paper therefore addresses these discourses in terms of the tensions that arise when educational and career matters are viewed as being related to individual reflection and choice. Whilst Beck’s notion of the ‘individualized individual’ seems to fit this discourse, it nevertheless glosses over the way in which this focus loses sight of the gendered nature of much of this policy and practice in HE. The first section considers the developments in PDP in higher education and how this has led to a concern with a masculinist and instrumental approach to learning to the exclusion of other aspects which impact upon the student experience. The second section considers the parallel discourse of WLB and the way in which a gender-neutral terminology leaves matters up to individuals and obscures the issue of how this is addressed and targeted more towards women than men in the workplace. The argument advanced here is that this individualizing discourse dissolves away any sense of the gendered backdrop to these discourses.

PDP in higher education

The basic principles of PDP are action-orientated and cyclical (Clegg & Bradley, 2006) and include the following dimensions: (i) goal setting and action planning; (ii) doing (learning through the experience of doing with greater awareness); (iii) recording (thoughts, ideas, experiences, evidence of learning); (iv) reviewing (reflections on what has happened, making sense of it all), and (v) evaluating (making judgements about self and own work and determining what needs to be done to develop, improve, and move on). However, whilst these principles are readily accepted, their translation into curricular developments and relationship with subject provision is less clear. This is a significant issue as the first ever mapping and synthesis review of PDP processes found that most, “adopted a prescriptive approach to PDP implementation in order to achieve course-specific outcomes” (Gough et al., 2003: 2). The danger with such prescriptive approaches is that PDP may come to be seen as an imposition rather than something that is integral to the higher education experience. Moreover, it can be viewed as an end in itself rather than as a means to a genuine engagement with the provisional nature of knowledge.

Therefore, if the process of PDP is to become an integral part of the student learning experience, a number of fundamental constructs need to be accepted by academic staff and students. It is crucial that these processes are integral to the whole learning experience of a student in higher education and thus should be embedded firmly with the rest of the curricula and student experience, and not seen as a separate activity or concept. The process also needs to be underpinned by institutional strategies, especially for teaching, learning and assessment and student support and needs to be learner-centred, in terms of supporting of a wide-range of

different learning styles and motivations. The main outcome from such processes in terms of personal development will likely be a significant contribution to students becoming independent, autonomous, self-aware learners. In other words, staff and students should be able to engage actively with the PDP process rather than experiencing it as an imposition.

However, whilst such an approach can be enabling for students in their learning there are tensions that emerge with such a focus on the individual student. These are often political issues concerned with matters such as (i) national, institutional or departmental PDP policies; (ii) access to PDP records; and (iii) academic or vocationally driven. These are issues which can become dissolved in the instantiation of PDP in terms of the overall focus on the individual and the need to get such a policy translated into action, and especially via the increasing reliance on virtual learning environments. The nature of any virtual learning environment defines the nature of the learning process via provision of tools and templates for actions. All too often the learning process can be subtly moulded as an instrumental rather than a critical process. Learning in this context can become a process of managing information (including personal information) rather than discovery, insight and growth (Brabazon, 2007). Thus, as some have suggested this has enabled a managerial model of learning to be surreptitiously substituted for the dialogic and critical model which characterizes the ideal of learning in higher education (Lambier & Ramaekers, 2006).

Others have pointed towards the tensions that arise in the different uses to which PDP is put. Three “ideal types” encapsulating the attitudes of different subject or discipline areas, have been distilled. The first ideal type, the professional, is strongly governed by the requirements stipulated by professional and statutory bodies such as health care professional bodies. The second, employment, includes both a general orientation to graduate employment and a specific work placement during study. This model is associated with areas such as management and business, sport and leisure, and those areas of applied science and engineering where the course focus is primarily towards employment rather than discipline. The final model, academic, is focused on the academic development of the student, incorporating meta-cognitive skills and those of the specific subject discipline. Humanities and social sciences predominate in the academic. The model also included some areas of pure science where the emphasis was more on subject understanding (Clegg & Bradley, 2006).

The aforementioned tensions in PDP were drawn out and articulated in interviews conducted with staff and students in the social sciences in one recent study (Moir et al., 2008; Moir 2009). One major aspect of this is the extent to which PDP is dealt with on an institutional-wide basis and its relevance for social science. In effect this is an issue of generality versus specificity. However, there is also more to this that bears closer inspection in terms of the way that PDP can, at a broad level appear to be related to the issue of enhancing employability, which some staff do not see as their subject in the sense that it is not an academic matter as such. On the other hand, there are members of staff who have suggested that PDP is something that could be used to encourage independent learning and reflexivity which they see as a key academic skill for social science students. A key issue that cuts across the above practical concerns is that of ensuring that the ‘personal’ nature of the process stays with the student whilst ensuring engagement in order to bring about the stated aims of PDP. On the one hand, it is something that is within the individual student’s control, but on the other hand its needs to be accessible to allow staff to assess its impact.

However, it is also clear that whilst PDP is almost universally accepted in principle, its more avowedly vocational association with graduate attributes and employability has gained

considerable traction in recent years. Perhaps this is not to be entirely unexpected given that PDP must function as a public institutional quality enhancement measure related to politico-economic matters, and as something that is private and personal to the student and within her control. The concept of 'graduate employability' itself has been the subject of debate in terms of its operationalization (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011). Yorke & Knight (2007: 158) defined it as 'a graduate's suitability for appropriate employment'. Dacre-Pool & Sewell (2007) point to a range of different aspects of the concept, including: subject knowledge, generic skills, emotional intelligence, career development learning, reflection and evaluation, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These aspects align with those of PDP in terms of a focus on the self as a project to be worked upon. More recently, Barton, Bates and O'Donovan (2019) have demonstrated how volunteering among psychology students is related to employability and enhanced self-confidence.

There clearly an ideological focus on ensuring graduates are ready for the employment market, although this discourse has been the subject of critique. For example, Fotiadou (2020) used the methodology of corpus-based critical discourse analysis in the analysis of 2.6 million words deriving from 58 university websites, and more specifically the careers services. Her analysis highlights the ways in language used by careers services reproduces and promotes a neoliberal ideology in which the notion of employability is related to fierce competition in the graduate job market. More rarely has the academic side of PDP been considered and problematized as equally ideological. Take for example, the rhetoric of independent learning that underlies much of PDP. One the face of it, 'independence' is seen as being crucial to the not only such matters a lifelong learning, but also a defining feature of what it is to be a graduate. It is therefore, almost without question, accepted as being both valuable both for the individual and for society. However, whilst this rhetoric may appear emancipatory it is nevertheless ideological in the sense that it is firmly rooted in the noted of self-reliance and the utilization of rational goal-driven thinking. This kind of thinking is traditionally associated with a masculine approach to such matters, and therefore whilst normatively presented as being desirable, is problematic for women. This has been highlighted in a recent qualitative study of students at a post-1992 university in the U.K. in which the dominant constructions of the independent learner in which asking for help is associated with what may regarded as technical matters of study rather than other forms of emotional support. In effect, a masculinized 'techno-managerial' agenda dominates such 'help' as a means to developing independence thereby promoting a rationalist model of learning Leathwood (2006).

While there is a positive connotation with the notion of personal development, this is not simply about a neutral inner process. However, the dominant discourse is one of a concern with the notion of individual self-direction and planning related to politico-economic aims such as employability and improving the nature of graduates as future employees in terms of national competitiveness in the face of a globalized knowledge-driven economy. This has gained much more of a hold in the light of what is commonly referred to as the 'Bologna process' which was instituted following the Bologna declaration of 1999 which aims to create a European-wide higher educational area by 2025. A number of structural changes have taken place in European universities that not only regulate the practice of studying but also include changes in the goals of higher education to meet the demands of the knowledge economy. The adoption of personal development planning and progress files are very much part of this process. These developments have also intensified following the European Union Lisbon Treaty of 2007 and European Commission Lisbon Agenda for addressing the globalized knowledge economy. Aspects of this agenda are aimed at improving graduates' employability and competitiveness. Graduates are required to be adaptable, multi-skilled and flexible, and

able to take charge of and plan their own careers in a rapidly changing workplace. The engine of this is PDP with an accompanying discourse of ‘graduate attributes’ (Barnett, 2006). There has also been a greater emphasis placed on developing the ‘purposeful graduate’ (Clydesdale, 2015). Universities now stress that their degree programmes include career development learning and personal development planning (Watts, 2006). PDP relies heavily on the notion of self-regulated learning (SRL), “monitoring and managing of one’s cognitive processes as well as the awareness of and control over one’s emotions, motivations, behaviour, and environment as related to learning” (Nilson, 2013, p. 5). This necessitates setting goals, planning, self-directing, focusing, and maintaining motivation. (Nilson, 2013).

Whilst this discourse aims to empower students by equipping them with ‘key skills’ to be adaptable and flexible, it also normalizes the view that coping with the labour market demands is an individual responsibility rooted in planning and decision-making. This trend has not been without critics who have drawn upon the Foucauldian notion of ‘governmentality’ to highlight the neoliberal focus on how individuals adapt to ‘the market’ as a means of social control (Fejes, 2007; Bloch, 2008). Still others have highlighted the depoliticized nature of what they view as the recent uptake by newer universities, in particular, of graduate attributes (via a focus on employability) as a way of legitimating what they offer whilst ‘traditional’ universities still largely adopt a disciplinary approach to their legitimation (Leathwood & Read, 2009). It is argued that this focus on the personal in this context reinforces the hegemonic dominance of vocationalism and downplays any sense of the gendered nature of associated attributes.

The specification of these attributes and their mapping onto curricular outcomes is now well underway in U.K. HE and in Scotland with its emphasis on an enhancement-led approach. A number of HEI websites now make explicit reference to these attributes, and as noted above, the newer post-1992 universities have embraced these as a means of legitimating their vocational credentials. However, of particular interest for this paper is the gendered nature of these graduate attribute statements which are commonly framed around masculinized characteristics such as competitiveness and the desire to succeed, assertiveness through driving change, and a rationalized notion of handling knowledge in terms of complexity. Some make reference to the ability to work in teams, but this is generally framed around the notion of ‘communication skills’ from individualistic perspective. Much of this discourse of graduate attributes is linked to a culture of audit that requires these to be evidenced in ways that relate to HE and governmental policy documents. Thus, it is not uncommon for universities to now adopt strategic planning models that explicitly link such policy initiatives to pedagogic targets that make explicit how, where and when these attributes are developed or attained. The current economic recession has intensified this process as universities strive to sell the vocational worth of their programmes in terms of marketable skills that graduates can expect to exit with that will make them more employable.

Whatever perspective is taken on the merits or problems of PDP, there are underlying ideological tensions between the notion of individual academic development and the concomitant contribution to an educated citizenry, and the imperative that requires knowledge linked to economic wealth creation. However, in an era of mass higher education it is often the latter that is a priority for governments. This political dimension to PDP can be lost when located inside the practical matters associated with education as an inner-directed process. Once set within this discourse then the practicalities of such matters curricular design, delivery and assessment come into play. However, this is a carefully managed process in which ‘personal development’ is circumscribed in a such a manner as to be related to

masculinized attributes. Learning the process of PDP therefore becomes the end in an instrumentally-driven fashion and its gendered nature is occluded within the rhetoric of employability.

Work-life balance as gender neutral discourse

This kind of focus on decision-making in terms of personal development can also be found in the emergence of a discourse concerning ‘work-life balance’ and ‘individual choice’ rhetoric in today’s workplace (Perrons et al., 2009). The use of gender-neutral language in the WLB rhetoric of today’s world of work can lead to the impression that gender stereotypes are no longer a constraining factor, especially for women. This again seems to accord with Beck’s notion of the ‘individualized individual’ who must chart their life course by weighing up matters and making decisions and choices. Parents are seen to be exercising choice when they take up the flexible work options on offer in order to balance their family and work commitments in accordance with their needs. In this way flexibility is extended beyond the attributes of the person and into the management of their family life.

Embedded within this discourse of balancing work and family commitments, and the employment policies and practices predicated upon this, is the view that as far as is reasonable, employers and employees should work together to try and ensure that family commitments are not sacrificed at the expense of work. The complexity of balancing work and family demands has been recently examined in terms of understanding the demands of both settings, the resources of both settings, the specific abilities of the individual parent or partner, and the fit between these aspects (Voydanoff, 2005). For example, many occupations may require additional hours at unexpected times in order to complete a project by a set deadline. This is a demand, but it may also provide an additional resource in terms of personal prestige and career advancement. However, determining the actual benefit of this may require additional cost in terms of decreased time with a partner or children. The concept of boundary spanning has been used to explain this in terms of the impact that meeting the demands of one setting has on the other setting. Thus, determining what makes for balance between work and family requires assessing the settings, resources, and demands separately, and then assessing the trade-offs individuals make between them, and the impact this has on the whole family.

As in virtually all occupations, women as the child-bearers carry the major responsibility of child care arrangements (as well as the care of ageing parents), and unless ‘family-friendly’ policies are part of the work environment, women employees are less likely to have a long-term and sustainable career and may have to take career breaks. Returning to work after such a break becomes an increasingly difficult task given that the time away may lead to unfamiliarity with new technologies and work procedures. Furthermore, pregnancy and childbearing have particular negative consequences for women in the early part of their careers, given that achievement and promotion during these years coincides with fertility.

Hence the turn to current approaches that call upon the need for more recognition of the diversity of flexible working styles and WLB needs, rather than policies which specifically enable working mothers to manage paid work and family needs. The aim is try and move beyond simply viewing equal opportunities policies as being a matter of human resources, and one primarily directed at women, to being concerned about all employees and an issue of concern for all employers and organizations (Sinclair, 2000; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). This discourse of diversity is meant to be open to all and is based upon the view that it is a matter of individual circumstances and choices. However, this approach to diversity management whilst focusing on the individual has a blind spot when it comes to the issue of power

differentials or structural inequalities (Sinclair, 2000). The argument that we are all individuals and are all have different circumstances effectively ensures that the pervasive male models of work are left unchallenged in the background. In doing so, a focus on diversity can absolve political and organizational responsibilities for tackling equal treatment and equal opportunity for women at work (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999).

In one of the earliest applications of this approach a study of equal opportunities talk, similarly found a mix of ‘principle versus practice’ discursive constructions with regard to gender and employment opportunities (Wetherell, Stiven, & Potter, 1987). Supporting equal opportunities in principle, positioned the speaker as liberal and fair-minded whilst talking about (external) practical employment issues (e.g. maternity cover, childcare, emotional unsuitability to stressful working environments) served to undermine this without any personal negative attribution to the speaker. In other words, participants in the study could at one and the same time appeal to identifying in principle with equal opportunities in an abstract sense whilst citing practical affairs as somehow inevitably at odds with this in how things are in the ‘real world’ of day-to-day living. In more recent work in this vein, sameness and difference discourses have been identified as being used by bank managers when alluding working mothers whilst the work context was portrayed as gender neutral (Meriläinen, 2000). It has also been shown how an abstract principle of individualism is favoured in professional men’s accounts on discrimination and equality (Riley, 2002).

Other discourse analytic work has shown how gender-blind approach to talk about such issues through terms such as ‘flexibility’, ‘flexible working’ and ‘work–life balance’ were used to occlude inequality for women (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). The exclusion of talk about men or fathers in managers’ accounts, and the construction of a ‘generic she’ or ‘generic female parent’ implicitly assumes that the mother, and not the father, is responsible for childcare (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001). Participants’ interview accounts routinely followed a ‘gender-neutral’ trajectory, by moving from an opening response to such questions in terms of gender making no difference, to talking about gender problems in a careful and implicit manner, and then by concluding that gender is not issue. This three-part discursive sandwich embeds any talk of gender as problem within an overall gender-neutral account as follows: (a) suggest gender is not an issue; (b) describe a gender problem or inequality; (c) conclude that gender is not an issue. However, such accounts are problematic given that they dilute any sense of gender as a political issue because they fall back on a ‘generic she’ as the subject of equal opportunity. In effect they minimize any notion of gendered work practices and fail to tackle the male model of work. The net effect of this is to therefore reproduction of gender differences within a rhetoric of working in a non-gendered organisation.

The distinction between male model of work as the norm and any deviation from this as problematic is why many women still feel compelled to fit in with this prevailing view as the acceptable nature of how employment is structured. The use of gender-neutral terms inevitably leads to falling back on the individual as the source of freely made decisions about working hours, parenting and childcare. So long as both women and men construct these ‘decisions’ and ‘choices’ as primarily a matter for women then a gender-neutral language of work-life balance may do little more than preserve the status quo of male patterns of work.

There are also generational and socio-economic class issues that are bound up with the discourses that women draw upon when discussing the relationship between work and family commitments. Data from in-depth interviews undertaken as part of a generational study of Australian women and found that the ‘progress narrative’ is no longer a major discourse for

young women, but rather gender equity is taken for granted. Motherhood continues to define and shape their working arrangements, but the discourses they use to make sense of the work-life balance tensions are framed in terms of 'choice', not 'equity'. The roles of 'mother' and 'worker' are not talked about by younger women as separate, but rather inter-twined. Gender still shapes young women's working lives, but in more complex ways than previously, and is related to the expansion of lifestyle options as well as class factors.

The young women interviewed place the constraints that affect achieving work-life balance in terms of the limited resources they have available to them as self-directed individual women. Gender equity discourses were therefore not used by the young women interviewed to understand the pressures and constraints that confront them, given that they presented themselves as facing individual choices in their lives. This discourse of individualism was also apparent in how they talked about perceived obstacles that they face as individual agents, who also happen to be women. As such choices are presented as depending on the availability and of resources and access to them. They did not identify with a particular social class but rather talked about life choices as being the result of their own individual achievements or failings. This discourse of WLB as being a matter of individual choice does not stem from notions of equity as a driving force for policies in this area but rather is about meeting the demands of different expectations and preferences for the ways in which people organize their lives according to different access to resources (Everingham, Stevenson, & Warner-Smith, 2007).

Previous research has highlighted the complexity of how people can at one and the same time support family-friendly policies as well as undermine such support through talking about local practical concerns. These discursive constructions therefore constitute a barrier to the promotion of WLB issues. The current rollout of WLB initiatives across the European Community does little to tackle the engrained ideology of this being more of a concern for women rather than men. The male model is left in place and whilst the issue of attaining a favourable WLB is constructed as a problematic issue where policy initiatives need to be directed.

In a climate when it is regarded as 'politically correct' to espouse a positive endorsement of work-life balance initiatives and policies then this does not pose a problem for men who can show support for such a position safe in the knowledge that it does not impact on them to nearly the same extent as women. It is also the case that engrained views on women as being responsible for childcare restricts their geographical mobility unlike men and, as in many fields of employment, mobility is often an advantage in terms of gaining experience and promotion. The net effect of this is that it leads to women working lower down the career ladder with men pursuing their careers at higher levels and in senior positions. This maintains a role model of top professional workers as male, again maintaining such work as a normatively male pursuit whilst women are predominately in junior or support roles given their work-life balance 'needs'.

The rhetoric of WLB is often equated with that of personal choices and decisions. This creates a dichotomy between personal life and career and the notion that this tension requires some resolution. The solution to this is offered in terms of a discourse of individual personal choice and decision-making. Thus, individuals can weigh up matters up about attaining a WLB through adjusting their personal lives or the occupational role aspects of their identity. However, this again ignores the extent to which an occupational role is contractual and normatively presented as a given whilst personal life is not subject to the same legal-rational

authority (Weber, 1978). In other words, there is less scope to change an occupational role than there is to change personal circumstances. A rhetoric of individualism ensures that the gendering of childbearing and care are cloaked within a language of personal choice, as if such matters were equally distributed amongst men and women when patently they are not. As previously noted, this kind of gender-blind rhetoric may at first seem liberal and reasonable but can in fact serve to work against women.

The final point to make revolves around the ‘sameness-difference’ opposition. Given that occupational roles are in themselves gender-neutral then the assumption is made that all who undertake an occupation can do so in the knowledge that it is performance in the occupation itself that matters. It is the demands of the job itself that are taken as requiring that those who undertake this work to be treated as being the same, irrespective of gender. To argue for gender difference and its impact on occupational performance would be to go against the task requirements of work. However, people can switch between the ‘same-difference’ ends of the explanatory dualism when it comes to talking about equal opportunities in employment and the position of women (Nentwich, 2006).

What is evident from the above is the parallel ideology that can be drawn with PDP. As with PDP, the discourse of WLB involving individual reflection and decision-making is something that is, almost without question, accepted as a proper and entirely appropriate basis for people’s actions. However, this danger of the reduction of such matters down to this individual level is that it actively occludes the ideological basis of this discourse and the practices that hold in place an overall masculinist approach to how the personal is related to education and the workplace. Whilst social theorists such as Beck have contributed to our awareness of individualization as a key feature of reflexive modernity this kind of focus disembeds the individual from society and in so doing diverts attention away from power inequalities (Francis & Skelton, 2008).

Conclusion

The emergence of a discourse of personal development related to education and the workplace has intensified in recent years. On the face of it, this may at first appear as a welcome development. The fast-paced and evolving nature of the knowledge economy has led many to argue for a more flexible workforce capable of keeping pace by planning and managing their own learning, developing themselves, and managing their own career. Mass higher education has also come to be regarded as an essential means of meeting the demands of the knowledge economy and students are urged to engage in PDP in order to make themselves more adaptable and marketable through this process. In tandem with this has been a concern to manage the demands of work and family life, and again this has been placed in the hands of the individual. Therefore, a rhetoric of the individual as being much more in control of their own destiny has taken root.

However, this paper has argued that this largely illusory, and that the exclusive psychologization of these matters has ideological effects. A neoliberal discourse which stresses individual control, planning and choice is often justified in terms of a paradoxical discourse of a global knowledge economy that requires and structures the need for a greater focus on the flexibility of individuals. However, it is not the case that individuals can simply develop themselves through exercising freedom of choice but rather that an internationalized and globalized knowledge economy demands that people are ever-increasingly more adaptable within a world of increasing market-like structures. As we look outward to the global impact of this world upon our lives, so we are encouraged to look inward as a means of

generating our capacity to change to meet these demands. This is likely to become more prevalent in a post-COVID-19 world.

The effect of this focus on the individual is to dissolve away a focus on the ideological nature of this concern with self-direction. As people are encouraged to look inward and adopt a more rationalist and instrumental approach to their lives, so their view outwards is occluded in terms the focus on the personal as having political implications. It is then but a short step for people to view problems and seek solutions as being their own responsibility rather than requiring an examination of the very foundations of this discourse in terms of a masculinist approach which is problematic, not only for women, but also relates to other social and economic factors, as well as being restrictive for men.

The ideological import of this conclusion is that people have at their disposal a set of discursive resources available to them in terms of the 'knowledge economy', 'flexibility' and 'risk' that legitimate an overriding focus on the personal. Mass higher education coupled with a de-regulation of the workplace to enhance productivity has naturalized the discourses of PDP and WLB. Beck's 'individualized individual', far from being empowered by this discourse, is the subject of a reinforcement of traditional gender lines of demarcation, and in particular the dominance of a masculinized conceptions of learning in HE as related to PDP and graduate attributes, as well as feminized notion of WLB.

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Language Levels of Primary English Teacher

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Abstract

The aim of the theoretical part of the paper is to characterize phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language levels which speaking skill of primary English teacher in the first grade consists of. The empirical part offers research results of three case studies where the oral production of English teachers at selected primary schools in the first grade in the western Slovakia is analysed and compared respecting the above-mentioned language levels. The aim of the research is, therefore, to find out what pronunciation mistakes occurred during the English lesson, which areas of formulaic language and which words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words were used during the English lesson. Research results are followed by their detailed description and interpretation. During the research, two qualitative research methods - structured observation and structured interview and one research tool - observation sheet were used. Based on the findings, we suggest three possible alternatives of the further research. The last part of the paper is dedicated to the conclusion where all relevant results are summarised.

Keywords: language levels, first grade, primary schools, research, oral production

Introduction

A primary English teacher acts as a language model for young learners and he / she significantly (either in positive or negative way) influences learner's attitude to a foreign language based on effectiveness of mutual cooperation between him / her and the learners. It is practically impossible to provide English primary teachers with a unified training, guidelines or curriculum in which the educational needs of young beginners meet because their brain functions gradually and individually develop. Primary level of education is, therefore, characteristic of their fluidity. It requires a constant use of specific and new teaching methods and techniques supporting all language systems that is pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in a particular group of young learners. As a result, teacher's approach should be flexible enough to foster a development of learner's communicative competence in the initial stages of learning English language.

The theoretical part of the paper briefly and concisely embraces phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language level emphasizing their importance in a teaching process. Theoretical part is followed by description of used methodology, description and interpretation of research results, implications and short conclusion about the work together with the references.

Phonetic-phonological level

The ability to speak fluently presupposes not only a knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and “language on the spot” (Harmer, 2008, p. 269). In the initial stages, primary English teacher focuses on three main components of foreign language: phonetic oppositions, correct grammar and sufficient amount of vocabulary. These components, or, more precisely, language systems are mastered separately. Consequently, learners create a language mosaic in their mind which spontaneously starts to overlap in their speech and learner becomes comprehensible for others. In the following chapters we, therefore, focus on phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language levels which are the part of primary English teacher speaking skill.

Phonetic-phonological level includes the production of speech sounds, their auditory differentiation (phonological awareness), pronunciation, articulation and their function in speech. Compared to other levels, the practising of phonetic-phonological level starts earlier and ends later due to several factors such as the ability to imitate, the level of intellect, skilfulness of speech organs, quality of psychological and speech stimulation (Chlebeková, 2014). Reid (2016) points out that pronunciation should be learnt and acquired from the early age because it is a necessary part of foreign language learning. Young learners have an exceptional ability to pick up the sounds of the language and imitate them. If they have a chance to use language on a daily basis, they are much more able to improve their pronunciation (Dunn, 1983).

Primary English teacher should be familiar with all 44 phonemes in English language, present and work with them in a playful and lively way to catch learner's attention. Simple pronunciation drills should be necessarily enriched by contextualized and meaningful activities including practice sound discrimination and drama activities with a special focus on pronunciation and intonation practice activities. In this way, the teacher creates multiple and creative opportunities for practising correct pronunciation which is usually perceived monotonously.

This claim is supported by Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992) and Cameron (2001) who state that pronunciation of primary English teacher should be flawless. Kelly (2000) also asserts that it is crucial to acquire a correct pronunciation from the early age including even minor nuances because each mispronounced word creates an obstacle in spoken language and it can affect the whole meaning of the sentence, for example in the pair of nouns *soup* and *soap*. It is needful to primarily practise a correct pronunciation of a word and then to write it down on the blackboard. It is particularly important to anticipate and concentrate on the phonemes whose pronunciation in the foreign language is unique such as /θ/. Since young learners are perfect imitators, they may absorb incorrect pronunciation patterns which are difficult to eradicate. Furthermore, they are often carried over into lower and upper secondary school.

When young learners start to connect the words into simple bare sentences, the second language level is created spontaneously and the learners start to use English in oral communication.

Morphosyntactic level

This language level includes the use of particular parts of speech, grammatically correct words and sentences, word order and formation of sentences (Vernarcová, 2004). These elements should be repeatedly and implicitly implemented in natural, authentic situations and stories using particular facts to form a general rule.

Hart'anská (2004) emphasizes that young learners have to be constantly exposed to English language through various activities which “force” them to manipulate with a foreign language. Young learners thus play with the language creating sometimes nonsensical words and grammatical constructions. At this point, it is recommended to avoid teacher correction and let learners discover their creative potential in a foreign language. When learners enjoy an activity focused on grammatical structures, they absorb them subconsciously. It helps them to develop positive attitude towards English language (Scott, & Ytreberg, 1996).

The fact that young learners learn grammar inductively is based on their psychological predispositions but the concept of creative grammar seems to be very distant from it. However, Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992) suggest that also young learners at primary school are able to discover a grammatical rule on their own comparing it with their mother tongue. This approach includes the use of short text which contains well-known vocabulary to all learners and visual teaching aids. Consequently, the text may be analysed from the point of view of parts of speech and their importance in it (this reasoning would probably be led in the learner's mother tongue). To check whether the learners remember the basic parts of speech and whether they perceive the differences among them, it is necessary to prepare follow-up activity where parts of speech would be randomly dispersed on a piece of paper / blackboard. Learner's task would be to put them in the correct word order creating meaningful sentence. This approach allows learners even at primary level of education to compare and experiment with the language. At the same time it motivates them to introduce their own sentences which may be similarly analysed.

Another effective way that encourages young learners to subconsciously acquire correct grammatical structures is formulaic language. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992) divide this type of language into the following groups: *simple greetings* (“Hello! How are you?”), *social English* (“Have a nice weekend”), *routines* (“What's the weather like today?”), *classroom language* (“Listen. Sit down.”), *asking permission* (“Can I go to the toilet?”) and *communication strategies* (“Can you say that again, please?”) (ibid, p. 65). The teacher can gradually increase the number of grammatical structures or add some words in the acquired ones to make formulaic language more complex and dynamic, e.g. Put away the pencils and take the pen. Using different grammatical structures, young learners enrich their vocabulary and they become the participants in conversations without being aware of it (ibid). They are used to pick up fixed phrases in a foreign language that help them to “communicate” (Moon, 2000). Moreover, the acquisition of formulaic language may significantly accelerate learner's cognitive thinking and improve a grammatical quality of basic conversation exchanges.

The moment when young learners acquire simple phrases, they add new meaningful elements to them, their vocabulary enrich and another language level is naturally created.

Lexical level

Language comprehension plays a crucial role. During the lessons, young learners spontaneously ask a lot of questions which requires teacher's longer answer in the foreign language. As a result, their active and passive vocabulary expands (Chlebeková, 2014). Presenting new vocabulary, teacher should take into consideration its cultural aspects. For instance, when topic of the lesson are Animals, it is appropriate to start with those ones that learners are familiar with on the basis of their cultural consciousness such as dog, fish and cat. Then, other animals together with pictures can be added such as whale, crocodile or kangaroo (Gadušová, 2004).

The question is how the teacher is able to control the amount of vocabulary young learners have already acquired. Based on the study conducted by Dolch (1930-1940), it is possible to identify the most common words which occur at a particular grade level. These words are called "sight words." When a young learner is familiar with a group of words appropriate for his / her grade level, reading short texts becomes easier for him / her focusing on the other unknown words. In this paper, we deal with the First Grade Dolch Sight Words. With regard to other unknown words in the text, it is also appropriate to organise them in groups, in so called "sets", e.g. lexical sets (vegetable, sports, subjects at school etc.), rhyming sets (cat, hat, bat etc.), colour sets grouping together things that are, e.g. red (an apple, a rose, a tomato etc.) or grammatical sets (nouns, adjectives, verbs etc.) (Brewster, & Ellis, Girard, 1992, p. 89-90).

Apart from Dolch sight words list, young learners should be familiar with basic phrasal verbs (stand up, sit down, look at, etc.) and antonyms which are usually represented by pair of opposite adjectives (light-dark, hot-cold, tall-short, etc.) Phrasal verbs and antonyms are very important part of lexical development and they are usually taught according to the topic of the lesson (Seewaldová, 2019).

Vocabulary of young learners expands not only thanks to teacher's intervention that is to a careful selection of classroom activities but through extracurricular activities, as well. In this way, parents can significantly contribute to child's lexical development. They can use memorable, rhythmic and repetitive lyrics of the songs, English TV channels for children, short extracts from children's literature and picture books or didactic games.

Another teaching aid which helps young learners either at school environment or at home during the process of acquisition are the flash cards. The most traditional way of their usage is their description. Nevertheless, they can be used as a marker, identifier, playing cards, for making concertina book, own original picture book and own vocabulary game or for creating pelmanism (Ardron, 2019, n.p.)

Methodology

The conducted idiographic research has the exploratory qualitative character since we wanted to gain a deeper insight into the issue.

The reason why we chose the topic *Language Levels of Primary English Teacher* was the interest in its closer analysis and comparison of speaking skills of the selected sample of teachers in the first grade which should be according to the theoretical background at a relevant professional level.

The aim of the research was to analyse the oral production of three primary English teachers respecting phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language levels to find out if their pronunciation was correct, which areas of formulaic language they used and which words they frequently used during the English lesson.

Based on the above stated research aims, we determined the following research problem:

What is the oral production of the selected English teachers in the first grade at the primary school according to stated linguistic levels?

Research questions

If a young learner acquires English language in his / her childhood, he / she will save a precious time in the adulthood (Horváthová, 2019). Máliková (2000), Hartánská (2004) and Pokrivčáková (2008) support the idea that a learner should be exposed to foreign language as soon as possible. They claim that the sooner young learners “meet” with the language, the better its quality will be. Their speech muscles start to develop and this is the reason why they can acquire English language much easier. They also believe that young learners are likely to gain clear pronunciation and foreign accent at an early age that can be compared to native speakers. For this reason, English primary teacher should be accurate in his / her spoken language.

Following the above stated theoretical knowledge, three research questions were formulated:

Research question n. 1: What pronunciation mistakes did the selected primary teachers in the first grade make during the English lesson?

Research question n. 2: Which areas of formulaic language did the selected primary teachers in the first grade use during the English lesson?

Research question n. 3: Which words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words did the selected primary teachers use during the English lesson?

Research methods and tools

Out of qualitative research methods, we used structured observation and structured interview. Within the research tools, we used a specially designed observation sheet that was not taken from a source but created by us as researchers.

Structured observation and observation sheet

The main method used during the research was *structured observation* that enables us to be in a direct contact with the research participants. The observation was carried out in February 2020 at three primary schools.

The observation sheet is divided into three parts: phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical level. Each language level contains specific aims based on the stated research questions.

a) Phonetic-phonological level:

We worked with the First Grade Dolch Sight Words to find out if the selected English teachers pronounced these words correctly. Then, we focused on the correct pronunciation of the words out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words.

b) Morphosyntactic level:

In this level, we concentrated on the occurrence of the following areas of formulaic language: simple greetings, routine questions, social English and classroom language during the English lesson together with their concrete examples.

c) Lexical level:

It was aimed at the variety and number of the words from and out the First Grade Dolch Sight Words during the English lesson. We also concentrated on the occurrence of phrasal verbs and antonyms together with their concrete examples.

Structured interview

The second research method was a structured interview which respect the above stated linguistic levels, as well. The interview consisted of seven open-ended questions which means that the participants had unlimited response options. The interview was carried out in February 2020 in a friendly atmosphere in the oral form after the end of the English lesson.

The aim of the interview was to find out whether English primary teachers check pronunciation of the words that will be presented in the class during their home preparation (if their answer was positive, they identified the ways of their checking); whether they consider pronunciation and intonation important in teaching English language in the first grade; whether they correct their learners when they mispronounce some words and whether they themselves are aware of their mispronounced words during the lesson. Then, we focus on morphosyntactic language level asking the teachers how they develop spontaneous speech of young learners when a predominant part of the lesson is oriented to fixed expressions. The last questions were dedicated to the presentation of new vocabulary at the lesson.

Table 1 creates a core for elaboration of the empirical part. It summarizes the research problem, research questions and it states research methods and research tool that were used.

Table 1: Research problem, research questions, research methods and research tool

Research problem:		
What is the oral production of the selected English teachers in the first grade at the primary school according to stated linguistic levels?		
Research questions	Research methods	Research tools
1. What pronunciation mistakes did the selected primary teachers in the first grade make during the English lesson?	Structured observation Structured interview	Observation sheet
2. Which areas of formulaic language did the selected primary teachers in the first grade use during the English lesson?		
3. Which words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words did the selected primary teachers use during the English lesson?		

Subjects of the research

Participants of the research were three English teachers who have been teaching in the first grade at three primary schools. All teachers were females. The age of the teachers oscillated from 27 to 44 years old. 60 young learners were presented at English lessons. During the first observed lesson, there were 22, during the second one 20 and the third one 18 learners.

Results

During the description and interpretation of the research results, we proceed according to research questions. We observed one English lesson at each of these schools. Each lesson lasted 45 minutes.

Phonetic-phonological level

Research question n. 1: What pronunciation mistakes did the selected primary teachers in the first grade make during the English lesson?

In this level, we focused on the accuracy of teacher's pronunciation using First Grade Dolch Sight Words as it is stated in Figure 1. We also focused on the words out of the Dolch list.

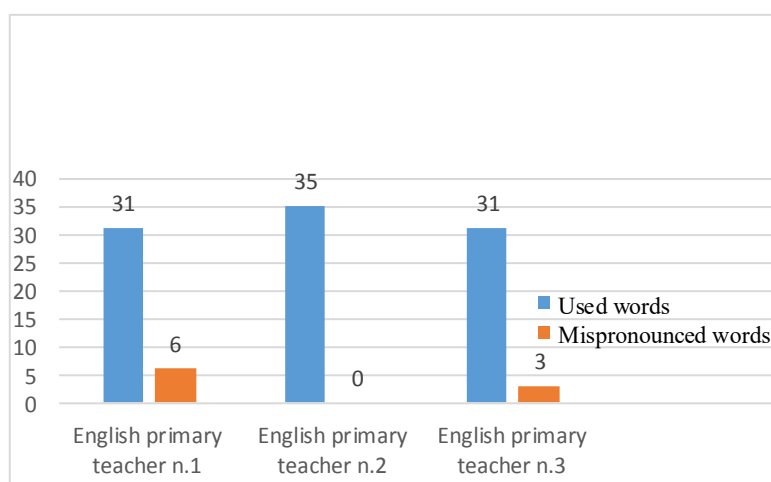


Figure 1: The number of used and mispronounced words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words (41 words)

Structured observation - description and interpretation of the results

The first teacher used 31 words during the lesson and she mispronounced 6 of them. We noticed that the teacher had difficulties to pronounce a vowel [æ] in the words such as “happy, sad and bad” (e.g. instead of [hæpi], the teacher pronounced this adjective [hepi]). She also used to replace [v] and [w] consonants in the words “walk” and “when”, “every” and “over.” She pronounced it [vɔ:k] and [ven] instead of [wɔ:k] and [wen]. Then, she made the analogical mistake in the words [evri] and [əʊvə] that were mispronounced as [ewri] and [əʊwə]. She did not mispronounce only the words from the Dolch list but also all the words that start with “w”, for example WH-words such as “what” and “why.”

Another mistake which occurred in pronunciation of the first teacher was the sound “g” at the end of the words “sing”, “song” and “ring.” According to the rule, a sound “g” should not be pronounced in the final position of words and it should be omitted and a sound [ŋ] is pronounced instead.

After the lesson, the teacher admitted that she was aware of these mistakes. In addition, she constantly struggles with incorrect pronunciation, even though she has put a lot of effort to get rid of these bad habits since primary and lower secondary school. Pronunciation mistakes also influence the level of her self-confidence during the English lesson. We assume that if the mistakes are not eradicated in a short period of time, they will become the errors.

The second teacher used the most words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words in comparison to other teachers. She used 35 words and mispronounced none of them. We consider her pronunciation flawless and accurate.

The third teacher used 31 words and mispronounced 3 of them. Resulting from the structured observation, the problem was identified as a lack of aspiration in the words: “put, paper, parents, person, pen and picture” and also in those ones that should be aspirated. Raising aspiration or a complete lack of it does not change the meaning of the words, however, it is important to be aware of this act of pronouncing in order to constantly improve the pronunciation. Another example of incorrect pronunciation is the consonant “f” which was repeatedly used instead of “θ”, for example the verb “think” was pronounced as [fɪŋk] instead of [θɪŋk].

All in all, incorrect pronunciation of the teachers was caused by its acquisition during their school years. This, at a first glance, obvious cause puts emphasis on the quality of pre-gradual preparation of pre-service teachers from the linguistic point of view. Currently, it is very challenging to differentiate between standard pronunciation and slang because the borders between these layers of vocabulary start to disappear. As a consequence, correct and incorrect pronunciation patterns overlap and they are acceptable on a formal level. The phenomenon may have a possible negative impact on the teachers at primary and secondary schools who teach foreign language using incorrect pronunciation which is interconnected with the spelling, morphosyntactic and lexical language level. Based on these results, we suggest some tips which may help teachers (pre-service and in-service) to improve their pronunciation such as face-to-face or online conversations with native speakers, staying abroad, regular attendance of English courses, a constant listening to the correct version of mispronounced words and their repetition, listening to authentic dialogues among people from English speaking countries, reading longer texts aloud, listening to the lectures of university teachers, speaking to yourself using the whole sentences (it is useful to summarise a lecture in your own words because you are listening to your way of expressing) or recording yourself using tape script / dictaphone and analyse possible pronunciation mistakes.

Structured interview - description and interpretation of the results

Results of the structured interview indicated that teachers always check the words whose pronunciation they are not sure about using printed and online dictionaries, original recordings on CD and methodological guide. This claim seems to be in a slight discrepancy with the results that we gained during the personal observation. As it was mentioned above, teachers were mostly aware of their incorrect pronunciation (the sounds “v” and “w”, “f” and

“θ”) which is positive. However, it is important to work on the elimination of bad habits. If a teacher pronounces the word “vegetable” at one lesson as [vedʒteɪbl] and on another one as [vedʒtəbl], we suppose that a learner acquires the first incorrect pronunciation pattern. In fact, the learner heard two versions of pronouncing one word and he / she does not know that one of them is incorrectly pronounced. It may happen that the word repeatedly occur in the text and the learner will have the tendency to pronounce it incorrectly over and over again. Due to this fact, it is essential to insist on a perfect pronunciation of primary English teacher.

Regarding incorrect pronunciation of the sound “g”, *the first teacher* stated that she was not aware of it. Concerning the pronunciation exchange of consonants “v” and “w”, the teacher said that she is familiar with their correct pronunciation but our presence at the lesson caused that she was not concentrated enough making the mistake. During the interview, we found out that she is a novice teacher and this was the first time when she was observed by somebody who was not her colleague. All circumstances considered, the cause of the mistakes is psychological rather than cognitive. For this reason, it would be necessary to carry out observations repeatedly to prove or reject an exact cause of the mistakes.

In comparison with the first and third teacher, the positive answer of *the second one* confirmed the research findings from the observation. Her pronunciation was clear and without mistakes which was caused by the fact that her husband is a native speaker and they lived for 10 years in the USA so she acquired a proper pronunciation thanks to daily contact with English. It is very encouraging that after ten years long stay abroad, she uses original recordings and dictionary as a help during the preparation of her lesson plans. We suppose that she does so to improve the quality of her pronunciation which she considers crucial in the educational process.

Some primary English teachers think that incorrect pronunciation patterns are a temporary issue based on learner’s age and other biological factors. To a certain extent, it is possible to agree with this statement because some pronunciation mistakes may naturally disappear. As we noted earlier, it is advisable to provide the learners from the early age with the correct pronunciation input to build up on it in the future. Otherwise, a learner gets into conversation in which his / her pronunciation would possibly create a barrier between him / her and his / her interlocutor. As a result, both of them would feel uncomfortable.

Morphosyntactic level

Research question n. 2: Which areas of formulaic language did the selected primary teachers in the first grade use during the English lesson?

In this level, we focused on four areas of formulaic language used by the teacher and their occurrence during the lesson: simple greetings, routine questions, social English and classroom language as it is stated in Table 2.

Table 2: Morphosyntactic level - areas of formulaic language

Areas of formulaic language	Examples – personal observation
Simple greetings	Hello! / Hi! Good morning, children! Goodbye! See you soon.

	See you next lesson!
Routine questions	How are you? What's the date? What's the day today? What's the weather like today? How do you feel?
Social English	What do you like? Have a nice day / weekend! What do you think?
Classroom language	Match the pictures with the numbers. Match these pictures. Sit down. Stand up. Close the workbooks. Do you understand? Create a row. Work in pairs / individually. Make a circle. Pay attention! Are you listening to me? Do not talk to your classmate!

Structured observation - description and interpretation of the results

Based on the above stated table, it is obvious that all four areas of formulaic language were covered and they were appropriate to young learners' level of language. We dedicated a special attention to classroom language which comprised the most fixed expressions. *The first and the third teacher* used some of these expressions in Slovak and only *the second one* used them in English language. Thus, English has become a very effective and useful tool. Young learners immediately reacted to these expressions, or, more precisely, instructions, questions and imperatives. A reason may consist in a systematic and coordinated development of learners' listening comprehension. From the point of view of time horizon, the research carried out in February 2020 which means that young learners were exposed to English approximately for five-six months (from September 2019 till February 2020) and they were able to react properly (the fact that some learners had attended English lessons at pre-primary level of education was not taken into consideration).

We assume that *the first and the third teacher* were afraid that young learners would not understand classroom language in English. If English language is not used during simple activities such as giving instructions and asking basic questions, learners will not have any opportunity to experience it. Teachers may think that it contributes to saving time but we think that it was / is counterproductive. For young learners, it is necessary to listen to classroom language in English on an everyday basis and absorb it. The teacher may start with a limited amount of expressions. When learners acquire them, they proceed with other ones combining them with the acquired ones.

Additionally, when the teacher says a word or phrase that is unknown to young learner, he / she immediately asks about it. The reason is that young learner is interested in what the teacher was talking about because of his / her strong intrinsic motivation and a natural desire to know more. Consequently, the teacher explains what the word or phrase means often using learner's mother tongue. Then, the word or phrase is repeated and a learner

remembers it much easily and in a spontaneous way. As a result, three verbs are crucial at primary level of education: repeat, revise and remember.

Structured interview - description and interpretation of the results

The presence of classroom language is a very important part of the lesson, however, it is vital to combine it with spontaneous speech. Based on the results from structured interview, we estimate that approximately 10-15% of the lesson was dedicated to spontaneous language and the rest of the lesson consisted of fixed expressions which learners are expected to memorize to produce at least “some English.” The questions which may support spontaneous speech in the initial stages of learning English language were the following ones: “What are you doing?, What do you see in this picture?, What are you talking about?, Did you do your homework?, Do you have a pet? What is its name?, Do you like English?”

As we can see, the content of the questions is very simple and it contains basic words so learners should be able to answer them but they usually do it in their mother tongue. Even though the teacher creates a simulated foreign language environment using simple concepts, young beginners know that they are supposed to learn “something new.” Their first reaction to it is an uncertainty, a refusal and confusion so their brain naturally defends against it. They do not know the reason why they have to learn something which does not make sense to them. Young age is therefore the best time to build up a positive attitude to “something new.” We assume that it is needful to ask even young learners about their reasons of learning English. Teacher may help them using words which they are familiar with in Slovak, e.g. Mum, hockey, basketball, computer, sandwich, jeans dividing them into several categories such as family, sport, school, food and fashion (we would not recommend to use the word “clothes” because it contains the sounds [əʊð] which are difficult to pronounce). In this way, the teacher can motivate learners to learn English.

This is also the time of comparing learner’s mother tongue with a foreign language. This process seems to be unsystematic and chaotic. On the one hand, young learners start to explore a foreign language and its language systems so their level of language is naturally poor but on the other hand, they should not be perceived as people without any knowledge about the world because of their age. After the first English lessons, they find out that the world which they live in is possible to describe in a “new”, “different” way and the only tool which they should own is a foreign language whose system differs from the mother tongue. In other words, learner gradually realizes that there are some rules which occur in the exercises and activities in a course-book and workbook whereas his / her task is to complete them without making a lot of mistakes. We can say that he / she is still in a safe environment where he / she respects and is aware of phonological, morphosyntactic and semantic rules “speaking some English.”

The next step is to apply this linguistic awareness to real conversation exchanges (above mentioned spontaneous speech) which is for most learners quite challenging. It seems to be a step backward. They find out that during the real conversation the language systems are interconnected and they do not see immediate results of their effort in comparison with completing exercises in the course-books. In other words, a learner has learnt a limited amount of the rules relatively quickly but it is equally important to apply them to conversation which significantly requires much time and personal involvement. Consequently, the teacher in the first grade at lower secondary school should foster these new linguistic habits.

Lexical level

Research question n. 3: Which words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words did the selected primary teachers use during the English lesson?

In this level, we focused on the number and variety of words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words and those out of it used during the English lesson. During the research, these words were named “other used words.” All words are listed in the following tables.

