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Teachers' perspectives on the difficulties they experience with students who stutter, and educational regulations

Pelin Pistav Akmese 

Department of Audiology, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ege, Izmir, Türkiye
pelin.pistav.akmese@ege.edu.tr

Nilay Kayhan 

Department of Speech and Language Therapy, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt, Ankara, Türkiye

Baris Akmese 

Faculty of Medicine, Izmir University of Economics, Izmir, Türkiye

Stuttering, the repetition of voice, syllable or sentence, is a speech and social communication disorder that negatively affects the fluency of speech. Students who stutter are often socially isolated in school, and also experience high anxiety and communication difficulty at different levels. With the study reported on here we investigated teachers' opinions about the difficulties they experience when supporting students who stutter, and how educational regulations are implemented. In this descriptive study the qualitative research method was employed. This method enables an in-depth investigation of participants' opinions and thoughts. Interview notes and observation data were analysed using descriptive and document analysis. Teachers' opinions are described along 4 main themes, namely recognition and intervention, providing cooperation, in-class communication environment, and academic support. The findings in the study show that teachers and peers have a great influence on stuttering children's access to quality education and their social acceptance.

Keywords: communication; cooperation; language and speech therapist; stuttering; teacher training

Introduction

Childhood onset speech fluency disorder (stuttering) is a social communication disorder characterised by interruptions to speech flow, sound prolongations and pauses produced by the repetition of a particular sound or word (Guitar, 2013; Yairi & Ambrose, 2005). Studies on stuttering show that it can negatively affect various areas, such as social, personal and life quality from the preschool period through to adulthood (Garcia-Pastor & Miller, 2019; Johnson, Baxter, Blank, Cantrell, Brumfitt, Enderby & Goyder, 2016; O'Brian, Packman & Onslow, 2004; Ward, 2006). According to Boyle and Blood (2015), stuttering is a communication disorder that is beyond examples of non-fluent speech for many people. This disorder has a multidimensional nature and frequently occurs in social situations. The nature of the disorder includes cognitive, emotional, and social components.

Social Implications of Stuttering

Stuttering causes experiences that are mostly negative for the individual. It also has social consequences that may affect the person who stutters. Thus, it is important to examine the attitudes of different communities towards stuttering and to determine predictor variables to provide changes in attitudes (Boyle & Blood, 2015). According to Tellis and St. Louis (2015), studies conducted until the 1970s focused on determining the causes of stuttering, and defining the nature and clinical processes thereof. Studies with a direct focus on social attitudes and the attitudes of professionals towards stuttering only started in the 1970s. The studies started to address widely reported cases of mocking, bullying, and discrimination – especially towards people who stutter. Studies based on the attitudes of communities in different age groups towards stuttering became prominent. In recent years, studies regarding opinion and attitude towards stuttering have become important in an attempt to change negative attitudes towards stuttering into more acceptable and positive ones. St. Louis (2015) acknowledges that it is important to measure the attitudes of different groups towards stuttering as a social communication disorder. He draws attention to the importance of comparing different populations regarding the attitudes of society. He states that it is necessary to understand the epidemiology of society's attitudes towards stuttering to predict the potential variables related to the attitudes towards stuttering. St. Louis (2015) examined the attitudes of teachers, speech language pathologists and candidates towards people who stutter and the results show that certain variables are more predictive (St. Louis, 2015). Kuruppu and Jayawardena (2015) conducted a study in a leading international school in Sri Lanka. They determined that the knowledge and attitudes of primary school teachers regarding stuttering and children who stutter have a strengthening effect on the children's daily social environment. The majority of primary school teachers thought that their students had the potential to overcome stuttering. Teachers who had experience of teaching at least three or more students who stuttered had a more positive attitude than their colleagues with limited experience. These results show the importance of examining teachers' knowledge levels regarding stuttering and measuring their attitudes, because school is an important social environment for children who stutter as they spend most of their days there.

The Psychological Effects of Stuttering

Iverach and Rapee (2014) state that social anxiety and the severity of stuttering increase in situations where the characteristics of social anxiety disorder such as avoidance of particular environments and situations, and fear of negative assessment due to stuttering become apparently prominent. Social anxiety disorder can be accompanied by communication difficulties that children with stuttering problems are exposed to for life. It can also turn into a multi-directional disorder when secondary mannerisms (e.g., eye blinking and head nodding or other movements of the extremities, body, face or physical tension) appear (Johnson et al., 2016; Lundskog, 2012). Logan, Mullins and Jones (2008) state that children with stuttering problems are thoughtlessly mocked and nicknamed in their environment, and are exposed to offensive expressions and bullying by their peers and other individuals. It has also been stated that high anxiety is observed in individuals with stuttering problems who are exposed to mocking, social isolation and humiliation throughout their lives (Logan et al., 2008).

Stuttering and Educational Life

Stuttering can negatively affect students' educational and professional lives in later years (Iverach, O'Brian, Jones, Block, Lincoln, Harrison, Hewat, Menzies, Packman & Onslow, 2009). The fear of creating a negative impression because of the stuttering forms the basis for the behaviour whereby speech or environments where stuttering may occur are avoided (Ward, 2006). In fact, cooperation between the family, speech and language therapists, teachers, and students with stuttering problems in the social and educational life should be improved.

Relatively little research has been done and published on the difficulties that teachers experience with students who stutter and on teachers' perspectives of educational regulations, which resulted in the urgent necessity for such studies.

Literature Review

Teachers' behaviour and approaches in the school environment have a significant influence on stuttering generally seen in preschool and primary school. Stuttering, which is defined as complex and multi-directional (Guitar, 2013), negatively affects individuals' quality of life (Kathard, Walters, Frieslaar, Mhlongo, Rhooide, Shaboodien, Weidmann, Zimmerman, Zoetmulder & Camroodien-Surve, 2014). Literature suggests that the attitudes of teachers towards the unknown and complex subject, stuttering, should be examined (St Louis, Sønsterud, Junuzović-Žunić, Tomaiuolo, Del Gado, Caparelli, Theiling, Flobakk, Helmen, Heitmann, Kvenseth, Nilsson, Wetterling, Lundström, Daly, Leahy, Tyrrell, Ward &

Węsierska, 2016). In a study to conduct an intercultural comparison between American and Turkish pre-school children, it was found that the attitudes of American and Turkish children were quite similar. In the study, children were asked to compare being obese, being in a wheelchair, and stuttering. The results show that the children had comparatively more negative attitudes regarding the character and personality of children who stuttered while their attitudes regarding the potential of the children who stuttered were more positive (Weidner, St. Louis, Nakisci & Ozdemir, 2017). Considering that children regard adults as role models in their early years, teachers' approaches and attitudes towards students who stutter are important for the classroom environment. In another study, the knowledge and attitudes of primary school teachers in Cairo were examined. The study was conducted with 100 teachers from four state primary schools. The results of the study show that teachers' behaviour towards students who stutter influenced the students' self-concept and how their peers treated them. If primary school teachers have enough knowledge about stuttering and how to intervene, they can make important contributions to the early detection of students who stutter. The findings show that teachers with positive attitudes also had high levels of knowledge (Elrefaie, El Ella, El Halim & Gobran, 2022). Thus, pre-school and primary school teachers' knowledge about stuttering can contribute to class participation of students who stutter and to their social relationships with friends. Children who stutter experience negative behaviour such as peer bullying and mocking in the school environment (Mallick, Kathard, Borhan, Pillay & Thabane, 2018). In various studies stuttering has been described as a factor that predicts peer bullying such as other factors do, namely disability, low academic achievement, ethnic background, and language (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Yaruss, Reeves & Herring, 2018).

When determining the educational regulations for students with speech disorders, the programmes they follow should be planned in accordance with the type and level of the speech disorders, existing communication performances, characteristics of the family and close environment of the preschool period (Le, Le, Nguyen, Mudiyansele, Eadie, Mensah, Sciberras & Gold, 2020; UN Humanitarian, 2023). For example, teachers should determine the communication to be used with the student while deciding what to do to support the communication skills of students who stutter and to which institutions and experts they should be referred. It is thus extremely important for teachers to accurately determine the existing communication performance of the students who stutter and to cooperate with relevant experts and language

speech therapists in their teaching approach. To support teachers by providing proper training, it is important to attend to their methods of dealing with the stuttering, the difficulties they experience when working with the students who stutter, and to determine their professional needs. With this study we investigated the difficulties that teachers experienced in supporting students who stutter, and their opinions about the educational regulations.

Theoretical Framework

Children obtain effective communication opportunities in a rich and qualified environment. According to Vygotsky's theory in which the social environment is emphasised, language is a tool – it is understood and interpreted with experience, effective communication and interaction. Knowledge is constructed cognitively and socially. For example, students construct knowledge through real experiences and social interactions at school. Social constructivism considers the school as a significant environment for children because learning occurs as a result of interaction and effective communication with peers and teachers. The school environment where the child interacts socially should be a qualified and inclusive place for every child. For stuttering children, the school environment should be an environment where they can develop qualified interaction with their peers and teachers, and access appropriate support. The teacher's role in the class based on social constructivism is to enable cooperation and to provide peer-mediated student-centred education (Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah & Okoro, 2020).

Urie Bronfenbrenner also presented a model in which the role of the environment is emphasised. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory a child's development is best explained in four main layers. These layers are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, of which the classroom environment is a significant area for children (Lindon & Brodie, 2016).

A child's interaction with others starts in the family environment, and it is, therefore, important to investigate the family history of children who stutter (Buck, Lees & Cook, 2002). The acceptance of a child starts in the family (microsystem) and this is supported by peers and the close environment (mesosystem). The environment where children encounter their peers is the exosystem (the school, health and other services). The quality of the child's environment and the presence of supportive policies are important for a child's development and total participation in life. School is an important area within the exosystem and inclusive teachers and peers are critical for every child in this environment. Inclusive teachers regard students' needs and background as important, adopt different teaching methods and are open to professional development (Muzata, 2018).

Family dynamics, genetic factors, development history and neurophysiological findings are important factors in stuttering. Teachers who have the appropriate knowledge about stuttering and who apply the correct strategies can greatly assist students who stutter. Supportive peers and teachers are important in the school environment because their attitudes can help the child who stutters to develop a sense of belonging in the school (Edwards, 2013; Sander & Osborne, 2019; Yates, Hudock, Astramovich & Hill, 2018). It was, therefore, necessary to examine the relationship of stuttering individuals with their teachers and peers in the school environment.

Ezrati-Vinacour, Platzky and Yairi (2001) examined children's awareness of fluency and disfluency of speech. They found that most children reach full awareness at the age of 5 years old. Thus, early diagnosis and speech and language therapy, support in communication skills, and acceptance in the family and school environments are important for children who stutter. National or local school policies are at play at this stage. If there are no educational policies to guide teachers in their support of children who stutter, the exosystem level, which includes educational services, will be a problem area for the child. Educational practices in schools will be insufficient to meet the needs of the school-going child. Even if the teachers' attitudes towards children with stuttering are positive, but they lack guidance, they may have conceptual fallacies about how to intervene in the classroom (Abrahams, Harty, St Louis, Thabane & Kathard, 2016). When examining teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards stuttering, it has been stated that they exhibit wrong behavioural patterns when dealing with a student who stutters and do not know what the classroom strategies should be. It has been noted that teachers frequently say the words for the student when the stuttering starts instead of leaving it to the student to complete the words (Abdalla & St. Louis, 2012). Thus, it is suggested that classroom-based stuttering intervention programmes that include the student's teachers and peers should be developed and that the teachers be taught certain strategies (Langevin, 2015).

Teaching teachers what stuttering is and how to treat students who stutter is the right approach to empower them. Unless the teacher has appropriate knowledge about what their attitude towards children who stutter should be, the therapy will be insufficient. The speech and language therapy provided to the child cannot be transferred into daily life because the success of the therapy process depends on the attitudes of the important people in a child's life (Abdalla & St. Louis, 2012). The communication skills of children who stutter are mostly supported in the family and classroom environment. However, unless teachers know how

to support children who stutter, they cannot communicate with them and cannot support children's communication with their peers. Because peers and teachers play a key role in the communication of children at school, it is essential that they support children who stutter in the school environment (exosystem). According to Bronfenbrenner, interacting with their peers is an important factor in child development. Yaruss et al. (2018) draw attention to six main principles to minimise the difficulties that children who stutter encounter when bullied by their peers. These principles are (1) educating children about stuttering, (2) educating them about bullying, (3) helping children change the way they think and feel about their stuttering, (4) helping children learn to use appropriate assertive responses, (5) educating peers and bystanders about stuttering and bullying, (6) educating parents, teachers, and administrators. As a result, examining what kind of support teachers need when communicating with children who stutter will reveal critical findings about the support to be provided to the child and the teacher.

With this study we aimed to investigate the opinions of teachers about the difficulties they experience while supporting the communication skills of students who stutter, and with educational regulations. Answers to the following sub-problems were sought in the study:

- 1) What are teachers' opinions about the education services provided to students with stuttering problems?
- 2) How should educational services for students with stuttering problems be planned and applied in schools?
- 3) What are teachers' opinions about problems experienced by students with stuttering problems in the education process and the causes of these problems?
- 4) What do teachers suggest to increase the quality of services provided to the students with stuttering problems?

