

Book Review

Book Review: Gibson, J.; Toseeb, U. *Developmental Language Disorder and Social-Emotional Development: An Introduction to Theories, Concepts, and Research*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2024; ISBN: 9780192843845Fatma Canan Durgungoz^{1,2} 

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Abstract: This book review evaluates *Developmental Language Disorder and Social-Emotional Development: An Introduction to Theories, Concepts, and Research*, written by Jenny Gibson and Umar Toseeb (2024), which presents a multidimensional analysis of how Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) intersects with mental health, emotional functioning, and social development. The book review aims to examine the interdisciplinary design, grounded in developmental psychology, genetics, education, and neurodiversity frameworks. The book includes evidence from longitudinal research, case studies, and theoretical models, offering insights into how early environments, behavioural challenges, peer relationships, family context and resilience influence outcomes for children with DLD. This book review critically synthesises the authors' methodology and presentation through the book's eight chapters. Key insights include the role of language in emotional regulation, the impact of ecological systems on DLD, and the limitations of deficit-based intervention models. This book review critically evaluates the authors' shift towards a neurodiversity-informed approach and highlights the underrepresentation of non-Western perspectives as a limitation. Although the authors of the book acknowledge this limitation of cultural generalisation, more international research and case material could have enriched it. This work concludes that Gibson and Toseeb's book provides a valuable contribution to inclusive practice and calls for cultural diversity in future DLD research. Practitioners, researchers, and policymakers can benefit from the book to adopt holistic frameworks that account for both linguistic and emotional dimensions in supporting neurodivergent DLD children.

Keywords: Developmental Language Disorder; Social-Emotional Development; Neurodiversity; Emotion Regulation

1. Introduction

The definition of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is often handled inconsistently or inaccurately in the literature and most importantly "most people who have DLD are not diagnosed with DLD" [1]. Similarly, in educational contexts, DLD is frequently mislabelled as a speech impairment, speech language delay or disorder or reduced to a problem of oral communication [2,3]. Such narrow conceptualisations risk overlooking the broader academic, social, and functional needs associated with DLD. Gibson and Toseeb's [4] book presents an argument for reframing DLD as a complex neurodevelopmental condition that intersects with social and emotional functioning. The book yields a compelling case for recognising DLD not just as a communication difficulty but also as a condition that necessitates implications for mental health, social participation, emotional support and long-term well-being.

Its theoretical orientation is grounded in developmental psychology, which is enriched by case studies, empirical research findings, and novel insights, making it a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

1.1. About the Book and the Purpose

The book is authored by Jenny Gibson from the University of Cambridge and Umar Toseeb from the University of York. The book adopts an interdisciplinary approach to explore the social-emotional development of children with DLD. The book combines theoretical frameworks with contemporary research, provides an understanding of how DLD manifests across neurodiverse individual profiles in eight core chapters. It covers a wide range of topics, including an introduction to DLD, psychosocial environments, genetic influences, social relationships, behavioural difficulties, emotional difficulties, resilience and neurodiversity, and lastly implications and future directions about all the presented chapters. The authors aim to explain how DLD impacts emotional regulation, peer relationships, and mental health, and how broader ecological and systemic factors, including early environments, genetic vulnerabilities, school experiences, and societal attitudes, shape these challenges through an interdisciplinary approach. Their goal is to highlight the often overlooked emotional and psychosocial dimensions of DLD, advocate for a shift from deficit-based to neurodiversity-informed understandings, and promote inclusive, evidence-based interventions. The book also aims to bridge gaps in research, policy, and practice by offering a comprehensive, socially conscious perspective that centres the lived experiences of children with DLD.

1.2. Author Credentials

Professor Jenny Gibson is an academic at the University of Cambridge, serving as a Professor of Neurodiversity and Developmental Psychology within the Faculty of Education. She leads the Play and Communication Lab (PacLab), where her research focuses on the interplay between linguistic and social development from childhood through adolescence. Her work is rooted in developmental psychology and encompasses interdisciplinary influences, including disability studies, linguistics, computer science, psychiatry, literary studies, and education. As a qualified speech and language therapist, Professor Gibson specialises in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and DLD, bringing both clinical and research perspectives to her work. She is also a co-director of the Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL), and the Centre for Human-Inspired Artificial Intelligence (CHIA). Her commitment to participatory research aims to include and amplify the voices of under-represented groups, particularly in the context of neurodiversity and play.

Professor Umar Toseeb is a Professor at the University of York's Department of Education, where he directs the Child and Adolescent Neurodevelopmental Diversity (CANDY) research group. He also leads the Psychology in Education Research Centre. Professor Toseeb's expertise lies in child and adolescent development, with a particular focus on special educational needs and mental health. His research employs advanced statistical models to analyse large and complex datasets, such as longitudinal cohort studies and administrative data. His interests encompass social functioning (e.g., antisocial behaviour, behavioural difficulties, youth offending, bullying), emotional functioning (e.g., depression, anxiety, well-being), and cognitive and learning differences (e.g., ASD, DLD). Professor Toseeb's work aims to understand and support the diverse needs of neurodivergent children and adolescents.

