

An integrated approach to teaching vocabulary and phonics to support reading

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Current literacy teaching focusses on phonics with less emphasis on language. Although many do well, children with weak language skills struggle, including deaf children, hearing children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with EAL, or language difficulties^{1,2,3,4}. For these children, delays occur in the early stages of reading, becoming more severe with progress through school. Language teaching is therefore needed, as well as phonics, to support literacy development.

This study investigated:

- The acceptability to school staff of a novel integrated phonics and language programme for Teaching literacy
- Teachers' adherence to the programme
- preliminary outcomes in intervention and control groups.

115 hearing and 23 deaf children (MA 4;09) from 2 mainstream schools and 4 deaf resources were randomly allocated to intervention and control groups at the level of the school. Intervention school staff were trained to deliver the integrated programme instead of their usual literacy teaching in children's first year in school. The control group delivered schools' regular teaching, receiving training and resources at end of study.

The intervention integrated three components: a language-rich systematic phonics programme, Floppy's Phonics⁵; a vocabulary enrichment programme, Word Aware⁶, and (for deaf children) Visual Phonics⁷.

Schools were visited termly to monitor fidelity and ensure that teaching in intervention and control schools was distinct. Fidelity visits and a focus group explored intervention acceptability.

Children were assessed at the start and end of year by blinded testers on literacy, vocabulary and phonological measures. Group scores were compared to investigate intervention benefits.

Teachers liked the intervention, although some differences were observed between teachers in mainstream schools and deaf resources. The fidelity checklist developed effectively monitored teachers' programme adherence and identified areas needing support. With subsequent visits, programme fidelity improved. Significant effects, with medium-large effect sizes, were found for reading and spelling and a smaller effect size for expressive vocabulary.

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