

GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND: CHANGES IN LANGUAGE ABILITY OVER THE PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS

This report drew on measures of language ability which were gathered from children participating in the Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS) at the time they were about to or had recently entered primary school (in 2009/10) and again when they were in Primary 6 (in 2014/15).

Is there still a gap in language ability between more and less advantaged children towards the end of primary school?

The findings in this report suggest that there is still a gap between more and less advantaged children as they reach the last years of primary school. This is the case regardless of whether the gap is measured with respect to family income, area deprivation or the parent's level of education.

Additionally, the findings indicate that children from more advantaged backgrounds improve at a higher rate over the primary school period relative to their peers from less advantaged backgrounds, suggesting that the socio-economic gap is widening.


Despite the significant differences in average language ability between different groups of children, the report also found substantial variation in ability *within* these groups. For example, many children in lower income households had high language ability, whilst many in higher income households had low ability.


This suggests that social background, whilst being important, is not the only factor that influences language ability. Although being from a disadvantaged social background increases the risk of poorer language skills, it does not mean that *all* children from disadvantaged backgrounds have poorer language skills.

What might help (and what seems to hinder) improvement in language ability over the primary school period?



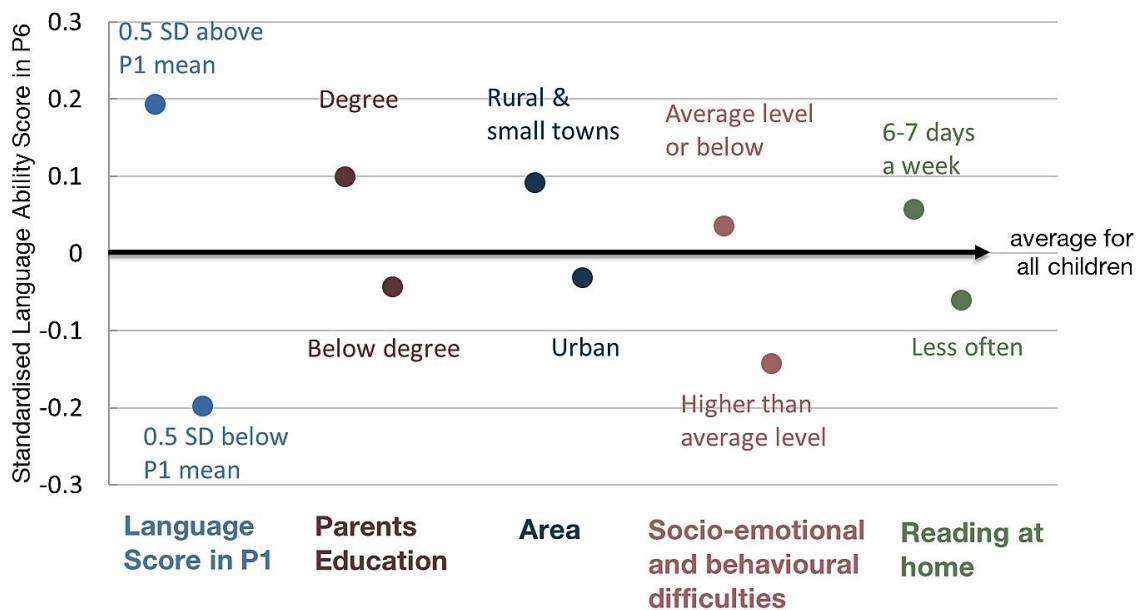
Firstly, the findings suggest that over the primary school period, the language ability of children with higher levels of social, emotional or behavioural difficulties was less likely to improve relative to other children, even after taking into account a number of other known differences between the children.

 Second, the report showed that over the primary school period the language ability of children who read or looked at books at home at least six times per week (when the child was nearly 8 years old) improved at a higher rate than those who looked at books less often, irrespective of known differences in other characteristics and circumstances.

 Finally, the findings suggest that over the primary school period the language skills of children living in small towns and rural areas improve at a higher rate than other children, after taking into account a number of other known differences between the children. However, it is not clear from this analysis what may explain this higher rate of improvement amongst children living in these types of area.

The relative importance of the various factors considered in the research is illustrated below. The figure shows how each factor affects the language ability score which the children achieved in Primary 6, relative to the overall mean for all children taken together.

Language Ability in Primary 6



Read the full report at <http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781787818392>

For more information on the Growing Up in Scotland study, visit our website: www.growingupinScotland.org.uk