Gender discrimination in environmental stimulation for language development of children

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ABSTRACT
Parents who around children in the early stages of language learning have a great deal of influence on how and what they learn. Language experiences should be given right from birth and involve children in activities that demand close interaction between the child and the parents/care takers. Looking at the importance of language development and the stimulating environment in early years, which forms the basis for later development of the child, the present research was conducted on male and female children of Hisar district of Haryana State. Two hundred forty randomly selected children of 4-5 years of age and their mothers constituted the sample. Reynell Developmental Language Scale (1985) was used to assess the language development of children and self-developed inventory was used to examine the environmental stimulation in families. The results revealed that the male children were better than the female children in comprehension and expressive components of language but were inferior against the standards given by Reynell. The mothers had better quality of parental and social interaction with male children as compared to females. In addition, male children also had more exposure to mass media than their counterparts which enhance their expression component of language.

Key Words: Gender discrimination, Environmental stimulation, Language development.

INTRODUCTION
Gender bias is a part of social value system which has roots in the family. Gender-based inequalities permeate the very fabric of the social and cultural environment and value systems. She belongs to a society that idolizes sons, and where female feticide and infanticide prevails. It is because of this deep rooted bias that girls are discriminated in families, which results in a denial of basic services necessary for survival, welfare, growth and development of girls. As a seed develops into healthy plant depending upon the environmental factors, so is the case with child’s ability to acquire language skills. The home environment is the first environment that a child gets. The quality of the environment inputs through material, non-material processes has the ever lasting impact on child’s language skills. The kind of environment the child gets, affects the level and quality of language he/she acquired. The language style of parents plays a dominant and important role in the quality of language a child learns and way he communicates. So, the patterns of verbal communication between parent and child and the way in which language is utilised, affects not only the child’s verbal development but also the ability to utilize higher order in problem solving (Freebury and Payne, 1967). A child learns language from the model available in his environment at the time of his language development. Swick (1979), Bricker and Carlson (1981), Norman (1982) found significant positive relationship between parental support and language development. Parents and teachers who are around children in the early stages of language learning have a great deal of influence on how and what they learn. Language experiences should be given right from birth and children should be involved in activities that demand close interaction between the child and the parents/care takers. Looking at the importance of language development and the stimulating environment in early years, which forms the basis for later development of the child, the present problem was planned.
The objectives of present study were: To find out the existing level of language development of male and female children and to study the differences in the quality of environmental stimulation for language development of male and female children.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Hisar district from Haryana State was considered purposively due to easy accessibility. Further six villages from Hisar-I and Hisar-II were selected randomly to meet sample size. Lists of anganwadis from six selected villages of block-I and block-II were prepared. One anganwadi from each selected village was further identified on random basis. Lists of children, in the age range of 4 to 5 years, enrolled with these anganwadis were prepared and a sample of 120 male and 120 female children was selected at random. Thus, 240 children constituted the sample for the present study. Reynell Developmental Language Scale (RDLS) developed by Reynell (1985) was used to examine the language status of the children and self developed environmental stimulation inventory was used to judge the quality of parental interaction, social interaction and media exposure provided to children by parents. To find out the existing level of language development of male and female children mean scores were calculated and compared with standards.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Level of Language Development**

To find out the level of language development in children, mean scores were calculated for verbal comprehension A (VCA), verbal comprehension B (VCB), expressive language (EXLA) according to RDLS norms. Table 1 explains the language performance of male and female children on three aspects of language development i.e. VCA, VCB, EXLA. Mean score of female respondent’s were higher on VCA (51.24) against male children (53.57). When compared with the standard scores, both male and female were below the standard mean (M= 55.50).

The data in Table 1 further highlights that same trend was seen on VCB performance. The mean score of male children was better (M = 49.83) than the females (M = 48.52). However both male and female respondents were below VCB standards (M = 53.2). Results regarding expressive language status of children also revealed the male (Ms = 43.86) superiority over female (Ms = 45.32) counterparts (and in female and male respectively). All the children irrespective of their sex were below the standards for expressive language.

**TABLE 1: Sex-wise Mean Scores of children on the performance of RDLS (N=240)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VCA</th>
<th>VCB</th>
<th>ExLa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female(120)</td>
<td>51.24</td>
<td>48.52</td>
<td>43.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male(120)</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>49.83</td>
<td>45.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDLS Scores</td>
<td>55.50</td>
<td>53.20</td>
<td>50.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: VCA - verbal comprehension A, VCB - verbal comprehension B, EXLA - Expressive language

**Quality of Stimulation**

Table 2 highlights gender differentiates in environmental stimulation provided by the parents. The results of parental interaction (PI) revealed that most of the female children (81) received moderate quality of parental interaction followed by high and low. Though the trend was same but comparatively more male children received high quality (46) of PI against females. There were only four male children who got low quality of PI. Overall, it could be said that male children were provided better quality of PI as compared to females.

Regarding the quality of social interaction (SI), the results indicated that majority of female children were provided moderate (57) to low (53) quality exposure against only 10 female children who received high quality of SI. A reverse trend of quality of social interaction was observed in male children as majority of them were provided moderate (70) to high (38) quality of SI.

Media exposure (MEx) was another area studied under environmental stimulation and data revealed that almost all the families (113) provided low quality of MEx to the female children. None of the family exposed their female children to high quality media. Comparatively, 40 families provided moderate quality of media exposure and 70 families were providing poor exposure to male children. A small number of mothers (10) gave high quality MEx to their male children.
TABLE 2: Sex-wise distribution of children for environmental stimulation

(n=240)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Stimulation</th>
<th>Components of Environmental Stimulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female(120) Male(120)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: PI - Parental interaction, SI - Social Interaction, MEx - Media exposure, TES - Total environmental stimulation

When total environmental stimulation (TES) of male and female children was compared, the data revealed that most of the mothers of female children were providing low (85) followed by moderate (35) quality of stimulation. None of the female child received high quality of stimulation. Though, male children families comparatively were better in providing stimulation but still there were 53 families in low stimulation category followed by moderate and high quality i.e. 45 and 22 families respectively.

It is concluded that the male children were better than the female children in VCA, VCB and ExLa components of language but were inferior to the standards given by Reynell. Female children were provided poor quality of parental and social interaction and media exposure to strengthen language quality. The reason attributed for language status of children might be that the quality and quantity of exposure provided to the child for mastery of language at home, community and school. This showed that the parents still provide better environmental stimulation to male children as compared to females which led to superiority of males in language performance. As far as their performance on total language aspect was concerned it was poor than the standards given in RDLS. The present findings were in collaboration with findings of Saharan (1993). Findings of Masur and Gleason (1980), Norman (1982) provided strength to contention of this investigation that parent-child interactions may exert an active influence on children’s language development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain recommendations based on the results and experiences gained by researcher while conducting the present study are as follows:

The environment of the child in which he/she grows is a major factor to maximize the developmental potentialities. Physical and psychological environments of the child may be considered as antecedent factors to expedite the language expression of the child.

Programmes may be planned especially for parents to develop the attitude that children should be valued equally, regardless of their gender.

Mobile short term training must be imparted to the parents at their door step about language stimulating activities and also how to use the environment in a stimulating manner.

Intervention programmes should be planned by the schools in terms of media exposure and to arrange activities to build the vocabulary, sentence formation and communication skills of children.

Potentiality of child development experts should be utilized in development of programmes, teaching aids and effective implementation of the programme for parents.

REFERENCES


