

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore how 10 year-olds describe speech and communicative participation in children born with unilateral cleft lip and palate (UCLP) in their own words, whether they perceive signs of velopharyngeal insufficiency (VPI) and articulation errors of different degrees, and if so, which terminology they use.

Methods/participants: Nineteen 10-year-olds participated in three focus group interviews where they listened to 10-12 speech samples with different types of cleft speech characteristics assessed by speech and language pathologists (SLPs) and described what they heard. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed with qualitative content analysis.

Results: The analysis resulted in three interlinked categories encompassing different aspects of speech, personality and social implications: Descriptions of speech, Thoughts on causes and consequences and Emotional reactions and associations. Each category contains four subcategories exemplified with quotes from the children's statements. More pronounced signs of VPI were perceived, but referred to in terms relevant to 10-year-olds. The articulatory difficulties, even the minor ones, were noted. Peers reflected on the risk to teasing and bullying and on how children with impaired speech might experience their situation. SLPs and peers did not agree on minor signs of VPI, but they were unanimous in their analysis of both normal and more severely impaired speech.

Conclusions: Articulatory impairments may be more important to treat than minor signs of VPI based on what peers say.