



Brief

The Importance of Early Special Education Support in Preschool for Successful Schooling

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In Sweden, the decision of whether children attend preschool, receive educational care, or stay at home prior to formal schooling rests with the parents. This choice is significant in the context of children's language development, as research has shown that some children exhibit what is termed "linguistic vulnerability" before they start school. This term refers to a mismatch between the linguistic abilities of the children and the demands of their environment. This imbalance can have far-reaching consequences, potentially leading to misunderstandings that affect various aspects of children's lives, including their participation in play, desire to learn, development of behavioral problems, and future reading and writing skills. The role of preschools is particularly significant in this regard. Unlike other forms of early childhood care, preschools in Sweden have a structured curriculum aimed at preparing children for school, with a specific focus on language development. However, some preschool teachers feel they lack adequate knowledge in this area. This gap in teacher preparedness is problematic, given the importance of early identification and support for children with linguistic vulnerabilities. Special needs teachers, therefore, become integral in recognizing and assisting these children. However, there exists a noticeable gap in research regarding special educational efforts targeted at preschool children. Addressing this research gap, our longitudinal study followed six children born in 2003 from a municipality in Sweden. These children, identified as needing special educational support in language development, were observed until their sixth year of school. The primary goal of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how children with linguistic vulnerabilities are identified and supported, and to assess the effectiveness

of such support by comparing it with the children's academic results in Swedish language studies up to year six. The data for our study was collected from various sources. It included anonymized documents showing results from national tests conducted in years three and six, as well as grades from year six in the Swedish subject. Additionally, we examined records of the special education efforts provided to these children before they started school. To gain further insights, interviews were conducted with two special educators in preschool, along with email correspondence with a special educator and a principal from the schools involved. Our findings highlight the critical importance of early specialized education in preschool for the successful academic progression of children, especially those with linguistic vulnerabilities. The use of diverse semiotic resources proved crucial in both the identification and support of these children's needs.

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