

InterACT from the perspective of therapists and teachers: How to change children's attitudes toward stuttering



Maja Pordzik mpordzik@fcl.org.pl
 Natalia Michalik nmichalik02@gmail.com
 Joanna Szymczakowska jszymczakowska@fcl.org.pl

UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA
 FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

FUNDACJA
 CENTRUM
 LOGOPEDYCZNE

Introduction

InterACT is an anti-discrimination education program designed for preschool and early school-aged children (Weidner, 2016; Weidner, St. Louis, 2021; Węsierska, Weidner, 2022). The program aims to promote appropriate attitudes towards various forms of diversity, including attitudes towards stuttering (Weidner, 2016). Trained therapists, teachers, or students in educational institutions can implement the InterACT program. It includes two sessions with puppet-based films and teaching materials used as a foundation for discussing diversity with children. Research conducted among program participants in the United States and Poland has shown its significant effectiveness in changing children's attitudes towards stuttering (Weidner, St. Louis, 2014; Weidner et al., 2015; Weidner et al., 2018; Węsierska, Weidner, 2022). In conjunction with the fifth anniversary of the program's adaptation to Polish conditions, a study was conducted to assess the opinions of specialists on the effectiveness of the InterACT program and to document the experiences of those who have implemented it.



Research objective

The study aimed to explore the opinions of specialists (teachers, speech therapists, educators, and students) regarding the effectiveness of the InterACT program. The researchers also intended to thoroughly examine the experiences of individuals involved in implementing the program.

Survey

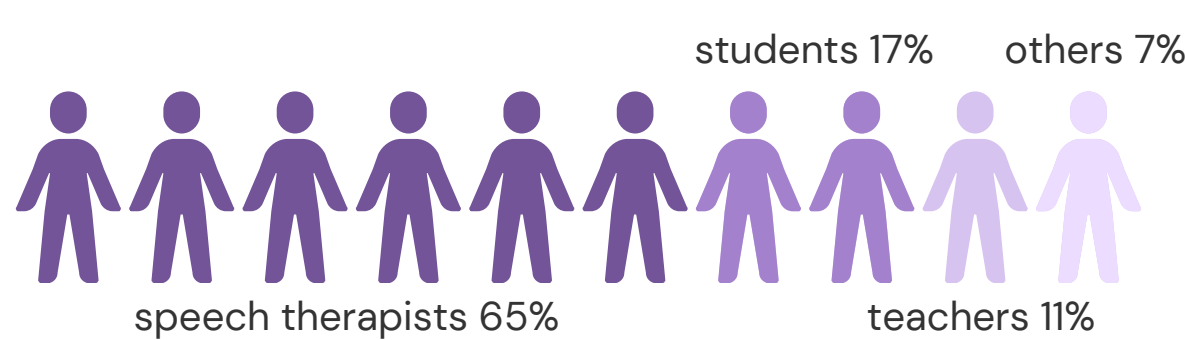
The study used a self-designed questionnaire, which included open-ended, semi-open, and closed questions, as well as a rating scale. Both single-choice and multiple-choice questions were used. The survey was conducted among a group of 40 speech therapists, teachers, and speech therapy students who implemented the InterACT program in various educational institutions. The questionnaire, created using Google Forms, was distributed to the participants via email.