Table 3: First teacher: Summary of the words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words and other used words

First teacher Topic: Animals
First Grade Dolch Sight Words - words which are underlined occurred during the lesson
after, <u>again</u> , <u>an</u> , <u>any</u> , as, <u>ask</u> , by, <u>could</u> , <u>every</u> , <u>fly</u> , <u>from</u> , <u>give</u> , going, had, <u>has</u> , <u>her</u> , <u>him</u> , <u>his</u> , <u>how</u> , just, <u>know</u> , <u>let</u> , <u>live</u> , <u>may</u> , of, <u>old</u> , once, <u>open</u> , <u>over</u> , <u>put</u> , round, <u>some</u> , <u>stop</u> , <u>take</u> , <u>thank</u> , <u>them</u> , <u>then</u> , <u>think</u> , <u>walk</u> , were, <u>when</u> (31)
Other used words
apple, bad, baby, bear, big, bird, black, blue, boy, bread, brown, cat, close, chicken, children, calm, corn, cow, dance, day, door, dog, doll, down, duck, egg, eight, farm, farmer, five, flower, four, frog, happy, hand, hill, home, horse, house, game, garden, girl, good, goodbye, grass, green, ground, here, hunt, kitty, milk, mother, morning, mud, name, nest, nine, one, open, paper, picture, pig, pink, purple, quick, quickly, rabbit, red, sad, seed, seven, sheep, sing, six, slow, slowly, small, song, squirrel, sun, ten, there, thick, thin, three, tree, two, watch, white, yellow (90)

Table 4: Second teacher: Summary of the words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words and other used words

Second Teacher Topic: My body
First Grade Dolch Sight Words - words which are underlined occurred during the lesson
after, <u>again</u> , <u>an</u> , <u>any</u> , as, <u>ask</u> , by, <u>could</u> , <u>every</u> , <u>fly</u> , <u>from</u> , <u>give</u> , going, had, <u>has</u> , <u>her</u> , <u>him</u> , <u>his</u> , <u>how</u> , just, <u>know</u> , <u>let</u> , <u>live</u> , <u>may</u> , of, <u>old</u> , <u>once</u> , <u>open</u> , <u>over</u> , <u>put</u> , <u>round</u> , <u>some</u> , <u>stop</u> , <u>take</u> , <u>thank</u> , <u>them</u> , <u>then</u> , <u>think</u> , <u>walk</u> , were, <u>when</u> (35)
Other used words
back, ball, beautiful, big, body, boy, black, blue, brown, chair, clap, close, door, down, ear, every day, eye, face, feet, finger, five, foot, four, girl, goodbye, hair, hand, head, home, knee, leg, listen, long, lose, morning, mouth, nose, one, open, short, shoulder, small, smile, stamp, sing, song, tall, time, teeth, three, tooth, toe, toilet, touch, turn, two, up, water, white, win, window, your (62)

Table 5: Third teacher: Summary of the words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words and other used words

Third Teacher
Topic: My family

First Grade Dolch Sight Words - words which are underlined occurred during the lesson
after, <u>again</u> , <u>an</u> , <u>any</u> , as, <u>ask</u> , by, <u>could</u> , <u>every</u> , fly, <u>from</u> , <u>give</u> , going, had, <u>has</u> , <u>her</u> , <u>him</u> , <u>his</u> , <u>how</u> , <u>just</u> , <u>know</u> , <u>let</u> , <u>live</u> , <u>may</u> , of, <u>old</u> , once, <u>open</u> , <u>over</u> , <u>put</u> , round, <u>some</u> , <u>stop</u> , <u>take</u> , <u>thank</u> , <u>them</u> , <u>then</u> , <u>think</u> , <u>walk</u> , were, <u>when</u> (31)
Other used words
baby, bad, ball, big, birthday, black, blue, boy, brother, brown, cake, car, cat, close, cousin, chair, child, children, dad, doll, dance, dog, family, father, girl, grandfather, grandmother, grandparents, happy, house, good, green, here, like, man, open, paper, parents, person, picture, room, sad, sibling, sister, song, sunny, share, swim, small, table, time, there, water, window, windy (55)

Moreover, we specifically focused on the groups of words which were taught at the lesson depending on a topic. These groups of words were represented by antonyms and phrasal verbs as it is stated in Table 6.

Table 6: Lexical level - antonyms and phrasal verbs

Teacher	Antonyms	Phrasal verbs
Teacher n. 1	good-bad big-small quick-slow girl-boy happy-sad laugh-cry close-open	Stand up! Sit down! Find out! Go over it! Calm down!
Teacher n. 2	big-small good-bad long-short start-stop black-white up-down win-lose open-close	Stand up! Sit down! Listen up! Give away! Cheer up! Take out!
Teacher n. 3	good-bad girl-boy happy-sad brother-sister mother-father open-close	Stand up! Sit down! Listen up! Put away!

Structured observation - description and interpretation of the results

All teachers used the words that were appropriate to learner’s age group and to the topic, as well. Research results proved that teachers used more than half of the words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words. Regarding other used words (out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words), their number reached double figures oscillating between 55-90 words. We

assume that other words can be divided into three groups: the first one includes the words that are explicitly connected with the topic, the second one contains the words that are implicitly connected with the topic and the third one comprises the words that do not belong to the previously mentioned groups and the teacher used them in a flow of conversation.

For instance, *the first teacher* (similarly as *the third one* presenting a different topic) used within the topic Animals words such as “bird, cat, chicken, dog, pig, sheep, squirrel, rabbit etc.” which belong to the first group. Words “big, black, grass, ground, seed, thin, garden, nest etc.” belong to the second group and “flower, goodbye, song, watch, open, paper, close, dance etc.” are the part of the third group. It is evident that the number of other used words is very high. The first teacher used 90 words which was the maximum in comparison to her colleagues who used 55 and 62 words. This fact, however, automatically does not have to imply the fact that young learners remember only some of them. We suppose that it is important to consider all possible circumstances. Learners could be either already familiar with the words from the kindergarten or they were not familiar with them but they wanted to learn them because they have got a pet at home so they were intrinsically motivated. For this reason, they learn and may also remember the words easily.

The second teacher was a very good language model for young learners. Her speech was accurate and fluent respecting the age of learners. Her speech tempo was adequate for young learners and it was supported by a clear articulation which made her language performance understandable for them. All words which she used during the lesson were properly explained using flash cards. With regard to other used words, it is worth mentioning that most of them were monosyllabic so they are easy to remember. In addition, the teacher used only English at the lesson which may contribute to it, as well.

Based on the results from structured observation, all three teachers used more than five pairs of antonyms and three phrasal verbs at the English lesson. Regular use of antonyms contributes to dynamic expansion of learners’ vocabulary because they simultaneously learn two words. If a noun, adjective, verb, adverb or preposition have their antonyms, we suppose that they should be introduced together so the learner creates stronger mental associations based on a particular feature as we stated in the theoretical part of the paper (paragraph dedicated to “sets” of words). As a result, antonyms can be used on a daily basis. When young learners acquire one word from the pair of antonyms, it is likely to happen that they also decipher the meaning of another word whereas the context has a complementary function, for example the pair of antonyms open-close in the same sentence: *Open* your exercise book. *Close* your exercise book.

Phrasal verbs are as important as antonyms but their structure and meaning differs from them. It is challenging to explain to young learners that the words which phrasal verbs consist of create one meaningful unit. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to start with basic phrasal verbs in the first grade at primary school because in the next grades young learners can build up on them.

All three teachers used phrasal verbs *Stand up* and *Sit down* which are the most common ones together with *Listen up* which was not used only by *the first teacher*. We noticed that all teachers used phrasal verbs in imperative. The reason may consist in the fact that this form is clear and understandable for young learners. If teachers incorporated phrasal verbs into sentences, even simple ones, young learners might not react to them which is similar to instructions. If a teacher gives instructions to learners, it is also better to use

imperatives instead of statement, e.g. “Could you please match these two columns?” versus “Match (these) two columns!” The point is not to express authority using an imperative tone but to give to the learners clear and simple instructions which make their classwork more effective. All in all, research results proved that teachers’ choice of words, antonyms and phrasal verbs was almost identical which is positive because the learners at different primary schools are exposed to the same lexical input. Besides, phrasal verbs such as *Stand up* and *Sit down* overlap with classroom language.

Structured interview - description and interpretation of the results

Questions concerning lexical language level were dedicated to the frequency of new words presented during the lesson and quantity of words that young learners remember from the lesson.

The first and the second teacher present new words every lesson and the *third one* almost every lesson. These findings seem to us beneficial because after a constant repetition of these words, young learners can remember them immediately at the lesson. Apart from introducing new vocabulary, teachers tried to revise the words from the previous lessons using them in simple sentences as we stated in morphosyntactic level. Based on teachers’ answers, young learners are able to remember approximately five words per lesson, however, as *the third teacher* stated, there are also learners that remember more than five. It always depends on their cognitive abilities and also other factors such as topic, learners’ mood, concentration, teaching approach and way of presenting new words.

Resulting from the research results, the number of words which is possible to introduce per lesson is not fixed. However, the teacher may follow a general pattern which helps to his / her learners to save vocabulary in a long-term memory. The pattern is represented by the verbs introduce, practise, check and consolidate. As it was stated above, all teachers introduced relatively a high number of words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words as well as other words but we have no evidences about their practice, checking and consolidating. Learners usually practise their vocabulary with respect to a specific topic. Then, they learn and acquire other words and make new associations. The problem is that the words often save in the passive vocabulary. As a consequence, the learners may have problems to express themselves properly and vocabulary difficulties manifest in receptive and productive language skills, too. Additionally, they may appear in the process of translation. The teacher may prevent this situation using foreign language materials where the words are put in different contexts so the learners recycle and consolidate their lexical knowledge. These techniques should serve as an inspiration for the learners themselves to find their own techniques of building up vocabulary.

Implications

The aim of the further research would be to find out the causes of teacher’s incorrect pronunciation and the ways of its elimination and to search for possible ways of avoiding incorrect pronunciation, to find out a proper proportion of formulaic language and spontaneous speech and identify an optimal number of words introduced per lesson and the ways of their practising and consolidating at primary level of education.

As a result, we suggest three possible alternatives of the further research. The first one would deal with the observation of the same teachers selected in the current research, however, in the further research we would observe them at least one month to analyse the

causes of the potential language problems whereas we would use similar research methods. The second alternative would consist in the observation of more than three teachers (other ones than in the current research) in the same time horizon as we mentioned in the first alternative (one month) using mostly the same but also different research methods and tools. The third alternative would concern with the distribution of the questionnaire as the main research method with closed and open questions whereas the observations would have a complementary function so we would use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods and tools. Research results would be compared, analysed and interpreted as we did in the current research.

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to characterize phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language levels which speaking skill of primary English Teacher in the first grade consists of. The empirical part included research results of three case studies of primary English teachers (research participants) with the aim to analyse their oral production focusing on the correctness of their pronunciation (phonetic-phonological level), the occurrence of formulaic language (morphological level) and the number and variety of words used during the English lesson (lexical level).

Out of qualitative research methods, we used structured observation and structured interview whereas the main research method was structured observation that allowed us to be in a direct contact with the research participants. The observation carried out in February 2020. The second qualitative research method was a structured interview. It was also carried out in February 2020 at the end of the lesson in a friendly atmosphere. The interview consisted of seven open-ended questions.

Before the research, the following research questions were formulated:

What pronunciation mistakes did the selected primary teachers in the first grade make during the English lesson?

Which areas of formulaic language did the selected primary teachers in the first grade use during the English lesson?

Which words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words did the selected primary teachers use during the English lesson?

As far as the research results of phonetic-phonological level are concerned, teachers were mostly aware of their pronunciation mistakes which were rooted in their mind from primary and lower secondary school. *The first teacher* had a problem with a sound “æ” pronouncing it similarly as the Slovak sound “e.” We suppose that it can be confusing for learners because instead of a word “*bad*”, the teacher said “*bed*” in fact. Another pronunciation problem we noticed was a replacement of the sounds “w” a “v” and pronouncing a sound “g” at the end of the words. Pronunciation of *the second teacher* was fluent and flawless thanks to her long-term stay in English speaking country. Her speech tempo and articulation were appropriate to young learners. Based on these findings, it is clear that she is a good language model for young learners and probably for other language teachers, as well. During the observation of the *third teacher*, we noticed the absence of aspiration. We do not consider it as a serious mistake in the first grade at primary school, however, young learners should be aware of this phenomenon because it is also the part of the pronunciation. During the interview, we found that that teachers checked pronunciation of the words that will be presented during the lesson using printed or online dictionaries, original recordings on CD and methodological guide. It seems to us that this finding is in a slight discrepancy with the results that we obtained during

the observation. If learners made some pronunciation mistakes during the lesson, the teachers took different standpoints. *The third teacher* corrected the learners only in the case of a serious mistake and *the first and second one* corrected them immediately.

The aim of the second research question was to find out which areas of formulaic language teachers used during the English lesson. Looking at a summative table, it was evident that teachers mostly used the expressions which belong to classroom language such as *Sit down. Stand up. Close the workbooks. Work in pairs / individually. Make a circle. Match these pictures* etc. The other areas of formulaic language, namely simple greetings (*Good morning. See you soon.*), routine questions (*What's the day today? What's the weather like today?*), social English (*What do you like? What do you think?*) were also presented at the lesson. Almost all phrases were used in English with the exception of the following ones: *Are you listening? Do not talk to your classmate! Pay attention!* We suppose that the reason may consist in the fact that these sentences contain more words and teachers were afraid of possible misunderstanding. *The second teacher* was the only one who used these sentences in English.

The third research question was focused on the number and variety of the words from and out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words. Research results proved that teachers used more than half of the words from the First Grade Dolch Sight Words. Concerning other used words (out of the First Grade Dolch Sight Words), their number oscillated between 55-90 words whereas the most words were used by *the first teacher* (90). *The second teacher* used an adequate number of words during the lesson (62). She always tried to explain each word using flash cards. *The third teacher* used the least words in comparison to other teachers which were appropriate for learner's age group, as well (55). Teachers also used more than five antonyms such as *girl-boy, good-bad, big-small, open-close* etc. and more than three phrasal verbs, e.g. *listen up, calm down, put away, go over it* etc. Some phrasal verbs even overlapped with classroom language, e.g. *stand up* and *sit down*.

To sum it up, learning and acquiring language systems, namely pronunciation, grammar and lexis or in other words, phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical language level seem to be a longitudinal study. Each language system, language level requires a special attention in order to be successfully performed in spoken and written communication.

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The Ordinary Language of Pain and Medical Education

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Abstract

There is a deficit within medical education in terms of understanding pain as part of the wider move towards shared decision making (SDM), and particularly in the area of general practice. The aim of this paper is to consider, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, how pain is a managed discourse within these consultations. Talk about pain is part of what Wittgenstein refers in his *Philosophical Investigations* as embedded within language games. In medical consultations there are ways of talking about pain, either directly or indirectly, which are part-and-parcel of an interactional event and which impact on the degree to which SDM is engaged in. The paper contrasts a discourse analytic perspective with a Wittgensteinian one with reference to an example of talk about pain within a medical consultation. This example serves as a means of highlighting the benefits of the latter approach for medical education.

Keywords: pain, language, medical education, Wittgenstein

Introduction

Healthcare professionals require an understanding of pain in order to be able to treat or manage it effectively. However, despite there being a clear need for this to be a significant aspect of medical education, pain education at medical schools is limited in its inclusion in the curriculum. Pain topics are typically subsumed within diagnostics for specific conditions rather than as an area. For example, pain management education in the United Kingdom accounts for less than 1% of university teaching time for healthcare professionals (Vadivelu et al., 2012). A UK survey of 11 major universities showed that the average content of pain teaching for undergraduates was 12 hours (Briggs et al., 2011). The APPEAL study on pain education curricula within undergraduate medical studies during 2012–2013 (surveying 15 European countries) showed that 55% of the medical schools taught pain within compulsory non-specific pain modules and 31% of medical schools taught pain in dedicated pain modules (Briggs et al., 2015).

Corrigan et al (2011) found that most medical students had a negative perception of their encounters with pain patients, with chronic pain being the difficult condition to deal with. The failure to teach undergraduate medical students a broader biopsychosocial approach to chronic pain management skills points to the mismatch between what is learned in the preclinical setting and what is actually encountered in the clinical setting (Egnew and Wilson, 2010). Giordano and Boswell (2016: 206) have noted, ‘So, while mechanisms of pain and analgesia are taught during basic neuroscience courses, there is no direct link to how the complexities of these systems are relevant to the illness of chronic pain and challenges of chronic pain management’.

However, more recently there have been attempts to listen more to patients as part of a biopsychosocial approach to medical consultations and notably in the area of general practice. While this is now part of continuing professional education, it is still not widely adopted as part of undergraduate medical education (Durand et al., 2018). The traditional model of

medical decision-making, in which general practitioners (GPs) make almost unilateral decisions about their patients' treatment, has increasingly come to be seen as outdated. Support for shared decision-making (SDM) has been expressed through government policy, medical education and other organisations. There is evidence that patients themselves want a more inclusive approach and that doctor–patient collaboration correlates positively with a number of health outcomes, although offering patients opportunities to be co-decision makers has been questioned (Towle et al., 2006).

One area, of particular interest, is the way that GPs and patients discuss pain within the medical consultation; what this means as a symptom, and what treatment decision follows. For patients and doctors alike much of this communication hinges on the use descriptions of pain. This raises the question of how such communication between patient and doctor occurs through the use of ordinary language rather than a specialist medical vocabulary. In addressing this issue, the next section considers work in the area of discourse analysis.

Discoursing pain

This discourse analysis perspective is founded upon an examination of various discursive devices that are used in terms of performative actions and the participants' orientations. The focus of performativity leads us to consider the language use in terms of the agency of the language user within the speech act (Austin, 1975). The aim of this kind of study is to examine how discourse is put together by speakers to perform requests, invitations, blamings, refusals, and so on. These actions are taken as being the key to what is going on in the interaction as participants (e.g. doctors and patients) engage in dialogue and interpret and respond to what each other is saying and *doing*. It is the latter point that is of importance in terms of viewing language as a means of engaging in action, rather than a form of representation.

However, in setting up the study of language use this way, there is a tendency to leave the door ajar for a mentalist view in terms of *designing* and *interpreting* these actions. In other words, it is suggested that participants treat each other as taking into account a mental world of thoughts and feelings as a background and reason for their action. As Edwards and Potter (2005: 241) put it:

There is some substance to the idea of referring to private mental states, though not as the analysts favoured theory of language and mind. [...] The status of reference to internal mental states is not something to be refuted, even though it is conceptually refutable, but rather, studied as a practice within a public form of life. People may sometimes talk as if, or on the proposed and oriented-to basis their words are expressing inner thoughts and feelings.

Note that the argument being made here is that in doing discourse analysis, there is an eschewal of a *theoretical* siding with mentalism. In place of this is a commitment to study the ways in which it is implicated in how people themselves *orientate* towards it in their interactions as part-and-parcel of the actions they are engaged in.

The problem with this stance is that there is an elision between agents and actions. Somehow these discursive constructions are produced, in terms of the actions that people are engaged in whether this is, for example asking for something, or refusing something. People are considered as being orientated towards what is going on *behind* the words as they design and interpret what is said. The upshot of this is that, in seeking to steer clear of adopting a

theoretical siding with mentalism, this kind of work instead examines the discursive devices used to bring off certain actions but at a distance from the assumed pragmatic orientations towards this by participants.

Thus, in the context of a medical consultation, the analytic focus is that of explicating the sorts of discursive moves that are made by doctors and patients in their turns at talk as they seek to treat each other as engaged in certain kinds of actions with accompanying certain kinds of motives. A doctor's questioning of a patient's pain sensations may, for example, be examined as an attempt to diagnose its severity through the sequential nature of the question-and-answer turns. The patient's answers, on the other hand, are examined in terms their engagement with the action, the extent to which they cooperate, through the responses they provide or questions that they may ask in turn. However, the main problem here is the focus on how each other *interprets* what is said and the imputation that this is a participant's concern. This introduces an element of mentalism into the participants' orientations, something that has to be assumed by the analyst, despite not contributing particularly to the intelligibility of the discourse. In order to avoid reading how doctors and patients attend to potential psychological business in talk it is necessary to turn to Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy as a way into understanding the medical consultation as a 'language game'.

Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy and pain

Wittgenstein's (1953) private language argument is most often associated with his discussion of the use of the terms 'pain' and pain behaviour. The latter is taken to be such things as crying out, grasping an afflicted area, writhing etc. If such behaviour is taken as being a referent of the word 'pain', then this construal would be to make pain into something external, something beyond the word. However, Wittgenstein was not denying that people do feel pain or that the word 'pain' has nothing to do with a particular kind of sensation.

What his argument was about is the way in people use the word 'pain', often in terms of first-person usage, not as a direct referent or sensation, but instead as a socially acquired and sanctioned equivalent for pain behaviour. In this understanding pain does not refer to pain behaviour neither the sensation. Pain behaviour is a criterion by which third-person identification of that sensation is enabled. In other words, others are able to tell from the display of pain behaviour that someone is in pain, or that a person is feigning being in pain.

By tackling conceptual nature of pain in this way Wittgenstein demonstrates the ways in the inner (sensation) of pain and the outer (display) of pain behaviour are bound to each other and inseparable. He also goes further in attacking the misconception of the privacy of the 'inner' as something that is a mental phenomenon, based on knowing what words mean through their association with one's own sensations. Thus, the argument that a given person knows the meaning of pain through accessing their own inner private mental theatre is something that Wittgenstein considers as a misconception. Instead he argues that the meaning of the word 'pain' is fundamentally associated with its usage within what he refers to as language-games, that is the normative and, therefore, culturally learnable ways of using that word. Words are not simply 'read off' a given situation but rather are applied in a criterial manner. Thus, learning the language of pain, or other sensations, is not simply a case of learning what the word means and then learning to apply them in a given situation. People do not learn how to apply it and then learn where to apply it. What they learn is the public use of language, its grammar and how it can be used in situ, rather than some mentalist notion of an inner process in which pain sensation is translated into the language of pain. Indeed, in many

instances, pain sensations are replaced by talking about pain, but of course, it is also the case that people may opt not to talk about pain sensations at all.

The best way to understand the foregoing arguments is to apply them to extracts from GP-patient interactions (Roberston et al., 2011) These extracts correspond to what can be considered as a relatively common instance of a consultation about a sore throat and are taken from a wider corpus of recorded general practice consultations. They are used here to illustrate the potential of Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy approach.

Extract 1

1. Dr: Okay how can we help you?
2. Pt: Well my throat ha ha (right) it started er I think last week
3. and I just sort and er I mean I smoke and I'd been having a few
4. late nights and I just thought well it was down to that (yeah) but
5. especially (right) this wee' well yesterday and today it was
6. really painful actually on Saturday round here and its spreading
7. Dr: Right and
8. Pt: Down there (down there)
9. and I don't know if its related but a colleague of mine
10. I've been working with she's was off for a couple of days
11. (right) with the same sort of thing (okay) but because I go out
12. working with people I just need to make sure it's not (yeah) too contagious
13. Dr: Quite, okay (erm)

Within the opening sequence of turns the patient formulates a warrant for seeing the doctor. This is accomplished through putting forward and then dismissing his/her initial assumption (e.g. late nights and smoking) as erroneous on the basis that the throat condition has become "really painful" and is "now spreading" (L1-6). This accounting also provides the patient's expectations from the visit, "because I go out working with people I just need to make sure it not too contagious" (L11-12). This formulation works to introduce a moral orientation into the interaction and disposes an inference that the claims are prompted by not exposing others to any potential virus. If the doctor can confirm the condition as contagious, this would provide the patient with the legitimacy required should he/she decide to address the implicit issue of sickness absence from work. As such shared-decision-making would coalesce around this issue.

However, the problem with such an analysis is that it requires the analyst to impute to the patient at this stage a private (unstated) motive or state of mind behind what is said. Yet, there is nothing in the words spoken that requires the introduction of such a mentalist conception. Note that the patient qualifies the descriptions of "really painful" with that of "spreading". This literal extension of the description can be seen as an evidential basis for seeking medical attention and in aiding with a diagnosis, and therefore functions as part of the language-game of the consultation.

In examining Extract 2 below from the same consultation, it is possible again to take a discourse analytic position. In doing so, it is evident that the GP engages in questioning the patient in a typical diagnostic fashion, which directs the patient and consequently controls the nature of the interaction. After examining the patient, the doctor 'suggests' that the 'likelihood' is that patient has a 'viral illness' (L35-36). The words "suggest". and "likelihood" constructs the diagnosis as tentative and implies there is still some doubt. This

sort of vagueness acts as a means of protecting the claim from being undermined in terms of potentially questioning the legitimacy of taking time off work due to the pain.

Extract 2

19. Dr: Have you been taking anything to help?
20. Pt: Em I take medication anyway which is down there (right)
21. that's for something (yeah) completely different. I bought
22. some cough linctus from Boots (right) (coughs)
23. Dr: Nothing to help the pain? Paracetamol, Aspirin gargles
24. Pt: (no, no)
25. Dr: There might be something we could (.) you know (.) add in
26. lets have a look and see what there is to see (.) open wide and say
27. Aaah (Pt: aah) a bit louder (Pt: aah) stick out your tongue a bit (.)
28. Yep (.) that's fine and 'Aaah' (Pt: Aaah) (1.) yep.
29. Pt: Sorry I can't:
30. Dr: That's fine (.) let's just check your glands (.) and it just
31. started over the week: end d: id it
32. Pt: We'll no (.) its (.) er (.) sort of Wednesday (.) it just happened
33. its keeping me up most of the night with a tickly cough (right) but
34. the pain its in the neck side
35. Dr: yeah okay I think what I would suggest is that the
36. (Pt: coughing) likelihood is that it's a (Pt: coughing) viral illness

However, if instead we focus upon this interaction from an ordinary language philosophy perspective, then the doctor's initial focus on something to "help the pain" is a clear reference to what the patient has raised as "really painful" and the suggestion of medications to alleviate this is, in effect, doing medical talk. Far from potentially being construed as focused on one unstated (but in the 'back of the mind') issue, the GP is talking the language game of a medical consultation. By both talking with the patient about pain and observing their pain behaviour the GP can be seen as engaging in typical diagnostic work while verbalising and sharing his or her decision-making as they go along.

Conclusion: implications for medical education

The Wittgensteinian position outlined above does not deny that there is an inner life to people, but rather it eschews the traditional Cartesian inner/outer dichotomy as the basis for understanding the intelligibility of the words we use. Instead, the focus becomes one of examining the grammatical nature of how words are used within language games, in this case medical consultations. Wittgenstein argued that we need to "make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts - which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please" (Wittgenstein, 1953 § 304). In a medical consultation, although a person may engage in the display of pain behaviour, for the most part, pain has to be expressed through pain descriptions. What is interesting here is that it is not just the patient who has to engage in the ordinary language use of pain, but also the doctor. Thus the doctor as a speaker of ordinary language participates in the interaction on the same level, so to speak, as the patient, in terms of eliciting descriptions of pain but must also make use of these ordinary language descriptions and interrupting the interaction with the application of medical knowledge. The upshot of this is that in an institutional setting where medical knowledge is systematically being applied, the immediacy of ordinary language usage is both operating whilst at the same

time being interrupted through the insertion of steps (questions, directives) that literally speak of medical discourse. Language use in this setting is therefore framed within a paradoxical framework: ordinary language descriptions and medical interjections.

In such a setting understanding the language of pain is rooted in discriminating how it is used, not simply according to the patient's own descriptions of pain sensations, but how it is used according to the 'rules' of medical diagnosis in an evidential manner. This is something that medical students should perhaps be exposed to in a more all-encompassing examination of pain within their curricula. Turning students' attention to the role of doctor-patient talk as a shared experience is a key step in bring about a deeper understanding of SDM. As Veen, Skelton and Croix (2020) argue in another, but distinct application of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in medical education, students' self-awareness is an important aspect of becoming a doctor and is not something that is readily amenable to measurable assessment. Understanding the ordinary language of pain and its role in medical consultations is arguably a very important part of medical education. While it is possible to imagine scenarios where students watch video recordings of such encounters (or themselves in mock consultations), and attend to pain descriptions, it is nonetheless important to note that much of what they 'know' about such matters may well trade upon their own implicit understanding of the life world. Learning about medicine in terms of the nature of human diseases, pharmacology, physiology, pathology etc. is all within the ambit of the biomedical emphasis in medical education. However, learning how to talk to patients, to a common language and understanding is another matter, and perhaps this needs to be brought more to the fore, and in particular when sharing understanding of the ordinary language of pain.

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Importance of Teaching Communication Skills of Medical Students

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Abstract

The physician - patient relationship is an important determinant of quality health care. This relationship is based on communication and on a solid foundation of trust, empathy and respect for the rights and dignity of the patient. Traditional medical teaching does not address communication skills which are most essential in dealing with patients. One important challenge in medical education is to change learners' communication for the benefit of their patients. This theoretical article highlights the fact that including patient-oriented communication skill teaching for undergraduate medical students improves their competency, increases patient satisfaction and clinical outcome. The present article was designed to understand the utility of teaching communication skills to medical students.

Keywords: education, communication, skills, students, physician

Introduction

Patients, as human beings, come to health facilities with their own expectation for care. Care of not only their "body", but also their "mind" and "soul". Until recently, it was common for people to consider physician as members of their families, and the trust they placed in them extended to matters that went beyond the family's medical needs. Today the physician-patient relationships and communication are deteriorating. In a perfect world, health care professionals would be effective leaders who inspire confidence and communicate with their patients in ways that produce positive clinical outcomes. Currently, however, many providers fall far short of this ideal (Wanzer et al., 2004; Suter, 2009). Although much of the communication between health care providers and patients is verbal, nonverbal communication also takes place, especially in the first minutes of an encounter. Communication with patients in clinical settings is varied however, and dealing with this variability requires flexibility on the part of the clinician. There is less evidence in the existing literature (Maguire, Pitceathy, 2002) for how students can be prepared for the flexibility required in clinical communication. Effective communication wins the physician the confidence and compliance of patients and helps build a healthy physician – patient relationship.

Communication interaction between physician and patient

From obtaining the patient's medical history to conveying a treatment plan, the physician's relationship with his patient is built on effective communication. On the problems with communication are implicated in a large proportion of medical errors, with evidence that failures in the process of taking a medical history from a patient are responsible for a substantial proportion of diagnostic errors in primary care (Singh et al., 2013; Schiff et al., 2009). The first few minutes of a clinical encounter are precious. There are many tasks that need to be completed during the visit – questions to ask, problems to analyze and solve – and

physician may feel pressured to dive right in. But if physician leaps into these tasks without listening first, physician may miss key information. There can be several reasons for this. One of the most important factors is certainly the commercialization and specialization of medical practice, which places great reliance on technology at the cost of meaningful interaction between healthcare professionals and providers at the human level. Urgent demands on physician time and a high dependence on diagnostic and therapeutic procedures from technology may have established the personal contact that is so necessary for a favorable physician – patient relationship (Kaba, Sooriakumaran, 2007; Hovey, Massfeller, 2012). It's distracting for doctors to have to click all the required boxes and fields on their computer screen and simultaneously try to listen to the patient. Lack of patient information retention has a major impact not only on patient understanding, but also adherence to care plans, and thus, outcomes. Maguire and Rutter (1976), Huntington and Kuhn (2003), Buckman (2005) showed serious deficiencies in senior medical students information gathering skills: few students managed to discover the patients main problem, to clarify the exact nature of the problem and explore ambiguous statements, to clarify with precision, to elicit the impact of the problem on daily life, to respond to verbal cues, to cover more personal topics or to use facilitation. Most used closed, lengthy, multiple and repetitive questions. A physician's communication style does not match the patient's needs, it may contribute to difficulty with understanding and frustration for all parties. Patients also prefer a psychosocial model of communication compared to a biomedical model, which is used more commonly by doctors. The physicians spend with their patients less than nine minutes. The discrepancy may be due to the nature of the visit, or even health insurance coverage (Torrey, 2020).



Figure 1: Key elements of communication for building patient - physician relationships

Physicians today are over burdened with the huge number of patients coming for care. In addition, the physician – patient relationship is influenced by many determinants related to

- socio-cultural,
- economic,
- political and
- health systems.

Traditional medical teaching does not address communication skills which are most essential in dealing with patients (Choudhary, Gupta, 2015). Traditionally, communication has been regarded as one of the ‘soft’ or non-technical skills of medical practice and has been taught separately from the medical science and physical examination skills seen as central to training. Faculty training is lacking in many medical schools for a range of reasons (Bylund, 2008). To address this issue, medical schools have begun to incorporate improvisation exercises into communication training. Medical students interpersonal and communication skills are a fundamental dimension of their clinical competence (Duffy at al., 2004). Today

communication interaction between physician and patient must be appropriate enough to create better understanding on both sides.

Education

Good communication skills are an asset in medical practice. These essential soft skills can be learned during the formative years and practiced to perfection over the years. Currently, training programs applied during medical courses have been shown to improve students’ knowledge, attitudes, confidence, critical thinking, empathy, patient-centeredness and interview structure and also promote patient satisfaction (Roter at al., 2004; Noble at al., 2007; Joeques at al., 2011). Effective communication is at the heart of good medical practice. Physician - patient relationships, and consequently patient outcomes, are developed through patient-centred, empathetic communication. There is mounting evidence for the influence of physician - patient communication on a range of measurable patient outcomes. Deveugele et al. in their efforts to teach communication skills to medical students used various methods like group discussions in small groups (10-15 students), with focus on role playing with colleagues and simulated patients and showing videotapes of real consultations etc., observed a positive effect in the communication skills of students.

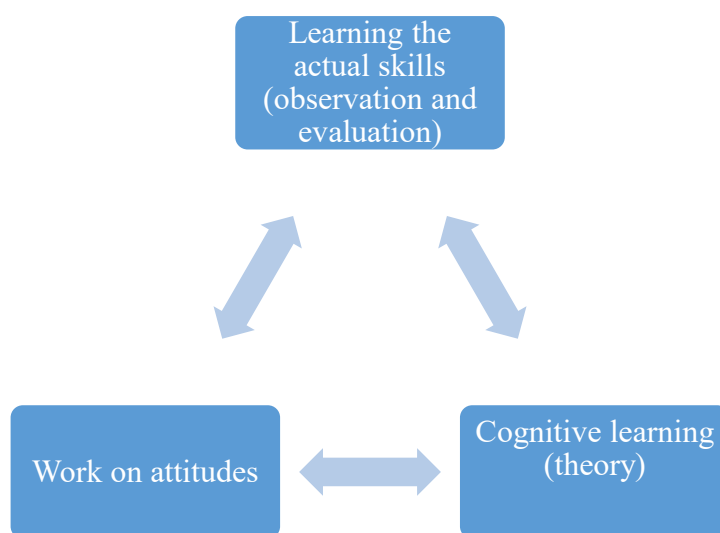


Figure 2: Methods of teaching communication skills include

Clinical encounters with simulated patients trained to follow standardized scenarios are presently widely used. Also the courses include interactive lectures, improvisational theater games, discussions, exercises, video presentations with oral, storytelling, essay role-playing, basic nonverbal improvisation exercises, and on-camera interviews (Kaplan - Lis at al., 2018; Lim, et al., 2012).

Table 1: Session Topics and Content Overview for the training of Communication skills

Topic	Content overview
Improvisation for scientists	Students use improvisational theater techniques to learn to be more direct and dynamically responsive communicators. This course is not about acting; it's about helping current and future scientists and health care professionals connect with their audiences.
Distilling your message	Students are introduced to the basic principles of clear communication as part of learning to speak clearly and vividly about science in ways a lay audience can understand and appreciate. Students are taught the skills of distilling their messages then practice these techniques in small group break-out sessions. They begin by crafting short, clear, engaging statements about their work and why it matters. The focus is teaching the students to communicate at different levels of complexity to different kinds of audiences using techniques that include storytelling.
Connecting with the community	Students explore the importance of community in outreach and research. They are introduced to communication techniques that incorporate cultural competency and health literacy concepts to engage and mobilize the community and key stakeholders on health-related issues. Role-playing with a community advocate illustrates the take-home points essential to cultivating these relationships.
On-camera interviews	In conjunction with the Clinical Skills Center, students tape on-camera interviews which enables them to practice the skills they learned in the previous sessions to communicate under the pressure of being interviewed. Trained journalists skilled in using improvisation and distilling techniques review the on-camera interviews with the students in small break-out sessions.
Engaging key audiences	Through role-playing, storytelling, and other exercises, students build on the skills they learned in previous sessions by practicing communicating with a diverse audience.
Roleplaying patient interactions	Students use the skills they learned and practiced in previous sessions bringing to bear these new techniques and becoming aware of the progress they have made. This session is focused on doctor-patient interactions, and it includes resources for students to continue working on their communication skills. Course evaluations are completed, and time is reserved for student feedback, with the goal of continuing to improve the course for future students. Student feedback is taken very seriously and has been incorporated into subsequent offerings of the course.

Authors found that student' skills and confidence in communicating with patients increased after training. Studies show (Nicholls at al., 2016, Berkhof at al., 2011) that physicians also perform better in assessments with simulated patients than they do in daily practice. Inconsistent or absent feedback can be counter productive and reinforce bad habits. The available evidence supports experiential learning models, with the use of actors as simulated patients, and opportunities for feedback and practice. There is a plethora of literature on approaches to teaching such skills, with recommendations for breaking the skill down into its component parts, correcting errors through immediate feedback, and using multiple, short practice opportunities. Present results point to the need to enlarge communication skills teaching and training during clerkships in real contexts. It is possible that students may develop improved communication skills by further promoting continuous patient relationships in their core clerkships, there by increasing their sense of accountability and responsibility for patient care (Hirsch at al., 2007). Authors (Kyaw at al., 2019) found also low-quality evidence showing that digital education is as effective as traditional learning in medical students' communication skills training. Blended digital education seems to be at least as effective as and potentially more effective than traditional learning for communication skills and knowledge. While there are many well established methods for teaching communication skills, the degree to which they are perceived to be effective by students and clinicians is less clear. Students cite difficulty understanding what is expected in different contexts, and feeling pressure from supervisors and time constraints to focus on the medical content, with less time for rapport-building and other patient-centred aspects of the consultation. The communication modelled by faculty in classroom settings is viewed as different to that modelled in the clinical setting (Aper, 2015). While clinicians might have good knowledge, or even good practice of communication skills, this does not mean that by default they have the skills to teach students how to apply various communication skills in appropriate clinical contexts. Comments from the experienced clinicians demonstrate that they did not receive formal training in communication skills during their own study, thus are not necessarily well placed to understand or deliver effective teaching in this area. Clinicians are often focused on the medical content, and have little or no training in educational approaches, yet they are tasked with supervising students and providing feedback on their communication with patients. Students develop communication skills by observing their

seniors, teachers and mentors and then practice. Though systematic teaching of these skills is challenging during formative years, training in communication during clinical posting can bring these skills to life and allow students and faculty to see their relevance. Despite a growing body of literature regarding the importance of effective patient-physician communication, are not found studies which to identify the best teaching and evaluation methods to improve the skills of medical students, faculty, and practicing physicians to communicate optimally with patients, families, and health team members (Hag et al., 2015). Experience shows that medical students are attentive, motivated and avidly develop clinical communication skills in concert with other medical skills (Ullah et al., 2012). The World Federation for Medical Education inclusion in their 2015 Basic Medical Education Standards of communication as a core clinical skill, recommended to be taught as part of early patient contact. The basis of the medical curriculum is the basic theory and practice in the field medicine, including clinical decision-making skills, communication skills and others.

Table 2: 3 Benefits of Effective Communication

Enhances patient satisfaction
Patient more open to seeking further care
Builds rapport between patient and professional
Leads to more realistic patient expectations
Patient may disclose more information
Leads to more accurate diagnosis
Patient is more involved in decision making
Better patient adherence to treatment

The most suitable and effective time during the medical course to learn communication skills is still a matter of debate, with some authors stating that a longitudinal design covering several years could be the more effective. Given the advances in understanding communication behaviors in the medical encounter, and the development of many successful teaching and evaluation methods, each school is challenged to develop practical, comprehensive, longitudinal programs to ensure that all students acquire effective communication skills for medical practice.

Conclusion

While the idea that communication is an essential aspect of medicine is not new, communication skills teaching and assessment have recently become more visible in medical education. This article demonstrates that medical schools can enhance students' communication skills through a variety of curricular themes and teaching methods. This article highlights the fact that including patient-oriented communication skill teaching for undergraduate medical students improves their competency, increases patient satisfaction and clinical outcome. Future physicians, regardless of specialty, will need to communicate effectively with their patients. To address this need, medical schools will must incorporate teaching of

patient-centered communication techniques in the pre-clerkship curriculum. The psychosocial, personality, language, and cognitive elements associated with communication make this challenge unique. Regular courses on effective communication should be included in the medical school curriculum. The modern training manuals provide provide clear instruction on how to play a vulnerable respondent in mock interviews, and are currently testing the ease – or difficulty – with which others can adopt the guidelines. Communication skill training during formative years is a positive investment for the better future health of the society.

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Social Adaptation of Foreign Students in Universities

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Abstract

Education of foreign students in Slovak universities is one of the competitiveness indexes of the Slovak higher education system. Adaptation process of foreign students has a complex structure and represents interaction of different kinds of adaptation (psychological, social, cultural, etc.). The article pointed out that social interactions are a problems and also unique challenge for international students. The aim of the research is to investigate the characteristics of social adaption of students and then give advice on the education about their social adaptation to help them form the healthy personality and accommodate college life. Article also represents the pedagogical support of foreign students' social adaptation in Slovak universities. The development of social adaptation programs for this category of students is especially important.

Keywords: adaptation, higher education, international student

Introduction

Today, global education market is one of the fastest growing export items. The number of international students attending universities has increased significantly in the last decade. In today's world, interstate education contacts are increasing at an intensive rate, and a growing number of young people would like to acquire an education outside of their own country. To a large extent, the success of foreign college students' studies and the level of their professional training depend on their social adaptation. A significant portion of the contemporary literature has dealt with the problems of international students: Zerengok at al. (2018), Rui, Wang (2015), Rhein (2014), Terziev (2019), Merenkov, Antonova (2015), Shubha, Padma (2016), Tu (2018), Forbush, Foucault-Welles (2016), Ward, Kennedy (1999), Westwood, Barker (1990), Kanapiyanovna Abdina (2015) etc. The articles reveal a correlation between the specificity of the countries international students come from and the main stages of their social adaptation. The articles discuss a range of common problems faced by international students while studying in universities. For an International student, residing temporarily in another country for the purpose of study, successful socio-cultural adaptation makes academic and non-academic life in the host country comfortable.

Social adaptation of foreign students

Adaptation to a foreign culture environment represents one of the major problems that international students encounter upon arrival in another country. From the very first days at a university, international students stay in an unfamiliar sociocultural, linguistic and ethnic environment, to which they must adapt within the shortest possible time. The adaptation process itself, in this case, is quite complicated and includes several types of adaptation: physiological, individual psychological, socio-psychological, ethno-psychological, cultural-communicative, etc. Social adaptation is analyzed in academic literature (Rhodes, Wellman, 2013, Miller, 2011) as a process of an individuum entering into the new sphere of social, group,

interpersonal relationships and the adjustment to the new social environment. Social adaptation, understood as the balance of the individual with the community, could be equated to the socialization, defined by sociology as a process of acquiring the social experience, necessary for the „appointed” by the society social roles of the individual. Socialization refers to those processes through which people learn to effectively participate in social groups. Having come to Slovakia, foreign students change their socio-cultural environment. The accustomed communicative relations with family, fellow citizens and friends are disrupted. International students are from different countries that may have different religions and political systems, but they share common circumstances that allow them to be identified as a group (Misra, Castillo, 2004). These characteristics include being transient and having to adapt, socially and culturally, to their new temporary situations.

The adaptation is process complex and multidirectional. Various theoretical aspects of the problem of social adaptation of the personality were considered by J. Piaget, E. Toffler, G. Selye, etc. (Glass at al., 2014). The increasing interest in foreign students has caused various researches devoted to a problem of social adaptation both in Slovakia and other countries.

Some studies (Searle, Ward, 1990, Poyrazli at al., 2001) have shown that students have more trouble adjusting. The students may be having more adjustment problems because their values, customs, and interests may have been set and they may have a hard time changing them (Simonet, Duchemin, 2010). On the basis of an established social structure, a system of factors of social adaptation can be discussed. The factors for social adaptation can be addressed in two main groups: individual and social environment (Figure 1).

Factors of the individual	Factors of the social environment
Psychological content	Organized upbringing
Moral content	Education
Political content	Media
Cultural content	Public opinion
Intellectual content	Social events

Figure 1: The factors for social adaptation

Sawir at al. (2008) have asserted international students experience three kinds of social loneliness: personal loneliness because of the loss of contact with families and friends; social loneliness because of the lack of social networks; and cultural loneliness, triggered by the absence of the preferred cultural and/or language environment. International students generally have positive experiences, though sometimes they do not thrive in their new social environments (Byrne at al, 2019).

Methodology of the Research

There is a large body of research, including our own highlighting the fact that for international students, mixing with home students can be challenging. How well students are able to develop social relationships and social friendships has an impact on their ability to cope with the complex demands of higher education.

They encounter different cultures and languages, experience new expectations and realities and have to deal with issues such as housing, finances and health care.

They also face separation from family and friends and the need to make new friends and establish relationships with staff and the local community. To teach the person to adapt to the changing conditions –has never been so serious and urgent as now. This article is devoted to the issue of social adaptation of the studentship as a social and professional group which undergoes the influence of social dynamics.

In an effort to help manage the process of adaptation of foreign students, the authors developed a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify problems that students may encounter during their stay abroad, in Slovakia and during their studies at TUKE. The questionnaire was administered anonymously.

The tools (the questionnaire) have been elaborated on the basis of research methodology (the goal, objectives, object, subject, etc.). The questionnaire is based on the questions.

It contains system of the questions allowing revealing the factors influencing adaptation processes and adaptability of students. It contained 78 items: informations, skills that are considered important for adaptation during college.

The research was conducted at the beginning of the students' studies. The respondents were first-year students. They have already gone through the initial phase of studying at university.

The research sample consisted of 241 foreign students, of which 170 were Ukrainian students. Another group consisted of students from India (51 students) and students from other countries (18 students).

We evaluated the obtained data with a statistical package (SPSS). In particular, we surveyed and compared the responses of Ukrainian and other students (English speakers).

It allowed us carrying out comparative analysis of adaptation processes of Ukrainian students and other foreign students to some extent.

The aim of the research was to monitor social adaptation, which includes various problems of adaptation to the conditions of the new environment.

The research questions mapped the answers of foreign students to their adaptation in the field: study in a social context.

The research was carried out at all faculties of the Technical University in Kosice where foreign students are taught.

We processed the results by statistical procedure, t-test to find out the differences between the groups. We present statistically significant results in this area of interest.

Results

Students commented on issues in social contexts during their studies. For each item, students indicated the extent to which they were satisfied with their study group on a scale of 1 - 5: 1 - very satisfied, 2 - satisfied, 3 - both satisfied and dissatisfied, 4 - dissatisfied, 5 - very dissatisfied. The students answered fifteen questions. Here we found several statistically significant differences between groups of Ukrainian and other foreign students:

Table 1: Statistically significant differences in the field of social adaptation

		N	AM	SD	t
study group size	Ukrainian	166	1,63	0,70	-4,347
	other	65	2,11	0,89	
level of tolerance between group members	Ukrainian	167	1,60	0,85	-3,824
	other	68	2,49	2,67	
acceptance by study group members	Ukrainian	166	1,77	0,81	-3,937
	other	69	2,23	0,83	
the level of interpersonal relationships between group members	Ukrainian	166	1,83	0,83	-3,371
	other	69	2,22	0,76	

rules of conduct in the group	Ukrainian	167	1,72	0,73	-4,888
	other	70	2,29	0,99	
division of roles between group members (expected behavior)	Ukrainian	165	1,95	0,83	-3,122
	other	70	2,33	0,88	

The results at a significance level of 0.05 show that other foreign students are more dissatisfied with the size of the study group than Ukrainians. Likewise, other foreign students are more dissatisfied than Ukrainians with the level of tolerance among group members, also with acceptance by group members, with the level of interpersonal relations, with the rules of conduct in the group. Likewise, other foreign students are more dissatisfied with the division of roles among group members than Ukrainians. The results may direct us to further investigations in the future, in order to obtain additional data that would allow us to understand these differences. Without developed cultural and social competences, students will possibly experience difficulties in communication with their classmates, teachers and advisors and will not be able to comprehend what is going on in the class in the fullest sense.

