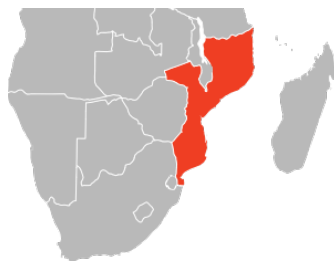


Literacy Boost is Save the Children's innovative program to support the development of reading skills in young children. Literacy Boost holistically pursues the goal of literacy by doing three things: using assessments to identify gaps in the five core skills, mobilizing communities for reading action, and training teachers to teach national curriculum with an emphasis on reading skills.

INTERVENTION SUMMARY

In 2008, Save the Children launched the Early Literacy Project in Mozambique, to help 7,800 preschool and primary school-age children, including children affected by HIV/AIDS and other vulnerabilities, develop sound early literacy skills. Funded by a private donor, this project randomly assigned the intervention to 30 communities and 10 geographically close primary schools, having for each a control community of similar population size. The program provided teacher training, community mobilization and reading promotion activities to foster systemic and high-quality early literacy instruction in Portuguese, the language of instruction. Additional activities included creating and distributing materials to support literacy instruction.



SAMPLE AND APPROACH

To measure the Early Literacy Project's effectiveness in improving the quality of early learning opportunities and development of early literacy skills, Save the Children randomly selected five target communities and their controls in each of three districts in Gaza Province. The project evaluated the emergent and early reading and writing skills of more than 600 children in grades 1-3 in 20 schools in a March 2009 baseline and an October 2010 endline, two full school years later. The assessment evaluated children's concepts of print, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary, oral comprehension and writing.

Students in grade 1 at baseline experienced one year of early childhood development programming, plus two years of Literacy Boost intervention. Those in grade 2 at baseline had two full school years of intervention during which their teachers were trained and supported using the Literacy Boost teaching modules. Those in grade 3 at the time of the baseline in 2009 had no Literacy Boost intervention in the classroom during 2009 or 2010.

RESULTS: YEAR 1

Literacy Boost Supports School Retention

Literacy Boost promoted consistent primary school retention of children who participated in the intervention. Approximately 28.9 percent of primary school children

were missing from the endline data collection due to circumstances beyond the control of the project, such as high rates of family migration to pursue employment in other communities. However, girls in Literacy Boost schools were significantly less likely to be absent than Literacy Boost boys and comparison school girls and boys.

Further, second and even third graders in Literacy Boost schools who had no intervention were significantly less likely than peers to be absent. From this, we can conclude Literacy Boost has had a school-wide impact on improving the attendance/retention of children in comparison to those in schools with no Literacy Boost intervention.

Students with low baseline scores, third graders, boys, and comparison school students were absent from the endline sample more frequently, rendering the comparison groups unequal and shifting the analysis to a comparison of endline performance and gain scores across grades within Literacy Boost schools and a comparison of students achieving full mastery.

Supporting Core Reading Skills

Literacy Boost supported students in grade 2 at baseline to develop reading skills equal to students a grade ahead of them at baseline who did not receive the Literacy Boost intervention. In Figure 1, the lack of a significant difference in endline and gain scores between grade 2 students and their peers in grade 3 is evidence of Literacy Boost's impact. Literacy Boost grade 2 students also demonstrated this benefit in letter identification, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension and writing.

Figure 1. Fluency Endline and Gain Scores by Grade.

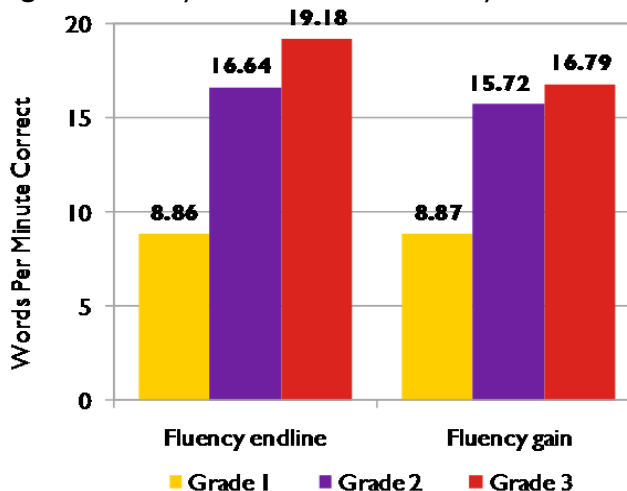
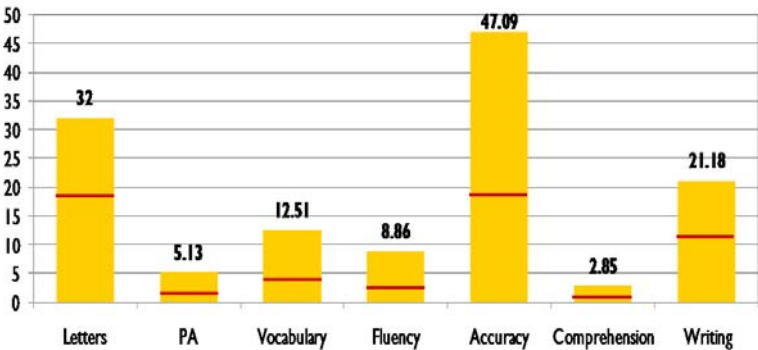


Figure 2 compares the average scores of students in grade 3 at baseline who did not receive any intervention (red lines) with those of students about to go into grade 3 at endline and who did receive the intervention (yellow column). Without Literacy Boost, we expect these skill levels to be similar, but because of it, students entering grade 3 have equal or greater scores than those whose classes and teachers did not have the chance to participate. In short, the third graders coming into the classroom in 2011 look very different from those who entered the classroom in 2009.

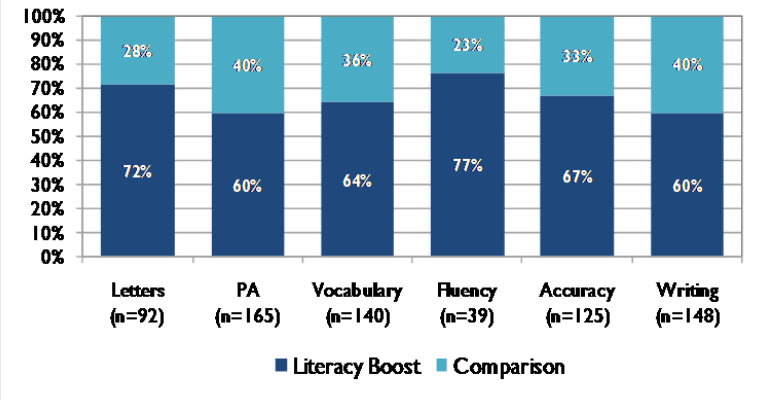
Figure 2. Average Grade 3 Student Skills in 2009 and 2011.



Supporting Reading Skill Mastery

At baseline, a handful of over 600 students demonstrated mastery on any skill. As seen in Figure 3, many now do so, and significantly more Literacy Boost students scored 100 percent correct on each reading skill, demonstrating full mastery of the skill, than their comparison school peers.

Figure 3. Percent of Students Demonstrating Full Mastery by Skill and Group.



Significantly more Literacy Boost students than comparison students knew all of their letters, rhymed eight words on demand, read 25 familiar words correctly, read 40 words per minute or faster with 100 percent accuracy and wrote a dictated sentence with complete accuracy. Thus, Literacy Boost supported more students to fully master letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, comprehension and writing as compared to schools nearby.

Success Story: Training and Learning in Action

What happens when Literacy Boost student picks up a book? “They pick up one book and read. They pick up another and read,” says third-year teacher, Idalina Mauae from Chingoe Primary School. By integrating Literacy Boost methods in the classroom, all of Idalina's students are able to read and write independently, a rarity in Mozambican students. Idalina feels very proud of her students’ achievements and also that they want to come to school, want to learn, and want to learn with her.



Children read stories together in groups at a Literacy Boost Reading Fair in Madjele, Mozambique. Photo by Mozambique Country Office.

Key Findings and Recommendations

In the primary schools surrounding randomly assigned ECD treatment sites, Literacy Boost kept more children in primary school and promoted greater skills development during the project period in key aspects of early literacy development.

Further research should consider designs less susceptible to attrition bias (when poorer performing children drop out of the sample); include additional skills assessment once ECD participants enter primary schools; and extend the early literacy tools on which many children are fully mastering skills to capture more complex skills development as children grow older.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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