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A story-based programme to support foundation learning at school entry

Submission date
21/08/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
25/08/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
24/08/2023

Condition category
Other

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

Plain English summary of protocol
Background and study aims
A foundation of strong oral language cascades to improved reading and writing in school, and beyond, which is why boosting children's language skills at school entry is so important. A focus on language skills is even more critical in multilingual settings where children's home language differs from the school language. The Sirsa Intervention Project (SIP) is set up to evaluate a 14-week-long Hindi story-based programme designed to improve children's oral language. The main goal is to examine the effectiveness of a Hindi oral language programme specifically tailored for children at school entry.

Who can participate?
Children enrolled in Balvatika (early childhood centres) and Grade 1 classes. These children are usually aged between 5 and 6 years, but the actual lower bound might be around 4 years and the upper bound around 7 years. It is also not unusual for children older than 7 to be part of these classes as Balvatika and Grade 1 have become the preferred points of entry into the school system, at least for the first six months of the school year, for early grades children arriving from other regions. All children (female and male) in the classes randomly selected for the study will participate unless they opt out.

What does the study involve?
The story-based programme will be delivered in Balvatika/Grade 1 classrooms by their usual teachers following a 2-3-day training programme. Pupils in each participating class within 20 randomly selected schools will receive the programme for 30 minutes every school day for 14 weeks, between August and November. After 14 weeks, the oral language skills of children who experienced the programme will be compared to those of similar children in other 20 schools in a business-as-usual regimen. Oral language includes measurements of expressive vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension and sentence repetition, collected at the start and the end of the study.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
A potential benefit of participating is that the intervention implements the stated curriculum for oral language through a more structured programme; a potential risk of participating is that the programme may be experienced as more intensive than the business-as-usual programme. This

research holds value not only for the Hindi setting in India but also similar other multilingual contexts in low- and middle-income countries. A further potential benefit of the study is that it could provide practical information for
the implementation of an oral language programme at scale.

Where is the study run from?
The study is run by the University of Oxford (UK) in partnership with The Promise Foundation (IN) and the Language and Learning Foundation (IN)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
January 2023 to December 2023

Who is funding the study?
The UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (UK)

Who is the main contact?
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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
SIP23

Study information

Scientific Title

A story-based programme to support foundation learning at school entry: a multi-school randomised controlled trial

Study objectives
The researchers will conduct a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Sirsa Intervention Project (SIP), a narratives-based program designed to improve oral language and foundational learning in urban schools across India. The story-based programme will be delivered in Balvatika /Grade 1 classrooms by their usual teachers following a two-to-three-day training programme. Pupils in each participating class within the intervention group will receive the programme for 30 minutes, at the beginning of each school day, for 14 weeks, between August and November 2023.

The main hypothesis is:
Balvatika and Grade 1 children who experience the story-based programme will show more improvement in their oral language abilities than other children their age in a business-as-usual condition.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 19/06/2023, Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), University of Oxford (15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY, United Kingdom; +44 (0)1865274024; staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk), ref: EDUC_C1A_23_233

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Multi-school cluster randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Oral language and foundational learning

Interventions
This is a multi-school cluster randomized controlled trial. The programme is organised around weekly themes following the schools' timetable for oral language classes. The first lessons every week will focus on the target story with linked oral language activities, followed by formative assessment and consolidation activities at the end of the week. Each lesson begins with a focussing activity and closes with an action poem.

To implement stratified randomization for school selection in the study: schools with fewer than 6 children in Balvatika/Grade 1 classes were excluded to avoid imbalances due to extreme class sizes, reducing the sample from 103 existing schools in the cluster to 82 schools; the remaining schools were grouped based on one stratifier, single-class vs multiple-class, to account for variations in outcomes resulting from different class structures; 20 schools were randomly assigned to the intervention group and 20 to the business-as-usual group, based on the stratification variables and total student counts, aiming to achieve a balance in the number of

schools and children in each group. This was done to obtain a manageable number of schools while maintaining adequate statistical power and balance between the groups.

Schools in the business-as-usual group will be offered the intervention once the study concludes.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
A latent oral language variable informed by measures of expressive vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension and sentence repetition at baseline and endline. Expressive vocabulary is measured using a word definition task, receptive vocabulary using a picture pointing task, listening comprehension using a just-heard narration, and sentence repetition using a just-heard sentence.

In the primary analysis, the pretest latent variable will serve as the covariate, with the posttest latent variable as the outcome. Subsequent analyses will examine the subscales constituting the latent variable. To gauge the intervention's impact, the researchers will employ an effect size measure, ie standardised mean differences, contrasting pre/post differences of students in treatment schools versus those in business-as-usual schools.

Key secondary outcome(s)
A latent variable of foundational learning measured by three tasks (Akshara recognition, number recognition, rapid automatised naming) at baseline and endline

Completion date
31/12/2023

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Children in Balvatika / Grade 1 aged 5 and 6 years

Participant type(s)
Learner/student

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
5 Years

Upper age limit
6 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Schools with fewer than 6 children in Balvatika/Grade 1 classes

Date of first enrolment
24/07/2023

Date of final enrolment
24/09/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
India

Study participating centre
Primary schools around Sirsa city, India
Sirsa
India
125055

Sponsor information

Organisation
UK Research and Innovation

ROR
https://ror.org/001aqnf71

Funder(s)

Funder type
Government

Funder Name
Global Challenges Research Fund

Alternative Name(s)
The Global Challenges Research Fund, GCRF

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Local government

Location
United Kingdom

Funder Name
Economic and Social Research Council

Alternative Name(s)
Social Science Research Council, ESRC, SSRC, UKRI ESRC

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
Research assistants will transfer any paper records from the field site to in-country research offices. Paper records will be digitally scanned inside in-country research offices and uploaded to secure in-country and Oxford digital file storage locations (i.e., the researcher's password-protected project-designated computer and Nexus365 Sharepoint, respectively). All participants will be pseudonymised. Their participant ID will be used on the transcripts. A linkage list will be stored in Excel that records (a) participants' names, and (b) participants' IDs. This linkage list excel-file will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer separately from the research data. Files containing identifying information of participants will not be shared outside of the in-country sites and will be destroyed at the end of the project period.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes