



IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON CHILD' S SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS

Ambili Raj, Dr. Satheesh Kumaraswamy, Saliha Khan, Rintu k Lenin , Smriti Joy

INTRODUCTION

A worldwide lockdown state during this pandemic has limited a child's interaction to their immediate family. It also impacts social behaviour especially in children. The pandemic has brought about a huge disruption in a child's language skills by snatching vital sources of interaction such as school life and play dates. Be it attending classes or walking to class with friends, sharing lunch or notes, playing and creating projects together, children learn innumerable skills like cooperation, trust, loyalty and support, emotional skills like understanding and expressing their own emotions, decision making, coping with challenges and accepting responsibility.

Parents have reported psychological and behavioural changes in their children due to COVID-19 lockdowns, including difficulty concentrating, increased loneliness, irritability, and anxiety (Jiao et al., 2020; Morgül et al., 2020). Children with developmental disabilities may have been particularly impacted by lockdowns, with parents reporting increased behavioural problems (Colizzi et al., 2020) and overall worsening conditions (Bobo et al., 2020).

A very well known theory of Maslow states that humans are inherently a social creature and require emotional relationships to develop to their full potential. The two main sources of social interaction, that of a child's immediate neighbourhood and the child's school, have been snatched away from their lives due to the pandemic. As a result, children missed classes, also missed simple everyday interactions like that of walking to class together, eating lunch together, playing and creating together.

Young children missed important experiences that contribute to the growth of their vocabulary, such as making friends through play, observing facial expressions, and experiencing hands-on learning. Parents were concerned about long-term effects of these lockdowns since "the research shows that if a child does have issues with language at that age, by adulthood they're four times more likely to struggle with reading".

Children were exposed to 10% less speech on average. This translates to approximately 600 to 2000 words missed per day, as well as missed opportunities to participate in conversation exchanges which are important for the development and maintenance of the language centres in the brain.

Out of 50, 000 kids in England who started school in September 2020, 20-25% students needed help with language skills compared to the previous year. 96% of schools who were surveyed said they were concerned about students' speech and language development.

A recent survey of schools and parents, conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation, has found that children who started school in autumn 2020 needed more support than in previous years. The findings suggest that the greatest area of concern was communication and language development, in which 96% (55 out of 57) of schools said they were either “very concerned” or “quite concerned”. Close behind were personal, social and emotional development (91%) and literacy (89%), skills which are heavily reliant on the development of strong speech, language and communication abilities. Evidence shows poor speech development can have long-term effects on learning.

However, the researchers warned against increased screen time in children during lockdown. The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends that children between 2 and 5 years of age should restrict their screen time exposure to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. The committee discourages media use in children below 2 years of age. Video-chatting is allowed in children < 18 months, whereas parents of children between 18 – 24 months, can choose high-quality programs and co-view with their kids if they want to introduce digital media. These recommendations are very important in view of neuroplasticity, requiring good quality interactions between the child and the caregiver in the initial years.

Child sitting in front of screen, will not interact with the people around them. They are not learning the skills they need to be able to communicate with others. They do not learn how to interact, play or make friends. Studies done in the past have found significant behavioural problems in pre-schoolers as well as in older children exposed to excessive media use.

Widespread mask wearing during the pandemic has also made us realise how much we rely on lipreading. Not being able to see lips move during speech, combined with the dampening effect that wearing a mask has on the sound produced, has made it difficult for us to understand what other people are saying.

METHODOLOGY

AIM : Aim of the study was to find the impact of lockdown on speech and language skills.

The study was carried out in two phases

PHASE 1: Preparation of questionnaire

A set of 15 closed set (yes/no) questions were prepared in order to know the impact of lockdown on speech and language skills. All these questions that were prepared was validated by 10 speech language pathologist who are working in the field for more than 5 years. The correction and suggestion given by SLP's were incorporated. The final questionnaire is as follows.

