

TESS Article – Maria Camilleri

MSc in Clinical Speech and Language Sciences under the Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme (TESS)

The Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme helped to support my three-year post-graduate studies in Clinical Speech and Language Sciences. This degree, which is offered part-time by the University of Malta and Faculty of Health Sciences helped to expand my knowledge and expertise in the field of Communication Therapy. The first four semesters of my course consisted of lectures and assignments in areas related to developmental speech and language disorders such as written language disorders, speech sound disorders, fluency disorders and language disorders in children. The last year of my studies focused on a dissertation project. My research topic was on Speech Sound Disorders and Phonological Awareness Skills in Maltese Children aged 4 to 6 years.

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was used in this study. I applied knowledge I had learnt in previous lectures and the research methods module. This study explored the 5 sub types of speech sound disorders in children - articulation disorder, phonological delay, inconsistent speech disorder, consistent deviant phonological disorder and developmental verbal dyspraxia. It also explored whether children with speech disorders present with phonological awareness difficulties and are at an increased risk for consequent reading disability. Five research tools were used for the purpose of this study: a speech assessment, a phonological awareness screening tool, an intelligibility rating scale and two self-developed questionnaires for parents and teachers. Findings show that typically developing children outperformed children with SSD on all measures of the Phonological Awareness Screening Tool. Moreover, children with inconsistent and consistent phonological disorders performed less well than children presenting with articulation difficulties or phonological delays. Bilingual Maltese-English speakers performed better than monolingual speakers on all measures of phonological awareness. Participants with a family history of literacy and/or language based disorders exhibited poor phonological awareness abilities.

I apply the knowledge I have gained from this Masters degree in my clinic and with children I meet everyday. It is fundamental for my future career and future prospects, also paving a way to a PhD study in the near future.