1.3. Rationale for Review

My interest in reviewing the book is rooted in my research background, which centres on the intersection of DLD and emotional development. As recent studies have indicated, children with DLD experience significant challenges in recognising, describing, and using emotions, especially when compared to their typically developing peers and children with other neurodevelopmental conditions such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and ASD [5,6]. These difficulties also extend to understanding emotions in specific social contexts [7,8] and social-emotional functioning [9]. Furthermore, children with DLD are at risk of being bullied due to their language difficulties [10] and show higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to their peers [6]. These findings highlighted the need for more integrated, evidence-based approaches to supporting the emotional well-being of children with DLD [11]. Building upon this foundation, I have collaborated with Michelle C. St Clair to develop and evaluate an online parent-led intervention designed to enhance emotion recognition and regulation abilities in children with DLD. The intervention incorporated interactive activities to meet individual needs, and findings indicated improvements in both emotion recognition abilities and social-emotional outcomes among participants [12].

Recognising the central role of parents in children's emotional development, I have also explored how empowering parents could influence their awareness of their child's emotional competencies. Results demonstrated that parents developed an increased awareness of the importance of emotion recognition, engaged more in emotion-focused communication, and integrated emotional discussions into daily routines [13]. These works highlight the importance of understanding and supporting the social and emotional needs of individuals with DLD, whereas Gibson and Toseeb's [4] book comprehensively discusses these social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

2. The Critique of the Book

Gibson and Toseeb's [4] book contributes a theoretical and practical understanding of DLD by criticising the narrow conceptualisation of it as only a linguistic disorder. The authors discuss how DLD affects not only communication but also children's emotional expression, peer relationships, and mental health conditions through a multidimensional and evidence-informed approach. The book addresses underexplored areas such as the role of socioeconomic and family environments, the overlap between DLD and externalising behaviours like conduct disorder or ADHD, and the systemic failures in identifying emotional distress in children with undiagnosed language needs. The authors use case studies and developmental models, such as the Social Adaptation Model, to illustrate how language difficulties interact dynamically with emotion regulation, social exclusion, and resilience. Rather than portraying children with DLD as passive recipients of risk, the authors emphasise protective factors and intervention points across the life course. They make a compelling case for DLD to be understood as a complex and socially mediated developmental condition.

The Introduction to the book lays the foundation by defining DLD, discussing its prevalence, the diagnostic evolution from Specific Language Impairment (SLI), and distinguishing it from bilingualism. In the literature, terminology relating to childhood language difficulties remained inconsistent. For example, a study examined manuscripts published by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) between 2017 and 2025 that described children with unexplained language disorder, and they concluded that 42% of published studies still use terms other than DLD [14]. This inconsistency was viewed as a significant concern because it complicated the comparison and synthesis of research, weakened communication across professional contexts, and risked restricting access to support and services [15]. The authors highlight the consequences of diagnostic shifts, particularly the transition from SLI to DLD and stress that while linguistic impairments define the disorder, social-emotional difficulties are frequently overlooked. This framing sets the stage for the book's core argument: DLD must be understood within a broader developmental and psychosocial context.

The Early Environments section examines the interplay between home, education, socioeconomic status, society, and individual factors, including mutual influences, maltreatment and neglect. The use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model and the opportunity-propensity framework demonstrates the authors' methodological sophistication. Their emphasis on mutualistic influences, how language development and emotional functioning co-evolve, helps dismantle binary thinking about nature vs. nurture. The authors demonstrate how adverse environments exacerbate the risk of socio-emotional difficulties in children with DLD. The discussion of mutualistic influences and the social adaptation model, highlights how language and social development influence one another over time. The chapter carefully avoids deterministic interpretations, instead emphasising the dynamic nature of developmental pathways through novel evidence-based literature.

The Genetic Influences chapter addresses a more complex and often misunderstood area: The genetic contributions to DLD. For instance, a recent study claimed that genetic factors appear to play an important role in DLD [16]. Evidence from a cohort of over 25,000 individuals suggests that SNP-based heritability ranges from about 27% to 52%, while twin studies of related speech and language difficulties have estimated heritability to be higher, at approximately 70% to 75% [16]. When it comes to the book, the authors discuss the critical overview of the heritability of DLD, cautioning against simplistic genetic determinism. The discussion of polygenic traits, candidate genes, gene-environment interplay, and the replication crisis in behavioural genetics is a valuable contribution to the DLD context. The authors walk a fine line between presenting evidence of heritability and cautioning against genetic determinism. Their critique of the "abnormal is normal" hypothesis is timely, particularly in light of current debates in behavioural genetics. However, this chapter is somehow less integrated into the social-emotional theme, with implications for well-being more implied than explicitly developed. Nevertheless, its relevance is secured through discussions on gene-environment interactions and how these shape opportunities for intervention. This chapter highlights the im-

portance of understanding genetic vulnerability, which is crucial for developing comprehensive support systems.

The Social Relationships chapter is directly about the heart of the book's thesis. It explores how language difficulties disrupt children's ability to form and maintain friendships, engage in play, and exhibit prosocial behaviour. For example, a systematic review about social emotional functioning and QoL of DLD proved that peer difficulties are the most prevalent social-emotional problem across studies of DLD, and they can worsen with age [17]. The authors of the book illustrate how language challenges can lead to peer victimisation, social withdrawal, and emotional distress. This section illustrates how DLD can lead to social exclusion, which in turn fosters emotional and behavioural challenges. The chapter critiques the lack of non-Western research samples, highlighting the danger of generalising findings across populations. Their critique of the lack of cultural diversity in existing research underlines the need for further research on DLD, particularly in terms of social-emotional development, across other countries and cultures.

The Behavioural Difficulties chapter expands the analysis to behavioural difficulties, particularly externalising disorders like ADHD, Conduct Disorder (CD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and their frequent co-occurrence with DLD. Literature also shows that ADHD and DLD often appear together [18,19]. In such cases, the child's language and academic difficulties are largely linked to DLD, while the additional behavioural and executive-function demands may extend more broadly across daily functioning [18,19]. The behavioural difficulties chapter's central insight, that behavioural disorders often mask unrecognised language impairments, is well-supported by empirical studies. This chapter includes well-chosen case examples to show how linguistic barriers can lead to misinterpretation of behaviours such as defiance or aggression. The critique of fragmented service provision and lack of integrated diagnosis underlines the critical systemic failings and challenges in supporting children with DLD.

The chapter on *Emotional Difficulties* offers a nuanced and theoretically grounded exploration of the heightened mental health risks faced by young people with DLD. Literature also shows that compared with their typically developing peers, children with DLD are more likely to experience anxiety, depressive symptoms, social withdrawal, somatic complaints, attention difficulties, sleep problems and aggressive behaviour [20–22]. Drawing on the two models of mental health and complex systems theories, particularly Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework and the opportunity–propensity model, the authors of the book convincingly demonstrate that emotional challenges in DLD are not isolated phenomena but emerge through a dynamic interplay of individual, social, and genetic factors. The discussion on emotion recognition and regulation, which highlights how linguistic impairments can impede emotional understanding, foster alexithymia, and disrupt co-regulatory exchanges with caregivers, is compelling. The chapter further strengthens its argument with longitudinal evidence linking peer relationships, prosocial behaviour, and play to emotional outcomes, showing both protective and risk pathways. The integration of case studies and empirical findings is effective in illustrating how communication deficits can lead to misdiagnosis or inadequate access to timely support. Importantly, the authors resist deterministic interpretations by emphasising individual variability and highlighting those emotional difficulties, while elevated in this population, are not inevitable. A critical limitation noted by the authors themselves, the lack of culturally diverse research, highlights an urgent need for broader representation in DLD mental health research.

The Resilience and Neurodiversity chapter presents a compelling counterbalance to deficit-oriented perspectives by foregrounding the potential for positive developmental outcomes in individuals with DLD. The chapter demonstrates how similar early profiles can lead to markedly different trajectories by beginning with illustrative case studies. It is prompting reflection on the environmental and relational factors that shape resilience. The authors frame resilience as a dynamic, system-level process, influenced by interactions between personal characteristics and socioecological contexts, rather than as an individual trait. Most importantly, the chapter advances the book's central contribution: reconceptualising DLD as part of human neurodiversity. In the literature, a novel study stated that although neurodiversity is increasingly recognised in autism research and practice, its relevance to DLD remains underexplored, and more attention is needed to ensure that people with DLD are better understood, supported through neurodiversity-affirming practice, and meaningfully included in the wider neurodiversity movement [23]. Moreover, a more recent study conceptualized DLD as a multidimensional neurodevelopmental spectrum [1]. While research on DLD through a neurodiversity lens remains sparse, in this current book, the authors argue for its relevance. They challenge traditional deficit-focused interventions and instead advocate for inclusive, context-sensitive support models, grounded in holistic assessment frameworks, such as the World Health Organization International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO ICF). This approach aligns with broader

shifts in disability discourse, which emphasises participation, strengths, and co-constructed support rather than remediation alone. The chapter is further enriched by its integration of longitudinal data, qualitative narratives, and systemic models of development. Its discussion of protective factors, such as peer relationships, classroom quality, and caregiver interactions, reinforces the importance of creating enabling environments that foster resilience. Overall, this chapter is a vital contribution to the volume, not only for its theoretical reframing of DLD but also for its clear implications for inclusive, rights-based educational and psychosocial practices.

3. Discussion of Key Themes

The book constructs a coherent narrative across all chapters: language disorders do not occur in isolation but are embedded within complex ecological systems that influence and are influenced by children's emotional well-being. The social-emotional development of children with DLD is shown to be at risk due to factors such as peer rejection, bullying, low self-esteem, poor emotion regulation, and difficulty with prosocial interactions. However, this vulnerability is not deterministic. The authors highlight multiple points of intervention where positive change is possible, from early educational support to family-level interactions and societal awareness. The book's emphasis on resilience and neurodiversity is particularly valuable. Rather than portraying children with DLD as uniformly disadvantaged, it presents a more nuanced picture of diversity in outcomes. Studies like the Manchester Language Study are used effectively to show both risk and possibility. In this way, the book avoids pathologising DLD and instead promotes a balanced view that accounts for strengths, agency, and potential.

3.1. Use of Case Examples and Evidence

Throughout the book, case studies are used, which makes abstract concepts more understandable and allows readers to grasp the lived realities of children with DLD. However, the book could have further diversified its examples to include voices from various socio-cultural contexts; however, the authors mentioned the lack of research in other countries. The critique of cultural blind spots in Chapter 4 highlights this limitation. Empirical evidence is well-integrated throughout the text after the case examples. The authors draw on a broad range of studies, including longitudinal and qualitative work, to substantiate their claims. However, they also acknowledge the lack of systematic reviews around social, emotional, and mental health outcomes for DLD, signalling a key area for future research. The authors' transparency regarding evidence gaps enhances the book's overall credibility.

3.2. Terminology and Conceptual Shifts

The most impactful contribution of the book is that the authors highlight the evolving terminology and frameworks within the field. The book addresses two pivotal conceptual shifts. One of them is the transition from the term SLI to DLD. The authors explain that while SLI was narrowly defined, DLD encompasses a broader range of language difficulties that are not attributable to other conditions, as suggested by CATALISE [24]. This shift, though more inclusive, also presents challenges in diagnosis and public understanding.

The other is the emerging adoption of neurodiversity as a lens for understanding DLD. The book's introduction of neurodiversity as a framework for understanding DLD is a novel approach. Although empirical research on DLD within this framework is limited, the authors make an argument for its potential. They demonstrate that inclusive practices, informed by neurodiversity, can shift the focus from deficit to difference, thereby promoting dignity and agency for children with DLD. The discussion in Chapter 7 is particularly forward-looking, encouraging researchers and practitioners to rethink how intervention is conceptualised. These shifts carry significant implications for diagnosis, identity, intervention, and public awareness. Through clear explanations and critical reflection, the authors demonstrate how such changes influence both research and practice in meaningful ways.

4. Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of the book is its interdisciplinary approach. Gibson and Toseeb synthesise findings from genetics, developmental psychology, speech-language pathology, and education in their book [4]. Their style is both accessible and rigorous. They make the complex ideas understandable without oversimplification. The repeated emphasis on context, interaction, and developmental systems aligns with contemporary best practices in child development research. One limitation is the relative underrepresentation of non-Western perspectives because of

the lack of research in other countries. Although the authors acknowledge the problem of cultural generalisation, more international research, evidence and/or case material could have enriched the book. However, it is important to also consider the gap and limitations in the literature regarding DLD research and interventions in non-English speaking countries. For example, a study highlighted that intervention research on DLD has largely focused on monolingual English-speaking children and bilingual children acquiring English [25]. This creates a need to examine how existing intervention approaches can be applied across a wider range of languages. Also, transferring an intervention to another language is not straightforward, it is often unclear which elements should be adapted and how. Additionally, while the book promotes neurodiversity, more direct engagement with the voices of individuals with DLD would have strengthened its participatory ethos.

5. Conclusion

DLD and Social-Emotional Development book is a distinctive contribution to the field of developmental disorders. Gibson and Toseeb offer a comprehensive, evidence-based, and socially conscious examination of how DLD intersects with mental health and social functioning [4]. The book not only highlights the challenges faced by individuals with DLD but also offers pathways toward inclusion, resilience, and equity. Its nuanced treatment of terminology, case examples, and intervention models makes it essential reading for professionals working with children who have communication needs. By bringing DLD into the mainstream of neurodevelopmental discourse, this book gives voice to an often-overlooked population. It challenges researchers and practitioners to rethink their intervention approaches in terms of the social and emotional development of children with DLD. This book deserves a wide readership and a lasting impact on practice and policy.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used Grammarly solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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