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Evaluation of Infant Language Link: an intervention aiming to improve expressive and receptive language skills among children aged 5-6

Submission date
10/08/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
15/08/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
17/10/2025

Condition category
Other

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

Plain English summary of protocol
Background and study aims
For children with speech and language difficulties, early intervention is crucial for success in education. Targeted interventions sometimes fail to reach the correct pupils. Infant Language Link enables schools to identify and support children in reception, years 1 and 2 with mild to moderate language needs. The intervention uses a graduated approach to determine the level and intensity of support for pupils, using a standardised universal screening tool to accurately assess pupil ability and tiered levels of support to improve language skills.

Who can participate?
Mainstream state primary schools with pupils in reception (age 4-5) and in years 1 and 2 (aged 5-7)

What does the study involve?
The intervention is designed for schools to identify and support pupils from reception (age 4-5), and provide continued support for pupils in years 1 and 2 (aged 5-7). For this evaluation, it will be delivered to year 1 pupils, although intervention schools will be free to also provide the programme to pupils in reception and year 2 should they wish. All pupils in the class are provided with support, and those identified as needing further support participate in targeted group sessions led by Teaching Assistants (TAs).

The online screening tool for assessing pupil language needs is a central part of the intervention. This screening takes place at the start of the intervention period. The Infant Language Link learning materials will be provided to schools; these include 500 group and classroom resources, 12 planned termly language groups, 24 individual teaching plans and 52 handouts for parents.

Guidance notes and session plans for teachers are supplied along with resources to support the delivery of engaging, interactive teaching and learning activities, for example, story planners, talk templates and concept cards. The session plans and ILL learning resources enable TAs to

deliver the targeted group sessions in a structured way. Tracking sheets allow teachers and TAs to record individual pupil progress. Schools in the control group continue providing language support on a business-as-usual basis during the study period.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Pupils could benefit from improvements in receptive and expressive language skills. The programme is delivered in school during school hours by regular school staff. As such, there are no risks of physical or psychological harm beyond those already applicable in a school setting.

Where is the study run from?
The intervention is delivered in Y1 classrooms at schools in England by teachers and teaching assistants employed by the participating schools. These school staff will have received online training offered by the delivery team, who administer the programme remotely and do not visit schools in person.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
October 2022 to January 2025

Who is funding the study?
Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Martin Culliney (Evaluation lead), m.culliney@shu.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title

Evaluation of Infant Language Link: an intervention aiming to improve expressive and receptive language skills among children aged 5-6

Acronym
ILL

Study objectives
Research questions
1. Primary research question: What is the impact of the intervention on Year 1 pupils' language and communication skills, as measured by the primary outcome (CELF linguistic concepts and sentence comprehension subtests and RAPT combined)?

2. Secondary research questions:
2.1. What is the impact of the intervention on the subgroup of Year 1 pupils who received targeted support, as measured by the primary and secondary outcomes?
2.2. What is the impact of the intervention on the subgroup of Year 1 FSM pupils, as measured by the primary outcome?
2.3. What is the impact of the intervention on Year 1 pupils' receptive and expressive language skills as measured by individual subtests of the outcome measure (CELF linguistic concepts and sentence comprehension; RAPT information and grammar)?
2.4. What is the impact of the intervention on the subgroup of EAL pupils, as measured by the primary outcome?

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 07/02/2023, Sheffield Hallam research ethics committee (Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, S1 1WB, United Kingdom; None available; SSH-ResearchEthics@shu.ac.uk), ref: ER51329820

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Two-arm cluster-randomized controlled trial with random allocation at the school level

Study type(s)
Efficacy

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Expressive and receptive language

Interventions
This trial is evaluating the Infant Language Link intervention. Pupils in schools randomly allocated to the intervention group will receive the programme, which uses a standardised universal screening tool to assess pupil ability in language and communication. The results are used to determine whether additional support is required through small group or one-to-one sessions delivered by teaching assistants, who receive training from the developer in the form of two 90-minute webinars. Teachers at intervention schools also attend two online training

sessions. All delivery takes place at school during normal lesson times. Pupils in control schools continue to be taught under business-as-usual conditions.

Randomisation will be conducted at the school level to minimise spillover risk. The procedure will be conducted using the 'stratarand' command in Stata. All schools will be allocated at the same time. Three stratifiers will be used, specifically whether a school: is/not (1/0) in an Education Investment Area, does/not (1/0) use any relevant interventions (such as NELI, Wellcomm and Talk Boost), and uses external speech and language therapy support.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Impact of Infant Language Link on language and communication skills in pupils measured using a combined measure derived from the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals - Fifth Edition (CELF5) receptive and expressive language subtests and the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT) at the end of Year 1

Key secondary outcome(s)
Impact of Infant Language Link on language and communication skills in pupils measured using the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals - Fifth Edition (CELF 5) receptive and expressive language subtests and the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT) as separate measures at the end of Year 1

Completion date
31/01/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
All maintained mainstream schools with pupils in the appropriate age range can take part provided that they have not already used the Infant Language Link intervention.

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
Pupils diagnosed with:
1. Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)
2. Selective mutism
3. Global learning difficulties

Date of first enrolment
01/03/2023

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Sheffield Institute of Education
10101 Arundel Building
Sheffield
United Kingdom
S1 1AY

Sponsor information

Organisation
Education Endowment Foundation

ROR
https://ror.org/03bhd6288

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name
Education Endowment Foundation

Alternative Name(s)
EducEndowFoundn, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Education Endowment Foundation | London, EEF

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 non-publicly available repository, the EEF data archive, as pseudonymised (meaningless pupil and school identifiers) pupil assessment scores study data. Researchers can apply for access. Consent from participants was required and obtained.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results		01/10/2025	17/10/2025	No	No
Participant information sheet			15/08/2023	No	Yes
Protocol file	version 2.0	07/05/2024	22/01/2025	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan	version 1.0	08/05/2024	22/01/2025	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes