

# Study finds language, achievement benefits of universal early childhood education

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Universal child care that starts as early as age one improves language skills for young children, especially those from low-income families, according to a study of Norway's child care system by a team of researchers led by Boston College Lynch School of Education Professor Eric Dearing. Offering high-quality child care beginning at age one is reducing early achievement gaps in Norwegian communities, the team reported in a recent edition of the education research journal *AERA Open*.

As the ranks of [children](#) in Norway's universal child care program increase, the [language](#) skill gap between rich and poor children narrows, according to the study of more than 60,000 children. "This has very important implications for early [education](#) policy in the United States, where we are debating how early to start and whether preschool should be provided to all children or exclusively target low-income children," said Dearing, a professor of applied developmental psychology who is also a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Center for Child Behavioral Development at the University of Oslo.

The study, titled Estimating the Consequences of Norway's National Scale-Up of Early Childhood Education and Care (Beginning in Infancy) for Early Language Skills, reported findings including:

- Norway's publicly funded early education and care for all children has led to improvements in children's early language skills, particularly for children from low-income families
- By age three, the language improvement of low-income children attending early education and care has led to a significant narrowing of the gaps in the language skills between low-income and high-income children
- The narrowing of achievement gaps has been greatest in low-income Norwegian

communities that made large increases in the number of children attending early childcare centers

"While many state-funded preschool programs in the U.S. do not begin until age three or later, this study provides some of the first large-scale evidence that public early education for children as young as age one can be critical for children's [language skills](#)," said Dearing.

**More information:** Eric Dearing et al, Estimating the Consequences of Norway's National Scale-Up of Early Childhood Education and Care (Beginning in Infancy) for Early Language Skills, *AERA Open* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/2332858418756598](https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418756598)

Provided by Boston College

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