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## DISCOVERING LANGUAGE AND SPEECH PATHOLOGIES IN PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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*Discovering language and speech pathologies in pre-school and primary school children: Speech and language abnormalities are associated with communication problems and violation of the sound-articulation features of a person's speech. Breaches of this type that are of a biological nature are known as speech-language pathologies. Speech and language disorders are explored by the science of speech therapy.*

*The term logopedics (from logos, speech, and paideia-education) means science of speech disorders and methods of their prevention, diagnosis, overcoming, social rehabilitation of children and persons with speech and speech disorders. The Subject and focus of speech therapy are the regularities and peculiarities in the occurrence and development of speech disorders and the main processes of correction and rehabilitation of speech functions. In the scope of logopedics is children from preschool and school age as well as adults with abnormal speech status. The main aim of speech therapy is to develop and implement scientifically proven and practically verified methods of speech prevention and treatment of speech pathologies through specialized systems for education, education and socialization of speech pathologists. Theoretical research and the development of tools for the early discovery of linguistic and speech pathologies are the subject of a project INTERACTIVE TOOLS FOR TEACHERS AND CHILDREN AT INITIAL EDUCATION. This project (2017-1-BG01-Ka201-036295) has been funded with support from the European Commission (Erasmus+ Programme).*

**Key words:** Education, Speech and language disorders, speech pathologies

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is a life-long process that begins in the first months of life and continues throughout the years of maturity. Learning processes develop in the early childhood at their fastest speed. Language acquisition and communication are essential for the success of children in kindergarten and school. Communication is a complex human skill that combines physical and mental elements and it is crucial for all children. Modern society requires a high level of communication skills; speech, language, vision and literacy are fundamental skills needed to meet these requirements. Dysfunction in one or more of these areas may lead to communication disorders. By the age of six, children learn basic vocabulary, grammar and more than 90% of the basic vocabulary in their native language. They use their accumulated speech knowledge to convey a wide variety of needs, desires, ideas and fears. As a form of communication, language can be defined as a conventional system of symbols that are combined and used, the latter ones are controlled by certain rules which main purpose is communication (Andreeva, 1999 ).

### EXPLANATION

Literacy problems in the EU are still a challenge. Many children have problems learning their native languages. These early speech and language problems can cause language problems later in life. Language proficiency can have an impact on both educational success and success in socialisation in general. In order to tackle those issues the project consortium (consisting of eight

partners from six countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, and United Kingdom) set the following primary objectives:

i) Increasing the educational chances of children with speech and language impairments/problems by creating a pre-assessment mechanism for use by teachers at nursery and primary schools;

ii) Intervening at the earliest stages of speech and language development (from the age of four to ten) by appropriate language support and therapy;

iii) Helping children to fully benefit from education with speech and language pathology by developing an online tool that will include mobile assessment, practical exercises, and gamification aspects.

First, it was necessary to research the current state of the art on the topic of speech and language pathology at initial education in each country, and what the actual needs of the target groups of nursery and primary school teachers, guidance counsellors, and speech and language therapists/logopedists were in order to find appropriate solutions to the possible issues emerging in the field. Hence, this report aims to conduct and present:

i) Legal regulations desk research;

ii) A comparative situation analysis of survey questionnaires with teachers, guidance counsellors, and parents of children at nursery and primary schools;

iii) Examples of good practices in all six partners' countries. The report is part of the SpeelPath4Teachers project (for more information about the project, please consult [www.speechpathologytools.eu](http://www.speechpathologytools.eu)).

The Law on preschool and school education in Bulgaria, which came into effect in 2017, is stated, that "education is a national priority and it is ensured by applying the following principles:

• 1. Orientation towards the interest and motivation of the child and the pupil, to the age and social changes in his life;

• 2. Equal access and the inclusion of each child and each pupil;

• 3. Equality and non-discrimination "

In part 178 paragraph 1 of the Law on preschool and school education, the general support for the personal development of children aimed at the prevention of learning difficulties is to include individual children in activities according to their needs, such as:

• training through additional modules for children who do not speak Bulgarian - the activity is done by the teachers in groups in the kindergartens;

• application of psychomotor, cognitive and linguistic development programs, individual and group work with established linguistic and/or emotional-behavioural and/or sensory difficulties - the activity is taken by a psychologist, speech therapist or another pedagogical specialist, if necessary - a rehabilitator hearing and speech, etc.

The overall support for personal development at school, which targets all children in a pre-primary school preparatory groups and all pupils in the classroom, ensures their participation in the educational process and the activities of the school and includes:

• Teamwork among teachers and other pedagogical specialists;

• Career orientation of students;

• interest activities;

• library-information services;

• healthcare based on information from the parent, the child's representative or the child care provider, the child's state of health and medical research and counselling, and interaction with the healthcare professional in the health office at the school;

• provision of a hostel;

• encouragement with moral and material rewards;

• activities to prevent violence and overcome problematic behaviour;

• activities for the prevention of learning difficulties, including logopedic work.

Speech and language abnormalities are associated with communication problems and violation of the sound-articulation features of a person's speech. Breaches of this type that are of a

biological nature are known as speech-language pathologies. Speech and language disorders are explored by the science of speech therapy.

The term logopedics (from logos, speech, and paideia-education) means science of speech disorders and methods of their prevention, diagnosis, overcoming, social rehabilitation of children and persons with speech and speech disorders. The Subject and focus of speech therapy are the regularities and peculiarities in the occurrence and development of speech disorders and the main processes of correction and rehabilitation of speech functions. In the scope of logopedics is children from preschool and school age as well as adults with abnormal speech status. The main aim of speech therapy is to develop and implement scientifically proven and practically verified methods of speech prevention and treatment of speech pathologies through specialized systems for education, education and socialization of speech pathologists.

The main goal is realised through the following tasks:

- 1) Study of the causes for the occurrence, development, symptoms, and extent of speech abnormality.
- 2) Systematization and classification of different forms of speech abnormalities.
- 3) Development of methods for diagnosis of speech abnormalities.
- 4) To study the mechanisms of forming the speech function in the context of different deviations in the development of children and adults.
- 5) Development of principles, guidelines and organization of the aids, as well as institutions for its realization.
- 6) Creation of methods and methodologies for specific speech effects, as well as for education and re-education of speech..
- 7) Study on the stages of formation of correct speech under the influence of corrective action.
- 8) Prophylaxis of speech disorders (Karagiozov I., Garbacheva A., 1996, 71).

Language disorders are among the most widespread childhood disorders. They have a strong impact on mental processes and on the communication process, and are related to the emergence of learning problems as well as emotional and behavioural disorders. Early diagnosis and treatment is crucial for later personal and social functioning in adolescence and adulthood.

Language and speech pathologies affect the ability to obtain, understand, produce and express verbal, non-verbal and graphical information. Communication disabilities in childhood may lead to additional negative consequences, such as delay in the development of communicative abilities and normal acquisition of language. This in turn, can lead to limited educational achievements, reduced employment opportunities and social adaptation problems. Effective and early diagnosis of speech and language pathologies, as well as promotion, prevention and education, can create better opportunities for children with communicative disabilities. Such children need appropriate support which to enable them to be socially interactive and to participate fully in the educational processes.

The general support for personal development at school aiming at prevention of learning difficulties is to include individual pupils in activities such as:

1. additional training on subjects with emphasis on Bulgarian language education, including literacy of students for whom the Bulgarian language she is not the first one;
2. counselling on subjects and additional counselling on subjects outside the regular school hours;
3. Logopedic work with students.

Teamwork between teachers and other pedagogical specialists involves discussions on issues and exchange of good practices working with the same children and students to increase the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches. Teachers working in municipal kindergartens, schools and service units know and use in their direct work various types of general support for personal development. They discuss activities, share information and good pedagogical practices to support all teachers to improve their work with children in the classroom or classroom students. They hold regular meetings when they are for prevention purposes between a small group of teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the kindergarten, respectively, between the class teacher, teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the school.

Additional support for personal development under Art. 187 of the WSA addresses four groups of children and pupils: with special educational needs (SOPs) - at risk, with prominent gifts, with chronic diseases and working with a child and a student on a specific case. Additional support for personal development includes: - psycho-social rehabilitation, hearing and speech rehabilitation, visual rehabilitation, rehabilitation of communicative disorders and physical disabilities; - providing accessible architectural, general and specialized support environment, technical facilities, specialized equipment, didactic materials, methodologies and specialists; - providing training on special subjects for pupils with sensory disabilities; - resource support.

The State Educational Standard for inclusive education sets out the terms and conditions to provide general support for the personal development of children and pupils; as well as the conditions and order for providing additional support for the personal development of children and students under Art. 187, para. 2 of the Pre-school and School Education Act and the provision is based on the assessment of their individual needs as well as the preparation of a plan to support the child or the student from a team for support for personal development in the kindergarten or in the school ( The Order for inclusive Education).

Support for personal development is provided in accordance with the individual educational needs of each child and each pupil and is carried out by teachers and other pedagogical specialists in the kindergarten or school - a psychologist, pedagogical counsellor, or pedagogical specialists at the centre for personal support development. To organize and coordinate the process of providing the general and additional support for the personal development of children and students by order of the kindergarten or school director at the beginning of each school year, a coordinating team.