Discussion

The social adaptation of international students has become one of the most important topics in the literature on the internationalization of education. This article was performed to survey the relations among the sub-variables of college adjustment and to identify the factors that affect college students' social adaptation. We determined that a significant cluster of research is devoted to the international students' adaptation process in general (Nugmanova, 2015, Tseng, 2002, Yang at al., 2015, etc.). They outlined the specifics of psychological and social adaptation, arguing that each of these two types of adaptation is influenced by a different set of variables: psychological adaptation is influenced by personality traits, coping strategies and available social support, whereas social adaptation is influenced by length of residence in the new culture, cultural knowledge, language ability and acculturation strategy. The views of students who choose to study abroad in Slovakia offer different perspectives. It was found that there were differences with regard to how students interacted with instructors and fellow students in terms of means of social adaptation (Aydin, 2020). However, the authors were not able to pinpoint why international students felt a reduced sense of belonging at their institutions (Guan, 1018). The influence of educational environment on the effectiveness of social adaptation of foreign students is shown in the study by Kravets (2013). Study showed that international students have demands and expectations from the university in terms of leisure time activities. A significant portion of the contemporary literature has dealt with the problems of international students. Owing to the importance of international students to culturally diverse blend of colleges and universities, higher education institutions must develop support services to assist international students with a series of special needs ranging from adjusting to the academic requirements, to dealing with cultural factors of being down in new community settings (Cho, Yu, 2015).

Educational strategy

It is the job of the host country to "provide the optimal conditions for living and educational needs of students," taking account of the complex process of adaptation to a new way of life. However, even under the most favorable conditions of international contacts, anyone student sentering a new culture encounters a variety of difficulties. In this article, the authors surveyed foreign students to examine how they adapt to the socio environment in

university. Based on the analysis several ways can be proposed to solve the existing problems of adaptation of foreign students

- to support student communities (interest groups, sport classes), so that foreign students have the opportunity to interact with each other, discuss arising issues, find support, maintain a high level of motivation to study, and also receive various information about life and studying at the university and the city of Kosice;

- to develop supervision and mentoring system at the university;

- to implement a general navigation system at the university (duplicate important information in dormitories and academic buildings in foreign languages);

- create a more detailed information environment of the university on the official website of the university;

- to conduct specialized (additional) continuing education courses for foreign students;

- to support interethnic holidays, events, projects at University that promote intercultural and interethnic dialogue;

- to improve social living conditions of foreign students.

Academic staff can be one of the most important support networks for international students. In their new environment – cut off from friends and family ties – they often see staff as the most familiar and trusted people, especially before they've had a chance to make new friends.

By mixing up students' normal groupings, teachers can influence the social learning of both international and home students.

In the same way, using culturally relevant learning materials, such as books by authors from different countries, can encourage students to share their own diverse range of perspectives in inclusive ways.

The responsibility of a university is not limited to just providing a good learning environment – it must provide a good social environment too.

International students have considerable difficulty in meeting and becoming friends with Slovaks, they would like the university to offer more opportunities for mixing with Slovak students, both inside and outside the classroom.

Foreign scientists (Schmitt et al., 2003, Yu, Kravets, 2010) emphasize the role of extracurricular work with foreign students which has an impact on their social adaptation and social performance. On the intervention of college freshmen's adaptability, Zhang et al. (1996) found that class psychological service was helpful for college freshmen to social adapt to a new environment. Interactions between international students and host nationals, lessen the difficulty they have in adaptation. Student mentors or friendship families Interactions between international students and host nationals, lessen the difficulty they have in adaptation (Rajapaksa, Dundes, 2003). Authors Chen et al. (2019) and Kolesnikov et al. (2019) also found that adaptation is accelerated by increased contact with people native to the host country. Their results indicated that peer mentors provided a higher level of psycho-social support. Social adaptation of international students is an important part of fitting-in to a new environment and to student retention (Rementsov, Kazantseva, 2011). The findings from this study will be useful to institutional leaders in assisting international students to social adapt to the university, and to the country. In order to accelerate the socialization of foreign students under the new conditions, more extensive investigation of their personalities, value and reason-for-being orientations and provision them with psychological and pedagogical maintenance are possible.

Conclusion

An increasing number of individuals leave their homelands to study, work, and even settle down in other countries and regions, including international students. In today's globalized society, it is not uncommon for young people to spend part of their studies or careers abroad. Adaptation to a new environment means for the student to meet, overcome and adapt to various obstacles that stand in the way of satisfying his cognitive, social and performance needs. In general, summing up the results of empirical research, the following conclusions can be made. Overcoming difficulties arising in the process of adaptation of foreign students at Technical University in Kosice and overcoming administrative and housing barriers at the regional level will create conditions for a comfortable and safe learning environment for foreign students and will contribute to the realization of the effectiveness factors of international educational activities of the university. However, despite numerous theoretical and empirical researches, this problem remains relevant and demands further research. Consequently, unlike biological, cultural and psychological aspect social adaptation is substantially accompanied by the processes of identification of the individual, his/ her comprehension and interiorization of rapid social and other changes which it faces.

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Non-Uniform Effects of Equine-Assisted Therapy in Motor, Adaptive and Social Skills of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder: A Qualitative Approach in Special Needs Education

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Abstract

Equine-assisted activities may greatly improve the skills' development of children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). This paper reports on a research project examining possible progress on the attitudes and behaviors of ASD children, concerning their social, motor and adaptive capabilities after their enrollment in equine-assisted therapy. To this end, an analysis of questionnaires and interviews that were used/applied to trainers and parents of the participants during and after the therapeutic period was conducted. Interestingly, the analysis of the responses provided evidence that a broader range of social skills are positively affected, when compared with motor or adaptive skills.

Keywords: equine-assisted therapy, autism spectrum disorder, multisensory environment, task engagement, occupational therapy task performance and analysis

Introduction

People with ASD face difficulties which include significant impairment in social interactions and communication. Children with ASD also have significant difficulties in sensory, integrative and motor functions. This fact consistently hampers their ability to participate in school and community activities (Ayres & Tickle, 1980; Smith, 2004). The latest rate of births of people being diagnosed with ASD is one in 160 children (WHO, 2019, and Elsabbagh et al., 2012).

According to Ayres (1979), there are two main types of sensory integrative dysfunctions in children with autistic behavior. The first corresponds to disturbances of sensory modulation, resulting in the inability to deal with registration of or orientation to sensory input. The second type of dysfunction is related to sensory discrimination and perception and involves reduced ability of refined organization and interpretation of sensory stimuli (Case-Smith, 1991). Children with ASD also exhibit motor deficits, as they frequently experience unusual body movements and postures, atypical acquisition of motor milestones (Teitelbaum et al., 1998), poor motor proficiency (Smith, 2004), poor postural stability (Koomar & Bundy, 2002), and lack of anticipatory movements and normal body concept (Reeves & Cermak, 2002).

Research has reported that the ability of ASD children to interact with others may be improved through their engagement in specific activities. The identification of such activities is essential. The benefits of animal-assisted intervention, including horses, with respect to social interactions have been reported in (Grandin, Fine & Bowers, 2010) and (O'Haire, 2012). The development of child - animal relationships may offer positive interactions and support and provide psychological and physical benefits for the child (McCardle et al., 2011).

Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is the integration of animal interaction into a client's therapy with activities planned by a licensed therapist (Doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, physician, occupational or speech therapist) to achieve the treatment goals (Sori & Hughes, 2014). Goals can include socialization, participation, physical, sensory and emotional improvements (Sori & Hughes, 2014). Animal assisted activities (AAA) differ from AAT due to the fact that AAA can be delivered by trained volunteers, paraprofessionals and physiotherapists, and is geared towards opportunities for motivational, recreational or educational benefits (Marino, 2012).

The therapeutic use of horseback riding goes back at least to ancient Greece, where it was recommended to raise the spirits of the chronically ill (Benda, McGibbon & Grant, 2003; Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004), or to ancient Rome, where it was used for the rehabilitation of wounded Roman soldiers (Benda, McGibbon & Grant, 2003). The Therapeutic Horseback Riding (THR) is a type of AAT which is based on teaching horsemanship skills, such as holding the reins appropriately, controlling the horse with voice commands, and other basic riding skills (Bracher, 2000; Drnach, O'Brien & Kreger, 2010). The therapy aims to improve balance, posture, gross and fine motor skills, and communication (Bertoti, 1988; Snider et al., 2007). Successful interactions with horses may provide important sensory and social stimuli with benefits for psychological, sensory, motor, communication, and social functioning (O'Haire, 2012). Research has identified benefits of THR for children with ASD, such as increased social motivation and decreased sensation seeking and sensitivity (Bass, Duchowny & Llabre, 2009), fewer stereotyped behaviors (Gabriels et al., 2012), and improvements in social communication and sensory processing during intervention (Ward et al., 2013).

One of the purported benefits of the THR is provision of two levels of sensor and motor experiences: The lower level (passive interaction) offers various motor challenges by changing the movements of horses, such that children can learn to control their body and postures in different positions (upright, prone, supine, forward, backward, and side-bending) on the horse's back. This level of sensorimotor experiences also assists children in acquiring basic motor control skills and inhibiting unnecessary movements (Schmidt & Lee, 2005). The higher level, which corresponds to active interaction, involves various combinations of riding movements that children use when they play and interact with others while on horseback. This way active movements are facilitated, and furthermore, opportunities are offered for the development of advanced motor skills (Wuang et al., 2010).

Being atop a mobile equine, it directly exacts a physical response. The walking gait of the horse is very similar to the human walk (around 100 – 120 stimulations/vibrations per minute). In addition, displacement, acceleration and deceleration of the horse's limb through the stride causes the rider to react in order to maintain balance (Cherng et al., 2004; Hamill, Washington & White, 2007). This allows the horse to serve as a therapeutic simulator (Benda, McGibbon & Grant, 2003; Casady & Nichols-Larsen, 2004; Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004; Hamill, Washington & White, 2007). Riding provides training for the trunk in coordination, balance, and reaction time, with constant alterations between muscle tension and relaxation

that encourages development of adaptive behaviors and movement strategies (Casady & Nichols-Larsen, 2004; Hamill, Washington & White, 2007).

Apart from the potential physical benefits derived from therapeutic riding, many social, cognitive, and emotional effects have been also delineated in the relevant literature (Bizub, Joy & Davidson, 2003; Cerino et al., 2016). The horse will also effectively mirror the human behavior and emotions directed toward him and provide immediate feedback on his interpretations (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005). The horse may also serve as a buffer from stress and anxiety (Bizub, Joy & Davidson, 2003), providing relaxation and recreation as well as the opportunity for the rider to develop personal responsibility and to learn about relationship-building (Kaiser et al., 2004). Successive mastery of riding skills can encourage increases in self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept, and a sense of control (Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004), and in turn encourages the brain to process sensory data more effectively and to release chemicals that help reduce stress, relax muscles, and provide a sense of well-being. Therapeutic riding clients are encouraged to use interpretation and insight to develop successful strategies in working with horses (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005), and within their group. The most succinct psychosocial goal, as described in (Bizub, Joy & Davidson, 2003), is “learn more, do more, be more.” The evidence on the benefits of THR motivated several countries to stress and support therapeutic riding (Theodorou et al., 2018).

Various experimental designs and approaches have been used for the identifications of the benefits of Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) for ASD children. In Llambias et al. (2016), a multiple-baseline design was used with 7 children with ASD ages 4–8 yr to assess the effect of including a horse in occupational therapy intervention on task engagement. The study concluded that equine-assisted occupational therapy, particularly when combined with a selection of specific techniques and strategies, appears to increase engagement in adult-directed activities for children with ASD. In De Milander, Bradley & Fourie (2016) it is shown that a 10-week EAT intervention may be beneficial to improve the balance, upper limb coordination and possibly strength of children with ASD. In Borgi et al. (2015) it is examined the effectiveness of an EAT in improving adaptive and executive functioning in children with ASD compared to a control group. Interviews to parents, instead of direct observations of children during therapeutic sessions were conducted, using the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale. The results indicated an improvement in social functioning in the group attending EAT, a milder effect on motor abilities and improved executive functioning at the end of the EAT program.

Van den Hout & Bragonje (2010) applied EAT to sixty 2-14 years old children with ASD once weekly for 10 weeks. As a result, improvements in ASD severity were larger for patients who received more EAT lessons and for patients with milder forms of ASDs prior to therapy. The largest effects on the specific areas of functioning were on sociability and sensory/cognitive awareness. Anderson & Meints (2016) provided evidence that a 5-week programme of therapeutic riding on social functioning of children/adolescents, aged 5-16 years with ASD, increased empathising and reduced maladaptive behaviors. Malcolm, Ecks & Pickersgill (2017) examined how staff and the parents of riders account for the successes and limitations of equine therapy. Three key explanations emerged to explain the efficacy of equine therapy: a. the sensorial, embodied experience of riding the horse; b. the specific movements and rhythms of the horse; and, c. the ‘personality’ of the horse. Through the multisensory dynamics of therapy, autistic children came to ‘surprise’ parents and teachers with their intersubjective, communicative, and empathic abilities.

Burgon (2011) explored the experiences of seven 'at-risk' young people who participated in a therapeutic horsemanship (TH) programme. The relationships and experiences the participants had with the horses, contributed to them gaining psychosocial benefits such as those identified in the risk and resilience literature as offering 'protective factors' (including the ability to reflect, social competence, empathy, sense of purpose and future, and mastery, autonomy and self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem).

Bass, Duchowny & Llabre (2009) found improvements in social functioning, measured by standardized questionnaires, for an experimental group of 19 ASD children after a 12-week THR program, compared to a waitlist control group (15 children with ASD) who did not participate in THR. In Kern et al. (2011) improvements were reported in the severity of symptoms commonly associated with ASD for 20 participants who completed a 6-month THR riding program using the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (Schopler, Reichler & Renner, 1994). Using standardized behavioral and physical assessments by individuals who were not blind to the study, Gabriels, et al. (2012) reported improvements in self-regulation behaviors, expressive language, and motor skills for a group of 26 children with ASD who participated in a 10-week THR program.

In order to assess the possible benefits of EAT to a wide spectrum of skills when applied to ASD children, we conducted an experimental study. Specifically, we analyzed data obtained by interviews with the trainers of nine children diagnosed with ASD, which followed a ten-session EAT. The questions asked during the interviews referred to social, motor and adaptive skills, and the trainers assessed children performance after each session. In addition to observing the progress of each child performance during the EAT period, we were able to identify impact asymmetries among the different skills categories. Next section presents the setup of the study. The third section outlines the results obtained by the interviews and identifies particularities within and among the different skills categories. The fourth section discusses the results of the study and proposes directions for future research.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Human Participants

Nine individuals, of which six male and three female, aged 8-19 years (average age: 13 years) and diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) participated in the study. They all participated, before and after the study, at the Therapeutic riding program, along with various other interventions. Six of them (5 male and 1 female) were talkative and moderately functional, while the rest three (1 male and 2 female) were highly dysfunctional. Exclusion criteria for selecting the participants were aggressive behavior and non-regulated epilepsy, as they are the main contraindications for Equine Assisted Therapy.

Animal Participants

Four well trained therapeutic horses participated in the study. All horses met the prerequisites of an adequate therapy horse and all had the qualities to promote equal chances of development to the human participants. Experienced horse handlers (two Therapeutic riding trainers) selected them and handled them during the whole procedure, after considering the ethics and safety regulations for both animals and humans.

Procedure

Setting and Ethics

The study took place in Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece (Athens, Greece), which offers therapeutic sessions with the assistance of the horses to all Disabled people. The study was fully completed (sessions, interviews, questioners) within a period of three months.

Prior to the study, a letter of consent for the conduction of the research, participation of the horses and usage of facilities was signed by the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece. Consent was also obtained from the parents of all participants (consent forms were distributed), for observing and collecting data from their therapeutic sessions and for the publication of anonymized data.

Materials and equipment

Appropriate horse tack was used to ensure the safety of both horse and human participants. In all sessions, the horses were wearing their own bridles, thick cotton pads and special surcingles with handles, adjusted to each horse's girth size. In two sessions where the horses walked in different gaits (trot/gallop), side-reins and boots were also used. All participants were wearing helmets while riding and closed type shoes in all settings. Following the therapeutic setting that was appropriate in each case, horses were led either in-hand, or at the lunging line.

Few materials were used in the sessions, since almost all activities were performed with the human body and the participation of the horse itself. Specifically, materials such as fitness circles, sticks, activity and space marker cones were used, mainly for motor exercises and as space orientation aids.

Activities

The intervention program which was implemented consisted of: psycho-educational group activities, psychomotor exercises, social interaction activities and emotional expression situations.

In every session, participants were – or suggested to be - involved in every of the following procedures: grooming, mounting, riding, leading, groundwork, tacking up and dismounting.

