VOCABULARY PERFORMANCE IN INSTITUTIONALIZED PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Desempenho de vocabulário em crianças pré-escolares institucionalizadas

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to evaluate the vocabulary performance of institutionalized children and compare with performance of children belonging to public and private schools. **Methods:** 16 children at institutional care in shelter, of both genders, aged between 4 and 5 years and 11 months (experimental group) participated. As the control group, 32 children from public (n=16) and private (n=16) schools matched for age participated, totaling 48 participants. A Vocabulary Test (ABFW) was used, to evaluate the performance of the vocabulary. This test verifies the child's lexical competence and the resources of significance used to name the target word. Statistical analysis of data was performed to analyze differences between the surveyed groups (Kruskal-Wallis). **Results:** it was possible to observe that institutionalized children showed lower performance in the vocabulary test in relation the control groups, which showed no differences between them. In addition, all children showed more difficulty in the semantic fields "professions" and "places". **Conclusion:** children in situations of institutional care have underperformed vocabulary for age and below the performance of preschool children in public and private schools who reside with their families.

KEYWORDS: Vocabulary; Child Language; Child, Institutionalized; Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Every human being has a mental vocabulary which is accessed when it is intended to show, through words, an object, an action or even a fact. Learn words and use them in a correct form is an essential aspect in language development and it is related to the syntax acquisition, morphology and phonology[1,2].

They are mentioned in the literature as factors that possibly interfere on vocabulary acquisition, frequency and word familiarity[3,4], its extensions[5] as well as the environmental insights[6].

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Source: Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo – FAPESP

Conflict of interest: non-existent

Regarding the environment aspects, the literature refers that the premature privation and institutionalization on the first life months affect the emotional, cognitive, social and neurophysiological development of a child. However, until now only a little is known about the specific aspects which interfere in the preschool period of these children[7].

In this study, it is being highlighted, however, the institutionalization of the child as an important variable to be considered on the language development, having in sight the institutions main goal on offering support to many aspects of the development of the children that are sheltered inside these institutions. In order to make the child have a domain over the language, the quality of information that is being acquired as well as the way which the child interacts with the social environment is quite important, that in these cases is the same social environment of the institution. If a child shows bigger opportunities of interacting socially, being an active participant of this interaction, probably this child will reach the

language domain with more effectiveness instead of those children which don´t have this opportunity and do not join actively this adult-child dialogue[8].

However, it can be mentioned that many times the conditions inside the institutions are marked by high privation levels. Children can be malnourished, receive uneffective medical assistant, be unoccupied besides the quality of their interactions with the care takers is often poor[9], and compromising their social development as well as their emotional.

Receiving an appropriate intervention in more premature ages propitiate an improvement on motor development, language skills, cognition and social relations[10]. Considering that the institution can propitiate a relations field which can allow private and affective exchanges which are particularly important to children that are deprived from their parents[11,12], the environment quality and the institutional care are considered quite essential to push forward their development[13,14].

Considering the child environment interference to the language, the evaluation of the vocabulary of institutionalized children needs to be systematic and recurrent. This fact is highlighted in Brazil, because there is an expressive number of children in this institutionalization situation. In this perspective, studies about the institutionalized children vocabulary may offer data which will help the comprehension of the language development and consequently for interventions in education and health about this aspect. Thus, this research had, as a goal, verify the performance of the institutionalized children and compare it with the performance of children that belong to the public and private education.

METHODS

This study was approved by the Ethical Study Committee of Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho, protocol nº2121/2010. The schools where the children of CG1 and CG2 were enrolled and people who are responsible for them were informed about the research and its goals. The principals of the institutions and the parents or people who are responsible for the children who agreed with the participation in this research signed off the Free and Enlighten Consent Term, as the resolution of the Health National Council CNS 196/96.

A transversal study was performed with 16 institutionalized children, of both genders, with ages from 4 to 5 years old and 11 months, and 32 children who came from public and private schools to make part of the control group, totalizing 48 participants. The children were divided in three groups: Experimental Group – EG (compound for 16 children of both institutions), Control Group 2 – CG1 (compound for 16 children of public school) and Control Group 2 – CG2 (compound for 16 children of private school).

The figures below 1 and 2 show data related to the age, gender, grade and permanence time in school of each participant.

