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NewsWise in primary education: News and digital literacy, and civic engagement

Submission date
05/09/2022

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
14/09/2022

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
02/05/2025

Condition category
Other

[_] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol
Background and study aims
NewsWise is a UNESCO-awarded cross-curricular news literacy programme for 9 to 11-year-old primary school children run by the Guardian Foundation with support from the PSHE Association. The taught programme addresses the growing concern of online misinformation and public mistrust in the news that undermines democracy. Civic society relies on a well-informed citizenry that is able to evaluate the validity of news and information. Such an ability requires lifelong skills and knowledge – commonly called news, media and/or digital literacy. Research shows that many children, especially when socio-economically disadvantaged, lack these skills and knowledge.

This project will test in the UK the hypothesis that increased news and digital literacy corresponds to positive attitudes towards, and/or involvement in, civic engagement through the following research questions:
1. To what extent do UK primary school children develop news and digital literacy as a result of taking part in the NewsWise programme?
2. To what extent do their news and digital literacy skills and knowledge correspond to positive attitudes towards and/or involvement in civic engagement?
The findings will be disseminated to inform subsequent implementations of NewsWise and similar programmes impacting generations of children who will increasingly need finely tuned media, news and digital literacy skills to participate in society.

Who can participate?
Primary school children, aged between 9 and 11 years old (i.e. in year 5 and year 6 in England and Wales, year 6 and year 7 in Northern Ireland, and P6 and P7 in Scotland), of any gender, at schools across the UK that are participating in the NewsWise programme.

What does the study involve?
Over a two-year period, 2,400 9 to 11-year-olds from 40 primary schools across the UK will experience the NewsWise programme, which is delivered by the Guardian Foundation, with support from the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association. The NewsWise programme consists of 15 lessons delivered over a 6-week period, as well as a live workshop from the NewsWise team and interactions with a journalist. In total, this involves 20 hours of learning,

embedded within existing class time.
The training and support materials include news literacy subject knowledge; how the programme covers existing areas of the curriculum; the aims and outcomes of the programme; how to run an immersive news project in the classroom including children producing their own news reports; and practicalities of the project - such as workshops, evaluation, and journalist volunteer interactions. Detailed lesson plans and all necessary teaching materials are provided.
The programme covers the following learning aims:
1. To engage pupils in news and deepen their understanding of how and why it's produced
2. To enable pupils to critically navigate the news
3. To empower pupils to report their own news stories
Measurements will be administered at three different time points, namely: pre-intervention (at the start of the NewsWise programme), post-intervention (within the week following the completion of the NewsWise programme), and follow-up (3 months after the completion of the NewsWise programme. Pupils in the control group will complete the three measures at the same time intervals as the experimental group and will participate in the NewsWise programme after completing the follow-up measure, at a time agreed between the school and the Guardian Foundation. The measure is a survey that has been created and trialled, bringing together different shorter measures for news literacy and civic engagement into one, comprehensive inventory.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
NewsWise is a UNESCO-awarded cross-curricular news literacy programme for 9-11 year olds run by the Guardian Foundation with support from the PSHE Association. The taught programme addresses the growing concern of online misinformation and public mistrust in the news that undermines democracy. Civic society relies on a well-informed citizenry that is able to evaluate the validity of news and information. Such an ability requires lifelong skills and knowledge – commonly called news, media and/or digital literacy. Research shows that many children, especially when socio-economically disadvantaged, lack these skills and knowledge. The possible benefits to be gained by participation is an increase in news, media and/or digital literacy. There are no known or anticipated risks from participating.

Where is the study run from?
The University of Birmingham is responsible for running the study, with support from the University of Liverpool, the Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust (NLT), and the PSHE Association (United Kingdom)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
March 2021 to March 2024

Who is funding the study?
Nuffield Foundation (United Kingdom)

Who is the main contact?
Prof Tom Harrison (United Kingdom)
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Contact information

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
EDO /FR-000023246

Study information

Scientific Title
Year 5&6 primary pupils and NewsWise programme Impact on Civic Engagement and News Literacy (NICENL)

Acronym
NICENL

Study objectives
Research questions
1. Does the NewsWise programme improve news literacy (a near transfer effect) and civic engagement (a far transfer effect) in pupils that have participated in the programme?
2. Do the observed effects of the NewsWise programme last from the post-intervention survey to follow-up?
3. What is the relationship between news literacy and civic engagement among pupils?

