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Evaluation of Talking Time: efficacy trial

Submission date
19/07/2024

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
23/07/2024

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
17/09/2026

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
Children from economically disadvantaged households experience disproportionate language learning delays in comparison to their less disadvantaged peers. The development of language and communication skills can have a significant impact on children's academic achievement, and their employment outcomes as adults. Talking Time© is a universal intervention targeting the oral language skills of children aged between 3 to 4 years. The intervention is designed to provide high-quality professional development to early years practitioners that will enable them to deliver a project of engaging structured activities to support the oral language skills of children in small groups in the nursery setting. The study will assess whether the Talking Time© programme has an impact on the oral language development of children.

Who can participate?
All children aged 3-4 years attending the selected State-maintained and private, voluntary and independent early years settings, for at least 15 hours per week can take part. Settings are recruited from the following local authority areas: North West: Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, parts of Lancashire (Burnley, Chorley and Rossendale); Yorkshire & Humber: Calderdale, Kirklees, Wakefield; West Midlands: Walsall, Shropshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Telford& Wrekin, Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton; East of England: Hertfordshire, parts of Essex (Brentwood, Harlow, Epping Forest, Basildon, Castle Point), Thurrock, Bedford, Luton, Central Bedfordshire, Southend; London: Camden, Barking and Dagenham, Westminster, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Enfield, City of London, Redbridge, Brent, Islington, Barnet, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Kensington and Chelsea.

What does the study involve?
Talking Time is an intervention designed to provide high-quality professional development to early years practitioners that will enable them to deliver a programme of engaging structured activities to children aged 3-4 years in small groups in the nursery setting. The programme aims to develop supportive conditions for language development, specifically, meaningful and engaging structured small-group experiences which allow children to hear and rehearse language in the context of multi-turn conversations. The intervention has been designed by experts in child language acquisition and early years professional development based in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford and the Institute of Education at University College London. Trainer-mentors recruited by the University of Oxford delivery team will deliver the intervention to early years practitioners.

This evaluation will assess whether the Talking Time programme has an impact on the oral language development of children aged 3-4. The evaluation also involves an implementation and process evaluation, to understand the extent to which the programme is implemented as intended, perceived impacts on outcomes, and to add greater depth to the findings, including the extent to which there is support for the causal pathways set out in the underlying theory of change. Finally, the evaluation will also estimate the cost of the programme.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The potential benefits will include improved language-supporting practice among early years practitioners in the selected settings, and improved grammar and oral language skills among children in settings assigned to the intervention.
No potential harm is envisaged for children, some potential increase in workload and routine disruption is possible for staff employed in the participating settings.

Where is the study run from?
1. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (UK)
2. The University of Oxford (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
August 2023 to October 2026

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

Who is the main contact?
Edoardo Masset, e.masset@niesr.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Study information

Scientific Title
Efficacy Trial of Talking Time©, an oral language intervention for early years

Study objectives
High quality professional development to early years' practitioners that enables them to deliver a programme of engaging structured activities to children aged 3-4 years in small groups in the nursery setting, can improve children's grammar and oral language skills.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 08/12/2023, NIESR Research Ethics Committee (REC) (2 Dean Trench Street, London, SW1P 3HE, United Kingdom; +44 (0)20 3948 4488; k.stockland@niesr.ac.uk), ref: EP30 31/10 /2023

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Cluster randomized control trial

Study type(s)
Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Oral language and grammar skills of children aged 3-4 attending early years settings in disadvantaged communities in England

Interventions
The study recruited 130 early-year settings across England from the State-maintained and from the private sector.

The researchers will use cluster randomisation. Half of the settings will be assigned to the intervention and the remaining half will be assigned to a control group not receiving the intervention. All children in the clusters assigned to the intervention will receive the intervention.

Randomisation will be conducted within strata. There will be five strata consisting of five geographic regions. After distributing study settings across regions, in each region the researchers will randomly select an equal number of intervention and control settings.

Randomisation will be conducted using Stata 17 in the following way:
1. Each setting will be assigned a randomly generated number
2. Settings will be sorted by strata and by the random number
3. In each stratum, the first setting will be allocated to either project or control, on the basis of the randomly generated number
4. Each subsequent setting will be assigned to have the opposite allocation of the previous setting

The intervention is Talking Time, a universal intervention targeting the oral language skills of children aged 3 to 4. It supports early years practitioners in delivering a programme of structured small-group activities to children. Children take part in two 15-minute activities per week during regular provision, for a period of 20 weeks during the academic year (from

November 2024 to June 2025). The programme is based on three evidence-based activities:
1. Shared storytelling and conversation using illustrations in storybooks as prompts ('Story Conversations')
2. Games and guided role play designed to develop vocabulary ('Word Play')
3. Narrative discussion and retelling based on photos of real situations likely to be familiar to children ('Hexagons').

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Sentence repetition measured by the Grammar and Phonology Screening assessment (GAPS) at the beginning of the academic year in September-October 2024 (baseline) and again at the end of the academic year in June-July 2025 (endline)

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Expressive vocabulary measured by the Renfrew Expressive Vocabulary Test, at the beginning of the academic year in September-October 2024 (baseline) and again at the end of the academic year in June-July 2025 (endline)
2. Information and grammar score measured by the Renfrew Action Picture Test, at the beginning of the academic year in September-October 2024 (baseline) and again at the end of the academic year in June-July 2025 (endline)

Completion date
31/10/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Children aged 3-4 years
2. Children attending settings for a minimum of 15 hours per week

Participant type(s)
Learner/student

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
3 Years

Upper age limit
4 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
29/01/2024

Date of final enrolment
29/07/2024

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Thrive Together Early Years Stronger Practice Hub (West Midlands)
Ryders Hayes School
Gilpin Crescent
Pelsall, Walsall
England
WS3 4HR

Study participating centre
Liverpool City Region and Beyond Early Years Stronger Practice Hub
Everton Nursery School and Family Centre
Spencer Street
Liverpool
England
L6 2WF

Study participating centre
REACHout - Early Years Stronger Practice Hub East of England
The Barn Nursery School
Crocklands
Greenstead Green, Halstead
England
CO9 1QY

Study participating centre
A Brighter Start: East London’s Early Years Stronger Practice Hub
Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre
Sheringham Avenue
London
England
E12 5PB

Study participating centre
St Edmund's Early Years Stronger Practice Hub
St Edmund’s Nursery School and Children’s Centre
Washington Street
Girlington, Bradford
England
BD8 9QW

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 the trial and analysed during the current study are not expected to be made available to the public because they include information authorised by parents' consent for the purpose of the study only. De-anonymised data will be archived in the EEF data archive managed by FFT Education at the end of the study (October 2016), and will be available to researchers upon approval of request.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Basic results			17/09/2026	No	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Plain English results			17/09/2026	No	Yes
Protocol file	version 2.0.0	01/09/2025	17/09/2026	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan	version 1.0	12/09/2025	17/09/2026	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes