

Cover sheet

For this assignment I have submitted the following:

- Component 1- A literature review
- Component 2- Methodological considerations
- Component 3- Ethical considerations

I confirm that I have not used AI during this assignment.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I have used which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Introduction

This assignment will explore the use of different methodologies to determine whether small group interventions will help develop children's delayed language and communication skills. Communication and language development are fundamental in early childhood as they allow children to express their needs and support social interaction and future learning. This assignment will also examine whether children are entering schools with a lower level of language and communication, and some reasons as to why this might be the case. The aim of this assignment is to discover whether small group activities help support language and communication development, and the ethical considerations that must be evaluated before conducting the research.

Children entering school with lower levels of communication skills, do small group interventions help?

Studies by Cooper and Kelly (2025) show that children appear to be entering schools with lower levels of communication skills. The development of language and communication is fundamental as it allows children to express their wants and needs (Tierney *et al.*, 2023, p. 1). This implies that children with language and communication delays may have difficulty expressing their interests, expressing if there is something wrong, or explaining what they would like to do. This may lead to the child feeling frustrated as they are unable to communicate their feelings properly. Essa and Burnham (2019, p. 297) also emphasise the importance of early language for developing language and communication skills. They argue that the amount of language a child is exposed to in the early years significantly influences the child's vocabulary development. (Essa and Burnham 2019, p. 297). This highlights the importance of communication skills as they form a crucial foundation for children's development.

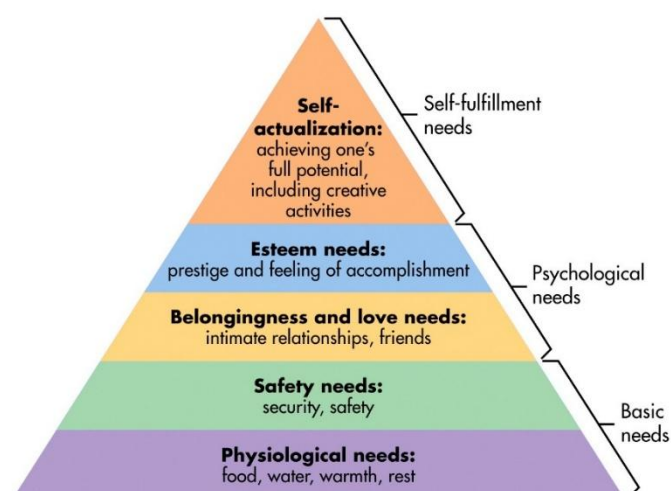
Studies by Cooper and Kelly (2025) suggest that children appear to be entering schools with lower levels of communication skills. A range of factors could contribute to this, including the relationship a child has with its caregivers and the quality of interaction at home (Buckley, 2012, p. 9). This highlights the importance of frequent, positive interaction, as it is how the child will learn to express itself. According to Buckley (2012, p. 9), another reason for lower level of communication skills when entering school could simply be a lack of interest in communicating from the child. This point does not seem to consider the developmental and environmental impacts on language and communication, as there could be a deeper reason a child seems uninterested to communicate.

Research by the theorist Les Vygotsky demonstrates the importance of social interaction in relation to a child's language and communication development. Vygotsky suggests that development occurs through interaction with others, as a child will learn from others and its environment (Bodrova and Leong, 2024, p. 14). This highlights that the way a child is communicated with at home may significantly influence their language development. Meaning, children who have less exposure to

language interactions may have fewer opportunities to develop their communication skills.

In addition, a child's background could also contribute to delays in language and communication development. Factors such as birth complications, low family income, or lack of parental knowledge have been identified as influencing language delay (Mondal *et al.*, 2016, p. 1). For example, if caregivers do not understand the importance of early communication strategies, such as serve and return, the child may have reduced exposure to language. Therefore, the child would have less opportunity to develop their language and communication skills.

Small group interventions provide children with time and space to take part in activities made to suit the development of language and communication skills (Brodie, 2026, p. 9). The role of the adult leading the small group activity is significant as they should carefully cater it to adapt to the children's needs to ensure the success and effectiveness of the intervention (Brodie, 2026, p. 9). Early literacy approaches (2023) state that targeted small group activities can be particularly effective, especially for children from a disadvantaged background, as they provide additional opportunities for language and communication exposure. Similarly, Leggett and Ford (2015) state that small group activities can support both communication skills and confidence, as children are given the opportunity to interact with peers who may be at a similar level of communication. Providing children with opportunities to engage in small group activities with their peers may also support their sense of belonging and self-esteem. The importance of a child's sense of belonging is highlighted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, as he believed that a



(Comberg, 2011)

child must feel a strong sense of belonging before they can progress further up the hierarchy (Comberg, 2011).

Although Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was discovered around 1943, it is still being evaluated and used to date, emphasising its importance (Ahmad Dar and Sakthivel, 2022). By adapting activities to meet children at their current level of development, practitioners can support language and communication in a meaningful way. This may enable children to feel a sense of achievement, particularly when they complete tasks that may appear simple to others but demonstrate progress for them. For example, after a few small group activities, a child may develop the ability to describe an object to an adult or one of their peers, demonstrating confidence in their communication skills. Providing a safe environment in which children can express themselves may contribute to the child's language development and self-esteem. However, Tal (2018) argues that the purpose of small group interventions must be clear and implemented positively. Tal (2018) states that small group intervention can be positive if the groups are appropriate, with an appropriate level of challenge. If the activity is well matched to the group of children and their abilities, they are more likely to succeed and make progress. In contrast, if expectations are too high, this may lead to frustration, and the children will not benefit (Tal 2018). This highlights the importance of careful planning to ensure that all children can benefit.

However, it could be difficult to conclude how effective small group interventions are, as it could be argued that there seem to be limitations within the existing research for example, Blankman (2024) argues that by demonstrating small group interventions with specific children, it may result in other children being overlooked. While this raises a valid concern, the lack of evidence to Blankman's argument limits the strength of the argument. Furthermore, practitioners could sometimes adapt activities to include more children to ensure all children have the opportunity to partake in small group activities, however prioritising the children with lower language and communication to ensure they can catch up to the rest of their peers as much as possible.

In addition, there appears to be a lack of quantitative evidence within the research. For example, while Leggett and Ford (2015) emphasise the importance of the

developmental outcome of the small group intervention activities, there is limited discussion of data to clearly demonstrate the effectiveness. At the same time, there also seems to be a gap in the qualitative first-hand research exploring children's experiences of these interventions. While the aim of the research is to support communications and language development, less attention is given to how children feel when participating in small group activities or being taken out of the classroom. Some children may benefit and enjoy the attention, while it may make others feel excluded from the rest of the class. Additionally, there seems to be limited exploration of children's engagement or enjoyment during the small group activities, suggesting that the current research may not fully capture the emotional aspects of small group activities.

Section two – methodological considerations

To observe children effectively, the appropriate technique must be carefully considered. Järvinen (2023) highlights the importance of choosing the right research methods, arguing that inappropriate methodology may risk the accuracy and reliability of the research findings. Järvinen (2023) explains that to find the correct method for research, the researcher must first decide whether they want their research to primarily be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research focuses on words, meanings, and experiences to gain deeper understanding of behaviours and perspectives (Mehrad *et al.*, 2019, p. 2). Whereas quantitative research focuses on numbers, patterns, and data, allowing researchers to measure progress and find trends (Mehrad *et al.*, 2019, p. 2). During this research project, both quantitative and qualitative approaches may be valuable when exploring whether small group interventions support children's language and communication development.

Wellcomm is an observation screening tool that could be used to track the progress of children's language and communication skills before and during small group interventions. It is designed for children aged six months to six years and aims to identify speech, language, and communication delays through observing behaviour and how children answer specific questions (Dysart and Code, 2024). In this research project the researcher will be working with children aged three to four, as that is the age they enter school. Wellcomm may be a particularly useful observation method within this research due to its wide age range and structured approach. After observing the children through the screening process, guidance on structured activities is provided to support the child's development, allowing practitioners to adapt the small group activities to meet individual needs.

Cohen (2011) argue that observation is an effective method for understanding children's behaviour, as it will allow the researcher to capture authentic behaviour in a natural environment. Similarly, Kumar and Sharma (2023) state that observation is one of the most effective methods to capture real-life behaviours in children, as they will be in their natural environment. However, to ensure observations are effective, the researcher should carefully plan what they aim to observe and how they will do it (Kumar and Sharma 2023, p. 2). To ensure preparation during this research task, the

researcher should, therefore, familiarise themselves with the handbook provided, prepare the right questions, and organise any resources needed.

Observation may be a particularly beneficial method when researching children with limited or delayed vocabulary, as it enables practitioners to identify a child's communication patterns and developmental needs without relying on a verbal response (Newby, 2014, p. 358). This suggests that observation could support early intervention, as the researcher could identify communication and language limitations or delays at an early enough stage to implement support strategies, such as small group activities, to help develop children's language skills and confidence (Leggett and Ford, 2015).

However, Bardon *et al.* (2020) argue that although observation is one of the best methods to capture authentic behaviour, it may be difficult to accurately communicate the information found to someone else who was not part of the observation. This suggests that observations may potentially affect the reliability of the research, as the information may lack clarity. To improve this, the researcher should consider taking brief notes during the observation to record significant moments. However, Mulhall (2003) contradicts this, as he recognises the importance of notetaking during observation but argues that practitioners should not focus solely on writing information, as it may distract them from the observation, which could result in key moments being missed.

Another limitation of the observation method could be the Hawthorne effect. According to Berkhout *et al.* (2022), the Hawthorne Effect is when children have a complex that they are being watched and therefore change their behaviour. This may be a limitation to the research, as children may not behave naturally during the observation process. For example, some children may become quieter, whilst others may become more confident because they're being watched. Within this research project, the Hawthorne effect may particularly affect the Wellcomm part of the research, as children may act differently when interacting directly with the researcher. However, as the children will be observed in their comfortable, familiar environment, it may help the children feel as though they can act more naturally.

Another method that could be used to measure children's language and communication skills is interviews. Interviews may support qualitative research, as

they allow children to express their opinions, feelings and perspectives in their own words (Ey, 2016, p. 37). This conveys that interviewing is a good methodology to gain insight into children's perspectives and experiences while also helping them feel listened to and valued. Providing children with opportunities to share their views and opinions may contribute to their sense of belonging, which links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the importance of self-esteem (Rojas *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, Newby (2014, p. 359) agrees that interviews are one of the best methods for gaining children's views and opinions. Newby (2014, p. 359) also suggests that small group activities may provide an effective environment for interviewing, as children may gain confidence from being with peers and may feel more comfortable discussing their opinions. In addition, by being in a small group, children may build upon each other's ideas, potentially leading to a deeper insight into their thoughts. be used as an effective way of interviewing, as by bringing children together they may give each other confidence to discuss honestly and may feed off each other's ideas (Newby, 2014, p. 359).

On the other hand, questionnaires would not be an appropriate method for researching whether small group interventions support children's speech and language development. Although Bell (2006, p. 132) states that questionnaires are an efficient and effective method to gather information and reach a conclusion, they may not be suitable for children aged six months to six years. This could be because participating in a questionnaire requires a level of understanding that the younger children may not yet have. Newby (2014, p. 94) believes that participants should understand what they are taking part in when engaging in research activities. Although the child's assent to participate in the activity is vital, children with delayed language and communication skills may struggle to fully understand or respond to a questionnaire. As a result, the data may not be accurate, making observations and interviews more appropriate methods for researching children's language and communication progress during participation in small group activities.

According to Elkatawneh (2016), quantitative research methods focus on numbers and statistics, whereas qualitative research methods focus on experiences, behaviours and feelings. To research into whether small group interventions support children's language and communication development, the researcher will use the Wellcomm screening tool before and during the intervention period, using both

qualitative and quantitative approaches. The use of observation through Wellcomm is primarily qualitative, as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the children's behaviour, interaction and communication skills and identify any developmental changes over time within a natural environment. However, the researcher will also include quantitative elements, as the data gathered through Wellcomm assessments will be recorded on paper and compared to track the children's progress throughout the small group interventions. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data may provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the interventions.

To carry out research on whether early group interventions support children with delayed language and communication skills, the researcher would use two methods, observation and interview. The use of more than one research method is known as triangulation. Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021, p. 1) recognise triangulation as a valuable approach which combines two or more methods to strengthen research which will help achieve the aim. In this research, the aim will be to discover if small group activities develop delayed language and communication skills. Triangulation may also help to validate the research findings. As previously discussed, no method is completely perfect, therefore by using triangulation to combine methods and qualitative and quantitative approaches, it may help improve the overall quality of the research (Bans-Akutey and Tiimub, 2021, p. 1). Similarly, Noble and Heale (2019) highlight that triangulation allows multiple theories and methods to be combined, reducing the risk of relying solely on one perspective for data collection and accuracy. However, França *et al.* (2024) argue that triangulation may create analytic complexity, as combining qualitative and quantitative data may make research harder to interpret. In addition, the researcher may not need to use more than one method during this research project to discover whether small group interventions will help to develop children's delayed language and communication skills. Due to the young age range within this project, ranging from three to four, certain methods like interviews, but mainly questionnaires, may not be fully effective, as some children may struggle to verbally express their thoughts or fully understand what they are being asked. Therefore, despite the limitations, observation through Wellcomm would be the best method to provide valuable insights into children's language

communication development over time, determining whether small group activities have an impact.

Section three – Ethical considerations

Sidgwick (2022) highlights the importance of ethical considerations whilst carrying out research, as ethics help researchers decide what is right and wrong throughout the research process. He also emphasises that ethics encourage researchers to reflect on what is most important, rather than focusing solely on the aims of the research project (Sidgwick, 2022). Similarly, Ahmad Dar and Shairgojri (2022) agree that ethics are fundamental when carrying out research, as they help researchers avoid conflict and ensure their behaviour aligns with the accepted societal standards. These points suggest that ethics may form the base of any successful research project. In addition, UWTSD (2022) states that researchers working with children must have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to ensure children's safeguarding and protection. During this research project, the researcher will regularly interact with children whilst observing their communication and language development, therefore a DBS check is essential to help ensure the children's safety and wellbeing.

The Bobo doll experiment by Albert Bandura is an example of research that did not fully consider the ethical factors of researching with children. The aim of this experiment was to study how children learn behaviour through observation (Everywhere Psychology, 2012). Within the study, different groups of children observed different behaviours towards the doll. One group observed aggressive behaviour, another observed calm and non-aggressive behaviour, and another group observed no adult modelling at all (Everywhere Psychology, 2012). The study showed that the children who saw the aggressive behaviour were then more likely to behave aggressively towards the doll themselves. This experiment raises ethical concerns, as there was not much consideration of the possible long-term effects the exposure to aggression may have had on the children. This experiment therefore highlights the importance of ethics when researching with children, as research should avoid causing any harm to the children. This experiment also emphasises the importance of prioritising the children's wellbeing throughout the Wellcomm observations and small group interventions.

ERIC (2013) highlights the importance of ethics as a way of ensuring children's rights are protected. ERIC (2013) states that ethical responsibility within research

involving children belongs to everybody involved in the research project. This emphasises the importance of listening to children's voices, views and beliefs whilst carrying out research. Ethics are especially important within early years research, as young children may not fully understand their rights or may struggle to communicate what they are feeling. Because of this, it is essential that the researcher regularly checks whether the child or children are happy to continue participating and remains aware of signs of distress or discomfort. This highlights the importance of understanding consent and assent when working with children. Spriggs (2023, p. 111) argues that gaining consent from children differs from gaining consent from adults, emphasising the need for researchers to understand the differences. Spriggs (2023, p. 111) states that gaining direct consent from young children may be difficult due to their limited vocabulary and understanding, meaning that an advocate or carer may need to consent on their behalf. Within this research project, the researcher would therefore need to gain consent from parents or carers before the children participate in the Wellcomm observations. To gain the parents' consent, the researcher may need to discuss the purpose of the research with the carers to ensure they understand what the aim of the research is.

If a child cannot consent for themselves, that is when assent is needed. Respecting a child's assent helps ensure the researcher upholds children's rights and wellbeing throughout the process (ERIC 2013). Spriggs (2023, p. 112) explains that a child's willingness to participate may be shown through their involvement, enthusiasm and engagement, particularly when they are unable to verbally provide consent due to limited language and communication. This highlights that even if parental consent has been given, the researcher must still follow the child's wishes throughout the process. If a child appears upset or distressed, the research should not continue. Within this research project, the researcher must therefore respect the children's assent and only remove children from the classroom for Wellcomm observations or small group activities if the child appears comfortable and willing. As this research focuses on children with delayed language and communication development, understanding the signs of assent will be vital. The researcher should carefully observe the children's body language, facial expressions and behaviour for any signs of discomfort to ensure the children's wellbeing remains protected throughout the research.

