

A modelling and feasibility study of a positive early childhood education programme for early years educators

Submission date 12/05/2024	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☐ Protocol
Registration date 18/11/2024	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☐ Results
Last Edited 18/02/2025	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data ☐ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

There is growing evidence that early childhood education benefits children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Early years (EY) settings are influential in supporting successful development, especially for children from more deprived backgrounds. However, early years senior staff (nursery managers) and early childhood educators (EYEs) report a lack of training and support in this area. A range of approaches and techniques have been developed for early years staff to manage and diminish behaviour problems in young children while promoting social and emotional development. Yet, few studies focus on the implementation of evidence-based programs with fidelity within early years classrooms. The Positive Early Childhood Education (PECE) programme is designed to build early years workforce knowledge, confidence and skills and enhance self-efficacy in implementing strategies that promote children's development, social competence, and self-regulation. This study aims to establish the feasibility and acceptability of evaluating the PECE intervention before a large-scale study. Subsequent objectives include characterising intervention components and potential mechanisms driving change in educator and child outcomes; informing the development of a scientifically rigorous yet service provider-, children-, and parent-sensitive explanatory large-scale study; investigating the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential PECE program impacts on children's early social and emotional development; and, exploring potential social, environmental, and demographic factors to enhance comprehension of trends in uptake, engagement, attrition, and outcomes.

Who can participate?

EYEs and EY practitioners (EYPs)/managers from nursery settings and children aged 3-4 years old who attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week

What does the study involve?

The feasibility study will include an intervention group and a control group. The intervention group will complete the PECE programme and implement it during the school term. The control

group will not complete the programme as part of the trial but will be given access to the online educator training at the end of the academic year. The control group will take part in the assessments following the same timeline as the intervention group.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The possible benefit for settings taking part in the study is that they will make an important contribution to developing the evidence base for early years education and improving child development. Settings in the intervention group will also receive free training and accreditation in Triple P – Positive Parenting Program PECE and the resources to support their early years educators. Although settings in the control group will not receive PECE training during the study, they will be offered free access to PECE online for up to 5 of their staff at the end of the trial. There are no anticipated significant risks or disadvantages in taking part. There may be some inconvenience in terms of the time needed for the staff to participate, e.g., completing training in the intervention group, completing data collection tools, and participating in data collection activities.

Where is the study run from?

The University of Sheffield

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

April 2022 to April 2025

Who is funding the study?

The Nuffield Foundation

Who is the main contact?

Dr Anna Weighall, anna.weighall@sheffield.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)

Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

Contact name

Dr Anna Weighall

ORCID ID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6736-287X>

Contact details

University of Sheffield

The School of Education

The Wave

Faculty of Social Sciences

2 Whitham Road

Sheffield

United Kingdom

S10TZN

+44 (0)114 222 8177

anna.weighall@sheffield.ac.uk

Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

171465, EDO/FR-000023236

Study information

Scientific Title

A cluster-randomised controlled feasibility trial of a Positive Early Childhood Education (PECE) CPD programme for educators to improve social and emotional outcomes for children in Early Years Settings.

Acronym

PECE

Study objectives

1. Establish the feasibility and acceptability of an evaluation of the positive early childhood education (PECE) intervention in advance of a large-scale cluster randomised controlled trial (cRCT). Subsequent aims are to:
2. Characterise intervention components and potential mechanisms by which they produce change in educator and child outcomes.
3. Inform the development of an appropriately powered explanatory phase II cRCT that retains scientific rigour while being sensitive to the needs of the service provider, children, and parents.
4. Explore the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential PECE programme impacts on children's early social and emotional development.
5. Explore potential social, environmental, and demographic factors to support understanding of the trends in uptake, engagement, attrition, and outcomes.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 29/11/2022, School of Education University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (The School of Education, The Wave, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield, S10 2AH, United Kingdom; +44 (0)1142228177; edu-ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), ref: 047115

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Multicentre interventional single-blinded cluster randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)

Other, Efficacy

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Exploring the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential positive early childhood education (PECE) programme impacts on children's early social and emotional development.

Interventions

The positive early childhood education (PECE) programme is for nursery teachers and managers, rather than parents. Both early years educators (EYEs) and early years practitioners (EYPs) complete online training. EYPs including nursery managers, and group leaders who can support EYEs, complete online training, where they learn the content of the online programme and the consultation skills necessary to facilitate practice sessions with Early Years Educators using a self-regulatory approach to become a PECE Coach.