Interview

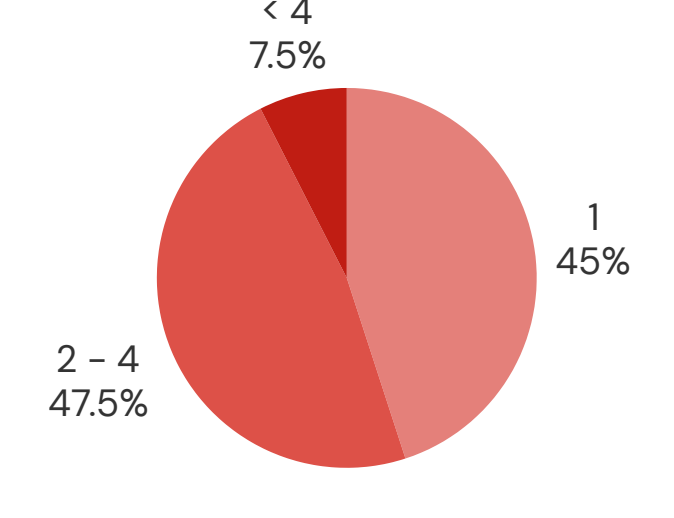
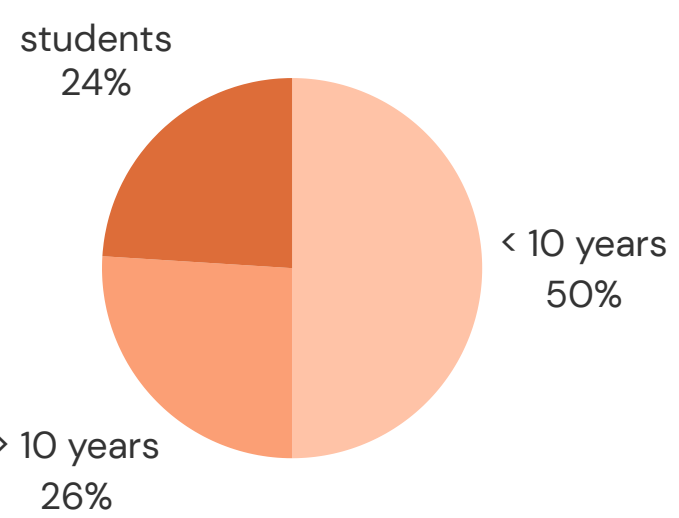
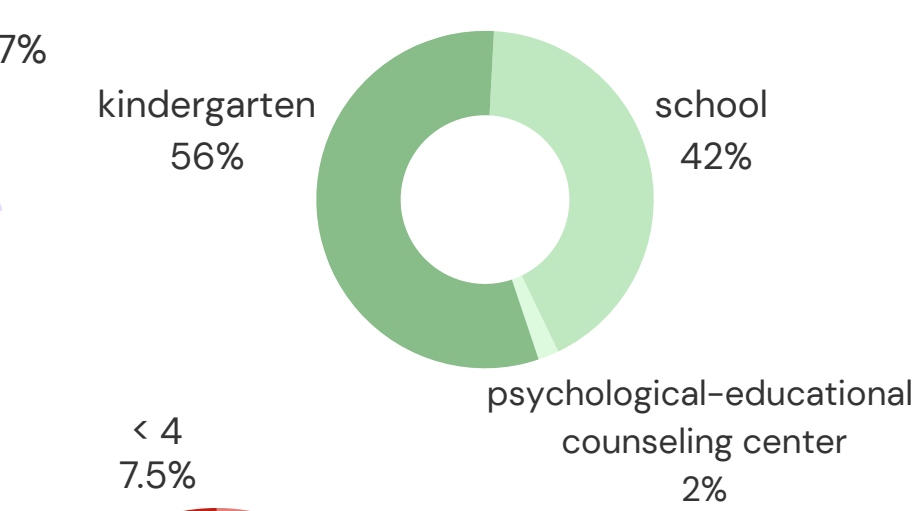
As part of the study, non-standardized and unstructured qualitative interviews were conducted. The interviews involved two speech therapy students from the University of Silesia who had recently implemented the InterACT program. The interviews were conducted via the Microsoft Teams platform and recorded for further analysis.

