

# Evaluating the Impact of a Universal Language Enrichment Intervention Programme in an Area of Low Socio-Economic Status



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## Introduction

- Children's language ability includes their capacity to express themselves and understand what others are saying. It underpins the ability to contribute to class discussions, engage in verbal reasoning, socialise with friends, and understand teacher talk and subject content (Nagy & Townsend, 2012).

- Consistent research reports have highlighted the increased risk of language difficulties associated with socio-economic disadvantage (e.g., Letts, Edwards, Sinka, Schaefer, & Gibbons, 2013).

- By adolescence, severe language difficulties have been estimated to be twice as common among participants from low socio-economic status (SES) areas (Spencer, Clegg, & Stackhouse, 2012).

- Universal language enrichment intervention programmes aim to mitigate these long-term risks.

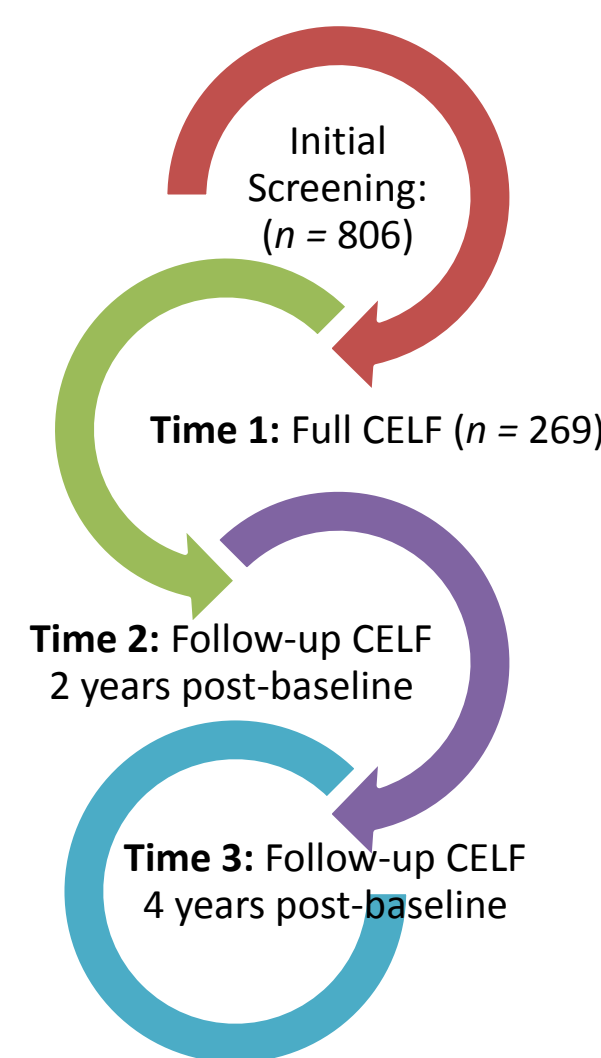
## Methods: Assessments and Follow-Up Assessments

- Language abilities of 806 pupils were screened using the Observational Rating Scale (ORS; Semel et al., 2006).

- 3 groups of pupils ( $n = 269$ ) were tested using standardised language assessments - Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF; Semel et al., 2006; Wiig et al., 2006).

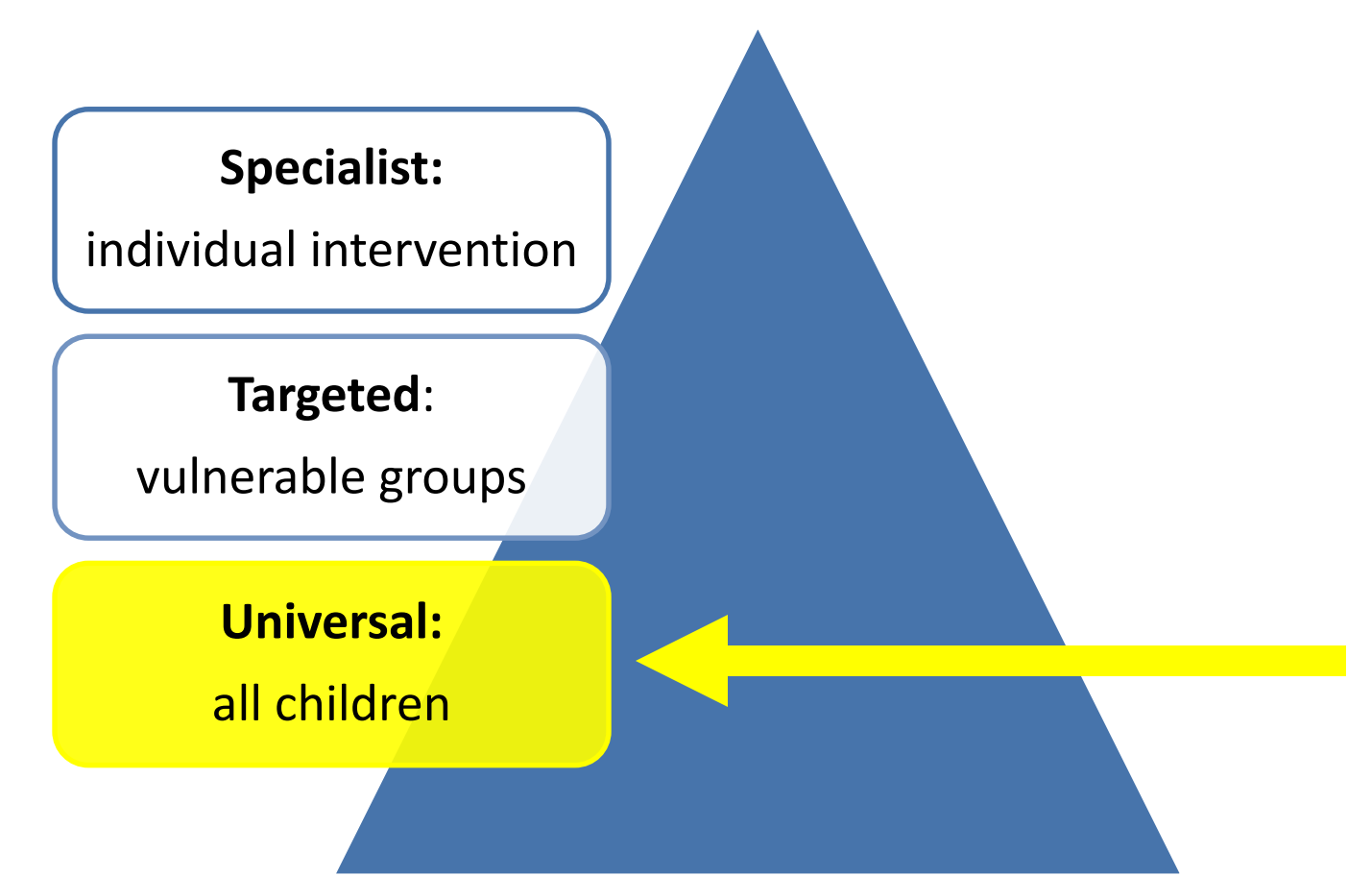
- At Time 1, Group A were in Junior Infants, Group B were in 2<sup>nd</sup> class, and Group C were in 5<sup>th</sup> class.

- The impact of the intervention was tracked over four years using the same measure.



## Methods: Universal Language Enrichment Intervention Programme

- Intervention was delivered to all children



There is an increased risk of language difficulties in areas of low SES and a universal language enrichment intervention programme impacts positively on children's outcomes

## Results: Baseline Assessments

- Prevalence of language difficulties was 34%, which is almost 5 times higher than that typically found in population studies (7%) (Bishop et al., 2017; Norbury et al., 2016).

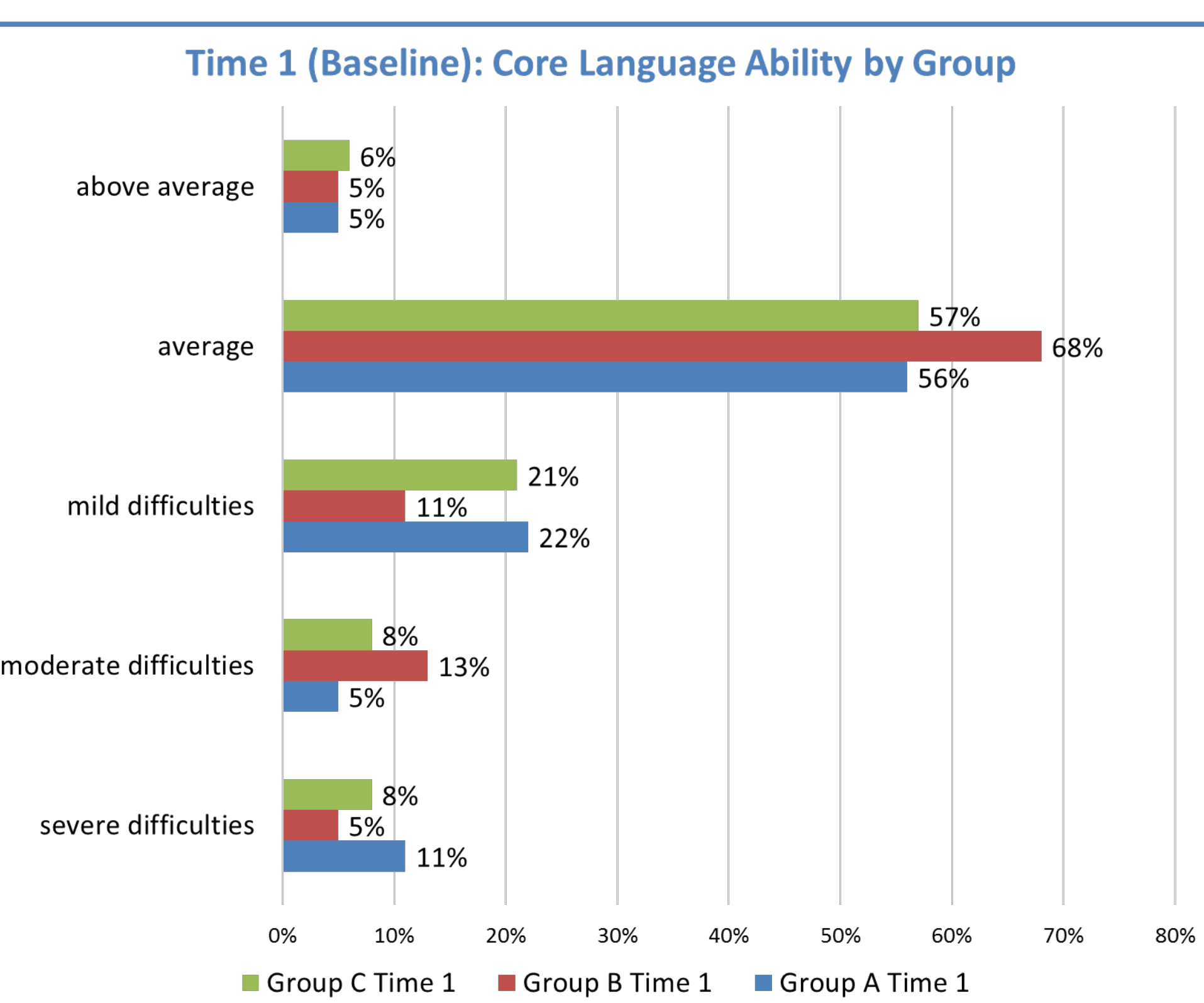
- This equates to an average of 10 children in a class of 30.

- Increased prevalence is consistent with previous studies in areas of low SES (Law et al., 2011; Letts et al., 2013; Roy et al., 2014).



In a class of 30 children, 10 experiencing language difficulties

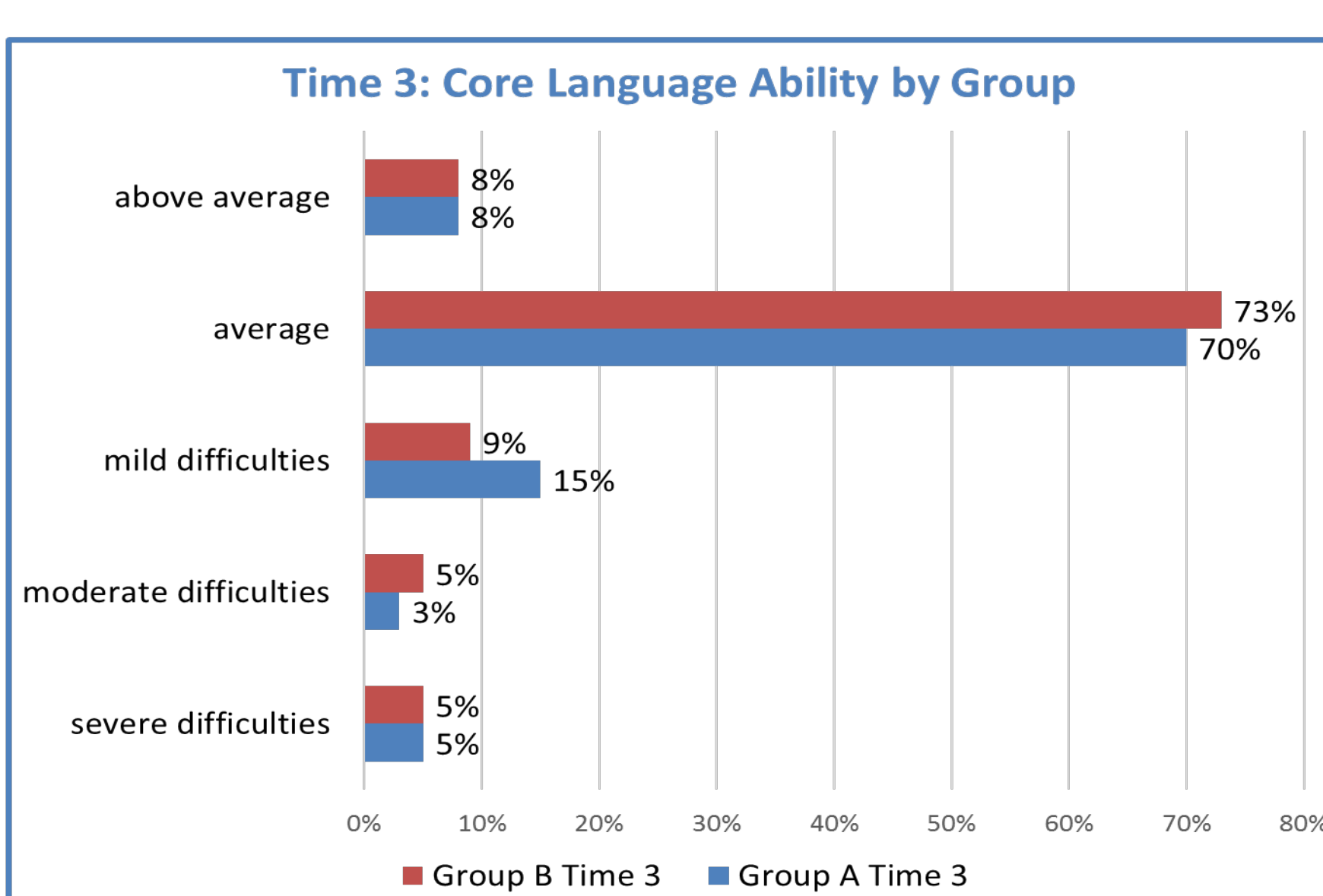
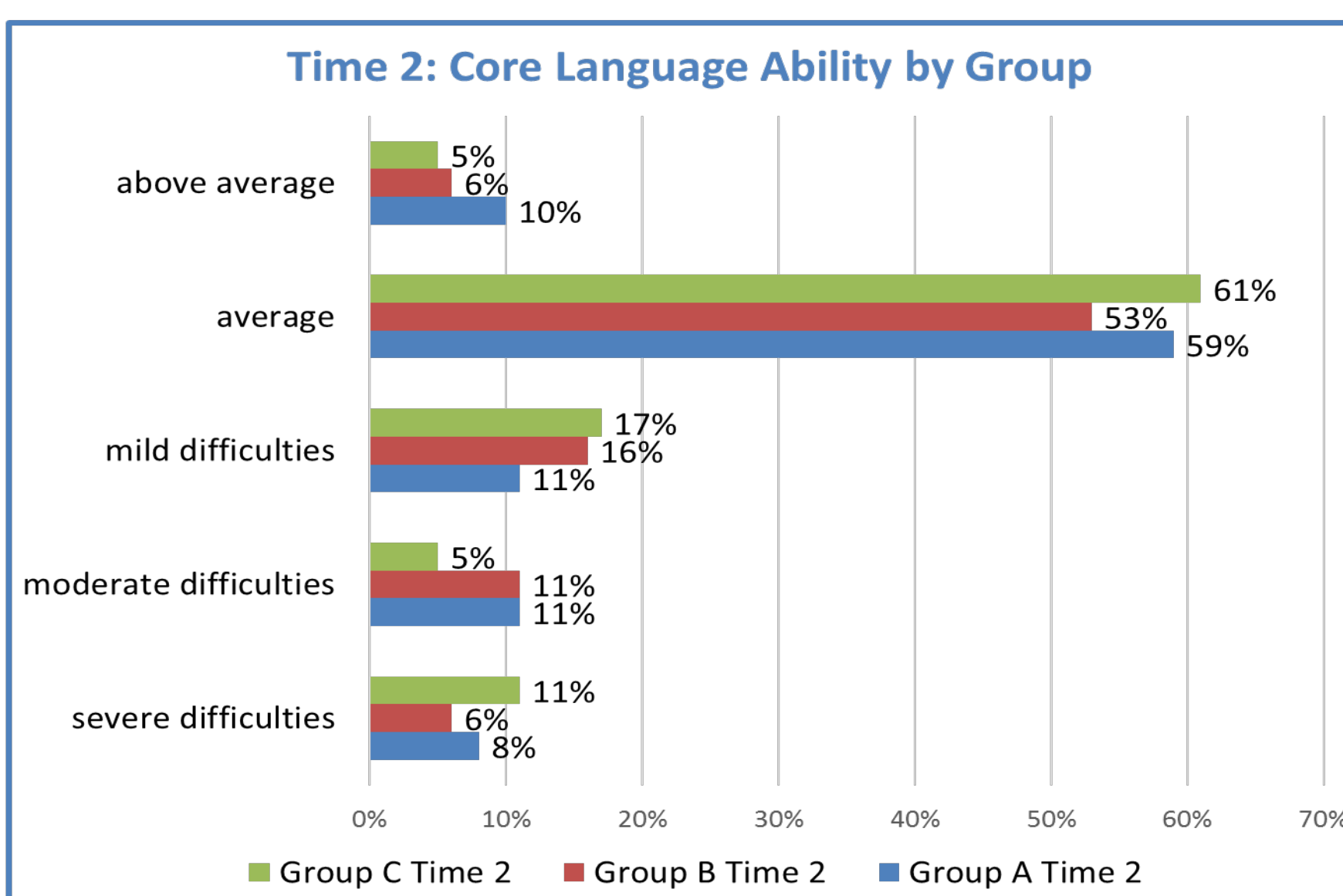
- Prevalence rates varied across the age cohorts, with a trend towards increased prevalence at Junior Infants (Group A) and 5<sup>th</sup> class (Group C).



## Results: Follow-up Assessments

- Post-intervention testing indicated increases in general language abilities for all groups.

- Once children with severe language difficulties were excluded, increases in mean scores were statistically significant for Group A ( $t=2.61, p<.01$ ) and Group B ( $t=1.99, p<.05$ ) between Time 1 and Time 3, with up to moderate effect sizes (Group A:  $d=0.41$ ; Group B:  $d=0.37$ ).



## Discussion and Conclusion

- Universal language enrichment intervention in an area of low SES is effective, supporting benefits of classroom-based interventions (Dickinson et al., 2014; Dockrell et al., 2010).
- The impact is greatest when intervention is delivered at younger ages.
- Flexible SLT services that include more universal approaches are important
- A greater emphasis on inter-professional practice between SLTs and teachers may lead to more creative and holistic intervention approaches (Korth et al., 2010).
- This may support children to be seen and heard, reaching their potential linguistically, academically, emotionally, and in their participation in society.

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