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TABLE OF BRIEF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. PEDAGOGY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD – AN INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE IN EDUCATION POLICY AND SCIENCE
 - 2.1 Supply and Access
 - 2.2 Authority of Ministries
 - 2.3 Pedagogical Quality
 - 2.4 Summary
3. DEVELOPMENT OF SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE – A DISCOURSE IN LINGUISTICS AND DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY
 - 3.1 Linguistic Background
 - 3.2 Linguistic Acquisition Theories
 - 3.3 Language Acquisition – A Holistic View
 - 3.4 Milestones of Spoken and Written Language
 - 3.5 Second Language Acquisition
 - 3.6 Disorders of Spoken and Written Language
4. LANGUAGE AND THE SUPPORT OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT – A DISCOURSE IN PEDAGOGY
 - 4.1 Early Childhood Education – A Question of Importance for the Pedagogical Work in Kindergarten
 - 4.2 Spoken and Written Language Support – Backgrounds and Contents of the Pedagogical Work in Kindergarten
 - 4.3 Summary
5. A CONCEPT TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN KINDERGARTEN
 - 5.1 Interests and Preliminary Work
 - 5.2 »SAPI« - A Holistical Concept to Support Language Development for all Children Right from the Start
 - 5.3 Summary
6. DESIGN OF STUDY
 - 6.1 Questions of Interest
 - 6.2 Methodology

- 7. RESULTS
 - 7.1 Level of Spoken and Written Language Development
 - 7.2 Language Education and Support from Kindergarten Teachers
- 8. DISCUSSION
 - 8.1 Summary
- 9. REFLECTION
 - 9.1 Methodical Reflection
 - 9.2 Reflection on the Concept of »SAPI«
- 10. FUTURE PROSPECTS
- 11. SUMMARY
- 12. LISTS
 - 12.1 References
 - 12.2 Abbreviation
 - 12.3 Tables
 - 12.4 Figures
- 13. APPENDIX
 - 13.1 Materials of »SAPI« Concept
 - 13.2 Training Curriculum for the »SAPI« Concept to Support Language Development
 - 13.3 Language Proficiency and Development Language Tests
 - 13.4 Curriculum of Early Childhood Education and Care for Thuringia
 - 13.5 Pedagogical Approaches
 - 13.6 Design for the Educational Plan
 - 13.7 Observations

SUMMARY

School achievement studies like PIRLS, TIMSS and PISA are offering an opportunity to monitor achievement trends in a global context. As a consequence in Germany, politics but also pedagogical professional discourse focuses now more on early childhood education and care. A major focus is now to support language development right from the start. It is partly due to the fact that language is an essential background for the development of cognitive and social skills and thus an essential prerequisite for a successful education. Also in the current figures of Education Reports in 2012 and 2014, 23% of the 3 to 7-year-olds are diagnosed with language problems. Looking more closely at the numbers it shows that those children are not only from educationally disadvantaged families or have German as a second language background: Between 40% to 45% of the children are from families with an average or high level of education back-

round and about 22% are native speakers of German. These figures force a critical look at the common practice for language support in Germany. Each federal state in Germany has its own specific methods to support language development and they are in general not optimized to meet the standards of language testing and they usually only start to work when development delays or already exist.

For the author, these aspects were the main reason to develop and test a concept as a possible part of the early childhood education in kindergarten and to support language development and acquisition. In order to meet this requirement, the Language Support Concept »SAPI« includes age-appropriate support content, the integration of language support in other areas of education with the help of the project work, language level tests and a Training Curriculum for kindergarten teachers. This makes it possible for language support to be a part of daily education and to ensure targeted support from the beginning.

The implementation of the Language Support Concept was monitored for a period of 16 months in three different kindergartens. The empirical part of the study consists of language level tests and the documentation and analysis of the planning of educational work, pedagogical approaches and the Curriculum of Early Childhood Education and Care for Thuringia, the observation and analysis of education situations. As a main conclusion of the study it was made clear, how big the influence of pedagogical quality characteristics is and how high and complex the performance requirement for kindergarten teachers are.

The results show that kindergarten teachers which have a knowledge of developmental psychology and pedagogical strategies have been much more effective in supporting language development in children. The study also shows that groups with little age difference have a positive effect on pedagogical planning and strategies as well as the effects of the support. Those groups showed a higher reduction of language support needs and a higher increase in children with normal linguistic abilities. The relationship between the age differences in a group and the development of specific linguistic competences is statistically significant. The Concept of Supporting Language Development »SAPI« builds a link between the distinction in linguistic education and language support in Germany. The concept »SAPI« gives kindergarten teachers a possibility to support language development in their daily educational work and because of that they are able to accompany and support language development continuously and effectively.

Studies like "EPPE" (2004), "BIKS" (2010) and "NUBBEK" (2012) were able to clearly show that the process quality, which has a major impact on child development, is affected through structural qualitative features, such as group size, age structure, staff-child ratio and the level of education and training of professional educators. The results of this study support these

claims and illustrate the prevailing divergence between the new claim of early childhood education and care and the environment in kindergarten. The pedagogical structure quality must be improved. That is the only way that a Concept of Language Support, like »SAPI«, can be a part of the pedagogical education and can also be effective for development of childhood language.