Subject	Group	Age	Gender	Scholarship	Permanence time on school
1	EG1	4y	F	Infantil I	Morning
2	EG1	4y	M	Infantil I	Morning
3	EG1	4y	M	Infantil I	Morning
4	EG1	4y2m	F	Infantil I	Morning
5	EG1	4y6m	M	Infantil I	Morning
6	EG1	4y8m	F	Infantil I	Morning
7	EG1	4y10m	F	Infantil I	Morning
8	EG1	5y1m	F	Infantil I	Morning
9	EG1	5y1m	M	Infantil I	Morning
10	EG1	5y1m	M	Infantil II	Morning
11	EG1	5y8m	F	Infantil II	Morning
12	EG1	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
13	EG1	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
14	EG1	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning
15	EG1	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning
16	EG1	5y11m	M	Infantil II	Morning

Legend: EG = experimental group; y = year; m = months
M = male; F = female

Figure 1 - Caracterization of the subjects which belong to the experimental group.

Subject	Group	Age	Gender	Scholarship	Permanence time on school
1	GC1	4y	M	Infantil I	Morning
2	GC1	4y	F	Infantil I	Morning
3	GC1	4y	F	Infantil I	Morning
4	GC1	4y2m	M	Infantil I	Morning
5	GC1	4y6m	F	Infantil I	Morning
6	GC1	4y8m	M	Infantil I	Morning
7	GC1	4y10m	M	Infantil I	Morning
8	GC1	5y1m	M	Infantil I	Morning
9	GC1	5y1m	F	Infantil I	Morning
10	GC1	5y1m	M	Infantil I	Morning
11	GC1	5y8m	F	Infantil II	Morning
12	GC1	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
13	GC1	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
14	GC1	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning
15	GC1	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning
16	GC1	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning
17	CG2	4y	F	Infantil I	Afternoon
18	CG2	4y	M	Infantil I	Morning
19	CG2	4y	F	Infantil I	Morning
20	CG2	4y2m	M	Infantil I	Morning
21	CG2	4y6m	F	Infantil I	Afternoon
22	CG2	4y8m	M	Infantil I	Afternoon
23	CG2	4y10m	M	Infantil I	Afternoon
24	CG2	5y1m	F	Infantil II	Afternoon
25	CG2	5y1m	F	Infantil II	Afternoon
26	CG2	5y1m	M	Infantil II	Morning
27	CG2	5y8m	F	Infantil II	Afternoon
28	CG2	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
29	CG2	5y8m	M	Infantil II	Morning
30	CG2	5y11m	M	Infantil II	Afternoon
31	CG2	5y11m	M	Infantil II	Morning
32	CG2	5y11m	F	Infantil II	Morning

Legend: CG = control group; y = year; m = months
M = male; F = female

Figure 2 - Caracterization of the subjects which belong to the control group.

As per criteria of inclusion to the EG, the children should live exclusively in the institution, at least for one year, and be enrolled in Child Education Public Institutions out of the shelter. Children of EG were inside institutional shelters and received the needed cares of the monitors who relayed in attainment duties every eight hours, being one or two monitors to one group of 15 children. Besides that, they were allowed to go to school, trips and family visits.

The inclusion criteria for CG1 and CG2 were: children should live with at least a member of their originary family and be enrolled in institutions of child education. Children of the three groups were taking the Infantil I or Infantil II grades.

The relatively small sample is due to the children age limit, considering that in the institutions in which the researches were performed, a big part of the children showed higher age than the test which evaluates until ages 5 and 11 months age.

Procedures

In order to have the characterization of the subjects, a quiz was specially elaborated for this study. The quiz consisted of the child data related

to: age; gender; scholarship and; permanence time on school. The institutionalized children data were provided by the social assistant or the coordinator of each of these institutions.

A speech trail was performed with all the children to guarantee that they were not showing complaint or language changes. A questionnaire with all the students´ parents was also applied in order to identify children of possible auditive complaints. This form had questions related to the global development with emphasis on child language and audition. Regarding children in public and private schools, the questionnaire was applied with the parents/responsible, and in institutions with a monitor which has daily contact with the child. Children who demonstrate changes in their development were addressed to speech evaluation.

The language test of ABFW[15] was used to evaluate the vocabulary. The goal of this vocabulary test is to verify the vocabulary competence of the child, the mechanisms used by children, related to the quantity of words and which resources of signification this child uses to try to name the target-word. The test contains analysis of the conceptual fields of clothing, animals, foods, transportation ways, furniture, jobs, places, shapes and colors, toys and musical instruments.

During the applying of the vocabulary test, the order of presentation of the figures was sequenced according to the conceptual fields. When showing the figure, it was asked "What is this?" to all the objects, "What color is this?" to all the colors, "Which shape is that?" to all the shapes, "Which place is this?" to all the places and "Who is he/she?" to all professions. If the child was not able to name the figure in ten seconds, the next figure was shown and the question was asked again. The figures that were not named before starting the next conceptual field were represented, obeying the numeric order. The answers given by the children were transcribed in the specific protocol. The applying time was of about 25 minutes per child. This procedure was applied in schools where there were children from CG1 and CG2. The EG data collection was performed in the same institution where the children were sheltered inside.

The records of the answers provided by the participants were recorded in a specific protocol of the test of vocabulary verification. Following the analysis criteria proposed by the test authoress[15], the answers were classified as designation of usual word (DUW), non-designation (ND) and substitution process (SP).

Data statistical analysis was also performed in order to compare the given performance in the vocabulary test among the participant children of this study and, later on, correlate the different variable. It was applied the Kruskal-Wallis test, with the goal of verifying the possible differences between the performance of the three children groups (EG – Institution; CG1 – Public School; CG2 – Private School), with significance level of 5% (p>0,05).

RESULTS

The group's performance was compared simultaneously, from the categories DVW (Designation by Usual Word), ND (Non-Designation) and SP (Substitution Process). Data was analyzed statistically and there were performed comparisons of EG related to CG1 and CG2.

Data about the Designation by Usual Word category in the three studied groups is presented firstly (Table 1).

Table 1 - Vocabulary performance of institutionalized children (Experimental Group) and not institutionalized (Control Group 1 and Control Group 2) in Designation of usual word.

	Designation of usual word																	
	Clothing		Animals		Foods		Transport		Furniture		Profes-sions		Places		Shapes		Toys	
	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD
EG	56,8	14,0	75,4	13,9	55,9	19,1	70,5	16,1	66,7	7,2	29,3	9,9	21,3	14,2	65,0	26,0	55,6	15,7
CG1	72,5	13,9	93,7	8,6	72,5	11,3	87,0	5,6	77,3	11,8	51,8	15,5	51,5	18,2	93,7	9,5	81,3	22,1
CG2	77,5	13,9	97,0	5,3	77,0	6,9	86,5	6,5	81,5	7,0	56,8	16,6	55,5	18,2	97,5	5,7	88,6	15,0
p	0,001*		<0,001*		0,003*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*	

Legend: EG = Experimental group (institutionalized children); CG1 = Control group 1 (childrenof public school); CG2 = Control group 2 (childrenof private school); p = value; Av = Average; SD = Standard deviation; * = Statistically significant values (p≤0,05) – Kruskal-Wallis Test.

The Table 2 demonstrates the results related to the Non-Designation category in the three studied groups.

On Table 3 data about the Substitution Process category in the three studied groups can be observed.

Table 2 - Vocabulary performance of institutionalized children (Experimental Group) and not institutionalized (Control Group 1 and Control Group 2) in not designation.

	Not designation																	
	Clothing		Animals		Foods		Transport		Furniture		Profes-sions		Places		Shapes		Toys	
	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD
EG	1,8	4,0	4,5	6,3	17,4	16,3	6,7	6,9	7,0	6,6	10,5	9,9	16,1	17,0	11,8	14,7	13,1	15,1
CG1	1,8	5,4	0,8	2,2	9,1	10,5	0,0	0,0	6,7	8,3	11,2	15,4	7,2	12,4	4,3	7,2	6,8	9,0
CG2	3,7	8,0	1,6	3,8	6,2	6,2	1,1	3,0	4,9	5,9	6,8	10,1	8,9	10,7	1,2	5,0	6,2	10,3
p	0,679		0,078		0,085		<0,001*		0,660		0,492		0,093		0,011		0,258	

Legend: EG = Experimental group (institutionalized children); CG1 = Control group 1 (childrenof public school); CG2 = Control group 2 (childrenof private school); p = value; Av = Average; SD = Standard deviation; * = Statistically significant values (p≤0,05) – Kruskal--Wallis Test.

Table 3 - Vocabulary performance of institutionalized children (Experimental Group) and not institutionalized (Control Group 1 and Control Group 2) in substitution process.

	Substitution process																	
	Clothing		Animals		Foods		Transport		Furniture		Profes-sions		Places		Shapes		Toys	
	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD
EG	41,2	11,4	20,0	12,4	26,5	15,9	22,6	11,0	26,8	7,3	60,0	10,3	62,5	18,7	23,1	16,6	31,2	16,3
CG1	25,6	12,6	5,4	8,1	18,3	7,7	12,9	5,6	15,8	8,5	36,8	11,3	41,2	17,6	1,8	4,0	11,8	22,9
CG2	18,7	10,2	1,2	2,6	16,6	8,8	12,3	5,5	13,4	5,7	36,2	20,2	35,5	14,7	1,2	3,4	5,0	9,9
p	<0,001*		<0,001*		0,108*		0,003		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*		<0,001*	

Legend: EG = Experimental group (institutionalized children); CG1 = Control group 1 (childrenof public school); CG2 = Control group 2 (childrenof private school); p = value; Av = Average; SD = Standard deviation; * = Statistically significant values (p≤0,05) – Kruskal--Wallis Test.

As demonstrated on Table 1, the DVW category showed statistically significant values in all the evaluated fields, among the three groups of participants. The SP category (table 3) also showed values of p>0,05 in the majority of the fields, except in transportation, which was not statistically significant. Regarding the ND (table 2), all the fields showed non-significant values, except the transportation fields.

It can be mentioned that in relation to the DVW , it was observed that on conceptual fields “clothing”, “animals”, “foods”, “Furniture”, “professions”, “shapes and colors” and “toys and musical instruments”, the CG2 showed better performance in relation to CG1, considering that only this one showed a better performance in relation to CG2 in the “transportation ways” field. However, there were no differences in the performance of both groups of control.

Regarding the NDs, it was found that in the “clothing”, “animals”, “transportation” and “places” fields, the CG1 showed lower values in relation to CG2, but in the remaining fields, the ND values in relation to CG2 were higher.

Analyzing the SP, it was possible to note that CG1 also showed inferior performance in relation to CG2 in conceptual fields as “clothing”, “animals”, “foods”, “furniture”, “places”, “shapes and colors” and “toys and musical instruments”. In the “professions” field, the CG1 showed a better performance, however it was not significant and, in the “transportation ways” field it showed percentage equal to CG2.

In general, the conceptual fields in which the three groups showed a better performance were “animals”, “shapes and colors” and “toys and musical instruments”. And the fields that showed higher level of difficulty were “professions” and “places”.

Summarizing, the institutionalized children showed lower number of designations by usual words and higher number of substitution processes in relation to the two groups of control in all the researched conceptual fields, as it was possible to observe on the tables. In relation to non-designation, the EG just showed inferior percentage to the other researched groups in the "clothing" conceptual field, but in the other fields, the EG showed higher percentage of non-designations in relation to CG1 and CG2.

Generally, the institutionalized children showed less performance when compared to the children of the other two control groups in the majority of the researched conceptual fields, and the two control groups did not show differences between themselves.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study allowed the vocabulary performance evaluation of the pre-school children in situation of institutionalization in shelters and of children who live with their Family.

A difference between the institutionalized group and the groups who live with their Family was found and the institutionalized group showed lower averages. This result confirms the initial hypothesis that the family and the social environment played an important role in the development of vocabulary skills and semantics of children in pre-school ages.

There was no difference amongst the non-institutionalized children, which can be explained by the fact that the public school participant in this research has a high quality of education and can be considered as reference in the region. A study that aimed to compare the scholar performance between a group that lived with their family and another group of institutionalized children concluded that this last one showed lower averages. This result confirms that the family plays an important role in the scholar development of the children[7,16].

The children of these three researched groups showed a big number of SP, however, it is valid to highlight that these substitutive processes were in some cases synonyms of the target-word. Like, for example, "police car" to "car", "hairdresser" to "barber", "soccer field" to "stadium", "blouse" to "coat", "vase" to "toilet", "police" to "guard", "cowboy" to "farmer".

It was observed that a big part of these children of the three groups showed difficulties in the "professions" and "places" fields. The fact that the children showed higher difficulties in the conceptual fields "professions" and "places" can be related to the references of words to objects which are stable and concrete. Opposite, the references of words of actions are transitory[17]. It is necessary to domain the knowledge, in order to have a good performance in the conceptual fields, professions and places, because capacities of representation and abstraction to acquire these concepts are necessary[18].

Studies which had as a goal verifying the expressive vocabulary of children with phonologic deviation, also showed that the most complex field to children was the "places"[19,20] field. In the age group evaluated, such conceptual fields tend to be less representative and familiar. As per another study[21], factors as familiarity and frequency of figures that should be named make the child access the vocabulary, favoring the naming and score of the shown objects.

In the comparison between the performances of the vocabulary on the three researched groups, it was noted that in the DVW category the non-institutionalized children, which belong to particular or public schools showed better performance in all conceptual fields in comparison to institutionalized children, except in the "professions" field, in which there were no differences.

In relation to the ND, it was possible to observe in the three studied groups, in which they made themselves more present in the conceptual fields "foods", "furniture" and "places", but the EG showed a higher quantity of ND. Another study[19] showed that about the ND, no other field showed itself more complex to children of the researched groups, knowing that the majority showed desirable results in all fields. The results of this research suggested that the children of the studied groups preferred to substitute the target-word than not designating it[19].

In the shown research, in SP, just the processes used by CG1 and CG2 were significant in relation to EG. The CG1 and CG2 groups which performed substitution process more coherent comparing themselves with the EG, meaning that they are processes that are inside of the same semantic field.

Researchers say that the development of language and the vocabulary is extremely complex, are influenced by the environment in which the child is inserted, by social relation established and by the particular characteristics of each human being[22]. The results of this study suggest that the social environment of the institutionalized children did not favored the normal development of acquisition of language and, consequently the vocabulary acquisition.

Besides the fact that the institutionalized children are inserted in public schools, it was noted the difference in relation to the vocabulary performance of the control group. In this way, the found data in this present research indicate that the institutionalized

children did not have in their familiar environments and after that in institutional environment interaction and social relation that seem to have offered lower opportunities to the development of the language. Other authors[23,24] described that children who stay under responsibility of a shelter institution and receive physical care relatively proper, but emotionally indifferent, can present delays in the cognitive and emotional development. These data corroborate the founds of this study on what is possible to note worse performance in institutionalized children in vocabulary tests in relation to children who came from public and private schools, who live with their families.

It is valid to highlight that there are few Brazilian studies about the language evaluation of institutionalized children, as the bigger part of them focus the institutionalized child related to the possible futurepsych-social disorders. It is highlighted that, these questions are very complex and would be necessary new studies to comprehend the effects of institutionalization in the child development process.

CONCLUSION

In this study it was possible to observe that the vocabulary of pre-scholars who live in institutions is under the expectations for the age and inferior in relation to the performance of pre-scholars from public and private schools who live with their families. Therefore, the children of institution seem to be in a less favorable social environment for the development of language in vocabulary-semantic aspects than children from control groups, who live with their families.

It was also possible to observe, that in the three researched groups, the conceptual field where the children presented a smaller number of designations per usual word was the “professions” and “places” fields. The fields which showed better performance were “animals”, “shapes and colors” and “toys and musical instruments” fields.

The results found indicate the necessity of investigations about the different kind of environment variables which interfere in the language development of institutionalized children and the factors of risk associated to language changes and learning of this population.

It is ratified through the data and discussions here exposed the relevance of the performance of the speech therapist and related areas in child institutionalization contexts, in search of better conditions of assistance to this population. The Speech therapist may contribute through preventive actions in assessment and intervention, through consulting, mentoring programs and production of materials for educators and caregivers of these institutions, as well as evaluation of children’s language, language therapy and referral to other professionals in the cases in which such procedures may be necessary.

RESUMO

Objetivo: verificar o desempenho de vocabulário de crianças institucionalizadas e comparar com o desempenho de crianças pertencentes à rede pública e particular de ensino. **Métodos:** participaram deste estudo 16 crianças em situação de acolhimento institucional em abrigo, de ambos os gêneros, com idades entre 4 anos a 5 anos e 11 meses (grupo experimental). Para compor o grupo controle, participaram 32 crianças provenientes de escolas pública (n=16) e privada (n=16) pareadas por idade, totalizando 48 participantes. Para a verificação do desempenho de vocabulário foi utilizado o Teste de Vocabulário – ABFW que verifica a competência lexical da criança e os recursos de significação utilizados para nomear a palavra alvo. Foi realizada a análise estatística dos dados a fim de analisar diferenças entre os grupos pesquisados (Teste de Kruskal-Wallis). **Resultados:** foi possível observar que as crianças institucionalizadas demonstraram desempenho inferior na prova de vocabulário em relação aos grupos controle, que não apresentaram grandes diferenças entre si. Cabe mencionar que todas as crianças demonstraram maior dificuldade nos campos conceituais “profissões” e “locais”. **Conclusão:** crianças em situação de acolhimento institucional em abrigo possuem desempenho vocabulário abaixo do esperado para a idade e inferior ao desempenho de pré-escolares de escolas pública e privada que residem com suas famílias.

DESCRITORES: Vocabulário; Linguagem Infantil; Criança Institucionalizada; Fonoaudiologia

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Received on: July 22, 2014
Accepted on: December 10, 2014

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