What is this study about?

This study examined whether the Head Start Research-based Developmentally Informed (REDI) program is more effective than the standard Head Start program at improving the language, emergent literacy, and social-emotional skills of preschoolers.

Head Start centers in three Pennsylvania counties were randomly assigned either to use the REDI program or to continue using the standard Head Start program. The study included 44 classrooms and 356 4-year-olds across the two research groups.

The study assessed language development and emergent literacy skills, as well as emotional understanding, social problem-solving skills, social-emotional behaviors, and learning engagement.

Assessments were conducted at the beginning and again at the end of the school year for most outcomes.

Features of the Head Start REDI Program

- Aims to improve preschoolers’ language development, literacy skills, and social-emotional development
- Delivered using brief lessons, “hands-on” extension activities, and specific instructional strategies
- Includes interactive book reading, “Sound Games,” and an alphabet center, to foster language development and emergent literacy skills
- Uses the Preschool PATHS curriculum to promote preschoolers’ friendship skills, understanding of emotions, social problem-solving skills, and self-control
- Provides teachers with training and ongoing mentoring and support

What did the study authors report?

The study finds that students in the REDI group outperformed control students on one of three measures of language development (effect sizes ranged from −0.07 to 0.15) and two of three measures of emergent literacy skills (effect sizes ranged from 0.16 to 0.39).

In addition, REDI program students exhibited greater understanding of emotions, better social problem-solving skills, and higher levels of learning engagement than students in regular Head Start classrooms.


WWC quick reviews are based on the evidence published in the report cited and rely on effect sizes and significance levels as reported by study authors. WWC does not confirm study authors’ findings or contact authors for additional information about the study. The WWC rating refers only to the results summarized above and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.