

Reading Achievements of Pupils with Pre-School Background and Those without at One Primary School in Lusaka District of Zambia

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In Zambia, some pupils participate in early childhood education, whereas others do not. This comparative study sought to highlight the importance of early childhood education when it came to learning literacy skills in primary education. In general, early childhood education and pre-school have been seen to give children some important social and academic skills. In Zambia, pre-school is not compulsory, and therefore the purpose of the study was to examine if there were any differences in performance between pupils who attended pre-school education in comparison to those who did not as far as the technical reading of letters, syllables, and

simple words was concerned. Other possible factors affecting reading achievement in Zambia were also discussed. The researchers hoped to produce information based on empirical evidence that could be useful for those who decide the country's educational policies. At the moment, only a small fraction of Zambian children attended pre-school.



The study

- The objective of the study was to compare technical reading skills of pupils with and without a pre-school background and establish teachers' views about factors affecting pupils' reading achievements. The research questions were the following:
 - What were the reading achievements of pupils with a pre-school background and those without in Grade 2?
 - What were the views of teachers regarding factors that affected pupils' reading achievement from different backgrounds in Grade 2?
- A mixed method research design was applied; both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse data.
- Forty pupils of one primary school who were in Grade 2 were administered a technical reading test of print letters and words; half of them had a pre-school background, and the other half did not.
- The reading test was adopted from the National Literacy Framework through the Primary Literacy Programme assessment tools and modified to focus on technical reading only.
- Pupils' knowledge of vowels and consonant sounds in the

regional official language, Nyanja, and their ability to read words consisting of one or more syllables were assessed.

- The pupils' parents (thirty-six in total) were interviewed to find out about the pupils' language background.
- Quantitative data were obtained from a class test for pupils while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with twelve early grade in-service teachers and one head teacher.

Quantitative data from the test were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), whereas the findings from the interviews were analysed thematically by grouping related data together into themes

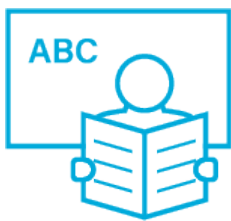


Findings

- Pupils without a pre-school background performed slightly better in technical reading than those who had attended pre-school; the difference was very small, even negligible. The study showed that pre-school education in Zambia has little impact on the technical reading of vowels, consonants, and simple words. Therefore, it did not influence pupils' ability to read technical letters, syllables, and words.
- The findings from the teacher interviews contradicted the test results. Teachers stated that pre-school education was a factor that determined pupils' reading achievement in Grade 2 since it was believed to establish a good foundation for future success in

school. They also stated that pupils from pre-school performed better in class, but the test results on reading proved the contrary.

- Other factors affecting reading achievement according to teachers were: parental educational background and socioeconomical status; home environment and parents' involvement in their children's education; pupils' own interest and commitment to learn; and the language of instruction.
- Teachers thought that a huge class size hindered reading achievements since it was impossible to pay attention to each pupil in class.



Implications

- Teachers considered pre-school education as an important factor in reading achievement, but the reading test results of this study did not support this view.
- These findings raise questions about the quality of pre-school education in Zambia. The study further noted that, although it covered a narrow sample size and assessed only a part of learning (reading letters and simple words), the pre-school education curriculum should be rechecked and revised to address essential segments of childhood education.
- Parents should be informed about the importance and impact of their involvement in their children's education.
- Class sizes should be smaller in early childhood classes.