Methodology

We investigated the opinions of 11 teachers who worked in pre-, primary and secondary schools about the difficulties of students with stuttering problems. The methodology included the research design, sample/participants, data collection tool, application and analysis sections.

Study Group

The homogenous sampling method, among purposive sampling methods, was preferred for this study conducted in the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods (Mason, 1994). Homogenous sampling was formed by bringing 11 teachers with the same teaching experiences together for a particular purpose, asking them open-ended questions and receiving answers to these. In the study, data were obtained from semi-

structured interviews with 11 teachers (one pre-school teacher, five classroom teachers and five branch teachers). The homogeneity of the participant group in this study was that they were graduates of a faculty of education, had work experience with children who stutter, and had taught the national curriculum programme. All teachers worked in the same settlement unit (a rural village area in Izmir) and followed the national education programme with the group they worked with in the state school. All 11 teachers attended training on effective education strategies and stuttering education.

The professional seniority of the 11 teachers (four male, seven female) and that they had working experience of between 9 and 15 years (T1, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8, T10). Of the teachers who were between 23 and 41 years old one worked in the pre-school (Participant T6), five in primary schools (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5) and five in secondary schools (T7, T8, T9, T10, T11). All teachers interviewed in the study had at least one student in their classes who stuttered. The participant group (sample) of 11 teachers could be regarded as a limitation of this study, but can be explained as follows. Students with different characteristics study in educational environments. When determining the teachers to be interviewed for this study, we took into account that the teachers worked with at least one student who stuttered, and stated that they needed training about strategies to provide quality education.

Data Collection

The 11 teachers who worked in a rural area (village) in Izmir were interviewed using a semi-structured interview form with seven questions. These questions were based on the literature and the opinions of three field experts were considered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interview process was as follows. The first author, (an audiology and speech language pathology expert and faculty members at a university in Izmir), conducted the field study (observations, interviews) with the teachers. The first author presented a seminar, "The Effective Education Strategies in Communication Language and Speech Disorders" to the participating teachers. The third author accompanied the first author in the field work. The research questions were prepared by the first two authors who were educators at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and presented seminars on special education, communication, language and speech disorders, teacher training, co-teaching to support communication and language skills.

The study, based on the principle of voluntary participation, was conducted during the field study in the schools where the teachers worked. This was done before the seminar mentioned above was presented in the spring term of the 2018–2019 academic year. Interviews were conducted in a

single session and each individual interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes. The questions on

the semi-structured interview form are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Semi-structured interview question list

1) Can you describe a typical day of yours at school?
2) Can you tell us the process of noticing students with stuttering problems?
3) How should the lesson planning for students with stuttering be done? Which factors affect this process?
4) How do you assess the development and performance of students with stuttering problems?
5) Which aspects (programme, family participation, peer interaction, etc.) do you find successful while teaching students with stuttering problems?
6) What opinions the problems that you experience in the education of students with stuttering problems (participation to lessons, communication with you, his/her family and friends, academic achievement, social communication)? What do you think cause these problems?
7) What do you suggest for providing quality education to the students with stuttering problems in schools?

Data Analysis

Observations and semi-structured interviews were carried out with the homogenous sample of teachers who had students with stuttering problems in their classrooms. An observer's log was recorded during the field study and observation data were obtained (Creswell, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Mason, 1994). Three researchers analysed the notes and observation data obtained during the interviews using descriptive analysis and document analysis in three stages, namely, preparation, organisation, and reporting. Conceptual structures were determined based on the patterns within the data itself, and were converted into categories within content integrity. In the last stage, themes were extracted and the findings were obtained (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Preparation stage

In this stage, records obtained from the interviews were transcribed. The written field notes taken during the seminar process were read. An online data list was obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the 11 participants, while a descriptive index, descriptive data, and comments by the interviewer were read separately by us. Our comments were then combined. Each participant was allocated and referred to by a code (T1, T2, ... T11) in order to maintain the anonymity. All data were transferred into an electronic environment after which the organisation stage started.

Organisation stage

The research responses were carefully read to gain a holistic view of the data. A conceptual framework was taken as a basis for creating the main themes. It was decided under which themes and categories the answers given by the participants would fall. Similar and repetitive data were analysed under certain concepts and themes.

Reporting stage

In the data reporting stage, conceptual relations of the explanations were taken into account. The aim was to provide validity by directly noting the opinions of the participants. Repeatability and intercoder reliability calculations were done on the

sub-themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Intercoder reliability using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula (Reliability = [Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)] * 100) was calculated and found to be 92%.

Findings

By examining the teachers' opinions on stuttering, noting the relations of students who stuttered with their peers and adults at school and in their daily life; considering how they participated in the class, asking for the right to speak, and their academic success and regulations to support their social development, four main themes and nine sub-themes (see Table 2) were identified.

Table 2 Main themes and sub-themes obtained from participants' responses

Themes and sub-themes	
1.	Recognition and intervention
1.1	The need for knowledge about true diagnosis, detailed assessment
1.2	Effective intervention methods and practices
2.	Providing cooperation
2.1	Attempts regarding family and colleague cooperation
2.2	Interventions regarding peer support in in-class process
3.	In-class communication environment
3.1	Fight with peer bullying
3.2	Self-confidence support
4.	Academic and social support
4.1	Educational regulations
4.2	Teacher training through pre-vocational training
4.3	Monitoring and assessment of development

Recognition and Intervention

Under the theme, recognition and intervention, teachers gave their opinions about noticing students with stuttering problems in their classrooms, true diagnosis, detailed assessment periods, knowledge needed, and effective intervention methods, and practices. It has been stated that pre-school teachers and classroom teachers notice students with stuttering problems early on. All teachers stated that it was important for the other teachers to receive active support from the school counsellor

about the students with stuttering problems. In addition, they indicated that the content on special education and practicums in the undergraduate programme in the faculty of education should be increased. For example: *“I notice the students with stuttering but I don’t know what to pay attention to, for example, I often make them talk but I don’t know if this is a correct practice”* (T3).

Teachers consider having a counselling teacher in the school (T1, T3, T9) as important for applying the individual education plans (IEP) effectively, helping with family education, and overseeing the progress of inclusive education.

Providing Cooperation

Teachers who emphasised cooperation by family and colleagues and support by peers (T1, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T11) stated that students with special needs should receive education together with their peers with normal development. Besides emphasising the co-teaching environment, the teachers also stated that the sociocultural characteristics and family structures of the students who stutter are effective for their academic success and peer relationships (T1, T3, T5, T8). Emphasising the importance of family support, they mentioned that the families should accept the cooperation, and be persuaded to participate in the diagnosis, assessment and education processes. Participant T10, who stated that they could not meet the family, said:

Families face misguidance and neglect. The family generally focuses on academic success when it comes to communication with the school and teachers. According to me they must discover their talents and develop a good dialogue with the children (T10).

For support, a big majority of the teachers underlined training programs which will be received from the experts in universities, who can give education about communication, language and speech disorders field (all participants except T2).

Experts on special education, language and speech areas can provide education to the family and teachers separately and sometimes together (T11).

In-class Communication Environment

All teachers stated that they did not have problems with teacher-student interaction in the in-class communication environment. They stated that the students in the last grades of primary school (T1, T3, T5) and secondary school (T7, T8, T9, T11) make fun of their friends with stuttering problems. Participant T1 stated that the (teachers) were role models in the in-class situation to fight against peer bullying and to provide support regarding self-confidence for students who stutter.

It first starts with anxiety and fear of exclusion. When the student is absent, I talk to the peers to prepare the classroom. I treat all students equally, give an opportunity to talk to the student with

stuttering and give him/her more time in the in-class process. (T1)

The teachers stated that the students who stutter were especially excluded by their peers (T1, T3, T4, T5, T8) and that the level of peer bullying was higher in secondary school (T7, T8, T9, T11). Teachers also mentioned that their own attitudes towards learners who stuttered was effective in decreasing the speech problem and creating an accepting classroom climate (T8, T9, T10, T11). The visual arts teacher (T10) who emphasised the importance of social activities and noticing the students’ talents, stated that students who stuttered were positive about the course. Participant T10 noted that, like the other students, students who stutter need to realise their strengths in order to fight off peer bullying. The participant stated: *“I don’t have much difficulty in my lesson, I try to discover the areas they are talented for each of my students so that they can recognize themselves in this process and realize that they may have different aspects”* (T10).

Academic and Social Support

The teachers stated that they can plan a more effective teaching process when they take note of the students with stuttering problems and use the support of the family and colleagues. With regard to the professional needs of the teachers regarding the education of the students with stuttering problems, they stated that they adopted their teaching in order to support students’ academic and social development in in-class and out-of-class processes. For academic support teachers (T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T8, T9, T11) emphasised the importance of the level at which the student studies; they drew attention to the fact that peer interaction and support were more successful during the pre-school and primary school periods. They also mentioned that the counselling units should actively work in cooperation with the family (all participants). Participant T1 stated that they needed the cooperation of and communication with the family to develop professional knowledge and skills:

They can have anxiety and fear at first, however, I make some arrangement, some academic adaptations in the in-class process such as physical arrangements, seating arrangement, giving the right to speak, showing that I respect their peer as a role model during the speech, activities showing that each of them has different qualities. In-class participation of the student with stuttering problems increases as s/he succeeds. (T1)

Teachers’ course planning, effective application of the teaching process and effective teaching skills are important. It is imperative for teachers to work with the language and speech therapists and special education experts who work in the field of language and speech disorders and to prepare

theoretical and applied education in order to develop these skills.

Discussion

Important findings of this study draw attention to the adaptations that teachers make when they notice that students stutter in order to support the relationship with the student's peers and family in terms of academic and social aspects at school and in everyday life. The teacher opinions on which the findings are based were collected under the main themes: recognition and intervention, providing cooperation, in-class communication environment, and academic support. The teachers also mentioned communication difficulties that they and the families of the students who stutter experienced. In the literature, Blood and Blood (2007) state that if individuals who stutter are supported in early childhood with effective intervention strategies, the social acceptance and participation of the individual will increase in the following period. Blood and Blood (2007) also state that children who stutter at school-going age face peer rejection and bullying, and their academic success decreases. Ollendick and Hirshfeld-Becker (2002) suggest that the regulations in the class periods at school have vital significance in peer acceptance for students who stutter. The teachers stated that the problems accompanying stuttering were not only limited to in-class activities but also negatively affected peer interaction in social environments. In the literature, the importance of education for the families of individuals with special needs, and the planning and implementation of early intervention and education processes by field experts in cooperation with the families are emphasised (Iverach & Rapee, 2014; Logan et al., 2008).

When examining the opinions of the teachers about their support to ensure academic success and social development of students who stutter, the teachers emphasised peer cooperation in the classroom and on the playground as well as the out-of-class family and social environment. To support the education of students with stuttering problems, the teachers stated that they had difficulty in finding language and speech therapists because this was a newly developed field of speciality in Türkiye. Similarly, Silva, Martins-Reis, Maciel, Ribeiro, Souza and Chaves (2016) point out that teachers' knowledge levels about stuttering are not at the desired levels. Teacher training programmes on stuttering expanded their knowledge on stuttering. Elrefaie et al. (2022) examined the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and found that teachers did not have sufficient knowledge although they had moderate levels of awareness. In our study, primary school teachers stated that they needed training on what to do when they had students who stuttered in their classes. We suggest that group studies, programmes, courses,

and workshops could be arranged in order for teachers to benefit from the experiences of their colleagues who previously worked with students who stuttered.

The teachers also emphasised the importance of the fact that families should inform the school when they notice that their children struggle with stuttering. They also stated that the families who attended the information sessions also supported the education period. Teachers stated that students who stuttered missed out on the right to speak, and observed repressive, mocking, humiliating, laughing behaviour in primary school and generally peer bullying in secondary school. Thus, they emphasised that schools should have counsellors available to support students who stutter. The teachers stated that stuttering leads to social anxiety during adolescence, and that the causes of the stuttering should be investigated, realised and improved early in the students' lives. García-Pastor and Miller (2019) support this finding and show that students who stutter avoid reading out loud and that their anxiety levels increased when communicating with adults. Findings from this descriptive study will assist in shaping policies and initiatives to increase integration in learning environments.

Conclusion

Important results about teachers' communication difficulties were obtained from the interviews conducted with the teacher participants in this study. The majority of the participants stated that they needed training in the area of communication, language and speech disorders. The study results show that teachers and peers have a great impact on stuttering children's access to quality education and that they can increase their social acceptance in their classrooms. Professional training by language and speech therapist can be provided to the teachers who work in pre-, primary and secondary schools about how to communicate with students who stutter and how to provide support through in-class and out-of-class activities. In order to decrease the fear of exclusion and mocking of students who stutter in the education environment, teachers can be taught effective intervention strategies. Besides speech therapy education, psychological support processes can be provided to students who stutter for them to be able to deal with peer bullying, violence, and other negative experiences, and to prevent this behaviour.

Authors' Contributions

PPA and BA conducted the interviews and provided the data. PPA and NK performed all qualitative analyses. PPA, NK, and BA wrote the article. All authors reviewed the final version of the article.

Notes

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