

Leveraging Early Childhood Care centers to reduce child language development inequalities

Cécile Crimon^{1,2}, Anne-Caroline Fiévet¹, Anne Christophe¹ & Sho Tsuji^{1,3}

¹LSCP, ENS, PSL University, EHESS, CNRS; ²Université Paris Cité; ³IRCN, the University of Tokyo

Around 34% of European children attend an Early Childhood Education Care setting (ECEC). But despite well-recognised impacts of the sociolinguistic environment on children's language development, the quality of care, notably regarding the educator-child interactions, is still highly heterogeneous (Eurydice, 2019). Parental trainings on evidence-based practices to foster language development have shown promising results. We here developed a RCT protocol to measure the effect of daycare center educators training on toddlers' language development, aiming to answer common limitations regarding scalability, generalizability and the age of children targeted, through the reliance on professionals and an online community training system. 179 educators and 230 20-28 month-olds from 35 French daycares were recruited. Half of the daycares' educators followed the Treatment training on language development, the other half a Control training. We first report effects on educators. Pre-training, we observed a significant positive main effect of their education level on scores to the SPEAK survey measuring language development knowledge (Suskind et al., 2018) ($p < .001$), demonstrating heterogeneity and room for improvement. Regarding training effects, scores to the two quizzes on Treatment and Control contents at Post-test showed a significant main effect of training group, demonstrating the capacity of educators to learn from our trainings ($p < .001$). As to effects on children, neither our direct tablet test of children's receptive vocabulary and word-learning abilities, nor the indirect parental vocabulary questionnaire (MBCDI) showed any effect of educators' training on children's language development at Post-test. The implementation difficulties faced by educators throughout the project, related to ECEC's difficult daily realities (like chronic understaffing) might have contributed to these findings. Our work shows a path forward in developing scalable universal language interventions, partnering with community actors. It raises questions regarding the feasibility of fostering child development through daycares without meaningful investments to improve the entire ECEC system.