EYEs including nursery teachers, nursery teaching assistants, and nursery staff working in the classroom, complete four 1-hour online modules (PECE Online), including video modelling, interactive activities, and key takeaway messages to help them acquire new knowledge and skills, self-evaluate their performance, and set themselves goals for change. This is followed by two to four practice sessions with a PECE Coach.

The feasibility study will include an intervention group and a control group (no treatment). The intervention group will complete the PECE programme and implement it during the school term. The control group will not complete the programme as part of the trial but will be given access to the online educator training at the end of the academic year. The control group will take part in the assessments following the same timeline as the intervention group. So that randomisation can be undertaken independently of those directly involved in the trial, it will be conducted by one of the research consultants from Seneca College, Canada. The randomisation will be conducted using an automated online system. No identifying information about settings will be shared. Codes assigned to each setting, which will be used for randomisation, will be shared.

Blinding: After randomisation, the research team cannot be blinded to the condition. However, trained research assistants will conduct observations in settings and will be blinded to the condition as far as possible.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

The primary feasibility outcome is recruitment to the trial, based on the final number of settings enrolled at baseline.

The following will be measured using administrative data recorded by the trial team at baseline

1. Number of settings approached to take part in the feasibility study
2. Number of settings which consent to take part in the feasibility study
3. Number of early years educators who sign up to take part in the feasibility study
4. Number of early years educators who start and finish the online training
5. Number of parents who consent for their child to take part in the feasibility study
6. Number of coaches who consent to become a PECE coach practitioner to support staff through the programme

Key secondary outcome(s)

To explore feasibility and process, the following secondary outcome measures will be measured using administrative data collected via the PECE online system and administrative data recorded by the trial team throughout the trial:

Intervention Feasibility:

1. Number of early years educators who received the online training

2. Length of time taken for early years educators to complete the online training
3. Number and timing of setting and nursery staff withdrawals from the intervention and reason for withdrawal

Trial Feasibility:

1. Number and timing of setting and nursery staff withdrawals from the intervention and feasibility study, and reason for withdrawal
2. Missing data on intervention outcome measures at baseline, 12-16 weeks and 24 weeks follow-up

Intervention Outcome Measures

To explore the feasibility of collecting potential intervention impacts on nursery staff and children the following secondary outcome measures will be assessed at baseline, 12-16 weeks and 24 weeks follow-up.

1. Child personal, social and emotional development measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ-T)
2. Child personal, social and emotional development using the Preschool and Kindergarten Behaviour Scales-2 (PKBS-2 Typical Social 3-6 Teacher)
3. Child behaviour measured using the Child and Adolescent Disruptive Behaviour Inventory (CADBI)
4. Child behaviour measured using the Child and Adolescent Disruptive Behaviour Inventory Observer
5. Child emotional well-being and involvement measured using the Leuven Scale
6. Early years staff professional practice and self-efficacy measured with a bespoke online questionnaire

Completion date

30/04/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria for settings:

1. A minimum of 4 Early Years Educators working with children aged 3-4 years
2. A minimum of children, at least 10, aged 3-4 years

Inclusion criteria for Early Years Educators:

Early Years Educators who have not participated in the PECE Programme before

Inclusion criteria for Coaches:

Coaches who have not participated in the PECE Programme before

Inclusion criteria for children:

1. Children aged 3-4 years old, attending the trial setting
2. Children who are taught by participating educators regularly
3. Children who attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week
4. Children whose parents have provided consent

Participant type(s)

Employee, Learner/student, Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Lower age limit

3 Years

Upper age limit

4 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

119

Key exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria for settings:

1. Having less than 4 Early Years Educators working with children aged 3-4 years
2. Having less than 10 children, aged 3-4 years

Exclusion criteria for Early Years Educators:

Early Years Educators who have participated in the PECE Programme before

Inclusion criteria for Coaches:

Coaches who have participated in the PECE Programme before

Exclusion criteria for children:

1. Children who are not aged 3-4 years, attending the trial setting
2. Children who are not taught by participating educators regularly
3. Children who do not attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week
4. Children whose parents have not provided consent

Date of first enrolment

05/09/2023

Date of final enrolment

20/10/2023

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

The University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
United Kingdom
S10 2TN

Sponsor information

Organisation
Nuffield Foundation

ROR
<https://ror.org/0281jqk77>

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
After anonymisation, aggregated outcome data will be shared via the University of Sheffield Data Repository and potentially other research teams.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