Results

Respondents



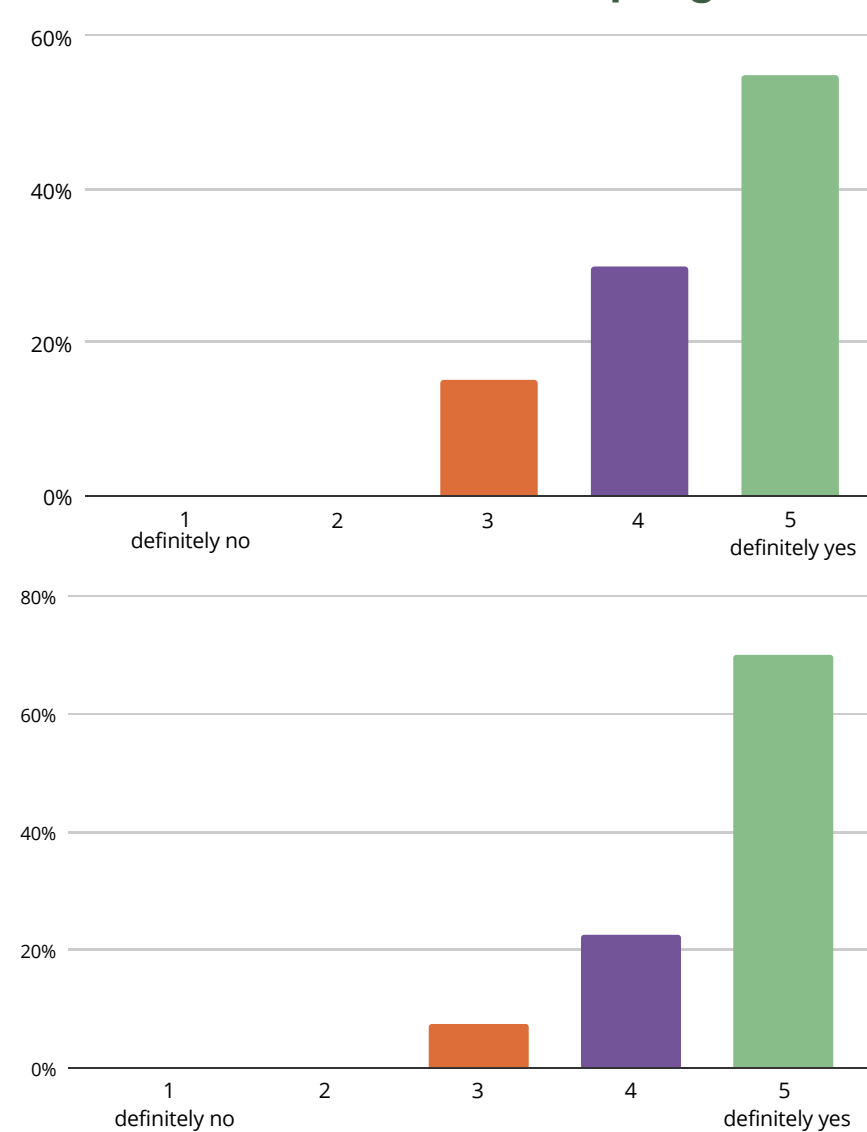
Place of implementation



Work experience

Number of implementations

The respondents noticed that after the implementation of the InterACT program, children have a greater knowledge about stuttering.



The children had a negative attitude towards people who stutter before the sessions, but once they learned the story of the workshop's main characters, things changed radically.

I'm glad that the children heard reliable knowledge, not myths, but actual, right information.

The respondents evaluated the InterACT program as intuitive for them to implement.

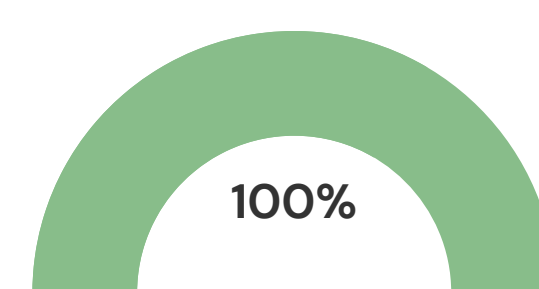
This also encouraged us because it's not too complicated, as this was our first experience working with a larger group.

From a technical standpoint, I think this program is well-executed, but if we had any concerns, it would be that it might not be enough, and it could benefit from additional introductory sessions on the topic.

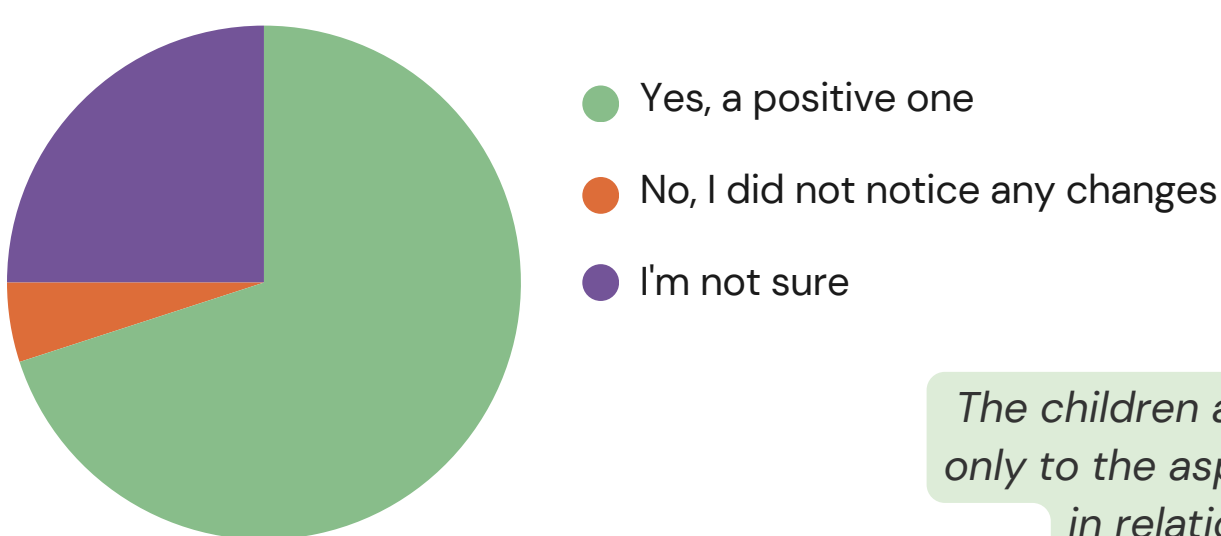
The respondents consider the content presented in the InterACT program to be useful and valuable.

I definitely think it was eye-opening for them. [...] The children initially had trouble recognizing diversity.

All respondents agree that there is a need to address anti-discrimination education and foster attitudes of acceptance among preschool and early school-age children.



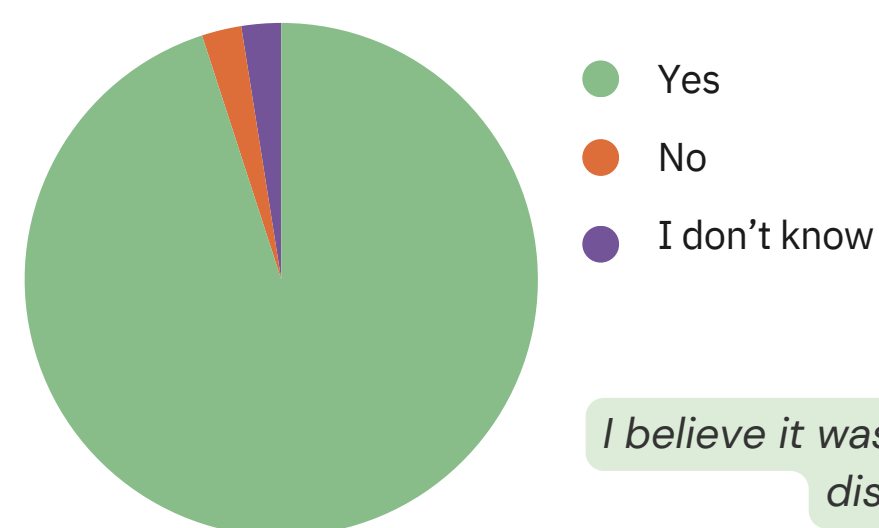
The respondents observed changes in children's perceptions of diversity.



Children discussed with each other that being different is okay and that it does not affect whether someone "is cool."

The children applied the knowledge they gained not only to the aspect of stuttering but also, for example, in relation to a person's weight or origin.

Participants would recommend the InterACT program to other professionals.



I think I would definitely recommend it. In fact, it could be expanded further, with additional meetings or perhaps some training sessions built around it.

I believe it was also engaging for the children: the movie, art project, and discussion combined to fully engage the children.

Conclusions

- The InterACT program led to a positive change in children's perception of diversity, according to the vast majority of respondents. These responses support the results of previous pilot studies conducted in the United States and Poland, which also showed the program's effectiveness and positive outcomes (Weidner & St. Louis, 2014; Weidner et al., 2015; Weidner, St. Louis, & Glover, 2018; Węsierska et al., 2020).
- The InterACT program is intuitive to implement, and most therapists do not encounter difficulties in its application. These characteristics make the program suitable for students and individuals working with a large group of children for the first time.
- According to the majority of respondents, the InterACT program significantly increases children's knowledge about stuttering and enhances their positive reactions to this topic.
- Specialists consider the InterACT program to offer valuable and useful content, recognizing the importance of addressing anti-discrimination education and promoting attitudes of acceptance among preschool and early school-age children.
- The InterACT program plays a crucial role in disseminating accurate knowledge about stuttering and anti-discrimination education among children in Poland.
- There is a need for further development and promotion of content related to stuttering and diversity among children. The InterACT program can provide a strong basis for future initiatives, and increased dissemination of this knowledge may amplify the desired outcomes.

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