

**KWENA BASIN PROJECT (2014-2018)**

A Basic Concepts Project for Foundation Phase Teachers in Four Schools

Word Test Results: 2014 + 2015

**Aim**

The project aims to systematically improve the language, cognitive and scholastic functioning of Foundation Phase learners from four multi-grade schools in the Kwena Basin by focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. The Basic Concepts Programme (BCP) is being used as a common approach to develop and extend the prerequisites for learning in English (First Additional Language). The teachers are being trained as mediators of the BCP and are receiving ongoing mentorship and support during the project.

**Measurement and Evaluation**

A number of measures are being used to evaluate the intervention and the project. Learners’ knowledge of basic conceptual systems is being assessed on an annual basis. The results of the *Test of Basic Concepts Knowledge* in Grades 1-3 are being compared with the baseline data on an annual basis. The learners’ literacy knowledge is also being assessed on an annual basis in Grades 3 - 4. The results of the *Word Test* are being compared with the baseline data on an annual basis. The decision was taken to include Grade 4 learners in the evaluation (even though the project is focused on the Foundation Phase) in order to assess the delayed effects of the project. This is particularly important for learners in Grade 4 who are being taught for the first time with English as the language of instruction and learning. The focus of the current report is on the baseline data for the Word Test gathered at the start of the project in 2014 as well as the data gathered after the first year in 2015. Data is gathered towards the end of the third term every year.

**Test Instrument:** Word Test

The Word Test is a literacy test designed to determine the number of words written by learners in 15 minutes. In this project the words are written in English. Children are encouraged to continue writing until the end of the test, but they are not rushed. Spelling errors and words classified as non-sense words are subtracted from the total number of words written during the test. Non-sense words include words that:- i) cannot be decoded, ii) are repeated in the test, and iii) have more than 2 spelling errors. The Word Test is a direct measure of vocabulary development and early word writing skills. It is also reasonable to assume that most words that can be written by a learner could also read by that learner. The Word Test was based on a similar measure developed by [Marie Clay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Clay) (1985).

**Method:**

Data was gathered from 3 of the 4 project schools in 2014 and 2015. In 2014 data was gathered from Enkeldoorn, Umthombopholile, and Klipspruit, while in 2015 data was gathered from Enkeldoorn, Umthombopholile and Phakama. In 2014 a total of 28 learners were evaluated in Grade 3 and 4, while in 2015 41 Grade 3 and 45 Grade 4 learners were evaluated. Comparative data was gathered from a school in a socio-economically deprived area of Cape Town.

**Results:**

The word scores for the Kwena learners were significantly lower than the control group. The Grade 3 and Grade 4 learners had an approximate delay of 2 years compared to the control learners. While a decline was noted in the scores of the Grade 3 learners (-4.49) from 2014 to 2015, a sizeable increase (+11.34) was found in the scores of the Grade 4 learners from 2014 to 2015. It proposed that 16 points on the Word Test might represent about 1 year of expected development, while 8 points might represent about 6 months in expected development. The decline in the Grade 3 scores from 2014 to 2015 might be of some concern, while the increase in the Grade 4 scores could be an encouraging sign.

**Discussion:**

While the data gathered in 2014 and 2015 was not fully comparable (different schools and different numbers because of logistical complications), it is thought to be reasonably representative of the population in the project schools. It had been the intention to test all Grade 3 and Grade 4s at all four schools each year. The baseline (2014) results indicated *significant delays* in the literacy knowledge of the Kwena learners. In addition, even the scores of the comparison learners were approximately 2 years behind learners from a private school in Cape Town.

It was a concern that there had been a decline in the scores of the Grade 3 learners, however these learners had not yet been exposed to English as a language of instruction and learning. It was therefore very encouraging to see the improvements in the Grade 4 results, which suggest that the consolidation of their newly acquired conceptual vocabulary learnt in Grade 3 with teaching and learning in English has had a positive effect.

It would be premature to make any hard inferences about the results, but they do provide some initial indications of the levels of English literacy in the project schools at the start of the project and a basis from which to make some meaningful comparisons as the project continues.