Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention

Key Conclusions

1. This evaluation does not provide any evidence that the Vocabulary Enrichment Full Programme had an impact on attainment in reading.

2. There was considerable variation in the way that the three components of the intervention were combined. The intervention would therefore have benefited from a pilot stage to refine the elements used in the Full Programme.

3. Pupils generally appeared to engage well with the intervention. However, some higher-ability pupils found the programme too easy and teachers felt that they should not be in the study.

4. In general, Literacy Plus and Sounds-Write were perceived by teachers to be less appropriate or less essential than VEIP. Sounds-Write is aimed at a younger audience than Year 7, but was used as there is a lack of phonics programmes specifically designed for secondary school pupils.

5. Given the emphasis placed by some teachers on vocabulary skills, a future trial might use a different test that captures this aspect better than the New Group Reading Test.

What is the impact?

There is no evidence from this evaluation that the Vocabulary Enrichment Full Programme had an impact on pupils’ reading ability. The headline findings suggest that on average the programme had a slightly positive impact on the reading ability across all pupils and across pupils eligible for free school meals, with effect sizes of 0.06 and 0.01, respectively. However, these estimates are not statistically significant so we are not able to conclude that the observed effects were caused by the programme rather than occurring by chance.

Observations and interviews with staff suggested that pupils generally appeared to engage well with the intervention. However, some higher-ability pupils found the programme too easy and teachers felt that they should not be in the study.

How secure is the finding?

Overall, the evaluation findings are rated as considerably secure. This assessment takes into account a number of factors including the study’s design, size, and level of drop-out.

Impact was assessed through a two-arm pupil-randomised controlled trial in twelve schools; 649 pupils in Year 7 were randomised to either the Vocabulary Enrichment Full Programme or the ‘business as usual’ control group. Although there was attrition of 12% by the final analysis, there was no evidence that this led to bias on observable...
characteristics that might impinge on the security of the findings.

There had been no assessment of the impact of the Full Programme prior to this trial. The main component of the intervention, the Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme (VEIP), was one arm of a randomised controlled trial undertaken by its developer in 21 secondary schools in outer London areas from 2006. The developer reported a significant impact of VEIP on vocabulary test scores, although the trial has not been reported in full. There is a lack of published evidence for the effectiveness of Literacy Plus and Sounds-Write.

As the present study represents the first formal evaluation of the Full Programme, and teachers had supervision and support from the development team and from a visiting educational psychologist, this study can be regarded as an efficacy trial. Efficacy trials seek to test evaluations in the best possible conditions to see if they hold promise. They do not indicate the extent to which the intervention will be effective in all schools, because the participating schools are selected from one area and the programme is closely managed by the developers.

The primary outcome was reading ability as assessed by scores from the GL Assessment New Group Reading Test (NGRT). The secondary outcomes were the two NGRT subscales: sentence completion and passage comprehension. Test administration was carried out by staff at the participating schools. Efforts were made to ensure that test administration was blind in every school, although complete blindness, as if delivered externally, could not be guaranteed. The test marking was carried out by GL Assessment and was therefore blind.

Analysis was completed on an ‘intention to treat’ basis, reflecting the reality of how interventions are delivered in practice.

How much does it cost?

The project had core costs, such as the externally-delivered training and teaching resources, and variable (additional) costs, such as the training delivered by the developers and ongoing support from an educational psychologist. The minimum (core) cost per school to train and equip four teachers to deliver the intervention to 100 pupils would be around £7,470 (£75 per pupil). The maximum cost (core plus variable costs) per school could be in the region of £10,990 (£110 per pupil).