

Time to Learn

by Dr Urshula Hoadley



What is the project?



A randomised control trial evaluation of a cost-effective, remedial holiday literacy programme that aims to support learners through the difficult transition from mother tongue instruction to English in Grade 4. The project aims to train unemployed youth to deliver a highly structured English reading programme.



Literacy in crisis



- Lowest score in the PIRLS 2006, performing behind Morocco, Indonesia and Iran
- Scored below the average in the SACMEQ 2000 and 2007
- For poorest 25% of schools, South Africa registers as 14th out of 15 Sub-Saharan countries for reading, and 12th for Math. (SACMEQ II and III)
- 54% and 45% of grade 3 and 6 learners in the Western Cape are performing at the age/grade norm for literacy (WCED systemic tests 2010)
- 2011 ANAs, mean literacy score –
35% for Grade 3, 28% for Grade 6

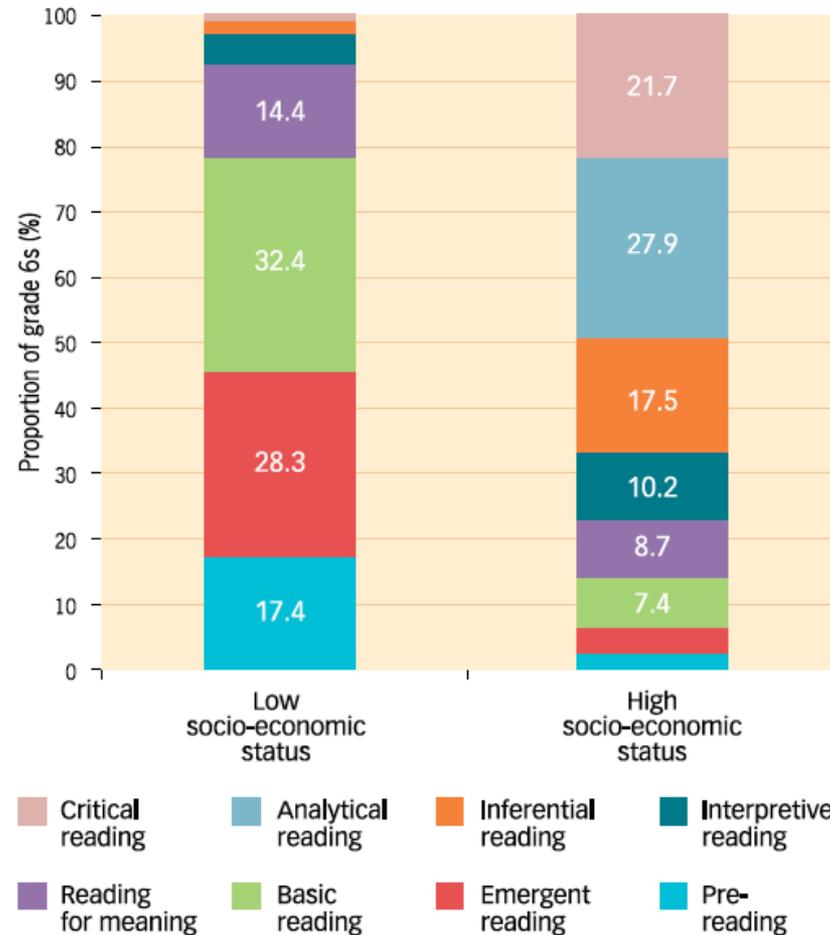
Literacy around the world



- *India (rural)*
 - 56% can read a Grade 2 level simple story in Grade 5
 - 19% cannot read beyond a word in Grade 5 (Pratham 2009)
- *Ghana*
 - <50% Grade 3 (P3) are at the minimum level of competencies in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic (NEA Results, 2009)
 - 16% P3 students can read simple P2 level text



Literacy performance across domains



Source: Hungi N, Makuwa D, Ross KN, Saito M, Dolata S, van Capelle F, Paviot L & Vellien J (2010) *SACMEQ III Project Results: Pupil Achievement Levels in Reading and Mathematics*. Paris: International Institute for Education Planning.

Note: Percentages not shown represent less than 5% of the sample.

Challenges in the school environment



- *Limited teaching time*
 - Low income quintile schools provide less teaching time than better-off schools due to absenteeism, poor punctuality, and poor classroom management (Fleisch 2008)
 - North West: 40% of class time is spent teaching (Carnoy et al. 2011)
 - Ghana : 39% of class time is used for instruction (Abadzi 2009)
 - India: 25% absenteeism rate for primary school teachers (Nazmul Chaudhury et al. 2006)

Challenges in the school environment



- *Learning losses over holidays*

- South Africa: Low and poor persistence of learning gains from year to year of schooling (Andrabi et al. 2009)



Source: Boston.com (Jasper Juinen/Getty Images)

- United States: Average summer vacation achievement losses of a full month of a school grade (Cooper et al. 1996)
- This effect is most severe for low-income households, who take a less active role in their children's education than middle income-parents, providing less educational stimulation and resources (Entwisle et al. 2001).

Challenges in the school environment



Compehension

While many children can decode text, few can read sufficiently with understanding, especially in a FAL. This is particularly important in the transition from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* in moving from Grade 3 to 4.

Challenges in the school environment



Transition to English

The majority of primary school children transition to English in Grade 4 without sufficient preparation in the LOLT

Youth unemployment crisis



- In the 3rd quarter of 2011:
 - 50.4% of youth (15-24 years) were unemployed
 - This is twice the number of the national unemployment rate. (Statistics South Africa 2011)



Source: BertelsmannStiftung Future Challenges, <http://futurechallenges.org>

Time to Read programme



- Remedial
- Small groups for individual attention
- Focused on transition to English
- Run in the holidays
- Delivered by trained unemployed youth

Two key aspects:

- Extended instructional time
- Repair system, in form of remedial curriculum and tutor

Global evidence



- *India - Balsakhi Programme*
 - Remedial literacy and numeracy for lowest performing learners
 - Grade 3-5 for two hours during the school day for 1-2 years
 - Young volunteers as tutors

0.076sd and 0.187sd change in reading scores after one and two years of programme implementation respectively (significant)



Global evidence



- *India – Summer Camps*
 - Remedial literacy and numeracy
 - Std. 3-5 for 2-4 hours every day for 3-4 weeks over holiday
 - Teachers and volunteer assistants as tutors

Participating children made large gains of 0.2sd higher than those in the comparison group (significant)



Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy



- Established in 1974, 37 years of experience in literacy training, classroom monitoring and curriculum development
- Experts in the field of literacy for learners who speak African languages
- Curricula in 51 African languages
- Extensive experience in teaching English as a First Additional Language in their programme *Bridge to English*



Source: Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy



Research team



- SALDRU: Prof Cally Ardington, Prof Murray Leibbrandt
- JPAL Africa: Kamilla Gumede, Rebecca Metz
- Univeristy of Cape Town School of Education: Dr Ursula Hoadley, Prof Johan Muller
- University of Chicago Harris School: Prof Alicia Menendez
- Joint Education Trust: Dr Nick Taylor

Time to read curriculum



- Carefully structured and tightly scripted, easy to follow
- Balanced programme (reading for meaning and exposure to text, as well as letter, word recognition, phonics and vocabulary development)
- Across language domains (decoding to comprehension)
- Reading AND writing





The curriculum



ACTIVITY	TIME
1. Assembly (listening/speaking/songs/rhymes)	15 min
2. Review of homework	10 min
3. Shared reading and discussion	20 min
4. Phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary activities	30 min
5. Guided group reading	30 min
6. Book related writing and/or drawing	15 min
7. Language game	15 min
8. Paired reading	30 min
9. Language game (oral)	15 min
10. Recap of new vocabulary, phonics and explanation of homework activity	15 min

A scalable and cost effective programme



Reducing programme costs:

- Unemployed youth as tutors rather than qualified teachers;
- Curriculum resources that minimize cost without compromising on content;
- Highly structured, scripted curriculum requiring minimal training
- Open-source curriculum materials to be freely available on the web,
- Utilizing existing resources within schools that lie dormant during the school holidays, such as classrooms, desks, chairs, kitchens,
- Partnerships with other initiatives, e.g.
 - The Peninsula School Feeding Association
 - The Premier's Advancement of Youth
 - Other employment initiatives



Evaluation design I



- Goal: to quantify the causal effect of the “Time to Read” program on the English literacy performance of learners
- Target: 50% worst performing schools in Western Cape, where learners transition from isiXhosa to English in Grade 4
- Randomisation: 24 treatment and 24 control schools. Approximately 4608 Grade 3 learners in total
- Treatment: 6 weeks of four hour daily sessions, December, March and June holidays to small, streamed groups



Evaluation design II



Measurement of effects:

- Individually, orally administered baseline and endline test (EGRA) to estimate the casual impact of the programme
- WCED and systemic tests allow for additional baseline information and measuring persistence and spillover to other subjects (numeracy)
- Take home survey on family SES, education resources in the home etc to explore heterogenous effects
- Attendance registers to measure intensity of treatment
- Qualitative data collected (classroom observation and interview data) to explore causal mechanisms between the holiday program and improved literacy outcomes and also to explore key tutor characteristics associated with improvements in scores

Evaluation design III



So MIXED METHODS consider whether the programme has an impact (quantitative) and if so, what are the underlying causal mechanisms and contextual features associated with gains (qualitative).

Summary – Theory of Change



- Small, streamed classes vs large, mixed ability classes
- Targeted, differentiated curriculum that breaks age/grade/curriculum gridlock
- Extended time for learning and preventing learning attrition over holidays
- Heightened exposure to English
- Highly trained, competitively selected tutors vs variable English ability teachers
- Mitigating cognitive and affective effects of falling behind: improving student motivation
- Grade 4 focus on reading for meaning, exposure to text, and revisiting the basics, *in English*, the LOLT until the end of their schooling

Conclusion – policy relevance



- National:
 - On-going crisis in learner performance
 - Improving literacy in early grades critical
- Scale:
 - 80% of SA learners transition to English
 - Relevant to a number of other countries in Africa
- Knowledge gaps:
 - Transition to English
 - Remedial program
 - Beyond decoding to comprehension
- Broadly:
 - Access to quality
 - Cost-effective solution to wide-scale problem

Thank you

