

Background

Multilingual children with suspected SLCN are often overlooked or their needs not accurately differentiated regarding the necessity of language support or therapy. Purpose of the study: To conceptualize, carry out & evaluate a local Language Support (LS) project within linguistically & culturally diverse (LCD) families, and establish its effects on collaborating participants. In addition to structured observations, two accompanying Bachelor projects were carried out. Research questions:

1. How does the project impact on the communicative abilities of the participating children?
2. What experiences do liaison workers (LW) report from the pilot phase, regarding (a) achievements, (b) barriers and (c) further development of the LS project?
3. How do 2-year-olds pragmatic-communicative skills change over the course of an intense five-week LS-support program with two sessions per week?

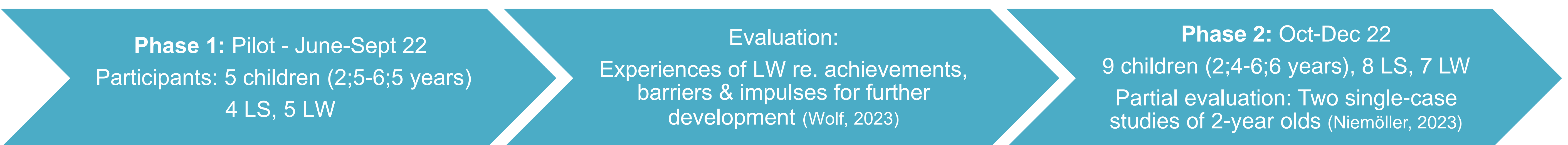


Fig. 1: Overview of phases in the LS-project (LS = language support staff, LW = family liaison workers)

Methods & Materials

- LS staff: Eight SLT students & one university teacher took part, alongside equal numbers of family liaison workers (LW).
- LS and LW conducted home visits to 14 children (n = 6/f, n = 8/m; mean age: 5 yrs./range: 2-6 yrs. L1: Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish). Per child: 10 LS sessions over 10 weeks; increasing numbers of up to 200 families were interested in project participation.
- LS and LW were introduced to parent-report, language enhancing strategies & materials (e.g. dialogic book reading, role play, puzzles, vocabulary work, etc.).
- Experiences & observations were documented in a structured way across LS sessions to enable comparisons within and across participating children.
- BSc project 1: Qualitative interviews & thematic analysis with five LW re. effects & development (fig. 2).
- BSc project 2: Multiple single-case study using a mixed methods design (parent interview, questionnaire, structured observation, video analysis, inter-rater comparison). Participants: two 2-year-old children (m: 2;8 years, f: 2;4 years) with pragmatic-communicative difficulties and no expressive German (fig. 3).

Results

- All participating LS noted positive changes re. children's communication, play & behavior (eye contact, pragmatics, vocabulary, MLU, comprehension, etc.). However, for 11 children intensive SL support, logopedic diagnostics and/or general developmental assessment were recommended.
- LW reported positive changes alongside parental wishes to continue the support (fig. 2). Two 2-year-old children (one in each phase) developed from no expressive German to first words. Participants embraced intercultural sensitisation, positive relationship building & exchange (fig. 2).

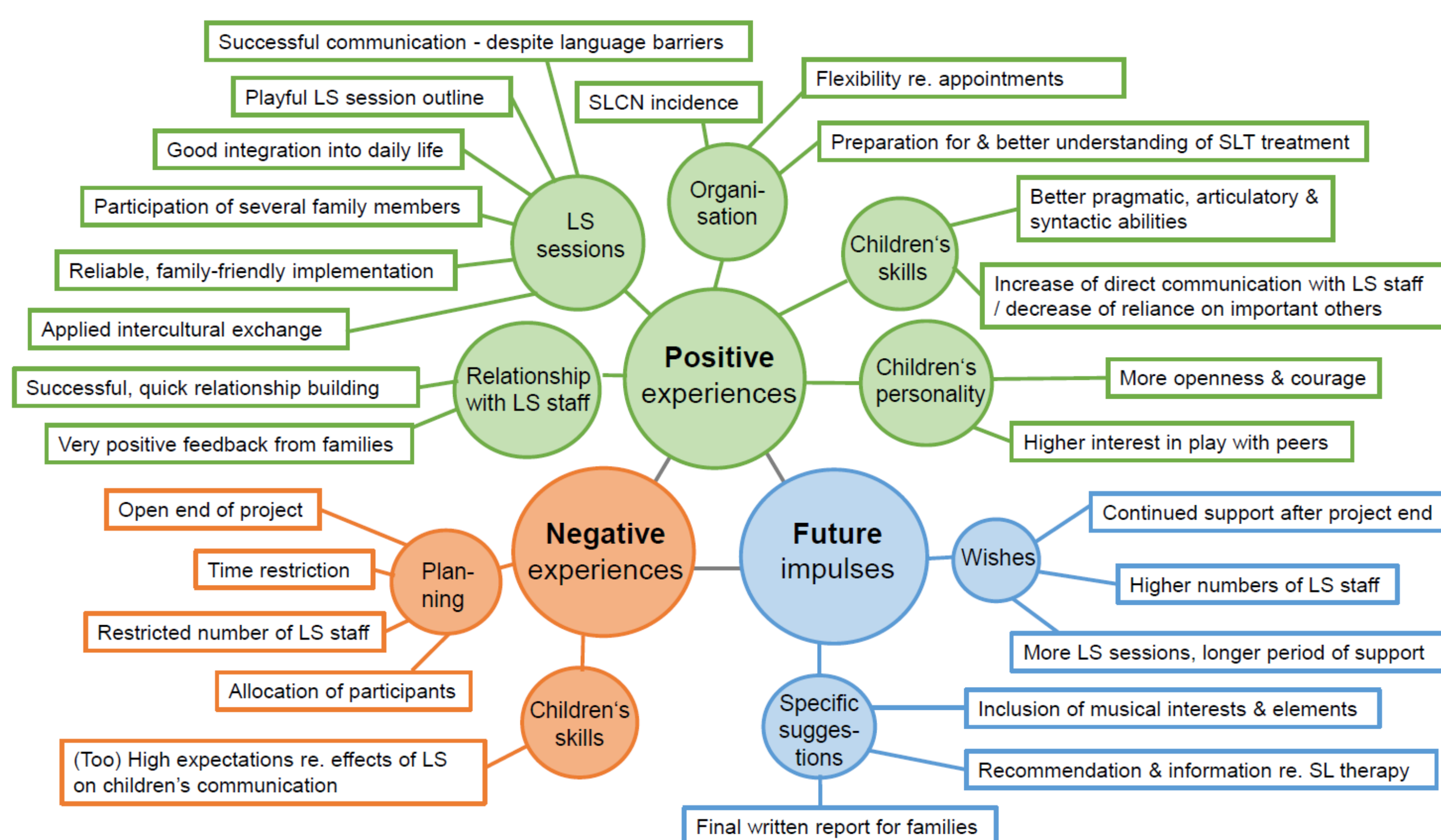


Fig. 2: Overview of main and sub-themes emerging from five LW interviews (BSc project 1: Wolf, 2023)