Impact of lockdown on child's speech language skills

- 1) Are you both working parents?
- 2) Do you think lockdown increased the usage of screen time of your child on a daily basis?
- 3) Do you spend quality time with your child?
- 4) Do you think your child's vocabulary reduced during lockdown?
- 5) Did your child get sufficient language stimulation at home?
- 6) Did your child get opportunity to interact with peer group during lockdown?
- 7) Do you think your child's learning skills has reduced during lockdown?
- 8) Do you think lack of communication has given rise to anger or frustration in your child?
- 9) Was your child encouraged on his small achievements or given appropriate reinforcement upon completing any of their tasks?
- 10) Have you noticed any drastic change in your child's language skills during lockdown?
- 11) Does your child communicate verbally?
- 12) Is your child attending therapy sessions for any reason?
- 13) Do you notice any changes in your child's speech due to increased screen time exposure?
- 14) Do you think overall development of your child has hampered due to lockdown?
- 15) Was your child obsessed to gadgets during lockdown?

PHASE II: Participants

A total of 47 parents of children aged between 3 – 6 years participated in the present study.

Stimulus used: A closed set of 15 questions which was prepared was used.

Procedure: The questionnaire was administered on parents. Where participants were asked to read and understand the questions adequately and appropriately mark response to the questions.

Analysis: For each item, the response was recorded as yes or no and a credit point of one was assigned for yes and zero for no. Further data was statically analysed for frequency and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Explains the frequency outcome of the impact of lockdown on speech and language skills.

	Yes		No	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Are you both working parents?	36	76.6	11	23.4
Do you think lockdown increased the usage of screen time of your child on a daily basis?	35	74.5	12	25.5
Do you spend quality time with your child?	34	72.3	13	27.7
Do you think your child's vocabulary reduced during lockdown?	33	70.2	14	29.8
Did your child get sufficient language stimulation at home?	41	87.2	6	12.8
Did your child get opportunity to interact with peer group during lockdown?	19	40.4	28	59.6
Do you think your child's learning skills has reduced during lockdown?	31	66	16	34
Do you think lack of communication has given rise to anger or frustration in your child?	23	48.9	24	51.1
Was your child encouraged on his small achievements or given appropriate reinforcement upon completing any of their tasks?	41	87.2	6	12.8

Have you noticed any drastic change in your child's language skills during lockdown?	27	57.4	20	42.6
Does your child communicate verbally?	43	91.5	4	8.5
Is your child attending therapy sessions for any reason?	32	68.1	15	31.9
Do you notice regression in your child's speech due to increased screen time exposure?	28	59.6	19	40.4
Do you think overall development of your child has hampered due to lockdown?	25	53.2	22	46.8
Was your child obsessed to gadgets during lockdown?	33	70.2	14	29.8

© GSJ

Fig 1: Explains the frequency outcome of the impact of lockdown in speech and language skills.



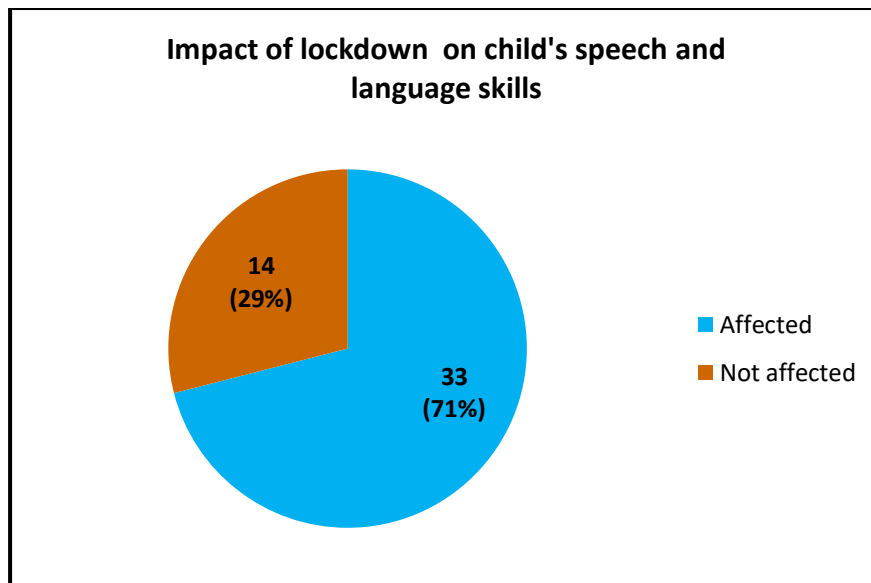
A total of 47 participants (parents of children between 3-6 years old) responded to the survey. When asked about the regression in child's vocabulary during lockdown 70.2% responded positively, 74.5 % agreed that lockdown increased the usage of screen time of their child on a daily basis ,70.2 % agreed child was obsessed to gadgets during lockdown,53.2 agreed overall development of the child has hampered due to lockdown,66% of parents agreed that childs learning skills has reduced during lockdown .When asked whether the child get opportunity to interact with peer group during lockdown 40.4% agreed positively ,57.4% agreed that there was drastic change in child's language skills during lockdown,59.6 % agreed that there is regression in speech due to increased screen time exposure. 48.9% has agreed that lack of

