

Using research tools to improve language in the early years

Submission date 05/11/2016	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☒ Protocol
Registration date 29/11/2016	Overall study status Completed	☒ Statistical analysis plan ☒ Results
Last Edited 03/04/2023	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Existing studies have demonstrated the potential of programmes in early childhood to improve children's cognitive skills (mental processing) and social development. This programme sets out to train nursery and reception teachers in the use of established research tools, with the aim of improving children's language and behavioural development. These highly regarded research tools have been widely used in assessing the quality of early years provision and have been shown to predict children's development in the early years and beyond. The aim of this study is to test whether the programme is effective in improving children's language and behavioural outcomes.

Who can participate?

Approximately 120 state-funded primary schools from across the West Midlands, Liverpool and Manchester areas, which have at least one nursery class.

What does the study involve?

Schools participating in the trial are randomly allocated to one of two groups. In schools in the first group, nursery and reception teachers participate in a programme comprising of five days of training, with an additional follow-up day. Mentoring support is also provided to the participating teachers. Schools in the second group are expected to continue with business as usual, and are offered the opportunity to take part in the programme following the completion of the study or the option to receive a payment. Children in both groups complete a range of assessments at the start of the study and then after 12 and 18 months to measure their language skills and behaviour.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The main potential benefit of participating in the trial is the opportunity to improve pupil's language development and behaviour. Even for those schools allocated to the control group, these schools still have the opportunity to benefit from the programme once the study is complete, or they can opt to receive a payment instead. There are no notable risks involved with participating.

Where is the study run from?

The study is being run by A+ Education Ltd and takes place in 120 schools from across the West Midlands, Liverpool and Manchester areas (UK)

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

February 2016 to September 2019

Who is funding the study?

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Mr Daniel Carr

Contact information

Type(s)

Public

Contact name

Mr Daniel Carr

Contact details

4 Matthew Parker Street
Behavioural Insights Team
London
United Kingdom
SW1H 9NP

Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

Does a programme to train teachers in the use of research tools improve language development and social behavioural skills among children aged 3-5 years (compared to children in schools where teachers do not receive the programme)?

Acronym

URLEY

Study objectives

The intervention to train teachers in the use of research tools will result in an improvement in children's language development and behavioural outcomes.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Oxford Educations' Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), 21/04/2016

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Single-blind cluster randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Language and social-behavioural development

Interventions

Randomisation will follow recruitment of schools, including the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and baseline data collection. Randomisation will be stratified on the basis of school-level characteristics to ensure balance between treatment and control groups (which will be of equal or near-equal size). This will be conducted using data analysis and statistical software Stata. The randomisation will follow a two-stage process:

1. The schools will be stratified on the basis of FSM students (split across the median sample proportion), and location (with schools split into West Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool groupings).
2. A random number will be generated within each block and the subsamples split into two groups to ensure that school FSM proportion and location are balanced across trial arms. We will use the Department for Education's Performance Tables to determine the FSM proportion (using 'FSMever').

Randomisation will take place once schools have signed the Memorandum of Understanding, returned parental consent forms and baseline data collection is complete. Schools will have their trial arm allocation communicated to them once baseline outcome measures assessments have been collected. The Stata code used for the randomisation will be recorded in the final report. If schools are late to fulfil pre-randomisation requirements, those that have will be randomised in an initial group, with those that are late to meet requirement being randomised at a later date.

Intervention group: The treatment 'programme' consists of training nursery and reception staff to better understand child development and curriculum, and to use environment rating scales (ERS) to evaluate and improve their practice. These scales provide a framework through which the early learning environment can be assessed, focusing on child-centred pedagogy. Staff receiving training will also be given out-of-school mentors who are experienced teachers familiar with using ERS to diagnose and improve their teaching practice. The training and mentoring will begin two months after baseline pre-test data collection is complete, and conclude nine months after baseline pre-test data collection is complete.

Control group: Schools will be expected to continue with 'business as usual', and will be offered the opportunity to take part in the programme following the completion of the study, or a payment of £1,000.

Participants in both groups are followed up after 12 and 18 months.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Language skills are assessed using the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS), the Renfrew Action Picture Test (APT) (both information and grammar scores) and the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) Preschool 2 UK - Sentence Structure subtest at baseline and 18 months.

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Social-behavioural development is measured by the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory (ASBI) total score at baseline and 18 months
2. Quality of the provision for language and social development is measured by a composite score based on items from the ECERS-3, ECRES-E and SSTEW (exact items defined in the trial protocol available at the trial website) at baseline and 12 months

Completion date

30/09/2018

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Schools

1. Located in one of the study areas (Liverpool, Manchester and West Midlands)
2. One or two form entry state primary school with a nursery class (three or four form entry schools will only be accepted where they agree to channel nursery children who have completed a baseline assessment into a reception class led by a participating teacher)
3. Those which have not previously accessed training by A+ Education Ltd which is substantially similar to that being provided via the current intervention, received substantial support from their local authority using rating scales such as the Environment Rating Scales (ECERS and others) or used such tools themselves on a regular basis
4. Willing to fully comply with the requirements of the trial, including the collection of opt-in consent from the parents of children involved in the study and provision of the required school and pupil level data

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. Independent schools
2. Schools with recent and non-trivial engagement with ERS training

Date of first enrolment

01/05/2016

Date of final enrolment

04/11/2016

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre**A+ Education**

Suite 3, Elm House 739 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury

Manchester

United Kingdom

M20 6RN

Sponsor information

Organisation

The Behavioural Insights Team

ROR

<https://ror.org/03mk5b468>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

Participant level data is quite sensitive, as it contains personal and academic information that could be used to identify trial participants. As such, this data will not be made publicly available. However, participant level data will be transferred and stored with the Education Endowment Foundation (the project funder) and (in an anonymised form) the UK Data Archive.

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results		25/02/2020	03/04/2023	No	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Protocol (other)		08/03/2017	03/04/2023	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan	v1.0	25/06/2018	03/04/2023	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes