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INTRODUCTION

The LAC Reads Capacity Program (LRCP) recently conducted a systematic review of research on Early Grade Literacy (EGL) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Systematic reviews use a rigorous process to identify, select, and critically appraise research around a particular topic, and to extract and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review. The American Institutes for Research team leading the systematic review conducted an initial search which resulted in 9,696 articles focused on EGL in the LAC region. After applying our inclusion criteria, we were left with a total of 162 studies that underwent full text review. During this phase, an additional 54 articles were removed as not relevant, resulting in 108 studies included in the final review. The 108 included articles were comprised of quantitative intervention research, quantitative nonintervention research, qualitative intervention research, and qualitative nonintervention research.

The vast majority of studies included in our review of evidence were published journal articles and came from either North or South America; significantly fewer articles were from Central America and the Caribbean. Most articles were published in English or Spanish. More than 90% of the articles were focused on high- to upper-middle-income countries as classified by the World Bank. The disproportionate emphasis on high-income and upper-middle-income countries may be explained by the limited available resources and capacity for conducting high-quality research in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Please visit www.lacreads.org in order to view the 108 reviewed articles as well as the executive summary and full systematic review reports. This document is a recommendations fact sheet designed to introduce readers to the main recommendations for various groups of stakeholders that came directly from the systematic review of evidence.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

The primary end goal of all activities within the LRCP is to enhance the capacity of key stakeholders (e.g., the Ministry of Education and the government, international funders and intergovernmental entities, international and national NGOs, academics, and researchers and practitioners) to use evidence to choose, develop, implement, and evaluate early grade reading strategies, programs, practices, and interventions. We developed several recommendations on the basis of the review of the EGR evidence from the LAC region and our analysis of the evidence-gaps. Some recommendations stem directly from the evidence on a particular topic, while other recommendations stem directly from gaps in the evidence and identify research gaps in need of addressing.



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We also took into consideration the strength of the evidence in our recommendations by distinguishing between internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the validity of inferences about whether the correlation between access to a certain program and the outcome variable can be considered a causal relationship (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). To identify the internal validity of the findings, we rely on the risk of bias assessments. External validity refers to the generalizability of the evaluation's findings to different contexts (Shadish et al., 2002). To examine external validity, we assess whether the findings are specific to geographic contexts with certain contextual characteristics.

We classify the recommendations on the basis of the internal and the external validity of the findings by assessing whether the findings identify a credible causal relationship and by examining the contextual characteristics to which the results can credibly be extrapolated. Recommendations about research gaps are in some cases also directly related to the relatively low internal validity of the research findings. Below we present our recommendations including a classification of the recommendations on the basis of the strength of the evidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MOE/GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS:

- Focus more resources on enhancing preschool quality specifically through training high quality teachers in higher middle-income and high-income countries. We did not encounter studies that credibly assess the impact of enhancing preschool quality in lower middle-income or low-income countries.
- Invest in nutrition programs in contexts with high rates of early childhood stunting and wasting to improve early grade reading outcomes. The evidence regarding the effects of nutrition programs on early grade reading outcomes is less clear in contexts with low rates of early childhood stunting and wasting.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

- Focus pedagogical approaches on the various predictors of reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding (learning the sound-symbol correspondences), vocabulary, and comprehension, which will likely contribute to reading improvements.¹
- Make reading activities more interesting and contextually relevant by incorporating students' ideas about potential activities and reading materials into lessons.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE EVIDENCE GAPS:

- Ensure that language assessments include multiple reading constructs and differentiate between those constructs so it is easier to identify the effects of interventions on individual constructs.
- Fund long-term mixed-methods experimental or quasi-experimental research on the effects of preschool and early childhood education on early grade reading outcomes.
- Include several early grade reading constructs in administrative data to enable researchers to conduct high-quality research on the mechanisms underlying early grade reading using large sample sizes.

¹ This recommendation is based on correlational and not causal research.



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- Document ongoing research to minimize publication bias so that unpublished research is available to policy makers as well and to ensure that hypotheses are pre-specified.
- Register ongoing research on early grade reading in a central, publicly available location so that everyone can see what is being done and seek to complement and add to the research base.
- Develop more interdisciplinary mixed-methods research on early grade reading that includes more than one reading construct and large sample sizes.
- Fund rigorous research that allows for an examination of the causal effects of development programs on early grade reading outcomes. These studies include both experimental and quasi-experimental studies with a sufficient sample size. These studies also need to be supplemented with qualitative research.
- Pursue more research on EGL strategies for students with disabilities.
- Pursue more research on reading in indigenous languages.
- Conduct more research on the linkages between the development of prewriting and writing skills and early grade reading outcomes.