

Elaine Ashton, Dr Christine Jack, Professor Ghada Khattab, Dr Carolyn Letts, Newcastle University; Dr Sean Pert, University of Manchester; Emily Preston, Sandhaya Sritharan, Professor Cristina McKean, Newcastle University.

Barriers and enablers to the delivery of home language interventions in SLT practice in the UK

Background

The majority of the world's population are bilingual; an asset which brings cultural, cognitive and social advantages. Bilingual children are just as likely to have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) as monolingual children. Working with bilingual clients is a core skill for Speech & Language Therapists (SLTs), although we know that many report significant challenges when working with bilingual clients. This results in inequities in access to SLT for bilingual children in the UK. Challenges were apparent during the LIVELY (Language Intervention in the Early Years) project, which evaluated an intervention delivered in home language for bilingual children working with interpreters. This prompted an evaluation of SLTs' and interpreters' experiences.

Method

First, an online survey, developed by the LIVELY team, asked about SLTs' clinical background and experiences of working with bilingual children and interpreters. It was shared by local and national networks, aiming to reach SLTs throughout the UK. Second, face-to-face interviews were carried out with interpreters. The data collected was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results

Survey responses were received from 62 SLTs representing all regions of the UK. Four interpreters were interviewed. The barriers and enablers identified included availability and access to interpreters, interpreters' level of skill, accuracy of interpretation, role expectations, available time and preparation for appointments, resources, referral information, and professional relationships with the families.

Conclusions

The survey has enabled a better understanding of current clinical practice for bilingual children. Working with this client group can be challenging for both SLTs and interpreters, however, working in the home language is essential for providing an equitable service. Study findings will help SLTs reflect on their clinical practice and points to the key areas of development required in policy, provision, training of SLTs and interpreters, to enable equitable provision for bilingual children.