However, Boyd and Ivey (2023) argue that a certain level of discomfort may be a natural part of observations and research participation. Therefore, rather than attempting to avoid all discomfort, they suggest that children's emotions should be supported appropriately throughout the research project. Boyd and Ivey (2023) suggest that children could be provided with a calm space to reflect on their feelings before being encouraged to try again. This perspective slightly contrasts with Spriggs' emphasis on respecting children's assent, as it could suggest that researchers should continue encouraging participation even after a child has shown discomfort. This could raise ethical concerns, as repeatedly encouraging a child to participate after they have shown unwillingness may overlook the child's wishes. Therefore, within this research project, the researcher must carefully balance supporting the children emotionally whilst also respecting their right to withdraw or not participate.

In addition, the British Educational Research Association (2024) highlights the importance of protecting children throughout the research process. They state that confidentiality must remain a priority to ensure children are protected (British Educational Research Association, 2024). To maintain confidentiality within this research, the researcher should only store the relevant information, such as the child's name and age, and the Wellcomm observations used to track the child's communication and language progress. Furthermore, to keep the child's dignity by following the Data Protection Act 2018, the researcher should ensure that the information is stored securely and only shared with necessary practitioners and parents if concerns arise or early intervention is required (Data Protection Act 2018). Ensuring this would help protect the children's dignity and privacy.

The use of small group activities as a part of the observation process may also create ethical complications. Forsell *et al.* (2021) argue that small group activities may be viewed as unfair, as children who are not selected to participate could feel excluded or left out. This may become an ethical concern, as making children feel left out or excluded could negatively affect their emotional wellbeing and sense of belonging. In relation to the Children Act 1989, children should feel valued, included and protected ([Legislation gov uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/26) 2026). These points highlight the importance of carefully planning small group activities to ensure children's rights and wellbeing

remain a priority, especially as young children may not always be able to clearly express their emotions.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the validity and reliability of the research task. The use of validity and reliability will help ensure that the research is accurate and trustworthy (Noble and Smith, 2025). Validity refers to whether the research methods are effectively measuring children's language and communication development (Noble and Smith, 2025). Within this research project, children will be observed within a natural and familiar environment, which may help them feel more comfortable and behave naturally. This may increase the validity of the research, as the observations are more likely to reflect the children's genuine communication behaviours. Reliability refers to the consistency of the research findings and whether similar results would be achieved if the research were repeated (Kouam and William, 2024). As the researcher will use the structured Wellcomm observation method before and during small group interventions, the consistency of the observations may be improved. This may strengthen the reliability by allowing children's communication and language progress to be compared over time, using the same method.

However, observation could be slightly influenced by the researcher's bias, as different practitioners may interpret children's behaviour and communication in different ways (Smith and Noble, 2014). This implies that the researcher could unintentionally focus more on positive outcomes or exaggerate the children's progress because they hope the small-group interventions will be successful, as that is the aim of the research. Research bias may become an ethical issue, as ethical practice requires findings to be honest and accurate to ensure fairness to all children. To reduce the risk of bias, the researcher could use triangulation by combining observations and interviews to allow findings to be compared across multiple methods. The use of triangulation may strengthen the credibility and accuracy of the research by providing a broader understanding of children's language and development. In addition, comparing data from different methods may help ensure the findings are more balanced and reduce the risk of ethical implications.

Conclusion

To conclude, communication and language development are fundamental within early childhood, as they support children's ability to express their views, opinions and feelings. The research shows that small group intervention may positively support children's language, communication and confidence when activities are carefully planned to cater to the specific needs of the children. The assignment has also highlighted the importance of using appropriate research methods, and the importance of ethical practice while researching with children. The research has reinforced the importance ethical practice when working with children, therefore the researcher will ensure to keep the interest of the children at the centre of all research. There seems to be a lack of detailed research into the long-term effects of small group interventions, meaning that further research could explore the long-term impact on children's language and communication development.

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