**Relationship between quality of interactions in ECE settings and language skills of neglected 4-year-olds: Preliminary results**

**CONTEXT**

Language is the most compromised area among neglected children (McDonald et al., 2013), since its development requires notably warm adult-child interactions and high-quality language input (Evans, 2001; Poli, 2011). The font size of your title should be bigger than (—THIS SIDEBAR DOES NOT PRINT—)

- **41.7%** of neglected children have a significant language delay at age 3 (Sylwester & Wiatr, 2010)
- More precisely, starting at age 2½, neglected children produce shorter utterances than their non-neglected peers (Sylwester & Wiatr, 2014; Fox & Coots, 2004), which is very worrying considering that mean length of utterance (MLU) is a strong predictor of reading skills (Blash & Astles, 1990; Durand et al., 2013).
- High-quality early childhood education (ECE) settings can help enhance language skills of young children as they are characterized by rich learning opportunities, stimulating material and positive interactions (Welandt et al., 2013).
- Among components of ECE experience, quality of interactions, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta et al., 2008) is the strongest predictor of language skills (Shavel et al., 2013).
- Very few researchers have investigated the relationship between ECE experience and the language skills of neglected children (Seele et al., 2012; Kovan et al., 2014; Merri & Klein, 2015), and none have specifically considered the quality of interactions. Previous research in this area has mostly considered ECE attendance in neglected children.

**AIMS OF THE CURRENT STUDY**

1. **Describe** the quality of interactions in ECE settings frequented by 4-year-old neglected children.
2. **Examine** the relationship between the domains of quality of interactions and language skills, as measured by MLU, among the population of 4-year-old neglected children.

**METHOD**

Recruitment in 4 Child Welfare Services in the Province of Quebec, including 2 University affiliated centers:

- 24 French-speaking neglected children (M = 48.3 months, SD = 0.39)

Exclusion: children presenting a biological condition associated with language disorder (e.g., autism, deafness).

**PROCEDURE**

**INSTRUMENTS**

1. **Standardized play**
   - Jeu de village (Sylwester et al., 2014) to collect a spontaneous language sample to measure MLU

2. **CLASS Pre-K**
   - Paired test: Narratives (see Pianta, 2006) to observe child language skills and classify them into one of the 3 dimensions: positive climate, emotional support, instructional support.

**RESULTS**

**Portrait of Quality of Interactions in ECE Settings**

By domains...

In the weakest domain (Instructional Support), concept development (M = 1.98, SD = 0.63), which refers to the integration of new concepts to previous activities/connections to real world and the support of high-order cognitive and language skills, such as predicting and reasoning, represents the dimension where the quality of the level is the lowest.

Linear regression (n=23) analysis was used to test if the domains of quality of interactions predicted neglected children's MLU. Results of the regression indicate that the three domains are not significant predictors of MLU (R² = 0.07, F(3,19)=0.76, p=0.56).

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

Our results regarding the level of the quality of interactions in ECE settings are consistent with previous local and international research on quality of interactions in pre-kindergarten and kindergartens (e.g., Boucard et al., 2017; Duval et al., 2016; Earlyt et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2016; Pianta et al., 2008; von Suchodolitsky et al., 2016).

We identified two main hypotheses to explain the absence of significance in our study, other than sample size.

First, conceptually closer instruments to measured outcomes, in this case language, could be preferred (Pianta et al., 2016). For example, a measure of the language stimulation techniques provided by the caregiver could be considered.

Secondly, according to different authors (Buxton et al., 2011; Welandt et al., 2013), the relationship between the quality of ECE settings and the outcomes on child's development is stronger when the quality level is within the high range.

- In our study, Instructional Support, which is known to be most support children's language skills (Pianta et al., 2011), ranges in the low level of quality.
- A minimal level of quality of interactions must be reached in order to observe a positive impact on language skills (Welandt et al., 2013). Some researchers suggest that this minimal level of quality is 3.25 for the domain of Instructional Support (Buxton et al., 2010). In our study, only 8.3% (n=2) of the ECE settings met this criterion.
- A slight improvement on the scale of quality of interactions allows to observe significant effects on children's language skills (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2015).

The professional development of caregivers is thus an interesting research path to pursue to reach this minimum threshold for the domain of Instructional Support. Caregivers working with neglected children, whose language difficulties are of great concern, should be targeted for this intervention.

According to these findings, subsequent studies, conducted on a wider samples, will provide further insights into the relationship between language skills of neglected children and their ECE experience.

**SELECTED REFERENCES**


**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Contact information: catherine.julien.5@ulaval.ca