

The Effects of the Pragmatic Intervention Programme (PICP) in Preschool-Age Children

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FIGURE 1

Speech and language therapist and children with ASD, during a PICP-based intervention session.

Using language for social purposes can be a real challenge for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) with pragmatic difficulties. Therefore, early, effective, and evidence-based interventions are crucial to minimise the long-term impacts of pragmatic language impairments. Despite the challenges, studying the effects of intervention programmes in heterogeneous populations such as ASD and DLD is essential.

In Portugal, the Pragmatic Intervention Programme (PICP) is the only intervention programme that was developed and content-validated for preschool-age children with pragmatic impairments. It includes 11 skills and advocates that these skills should be worked on with different communicative partners (e.g., peers, teachers) and in multiple contexts (e.g., home, kindergarten) to promote skills generalization. The effects of this programme are being studied through a non-randomized controlled trial with preschool-age children with ASD and DLD.

In this study, each child attends 24 PICP-based intervention sessions provided by a Speech and Language Therapist, bi-weekly, in kindergarten, where the active participation from several communicative partners is a premise. Outcome measures include a Goal Attainment Scale, rated by parents and kindergarten teachers; parent/teacher-reported communication skills (Escala de Avaliação de Competências Comunicativas – EACC) and an assessment of the child's general language ability (Teste de Linguagem – Avaliação da Linguagem Pré-Escolar – TL-ALPE). Data from 20 children with ASD and DLD (experimental group, $n = 11$; control group, $n = 9$) shows that the PICP contributes to a significant language improvement in preschool-age children with ASD and DLD with pragmatic difficulties. However, further research is needed to analyse the effectiveness of the PICP for each neurodevelopmental disorder individually, to contribute to future research and evidence-based practice.