communication has given rise to anger or frustration in children, 68.1 % of children are attending therapy sessions.

Table 2:

	Frequency	%
Affected	33	71
Not affected	14	29

FIG 2:



The above table -2 explains 71% of the children's speech and language skills was affected during the lockdown.

DISCUSSION

The children all throughout the world suffered from a domino effect caused by a lack of social interaction. The child's cognitive and emotional stability have been disrupted, which could have a negative impact on the child's mental health. As the time with gadgets use becomes increasingly longer, it reduces the child's physical activity as well as their social and interpersonal interaction. This leads to problematic addictive media use among children which is a challenge faced by parents during lockdown. School closures and the restricted outside movement, made children spend the entire day indoors. Excessive screen use caused behavioural problems among children such as hyperactivity, inattention and emotional problems. A child is not interacting with those around them when they are obsessed with gadgets. They do not acquire social skills, play skills and language skills. Being locked indoors there is exorbitant media exposure among children.

CONCLUSION

The current study, conducted using a self-assessment questionnaire, explores the impact of lockdown on speech and language skills. Overall, the consensus was that the lives of these children were quieter than they were before the lockdown. The decrease in social interaction during the lockdowns lead to a reduction in the exposure to spoken language. Children's social behaviour and language skills were all negatively impacted by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The increase in screen-time during lockdown also had an impact on language development. Excessive screen time or gaming in children caused significant functional impairment in their everyday life. It disrupted the child's social relationship with family and peers, reduced focus on school tasks, interferes with activities of daily living and caused emotional outbursts. Especially during the growing phase of life, the pandemic isolation has disrupted a child's cognitive and emotional stability which has coercive effects on the child's mental health.

REFERENCE

S. Madiqan, B. McArthur, D. Christakis, 2020 ,Associations Between Screen Use and Child Language Skills: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

Pauline Martinot, J.Y.Bernard, B.Heude ,2021,Exposure to screens and children's language development

G. Fatima Shirly Anitha, Udayakumar Narasimhan,2020, Coronavirus disease 2019 and the inevitable increase in screen time among Indian children: Is going digital the way forward ?

Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills - report

<https://www.bbc.com/news/education>

Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills - report

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news>

How lockdown has affected children's speech and what parents ...

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2021>

Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Communication and Language ...

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>

How lockdown has Affected Children's Speech – and What Parents can do to Help - International Communication Project

<https://internationalcommunicationproject.com/...>

The Impact of COVID-19 on Speech-Language Pathology Practices in Western Kenya | Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups

https://pubs.asha.org/.../2020_PERSP-20-00...

Social Communication - American Speech-Language ...

<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/Social-Communication>

Screen Time and Speech – Is your child's language being affected?

<https://www.andalusiaspeech.com/post/screen-time-and-speech>

© GSJ