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 05/05/2022, University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee (Research Support Group, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK; +44(0)1214148825; aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk; s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk), ref: ERN_22-0130

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Multicenter mixed-method interventional evaluation randomized cluster controlled study

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Evaluation of the NewsWise educational intervention's impact on news literacy and civic engagement in year 5 and 6 primary school children (aged 9-12) in the UK.

Interventions
The NewsWise programme consists of 15 lessons that will be delivered over 6 weeks, as well as a live workshop from the NewsWise team and interactions with a journalist, and involves 20 hours of learning. The programme does not displace other aspects of the school curriculum; each lesson is mapped onto the English/Literacy curricula of the four nations of the UK, the PSHE Association programme of study (incorporating statutory RSE guidance), and digital literacy objectives. All teachers delivering the programme will receive an initial one-hour pre-intervention training session followed by ongoing support from the NewsWise team. The training and support materials cover:
1. News literacy subject knowledge
2. How the programme covers existing areas of the curriculum
3. Aims and outcomes of the programme
4. How to run an immersive news project in the classroom including children producing their own news reports
5. Practicalities of the project (e.g., workshops, evaluation, and journalist volunteer interactions)

Detailed lesson plans and all necessary teaching materials are provided as part of the programme. Each class taking part in NewsWise receives a live workshop delivered by the

Guardian Foundation (GF) at the start of the programme. The workshop is an immersive newsroom experience, generating curiosity and critical engagement with the news. The fifteen units in the programme cover the following learning aims:
6. To engage pupils in news and deepen their understanding of how and why it is produced
7. To enable pupils to critically navigate the news
8. To empower pupils to report their own news stories. As part of this objective, schools are offered opportunities for classes to have interactions with journalists as they progress through the units. These are aspiration-building experiences and help bring learning to life; children have the chance to ask questions related to what they are doing in the classroom to a professional who does the same thing on a daily basis.

Focusing on primary school children is important, as we know the extent to which news and digital literacy are crucial, especially among socio-economically vulnerable children, to their development as well-informed citizens. However, there remains a lack of existing research into this age group that focuses specifically on the effectiveness of interventions addressing this challenge. It is for this reason that the NewsWise programme is currently only offered to primary schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

In this evaluation over the course of eighteen months, the GF with support from the PSHE will deliver the NewsWise intervention in 40 primary schools and 80 classes. Around 2,400 pupils, aged 9-11, will experience the news literacy programme. The participating schools will be broadly geographically representative of the UK in terms of the number of schools from each region.

The intervention will be divided into two cohorts. The first one will be delivered between September and December 2022, whilst the second will be delivered between January and April 2023.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
News literacy measured using a bespoke designed evaluation measure in the form of a questionnaire at baseline, 4 weeks and 3 months

Key secondary outcome(s)
Civic engagement measured using a bespoke designed evaluation measure in the form of a questionnaire at baseline, 4 weeks and 3 months

Completion date
29/03/2024

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Criteria for pupil inclusion:
1. School pupils aged 9-12 years attending schools that are participating in the NewsWise programme
2. Signed agreement participation forms

Criteria for school inclusion:
Schools must have an above-average percentage of Free School Meals (FSM; i.e. 15.1% or higher) for participation

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
9 Years

Upper age limit
12 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
01/06/2022

Date of final enrolment
21/06/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
University of Birmingham
University of Birmingham
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Study participating centre
The Guardian Foundation
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Kings Place
90 York Way
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Sponsor information

Organisation
University of Birmingham

ROR
https://ror.org/03angcq70

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name
Nuffield Foundation

Alternative Name(s)
NuffieldFound

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publicly available repository, namely the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/). Once

confirmed, the specific link to the repository will made available here. The data that will be made available will be in the form of de-identified participant data, which will be made available after the completion of the study (which concludes on 29/03/2024) for 10 years.

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results		01/02/2025	02/05/2025	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes