

The important role of spoken language

key
facts

Good language at age five correlates with better academic attainment, good mental health in later years, improved social interaction and relationship building and better employment outcomes.



The important role of spoken language – key facts

Spoken language is the foundation life skill, underpinning the ability to learn, make friends and manage behaviour. The evidence to support this is strong.

Language underpins good literacy development. Successful development of literacy depends on good spoken language skills. If children struggle with spoken language at an early age it puts them at risk for literacy difficulties later on. The evidence shows that:



Language at age 5 is the single most important factor in influencing literacy levels at age 11. In fact, with poor early language at age five you are four times more likely to struggle with reading at age 11.



Vocabulary is vital for comprehension, crucial for writing and content-area learning; and is an area of weakness for poor or reluctant readers.



Narrative skills at 3–6 years are a powerful predictor of literacy skill at 8–12 years.



Language skills support both aspects in the Simple View of reading (Gough and Tunmer 1986). You need language skills for word recognition and also for reading comprehension.

Learning and attainment

Every aspect of learning relies on good spoken language skills. Spoken language skills have a significant impact on academic achievement. The evidence shows:



Vocabulary at age five is a strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond.



Good language, particularly vocabulary at age 13, is a strong predictor of better outcomes at GCSE.



Spoken language is a key component in all learning and a key lever in raising attainment for all children and young people.



The most important factor in reaching the expected levels in English and maths at seven is children's language skills at age five.



Language ability at ages three and four predicts later reading comprehension through secondary school.



Social and emotional development

Spoken language is crucial for social and emotional wellbeing, and for developing relationships. Children and young people with poor language skills can struggle with these aspects of life. Evidence shows:



Spoken language skills are important in building and maintaining relationships, in understanding and expressing feelings and emotions – and in problem solving. Good spoken language skills are identified as supporting resilience when it comes to mental health.



Early language ability at two years predicts later emotional and behavioural ability.



Good language at seven predicts better quality friendships at 6 years.



Employment

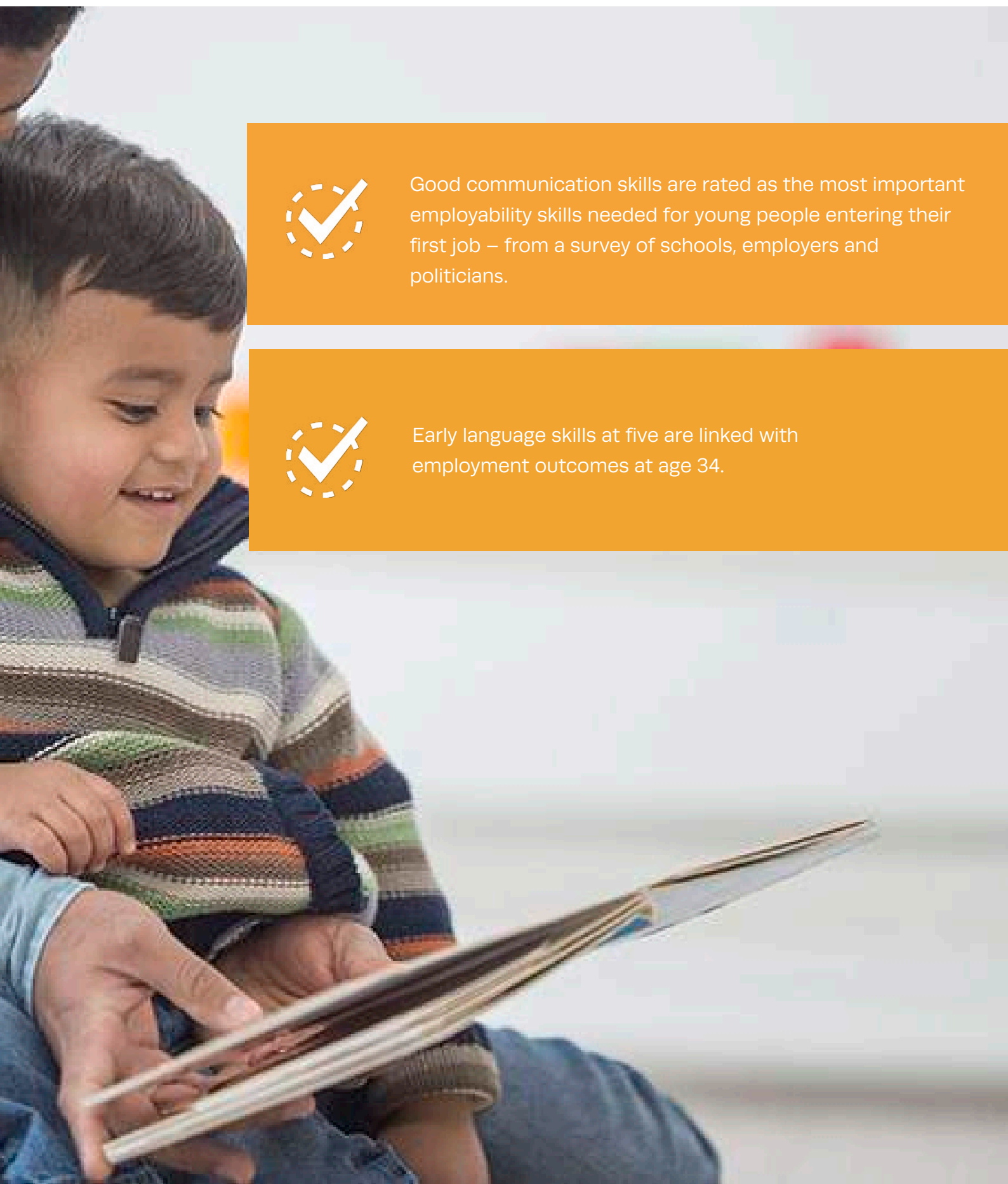
There are links between good spoken language and later employment outcomes:



Good communication skills are rated as the most important employability skills needed for young people entering their first job – from a survey of schools, employers and politicians.



Early language skills at five are linked with employment outcomes at age 34.



Footnotes

- 1 Save the Children (2016) The Lost Boys: How boys are falling behind in their early years
- 2 Save the Children (2016) The Lost Boys: How boys are falling behind in their early years
- 3 Snow C. (2011) The Potential of Discussion to Improve Reading Comprehension – Lecture IDA New York
- 4 Wellman R.L., Lewis B.A., Freebairn L.A., Avrich A.A., Hansen A.J., and Stein C.M. (2011) Narrative Ability of Children With Speech Sound Disorders and the Prediction of Later Literacy Skills LSHSS 42;561–579
- 5 Feinstein, L. And Duckworth, K. (2006) Development in the early years: Its importance for school performance and adult outcomes. London: Centre for research on the wider benefits of learning.
- 6 Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J., & Rush, R. (2017). Contribution of spoken language and socio-economic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years. International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 52, 2, 184–196
- 7 summarised in Gascoigne, M. and Gross, J. (2017) Talking about a Generation The Communication Trust
- 8 Analysis carried out by UCL Institute of Education for Save the Children
- 9 Verhoeven et al (2011) Vocabulary Growth and Reading Development across the elementary school years. Scientific studies of reading 15; 1
- 10 Public Health England (2016) the mental health of children and young people in England https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575632/Mental_health_of_children_in_England.pdf
- 11 J.Clegg J. Law R. Rush J. T.J. Peters and S. Roulstone (2015) The contribution of early language development to children's emotional and behavioural functioning at 6 years Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 56.1
- 12 Durkin K. and Conti-Ramsden G (2007) Language, Social Behaviour, and the Quality of Friendships in Adolescents With and Without a History of Specific Language Impairment Child Development 78 (5)
- 13 Asdan Employability and skills forum (2012) virtual think tank survey results
- 14 Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I. and Parsons, S. (2009) Modeling Developmental Language Difficulties From School Entry Into Adulthood: Literacy, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes. Journal of Speech, language and hearing research, 52 (6)