

# Development of Reading and Writing Skills and Motivation in Preschool and Early School Years

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This study explored the progress of reading and writing skills from preschool to grade 2 among three groups: a risk group, an early readers group, and a middle group. Differences were observed between these groups through the school years in pre-reading skills, reading and spelling skills, and motivation. These skills were lowest in risk group and highest in early readers group.

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Source: Lerkkanen, M-K., Poikkeus, A-M., Ahonen, T., Siekkinen, M., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J-E. (2010). Luku- ja kirjoitustaidon kehitys sekä motivaatio esi- ja alkuopetusvuosina. *Kasvatus*, 41(2), 116–128.

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expectations and beliefs about their child and they taught reading more frequently to their child.

- Preschool provides the foundation for learning to read and write by supporting children through playful activities, phonemic awareness, and letter knowledge.
- Approximately a third of Finnish children starting school already know how to read, and they remain in the region of one year ahead of others in reading speed.
- Approximately 5%–20% of children are at-risk in terms of reading difficulty.
- Letter knowledge and phonological skills predict later reading and writing skills.
- Reading comprehension depends on reading fluency. Furthermore, vocabulary and listening comprehension, deduction, metacognitive skills, and memory are all related to reading comprehension.
- Self-concept, working habits, and interests are motivational constructs related to reading.
- There is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and reading skills development.

### **What is intrinsic motivation?**

- This refers to motivation that comes from within an individual, such as interesting, challenging, and joyful activities that provide internal satisfaction.

### **What is extrinsic motivation?**

- This comes from something external, such as a reward system in a classroom, which is not related to the learning of the skill itself.



## The study

This study formed part of the larger First Steps study, in which approximately 2000 children were followed from preschool to grade 9. In this particular study, children's reading and writing skill development was monitored from preschool to grade 2 among three groups: a risk group for reading difficulty (n = 162), an early readers group (n = 469), and a middle group including all the other children (n = 1205).

Research questions:

- *How do the risk and the early readers groups differ in reading and spelling skills' development and motivation?*
- *How do girls and boys differ in reading and spelling skills development and motivation?*
- *How are parents' expectations and beliefs related to development of reading and spelling skills and motivation in both the risk and early readers groups?*

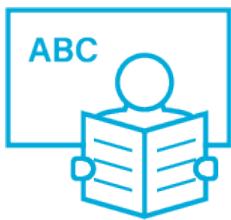
The study included several assessments (on a yearly basis) of student academic performance, motivation, social skills, and wellbeing.



## Findings

- Pre-reading skills and reading and writing skills were lowest in the risk group compared to other children, and highest in the early readers group.

- The risk group demonstrated lower motivation to read and less interest towards letters and reading. They also demonstrated the lowest self-concept as learners for letters and reading, and greater avoidance behaviour towards this kind of task.
- In the risk group, girls achieved better results in letter knowledge, reading comprehension, and spelling through all years.
- In the early readers group, girls also achieved better results in listening comprehension and spelling, as well as being more interested in letters and reading.
- Parents of the children in the risk group had lower expectations for their child's achievements and abilities. They also provided less guidance to their children at home for reading.



## Implications

Children in the risk group had lower pre-reading, reading, and spelling skills, as well as motivation compared to other children. Furthermore, their parents had lower achievement expectations and beliefs as well as guiding their children less towards reading. Children in the risk group may need more motivation and individualised support at school to learn to read. Their vocabulary and listening comprehension skills should already be practiced in preschool. Risk group children (especially boys) might benefit from teaching that includes adventure, action, and movement while learning letters, phonemes, and decoding. In addition, computer-based games might help them to learn to read. One important factor in

learning is the teacher–student relationship and the quality of instruction. The quality of teaching practice and emotional support affects the climate of the class and therefore also student motivation and reading skill development.