

Toddlers' language development can predict later ability

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Credit: Newcastle University

A team of researchers, led by Professor James Law from the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, looked at the existing evidence to find out which interventions have the greatest potential for boosting toddlers' language skills and reducing inequalities in outcomes. They also summarised the existing literature on language development.

The [report](#), published this week, was commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in partnership with Public Health England.

According to the report:

- [children's](#) gestures, such as pointing, are key to their early [language development](#);
- toddlers need to be using between 50 and 100 words before they start putting words together, a skill that can be a better predictor of later abilities than the number of words used;
- at some point between the ages of two and three, children typically start to produce longer, more complex sentences.

However, the most recent figures suggest that between 7-14% of children struggle with language before school starts. This can hold back their reading and writing ability later in school.

Importance of early years provision

The researchers identified a series of intervention studies which have had positive results on developing [language skills](#). They found one of the best ways to improve early language [development](#) for this group is through training for teachers in early years settings so that they can deliver cost-effective and evidence based interventions to those children who have fallen behind.

In addition to high-quality early years provision, the researchers identify interactions with parents as key. They highlight a need to promote positive interaction between parents and their children before they get to nursery at 2-3 years.

The report also stresses the need for better monitoring of children's progress at different stages of their development, to catch those children falling behind and to identify those who need targeted, specialist support.

James Law, Professor of Speech and Language Sciences, said: "Children's [language](#) development is key to an individual's personal and educational development. Differences between those at the top and the bottom of the social scale have started to open up by the time children are aged two years, and these remain pronounced right through primary school and through into the workforce.

"Through these reports Public Health England has now identified this as one of its priorities and will be taking this forward to influence policy and practice over the next few years."

The evidence review will inform guidance on early years literacy teaching, due to be published later this year.

More information: Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds: [educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-language-development_final.pdf](#)

Provided by Newcastle University

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