Data collection

Prior to the study, an individual baseline was taken, by their records keeping files and by interviewing the therapists on duty (psychologist and occupational therapist).

Ten sessions of Equine Assisted Therapy were conducted and observed. The sessions were conducted on a weekly basis, with 30 minutes duration each, implemented by the same therapists on duty (one psychologist and one occupational therapist). Observation sheets were used during the sessions, which consisted of 91 statements on the behavior of participants. Specifically, 31 of them referred to social skills, 17 referred to motor skills and 43 referred to adaptive skills. Appendix A, Appendix B and Appendix C, present the full sets of statements

that correspond to the social, motor and adaptive skills, respectively. The observation of the qualitative research classified the abilities of corresponding child -in every session- in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to “almost never/ not at all” and 5 corresponds to “always/very much”.

Results

A detailed table for each skill category was built, with the skills classified based on the number of children who have made significant progress. After removing the questions referring to specific skills in which at least two-thirds of the participants were reported as having good performance at the first session, i.e. the corresponding grade was 4 or 5 since the beginning of the therapy, 26, 15 and 33 questions remained in the social skills, motor skills and adaptive skills categories, respectively. As significant improvement between the first and the tenth session, we defined a grading increase by at least 3 units. The aggregate results concerning the number for the three skills categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of significantly improved skills (grade in corresponding questions) by number of participants which exhibited improvement for each skills category

Number of questions with improvement:	Social Skills	Motor Skills	Adaptive Skills
in 0 participants	4	8	16
in 1 participant	6	4	8
in 2 participants	8	1	7
in 3 participants	5	1	1
in 4 participants	2	0	1
in 5 participants	1	1	0

Notably, Table 1 shows that in only two questions from each of the motor and adaptive skills categories, the number of participants with a significant improvement between the first and the tenth session was larger than two. On the other hand, in eight questions of the social skills category, the number of participants who showed significant improvement was at least three. In Table 2 the questions of the social skills category are presented sorted with respect to the number of participants that exhibited significant improvement during the equine-assisted therapy.

Table 2. Social skills sorted by number of participants that exhibited significant improvement

Question: <i>Does the child...</i>	Number of significantly improved participants
Q3. participate in group activities when simple instructions are offered?	5
Q9. take the initiative to help someone without being asked?	4
Q27. put off and tidy the equipment at the end of the session?	4
Q7. choose and participate in group activities (and he is happy for this)?	3
Q8. take the initiative to an activity or a game with one or more persons start spontaneously?	3

Q11. waits for its turn in group activities with one or more familiar persons without leaving the line (self-control, rule)?	3
Q12. wait for its turn in group activities with one or more persons, while participating in athletic, motor activities (self-control)?	3
Q18. talk to the horse?	3
Q2c. respond and follow verbal instructions to new activities?	2
Q4. participate in group activities imitating others?	2
Q5. respond to a request for help?	2
Q14. exhibit the ability to wait for the completion of an interactive activity without interrupting it?	2
Q20. tolerate physical contact from the horse?	2
Q21. tolerate physical contact from the human members of the group?	2
Q22. have proper body distance from other persons?	2
Q25. give the horse a carrot and groom it at the end of the session?	2
Q26. wait for the horse to eat the whole carrot, when riding is over?	2
Q2a. respond and follow instructions to new activities under physical prompting?	1
Q2b. respond and follow instructions to new activities under visual prompting (signals, pictures, gestures)?	1
Q6. give handshake (High5 or physical contact)?	1
Q10. wait for its turn in group activities with one or more familiar persons, without touching others (autonomy)?	1
Q16. exhibit the ability of sharing material with others when it participates in group activities?	1
Q17. exhibit the ability of sharing material with others during independent activities in free time?	1
Q19. caress the horse on the head and/or the body?	1

Within the social skills category, the skills or tasks that correspond to question Q3, questions Q9 and Q27, and questions Q7, Q8, Q11, Q12 and Q18 exhibited significant improvement for five, four and three participants, respectively. On the opposite side, the skills or tasks that correspond to questions Q1a, Q1b, Q1c, Q13, Q15, Q23 and Q24 (see Appendix A) did not appear to improve significantly for anyone of the participants.

Table 3. Motor skills sorted by number of participants that exhibited significant improvement

Question: <i>Does the child...</i>	Number of significantly improved participants
Q29. hold the rope and lead the horse anywhere he wants when the riding is over?	5
Q30. move along with the team to various locations?	3
Q28. wait next to the horse while the horse eats?	2
Q44. ride the horse by holding it off the rope when the riding is finished?	2
Q31. participate spontaneously and cooperate with others while riding	1

and mounting the horse?	
Q33. change its posture on the horse (it rides in a sideways and in a posteria position)?	1
Q34. perform complex postures and stunts?	1
Q39. exhibit the ability to perform physical exercise while riding, imitating the movements indicated by someone who walks next to it while riding?	1
Q43. get off the horse according to the instructions given to it?	1

Within the motor skills category, only the skills or tasks that correspond to question Q29 and question Q30 exhibited significant improvement for five and three participants, respectively. The skills or tasks that correspond to questions Q32, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38, Q40, Q41 and Q42 (see Appendix B) did not appear to improve significantly for anyone of the participants.

Table 4. Adaptive skills sorted by number of participants that exhibited significant improvement

Question: <i>Does the child...</i>	Number of significantly improved participants
Q60. participate in activities alone, with or without the horse, without disturbing others?	4
Q86. clean and care for the horse in the beginning of the session?	3
Q45. make eye contact with those it is interacting with?	2
Q46. respond with eye contact or head orientation to familiar adults?	2
Q47. respond with eye contact or head orientation to its peers?	2
Q67. express in some way its desire to ride a horse?	2
Q73. speak rarely?	2
Q77. get upset when the horse flinches while riding?	2
Q79. show a slight anxiety while riding?	2
Q48. respond to anyone's smile?	1
Q49. show respect for other people's personal belongings and personal space?	1
Q50. easily share objects with others?	1
Q57. seek comfort when it is hurt or sad?	1
Q65. oppose to riding?	1
Q71. show interest when it is approached by others, but it does not mimic the physical movements of others while riding?	1
Q78. show great anxiety while riding?	1
Q87. smile when the researcher rewards it after the riding is over?	1

Within the adaptive skills category, only the skills or tasks that correspond to question Q60 and question Q86 exhibited significant improvement for four and three participants,

respectively. On the opposite side, the skills or tasks that corresponds to questions Q51, Q52, Q53, Q54, Q55, Q56, Q58, Q59, Q61, Q62, Q63, Q64, Q66, Q68, Q69, Q70, Q72, Q74, Q75, Q76, Q80, Q81, Q82, Q83, Q84 and Q85 (see Appendix C) did not appear to improve significantly for anyone of the participants.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of equine-assisted therapy on various skills and behavior of autistic children. Specifically, nine children participated in ten sessions of equine-assisted therapy. The sessions took place at the Therapeutic Riding Association of Greece in Athens, Greece. During and after the completion of the therapy, extensive interviews were conducted with the instructors and parents of the participants, in order to identify the degree of improvement in three general skill areas, namely, social skills, motor skills and adaptive skills.

The questions asked during the interviews corresponded to specific skills and were divided in three groups, social, motor and adaptive, each of them related to the respective skill category. After removing the questions referring to specific skills in which at least two-thirds of the participants were reported as having good performance at the first session, 26, 15 and 33 questions remained in the social skills, motor skills and adaptive skills categories, respectively.

The analysis showed that in only two observation areas from each of the motor and adaptive skills categories, the number of participants with a significant improvement between the first and the tenth session was larger than two. On the other hand, in eight observations of the social skills category, the number of participants who showed significant improvement was at least three.

Specifically, the analysis of the collected reports of the social skills category showed that five children were significantly improved in participating in cooperative activities when simple instructions are offered, while in each of the skills concerning helping someone or tidy the equipment without being asked, four children were significantly improved. Moreover, in each of the skills concerning the participation in, or initiation of an activity spontaneously and waiting for their turn to do so – either whilst in a line or already participating, three children were significantly improved.

The results presented here may provide the first evidence that the positive effects of equine-assisted therapy for autistic children are not uniform across social, motor and adaptive skills, and they mainly concern the first skills category. This fact naturally gives rise to interesting questions. For example, does the equine-assisted therapy framework mainly focuses on the development of social skills, and if so, would it be adequate to enrich this framework with tasks and exercises focusing on the development of motor and adaptive skills? More generally, is the development of motor and adaptive skills of children with ASD more demanding when compared with the development of social skills? Or, does the contact with the horse prevail over other factors, such as, the design of the therapy, and this interaction with the animal naturally unblocks the social skills potential of the child? On the other hand, the improvement in specific types of motor and adaptive skills should not be ignored. What are the factors that make these types of motor and adaptive skills more sensitive to equine-assisted therapy, with respect to the rest of the skills that lie in these two categories?

The evidence reported in this study not only motivates the examination of the factors that cause some skills to be affected while others are almost unaffected within the framework of the equine-assisted therapy, but also outlines a direction of research concerning the relative complexity among different skills' categories for children with ASD. The answers to the corresponding questions would possibly allow us to identify "best practice" approaches of equine-assisted therapy for ASD children. Such investigation, however, exceeds the purpose of the present study and is left for future research.

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Appendix A: Questions of the Social Skills Category*Does the child*

- Q 1a. respond and follow instructions under physical prompting?
- Q 1b. respond and follow instructions under visual prompting (signals, pictures, gestures)?
- Q 1c. respond and follow verbal instructions?
- Q 2a. respond and follow instructions to new activities under physical prompting?
- Q 2b. respond and follow instructions to new activities under visual prompting (signals, pictures, gestures)?
- Q 2c. respond and follow verbal instructions to new activities?
- Q 3. participate in group activities when simple instructions are offered?
- Q 4. participate in cooperative activities imitating others?
- Q 5. respond to a request for help?
- Q 6. give handshake (High5 or physical contact)?
- Q 7. choose and participate in group activities (and he is happy for this)?
- Q 8. take the initiative to an activity or a game with one or more persons start spontaneously?
- Q 9. take the initiative to help someone without being asked?
- Q 10. wait for its turn in group activities with one or more familiar persons, without touching others (autonomy)?
- Q 11. wait for its turn in group activities with one or more familiar persons, without leaving the line (self-control, rule)?
- Q 12. wait for its turn in group activities with one or more persons, while participating in athletic, motor activities (self-control)?
- Q 13. exhibit the ability to follow simple social rituals (e.g. by greeting someone or by saying “thank you” and “please” when (s)he is given something?
- Q 14. exhibit the ability to wait for the completion of an interactive activity without interrupting it?
- Q 15. show compliance when someone in authority (adult or classmate) requests something?
- Q 16. exhibit the ability of sharing material with others when it participates in group activities?
- Q 17. exhibit the ability of sharing material with others during independent activities in free time?
- Q 18. talk to the horse?
- Q 19. caress the horse on the head and/or the body?
- Q 20. tolerate physical contact from the horse?
- Q 21. tolerate physical contact from the human members of the group?
- Q 22. have proper body distance from other persons?
- Q 23. say to the horse to stop / go?
- Q 24. caress the horse when it dismounts?
- Q 25. give the horse a carrot and groom it at the end of the session?
- Q 26. wait for the horse to eat the whole carrot, when riding is over?
- Q 27. put off and tidy the equipment at the end of the session?

Appendix B: Questions of the Motor Skills Category*Does the child...*

- Q 28. wait next to the horse while the horse eats?
- Q 29. hold the rope and lead the horse wherever the child wants when the riding is over?
- Q 30. move along with the team to various locations?

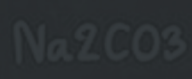
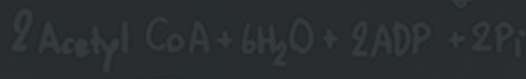
- Q 31 participate spontaneously and cooperate with others while riding and mounting the horse?
- Q 32 lie on the horse?
- Q 33 change its posture on the horse (it rides in a sideways and in a posteria position)?
- Q 34 perform complex postures and stunts?
- Q 35 fail to show any stable behavior during riding?
- Q 36 ride the horse according to the instructions that were given to him?
- Q 37 exhibit the ability to hold the reins if someone showed the way to do it?
- Q 38 control the horse up to a point by handling the reins while riding?
- Q 39 exhibit the ability to perform physical exercise while riding, imitating the movements indicated by someone who walks next to it while riding?
- Q 40 ride for a very limited period of time, with the help of a trainer, and occasionally try to dismount?
- Q 41 ride harmonically the horse?
- Q 42 show a kind of physical movement that expresses satisfaction at the end of the session?
- Q 43 get off the horse according to the instructions given to it?
- Q 44 ride the horse by holding it off the rope when the riding is finished?

Appendix C: Questions of the Adaptive Skills Category

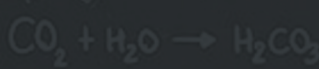
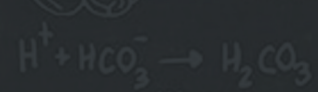
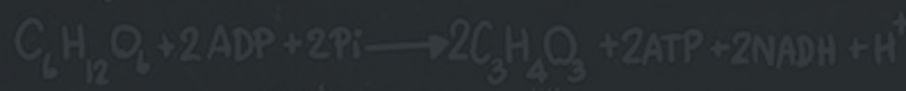
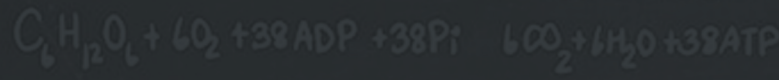
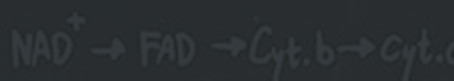
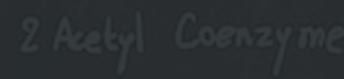
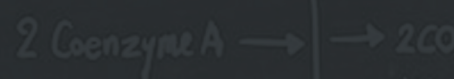
Does the child...

- Q 45 make eye contact with those it is interacting with?
- Q 46 respond with eye contact or head orientation to familiar adults?
- Q 47 respond with eye contact or head orientation to its peers?
- Q 48 respond to anyone's smile?
- Q 49 show respect for other people's personal belongings and personal space?
- Q 50 easily share objects with others?
- Q 51 adapt and tolerate changes in materials – toys?
- Q 52 adapt and tolerate changes in activities?
- Q 53 adapt and tolerate changes in faces?
- Q 54 feel happy with the horse's presence?
- Q 55 look at the horse (e.g. in the eyes)?
- Q 56 show a great attachment to a certain object and cannot ride without it?
- Q 57 seek comfort when it is hurt or sad?
- Q 58 observe the others around it as they engage in some activity?
- Q 59 visually perceive that a person is coming or leaving?
- Q 60 participate in activities alone, with or without the horse, without disturbing others?
- Q 61 stay in the group during group activities, without actively participating at that moment?
- Q 62 observe the horse's behavior / movements?
- Q 63 imitate the horse's sound?
- Q 64 reject to ride the horse without a crucial person alongside (like its mother)?
- Q 65 oppose to riding?
- Q 66 exhibit the ability to ride a horse, but it is not interested in this kind of activity?
- Q 67 express in some way its desire to ride a horse?
- Q 68 transform the environment so that it can ride comfortably?
- Q 69 try to dismount immediately?
- Q 70 concentrate on something and worries about it while riding, without having any prior attachment to a certain object?

- Q 71 show interest when it is approached by others but it does not mimic the physical movements of others while riding?
- Q 72 fail to express itself verbally?
- Q 73 speak rarely?
- Q 74 speak during the session, but it does not converse while riding the horse?
- Q 75 communicate and chat talk to others to a certain extent while riding?
- Q 76 find it easy to talk with others while riding?
- Q 77 get upset when the horse flinches while riding?
- Q 78 show great anxiety while riding?
- Q 79 show a slight anxiety while riding?
- Q 80 feel no fear when riding?
- Q 81 show an expression of pain during riding?
- Q 82 show no facial expression while riding?
- Q 83 show satisfaction and excitement when getting off the horse?
- Q 84 show great attachment to objects when riding is over?
- Q 85 thank the horse by touching the horse's head with the help of team members at the end of the session?
- Q 86 clean and care for the horse in the beginning of the session?
- Q 87 smile when the researcher rewards it after the riding is over?



$\frac{P(x)}{Q(x)} = \frac{G(x)}{Q(x)} + \frac{R(x)}{Q(x)}$



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