

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

A Basic Concepts Project for Foundation Phase Teachers in Four Schools

Word Test Results: 2014 - 2018

**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 with English as the language of instruction and learning for the first time. The current report will compare the data gathered at baseline in 2014 with that gathered after 4 years of intervention (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018). Data has been 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 be read by that learner. The Word Test is 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, Umthombophile, and Klipspruit, while in 2015 this was done at Enkeldoorn, Umthombophile and Phakama. From 2016 to 2018 data was gathered at all 4 project schools. The data is therefore not entirely comparable particularly when matching the average scores in a grade for different years. Comparative data was also gathered from a school in a socio-economically deprived area of Cape Town as well as from another school within the area of operation of the project.

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| Total number of learners assessed at the project schools (2014-2018) |
|   | **Grade 3** | **Grade 4** |
| 2014 | **28** | **28** |
| 2015 | **41** | **45** |
| 2016 | **69** | **62** |
| 2017 | **68** | **68** |
| 2018 | **72** | **74** |
| **Total** | **278** | **277** |

**Results:**

Grade 3

There was an improvement (2.31 points) in the average score for 2018 compared with the baseline assessment in 2014. The project schools in 2018 on average scored 17.27 points higher than a comparable group of learners from the province. The average word score for the project learners was approximately 1.1 years higher than that of the control learners, however approximately 2 years delayed in comparison with a group of disadvantaged learners in the Western Cape. The majority (77%) of the Grade 3 of learners from the surrounding area could only write a maximum of 16 words, whereas the majority (63%) of the Kwena Basin children could write over 17 words per child.

While there have been gains in the average scores at two of the project schools since the start of the project (*Enkeldoorn: +42.28 & Klipspruit: +5.93*), there have been declines in the scores at two schools (Umthombophile: -13.88 & Phakama: -4.22). Since 2016 there have however been improvements in the average scores at all four project schools: *Enkeldoorn = +1.61; Umthombophile = +5.61; Phakama = +4.41 and Klipspruit = +18.49.* There was a marginal decline at one school (Enkeldoorn:-1.0) in 2018, yet the greatest gains (+42.28) in the project have been found at this school. The gains at this school equate to 2.6 years of growth in word production since the start of the project. The learners at Enkeldoorn in 2018 were functioning slightly below the average score (-3.25) expected of a child in Grade 3. The greatest concern was the low score attained by the learners at Phakama. The learners scored only marginally higher (.13) than the local comparison school - this represents an approximate delay of 2.7 years compared with an average child on this test. See the Figure above.

Grade 4

There was an increase (+10.03 points) in the average score since the baseline assessment in 2014. The increase in the average scores could be regarded as a word gain of approximately 6 months compared to the baseline learners at the start of the project. There was an improvement (+6.84) in the scores since last year and a small decline compared to 2015 and 2016 (-1.31 & -1.1 respectively). The word scores for the project learners were approximately 1.7 years in advance of the control learners in the area, however, approximately 1.8 years delayed compared to a group of disadvantaged learners in the Western Cape. The majority (73%) of the Grade 4 of learners from the surrounding area could only write a maximum of 16 words, whereas the majority (74%) of the Kwena Basin children could write over 17 words per child.

The results at Enkeldoorn (+74.21) and Klipspruit (+7.1) were higher than the initial baseline results, while the results at Umthombophile were significantly lower (-20.3). No baseline data had been gathered at Phakama at the start of the project. There was however a decline in the average scores at Umthombophile: (-20.10) and Phakama: (-17.94) between 2016 and 2017. See discussion for further interpretation of these results. From 2017 to 2018 there were however improvements in the average scores at all four of the project schools, albeit very small improvements at two of the schools: Enkeldoorn = +36.58; Umthombophile = +.07; Phakama = +.79 and Klipspruit = +8.98. The learners at Enkeldoorn were functioning 1.7 years (27.45 points) in advance of the average score expected of a child in Grade 4. See the Figure below.

**Discussion:**

The Word Test results were among the most positive and encouraging since the start of the project, particularly for the learners at Enkeldoorn and Klipspruit Primary. The average scores at these schools have increased steadily since the start of the project. During this round of testing improvements were found in all but one of the classes of the project schools. The one class that did not show an improvement from last year (Enkeldoorn, Grade 3), remains an outlier in terms of its performance on this test and experienced only a nominal (-1) drop in its score. Whereas there had been a decline in scores (in two Grade 4 classes and 3 Grade 3 classes) during the project, we have now started to see a general increase in the results in all classes.

The average word scores in both Grade 3 and Grade 4 were higher than the baseline test results in 2014. Whereas the Grade 3 results showed an initial decline at the start of the project (2015 & 2016), there has been a general improvement in the results in 2017 and 2018. While there was a decline in the average Grade 4 scores at all the schools last year (2017), the decline at two of the schools (Umthombophile and Phakama) was particularly significant. There have however been small improvements in both these classes this year. The decline in these two classes in 2017 might have been related to the resignation and redeployment of the two multi-grade teachers who taught these classes during that year.

The general trajectory of the word test results seems to indicate a stabilisation and that further incremental improvements might be possible. The ongoing training and induction of the two new teachers to the project would also assist to improve the word knowledge of their learners further. In addition, the more experienced project teachers have started to work in a more consistent and focussed way on developing not only the oral, but the written vocabulary of their learners. It is hoped that these positive developments will continue into the future.

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