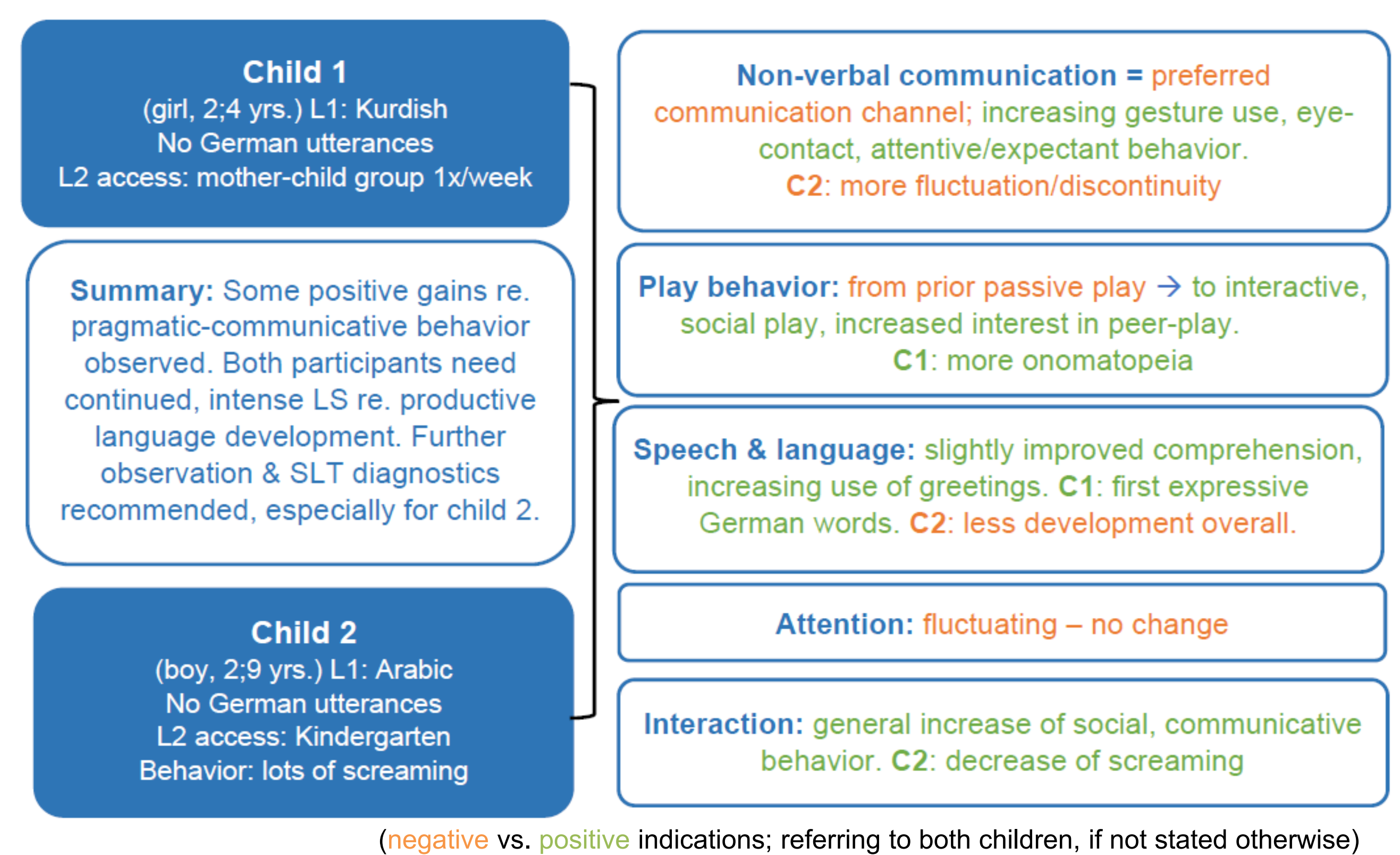


Fig. 3: Key findings from phase 2 in two 2-year olds (BSc project 2: Niemöller, 2023)

Discussion & Conclusions

- Local LS projects with LCD families can lead to positive differences, (a) re. their children's communication development, (b) better inclusion in mainstream society, and (c) prospective better differentiation of SLCN vs. DLD in the diagnostic process → more successful affiliation of LS support vs. SLT treatment.
- SLT students benefit from working with LCD families & their LW - and vice versa. All participants collaborated successfully, based on trusting relationships & positive experiences, leading to personal growth and increasing knowledge. Project participation may enhance access to language services of LCD families.

Learning Outcomes

- To enhance relationships with LCD families & collaboration with LW in SLCN settings. To incorporate life-long learning & intercultural sensitisation.
- To differentiate effects of language enhancement vs. SLT therapy and drawing conclusions re. necessary diagnostics.

Contact information

Christina Haupt (MPhil, MSc), Senior University Teacher
University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany)
Email: c.haupt@hs-osnabrueck.de
<https://www.hs-osnabrueck.de/christina-haupt-mphil-msc/>

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