

Evaluating a digital service for parents to support toddler language development: A pilot and feasibility service

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Abstract

BBC Education's Tiny Happy People (THP) service seeks to reduce the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on children's language skills before they begin primary school. Recent studies suggest this service can support parent-child interaction but more intensive support is needed for families whose children are at higher risk of language delay. To this end, we adapted the Early Language Identification Measure- Intervention (ELIM-I) for delivery online. This Pilot and Feasibility Study aims to determine whether an intervention that combines the delivery of THP videos via text message with video-calls with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) delivering the ELIM is feasible and acceptable to parents of toddlers, and whether it promotes parent-child interaction and child language.

Participants are 200 families with children aged 30-36 months located across the UK who have continued to the current study following their involvement in a previous infant phase evaluation of THP materials. Families have been randomly allocated to the language intervention arm or to an active control arm. Parents in the language intervention arm receive short THP videos sent by text message three times a month on the topic of language development, with a text message follow-up. On the basis that their children are at higher risk of language delay (identified by known risk factors), 25% of these families were then offered higher intensity support via a series of video-calls with a qualified SLT following the ELIM protocol. Families in the active control arm are also sent videos by text message three times a month but on the topics of child health and safety, with a text message follow-up.

Pre-registered primary outcome measures will assess participant engagement with the text messages (link clicks) and video-calls with the SLTs (number of video-calls attended). Secondary outcome measures will include the fidelity of the video calls; feasibility of service delivery (participant attrition), participant acceptability of the text message and video-calls (questionnaire); and SLT acceptability of the video-calls (questionnaire). Data collection for this will complete in May 2024. Outcomes will be reported and discussed in terms of recent findings regarding features of effective and proportionate preventative services for families.