The functions of the logopedist in the institutions of pre-school and school education are related to the effective prevention, diagnosis, therapy and counselling of communicative disorders of children and students. Features include:

1. carrying out an early assessment of the overall development of the child to identify needs to provide general and additional support for personal development;
2. prevention of educational difficulties through the implementation of programs for psychomotor, cognitive and linguistic development of children, etc., after acquainting the parents with the importance of prevention and obtaining their informed consent;
3. assessing the speech and language characteristics of children and students in order to determine the nature of communication disorders;
4. conducting logopedic tests or studies using standardized diagnostic tools and equipment;
5. interpretation of the results of standardized tests and studies and determination of appropriate forms of corrective and therapeutic work;
6. planning, conducting or participating in counselling, speech and speech retrieval programs as well as in programs for the prevention and correction of communicative disorders;
7. planning and conducting adaptive programs for children and students with communicative disabilities in physical disabilities;
8. tracking and supporting the progress in the individual communicative development of children and students, advising teachers and their parents on the specifics of working with them;
9. counselling parents of children and students with communicative disorders and, if necessary, directing them to additional medical or educational services;
10. participation in the personal development support team in the institution that assesses the individual needs of a child or pupil to provide additional support for personal development;
11. participation in planning and conducting forms of in-house training, including sharing good practices ( Order 12 from 1st September 2016 concerning the status and the professional development of teachers, principals and the other pedagogical specialists)

Early assessment of the needs for support for personal development of children takes place in the preschool process and it is carried out by the pedagogical specialists and / or by the psychologist and the speech therapist in the kindergarten and the school. Children at the age of 5 and 6 in preparatory groups in kindergartens or in schools carrying compulsory pre-primary education are assessed for the risk of learning difficulties. (there, Article 10). Within 14 days by the end of the

school year, the teacher of the relevant preparatory group establishes the child's readiness for school that includes physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development in a report.

Logopedic diagnosis of communicative disorders includes:

1. diagnosis of speech disorders;
2. neuropsychological diagnosis of entry and exit level of children from 3 to 6 years of age and of students from primary, lower secondary, first and second high school stage;
3. diagnosis of the language competence of children from 3 to 6 years of age.

The corrective-therapeutic activity with established indications of communicative disorders includes:

1. preparation of individual programs for corrective and therapeutic activity for all children and students with communicative disorders;
2. early logopedic effect with children aged 3-4 with complex communication disorders and at risk of learning disabilities;
3. conducting corrective-therapeutic activity with children and students with communicative disorders.

The advisory activity includes:

1. counselling teachers on the peculiarities and needs of children and students with communicative disorders and providing methodical support in working with children and pupils with communicative disorders;
2. counselling, supporting and motivating parents / representatives of children / carers for children with communicative disorders, for active participation in the logopedic process.

In carrying out the assessment of the individual needs of children and students, the specialists from the team under Art. 68, 2 obligatory:

1. Use assessment methodologies approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (Examples include: Methodology for assessment of the educational needs of children and students; Methodology for functional evaluation and work with children with intellectual disability and autistic spectrum of development; Methodology for assessment of the individual needs of children and students with multiple disabilities; methods for verbal and non-verbal evaluation - PECS system; MACATON; hand-in-hand communication; Tadoma method; C-MAP method; standardization wounds instruments; Test "Binet-Terman"; Test Wexler, etc.);
2. take into account the educational and personal achievements of the child or pupil;
3. take into account the social and emotional development of the child or pupil;
4. use formal and informal methods of monitoring and evaluation;
5. use the information for the child and the student referred to in Article 22 so far;

In accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO) International Classification of Functioning of Man, Disability and Health (ICF) and taking into account the WHO International Classification of Diseases - ICD 10, the assessment of children and students is carried out with an Individual Needs Assessment Card the child or student. It contains the following components:

1. assessment of the functioning of the child or the student;
2. an opinion of the team that carried out the assessment of the individual needs for the resources needed for additional support for the personal development of the child or the student;
3. determination of the specificity and type of additional support - short-term or long-term;
4. a recommendation to use other services, including social services, or to engage in other activities.

## CONCLUSION

A speech disorder refers to a problem with the actual production of sounds. A language disorder refers to a problem understanding or putting words together to communicate ideas. These types of disorders may also cause pain or discomfort for a child when speaking. Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) covers a broad range of work. Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) assess and support people with speech and language difficulties, to help them to communicate better. developing the production of speech sounds, may be given to children who need extra support in school. This is so they can catch up with speech, language and communication skills. Most children with needs will be successfully supported in a mainstream early years setting or school.

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