

Talk with Tales for Children (TWITCH) Efficacy Trial Information for Settings



What is the TWiTCH EEF funded efficacy trial?

TWITCH is designed to support early years practitioners to use story time more effectively to develop **3–4-year-olds’ language skills**.

Sheffield Hallam University is partnering with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Durham University to further evaluate the **Talk with Tales for Children (TWiTCH)** programme.

Through a randomised controlled trial, the evaluation will assess the impact of the TWiTCH approach on children’s **narrative skills, vocabulary, and self-expression**. This is an exciting opportunity for your setting to contribute to **important research evidence** about the role of story time in supporting children’s language development.



Each setting will be **randomly allocated** to either an **intervention group** or **control group**.

- **Intervention settings** will **receive the training and year-long coach support at no cost**. This will be funded by the EEF. Settings will complete evaluation activities and receive a thank you **payment of £575**.
- **Control settings** will continue with their usual story time practice and complete the evaluation activities; but will **not** receive the programme input. Control settings will receive an enhanced thank you **payment of £1000** for completing the evaluation activities.



Eligibility

To take part, settings must:

- Offer **funded places for 3 and 4-year-olds**
- **Be located within** one of the following Local Authorities:

North West:	Bolton, Bury, Cumbria, Knowsley, Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Sefton, St Helens, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington, Wigan, Wirral
East Midlands:	Derbyshire, Nottingham
Yorkshire and the Humber:	Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, Kirklees, Leeds, Rotherham, Sheffield, Wakefield, York

- Have **sufficient space and staffing** to run story time with **groups of around ten children**
- Have **at least 15 children aged 3-4 attending for a minimum of 15 hours per week**
- Have a **minimum of two staff** working with preschool cohorts
- Not be involved in any other EEF project during the 2026–27 academic year
- Not previously have taken part in TWiTCH training



What does the TWiTCH programme involve?

The programme will run from **September 2026 to early July 2027**.

TWiTCH trains early years practitioners to use **dialogic reading strategies** alongside the **daily shared reading of traditional tales** to support children's language development. Using the traditional tales provided in the TWiTCH resource pack, practitioners will deliver nine story cycles, each lasting three weeks, as part of regular story time. Daily activities take 10-15 minutes.

Each three-week cycle includes:

- Week 1: Developing children's understanding of the story and providing opportunities for discussion about characters and events.
- Week 2: Deepening discussion through choice-based activities focused on the moral dilemmas within the stories.
- Week 3: Supporting children to apply their story knowledge in play (e.g. through continuous provision), with additional support for children who need it.

Intervention settings

Each setting will be supported by a named TWiTCH coach for the duration of the project. The coach will deliver:

- Initial TWiTCH training at your setting (2 x 3 hours), and three coaching visits (3 x 1 hour).

Nursery leaders will be asked to:

- Ensure all the staff who will be delivering TWiTCH attend the training (minimum 2 practitioners)
- Appoint a TWiTCH Champion, who will also:
 - Attend online Champion training (2 hours)
 - Attend two online network events (2 x 30 minutes)
 - Liaise with the TWiTCH team throughout the efficacy trial
 - Support their colleagues with implementation and evaluation activities



How does the evaluation work?

Following on from a positive pilot evaluation, the purpose of this evaluation is to further test the effectiveness of TWiTCH on children's language development.

To do this, settings will be randomly allocated to either an **intervention group**, or a **control group**:

- **Intervention settings** will receive TWiTCH training and coaching and complete the evaluation activities.
- **Control settings** will continue with their usual story time practice and complete the evaluation activities but will **not** receive the programme input.

The evaluation will compare children's language skills in the intervention and control groups. The evaluation will also look at how taking part in TWiTCH impacts on nursery practice during story time, on practitioner knowledge and confidence, as well as looking at how TWiTCH is implemented across different nursery settings.



What does the evaluation involve?

Evaluation activities include:

- Short child language assessments at the start and end of the year conducted by Navigator Insight Limited (all settings)
- Short staff questionnaires at three timepoints (all settings)
- Providing audio recordings of nursery story-time towards the end of the programme (in some settings)
- Short staff interviews either online or in person (in some settings)
- Observation of TWiTCH lessons and coaching sessions by the evaluation team (in some settings)

Settings will also be asked to:

- Share parent information leaflets and encourage families to take part in the research
- Provide pupil data for participating children
- Provide time for our assessors to conduct the child assessments
- Provide time for practitioners to take part in evaluation activities



What are the benefits of participating?

Before launching the TWiTCH Efficacy Trial, the EEF evaluated the TWiTCH programme through an earlier pilot with early years settings. Findings suggested promising improvements in children's narrative skills, vocabulary, and confidence in expressing ideas, alongside positive feedback from practitioners about their increased confidence in facilitating high quality interactions during story time. The current efficacy trial, developed by Sheffield Hallam University and independently evaluated by Durham University, is building on this work through a randomised controlled trial with a larger group of nursery settings.

By taking part, all settings will contribute to understanding the impact of TWiTCH on children's language development and to strengthening the evidence base for best practice in early years.

All settings will also be compensated for their time spent on evaluation and data collection:

- Intervention settings will receive:
 - Full TWiTCH training and coaching support, and a thank you payment to support staff time for training, Champion responsibilities, and evaluation activities.
- Control settings will receive:
 - A thank you payment to support their participation in the evaluation activities of the trial.

All payments will be made upon completion of the trial. The evaluation report will be published on the EEF website in 2028. All participating settings will receive a summary of the findings at the end of the trial.



[Who is running the project?](#)

Sheffield Hallam University is one of the largest providers of early years education in the North of England and teacher education is rated Outstanding by Ofsted. The TWiTCH programme was designed by the early years team at Sheffield Hallam University led by Fufy Demissie who will be delivering the trial with her team.

TWiTCH will be independently evaluated by Durham University working with Manchester University and Navigator Insight Limited. The evaluation will be led by Vic Menzies at Durham. Navigator Insight Limited will be responsible for conducting children's language assessments across participating nurseries.



[How will data be handled?](#)

All data will be handled securely and confidentially in line with data protection legislation. Personal data will be used only for evaluation purposes, with pseudonymised data shared for archiving and future research. No nursery, staff member, or child will be identifiable in any published reports. Further details are available in the [project's privacy notices](#) on the TWiTCH webpage.



[Are there any costs involved?](#)

No. The TWiTCH programme is free for all participating settings.



[What is the timeline for this project?](#)

For further details please view the [timelines section](#) on our TWiTCH website.

FAQs

What happens after a school/setting expresses an interest?	You will be invited to either attend or watch a briefing session. Afterwards we will send out a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which you will be asked to complete and return in order to sign up for the project. We will then conduct a final eligibility check before confirming enrolment to the efficacy trial.
When will settings hear whether they have been allocated to the intervention or control group?	Oct – early Nov 2026
When will the programme be delivered?	September 2026 -July 2027
When will pre- and end-testing be carried out?	September - early Nov 2026 and June - early July 2027
When will control group schools/settings receive incentive payments?	At the end of the project July 2027
When will the evaluation results be published?	Summer 2028



[Interested in participating?](#)

More Information	Ask a question	Register your interest
https://research.shu.ac.uk/twitch/efficacytrial/	twitch@shu.ac.uk	https://forms.office.com/e/Qr5VH4cbFK?origin=lprLink
		