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An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme in New Zealand

Submission date
01/07/2024

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
03/07/2024

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
02/07/2024

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[ ] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
The Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) is an evidence-based programme that has been shown to improve children's oral language skills and in some cases reading skills. A slightly modified version of the programme is now available in Australia and New Zealand. The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme when delivered in New Zealand schools.

Who can participate?
Children aged 5 years in their first year of school who have language weaknesses. The SIX children with the weakest language skills in each classroom will be eligible to participate in the study.

What does the study involve?
The six children with the weakest language skills in each classroom will be randomly assigned to either receive or not receive the NELI programme. Children receiving the NELI programme will receive small group and one-to-one language teaching from specially trained teaching assistants. The control group will receive typical classroom teaching.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The researchers expect children receiving the NELI intervention to improve their language skills and possibly also improve their reading skills. They do not believe that there are any risks to children or schools from participating in the study

Where is the study run from?
The University of Canterbury (New Zealand)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
January 2024 to June 2025

Who is funding the study?
The University of Canterbury (New Zealand)

Who is the main contact?
Prof. Gail Gillon

Contact information

Type(s)
Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Clinical Trials Information System (CTIS)
Nil known

ClinicalTrials.gov (NCT)
Nil known

Protocol serial number
2023-138

Study information

Scientific Title
The effectiveness of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme: a two-arm randomised controlled trial in New Zealand

Acronym
NELI-NZ

Study objectives
The NELI programme has been the subject of a series of trials in the UK, which have demonstrated its efficacy. This study will gather further data to check on the effectiveness of

the programme when using materials that have been modified to make them suitable for use in Australia and New Zealand. We expect the NELI programme to produce improvements in children's oral language skills when compared to a no-treatment (business as usual) control group.

This is a randomised controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme. NELI is a 20-week evidence-based programme developed for children in reception year in UK primary schools. The programme is designed to improve the oral language skills of children with language learning challenges. The programme is delivered by specially trained teaching assistants working with children individually and in small groups. The version of the programme to be evaluated in the current trial is published by Pearson Australia. Training for the teaching assistants will be provided online by OxEd and Assessment. Evidence from existing trials has shown the programme to have positive effects on children's language skills (Fricke, Bowyer-Crane, Haley, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013; Fricke et al, 2017; West et al., 2021). The current trial will seek evidence that the programme works in a different educational /social context (New Zealand). All students involved in the trial will receive the Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) as their classroom approach to literacy instruction.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
approved 09/02/2024, University of Canterbury, NZ, Human Ethics Committee (20 Kirkwood Avenue, Upper Riccarton, Christchurch, 8041, New Zealand; +64 (0)3 369 3333; education@canterbury.ac.nz), ref: 2023-138

Study design
1-year randomized controlled trial

Primary study design
Interventional

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Developmental language difficulties

Interventions
All children in each participating classroom will be screened with LanguageScreen. The six children in each classroom with the lowest LanguageScreen standard scores will be eligible for intervention. These six children will be randomised within classrooms, minimising for age and LanguageScreen scores.

The intervention arm will receive a published 20-week language intervention programme (the Nuffield Early Language Intervention) delivered by teaching assistants working in the children's schools. The control arm will receive typical classroom teaching.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. Language is measured using four LanguageScreen subtests (Expressive Vocabulary, Receptive Vocabulary, Listening Comprehension, and Sentence Repetition); three subtests from the CELF-5 Recalling Sentences; CELF 5 Formulating Sentences; CELF 5 Understanding Spoken Paragraphs and two scores from the Renfrew Action Picture test - Information and Grammar. These measures will be administered at baseline and at time 2 (end of intervention). These measures will be used to define two latent variables at both baseline and time 2: a Latent variable for individually administered language measures (CELF-5 Recalling Sentences; CELF-5 Formulating Sentences; CELF-5 Understanding Spoken Paragraphs and two scores from the Renfrew Action Picture test - Information and Grammar) and a Latent variable for LanguageScreen using the four subtests (Expressive Vocabulary, Receptive Vocabulary, Listening Comprehension, and Sentence Repetition).
2. Reading is measured using the ReadingScreen word and nonword reading subtests at baseline and at time 2 (end of intervention). A latent variable for reading will be defined by the two ReadingScreen subtests (word and nonword reading) at both baseline and time 2.

Key secondary outcome(s))
1. Four variables indicating foundational literacy skills, as assessed using the Better Start Literacy Approach assessment tools: initial phoneme identity, phoneme blending, and letter sound knowledge (Set 1 and Set 2) at baseline and at time 2 (end of intervention)
2. Socioemotional and behavioural adjustment, as reported by parents using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and self-reported by children using the KINDLR scale at baseline and at time 2 (end of intervention)

Completion date
01/06/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Eligible children (5-year-olds who have started school in the 2024 school year) in all participating classrooms will undergo a language assessment using LanguageScreen (https://oxedandassessment.com/uk/languagescreen/). The children eligible for the intervention will be the six children in each participating reception classroom with the poorest language standard scores on LanguageScreen

Participant type(s)
Learner/student

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
4 years

Upper age limit
6 years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
01/03/2024

Date of final enrolment
01/07/2024

Locations

Countries of recruitment
New Zealand

Study participating centre
University of Canterbury
20 Kirkwood Avenue
Upper Riccarton
Christchurch
New Zealand
8041

Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Canterbury

ROR
https://ror.org/03y7q9t39

Funder(s)

Funder type
University/education

Funder Name
University of Canterbury

Alternative Name(s)

Canterbury College, Canterbury University College, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, UC

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Universities (academic only)

Location
New Zealand

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
Anonymised data will be placed on OSF after the study and analyses are completed

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes