



Basic Concepts
Building Thinking - Harnessing Potential
foundation

Evidence of Impact: 20 Years of Research and Implementation

Since its development in 2002, the Basic Concepts Programme (BCP) has built a substantial body of evidence confirming its effectiveness in strengthening the foundations of learning for young children, especially those facing barriers to education. The programme has been externally validated, independently evaluated, and published in peer-reviewed journals, making it one of the most rigorously tested early learning interventions in South Africa.

Foundational Validation

The BCP was first validated through doctoral research in 2005, where international cognitive education experts (Prof. Carl Haywood, Prof. Bob Burden, and Prof. Charl Cilliers) confirmed the programme's statistically significant impact on learners' cognitive development, conceptual knowledge, and scholastic achievement. This study established the scientific credibility of the model and provided the foundation for subsequent implementation and research.

Urban and Inclusive Settings

In partnership with the Western Cape Department of Education, the programme was refined and tested in Metro Central and Metro South districts. Here, the BCP was applied as an inclusive support strategy in the Foundation Phase, helping learners with barriers to learning engage meaningfully with core concepts. These early projects demonstrated that the programme could be embedded into government systems and sustained in diverse classroom contexts.

Long-Term Tracking in Rural Schools

The BCP has also been implemented in rural areas where learners face compounded disadvantages. In the Pixley ka Seme district (Northern Cape), learners were tracked from Grade R through Grade 3. Published findings in the *South African Journal of Education* showed consistent improvements in conceptual and scholastic functioning, with the strongest results where the programme was applied continually over three years.

Gains in School Readiness and Language Development

Partnerships with community-based education trusts further highlighted the adaptability of the model. At the Hantam Community Education Trust, the BCP was introduced across the entire Foundation Phase, producing mean gains of nearly 50% in three of four scholastic areas. At the Kweni Basin Education Trust, in collaboration with Wits University, learners' school readiness improved from 8% to 48% over 3.5 years, while vocabulary growth outpaced that of control schools. These projects demonstrated the programme's ability to accelerate development in multilingual and disadvantaged settings.

Strengthening Early Literacy and Numeracy

The Ikwezi project, led by the University of Cape Town's Schools Development Unit, applied the BCP to strengthen mother-tongue isiXhosa instruction in the early grades. Teachers consistently reported that the programme gave them practical strategies to teach mathematics and conceptual understanding, particularly for learners who struggled most. External evaluation confirmed its contribution to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes in the lower grades.

Provincial-Scale Implementation

The Basic Concepts Advocacy Project in partnership with the Northern Cape Department of Education represents the first province-wide implementation of the BCP in South Africa. The project has focused on training Grade R teachers and supporting district officials to take ownership of the programme. An external evaluation by Alacrity Development (Anderson, Horler & Snelling, 2022) confirmed that the intervention had a meaningful impact on learners' school readiness and demonstrated that the BCP is both scalable and sustainable at provincial level.

Consistency Across Contexts

Across all of these projects, several consistent findings emerge:

- **Measurable gains** in learners' conceptual, cognitive, and scholastic development.
- **Improved school readiness** and accelerated language acquisition for children from disadvantaged and multilingual backgrounds.
- **Sustained impact** where the programme is implemented over multiple years.
- **Positive teacher feedback**, with educators reporting that the BCP equips them with tools to support struggling learners and enrich classroom practice.
- **External credibility** through doctoral validation, peer-reviewed publications, and independent evaluations.

Conclusion

Over two decades, the Basic Concepts Programme has demonstrated a consistent and replicable impact on children's early learning across provinces, languages, and school contexts. It stands as a rigorously tested, adaptable model that not only addresses barriers to learning but also equips teachers with the cognitive and metacognitive tools to scaffold foundational knowledge. The research base confirms that the BCP is a proven intervention with the potential to drive systemic improvement in early learning outcomes in South Africa.