



PHOTO CREDIT: STEFAN MCLETCHE

Zambia Can Read

SIMPLE STEPS TO ACHIEVE BIG GAINS

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The USAID-funded Time to Learn (TTL) program (2012-2017) was an innovation in early grade literacy instruction in Zambia. Based on Education Development Center's proven Read Right Now! (RRN) literacy approach, TTL addressed challenges of teacher mobility, no or limited teacher training, and very low levels of resources for supporting learning in participating schools. TTL's simple, research-based set of daily literacy routines supported by mobile technology-based resources for teachers and supervisors generated promising results: a dramatic drop in the proportion of non-readers and increases in the proportion of students in all categories of greater proficiency.

The Zambia Can Read study tracked a more robust implementation of the RRN/TTL approach, with faithful implementation of the instructional model and consistent coaching support. Carried out in partnership with Ministry of General Education (MoGE) partners, the study highlights the potential for dramatically improved literacy results when existing system resources are effectively applied.

About the Study

The study provided a two-day training; a tablet-based resource package including videos, text, digital learning activities, and assessment tools; the 5-step RRN/TTL instructional model; and coaching to a sample of schools in Kafue district in Lusaka Province. Resource Center Coordinators and ZICs from Kasenje, Kafue and Chilenge zones visited the participating schools every two weeks to coach and provide feedback to teachers, Parent Community Support Committee chairpersons, and Head Teachers. The program was implemented for three months, and the performance of Grade 2 students in study schools was compared to students in similar schools that did not receive any intervention.

Results

Grade 2 intervention students significantly outperformed Grade 2 comparison students across all subtasks. On average, intervention students met or exceeded proposed national benchmarks for oral reading fluency and comprehension with only 3 months of exposure to the literacy approach and 3 months of teacher coaching and support.



ZAMBIA CAN READ

Letter Reading

62% of intervention students read between 60 and 100 letters after 3 months of instruction using the RRN/TTL approach, and no students were unable to read any letters. Only 2% of comparison students achieved 60-100 letters, and 28% could not read any letters.

Oral Reading Fluency

Intervention students read an average of 42 words per minute (WPM)—an increase of 31 wpm from baseline to endline. In other words, students on average exceeded the “desirable” achievement level (40 WPM) in the 2014 Reading Performance Level Descriptors (RPLDs) for Grade 2, after only 3 months of instruction. Indeed, 48% percent of intervention students were able to read between 41-63 words of the story correctly, approaching or exceeding the “outstanding” achievement level in the 2014 RPLDs. Comparison students averaged 11 WPM at endline, with 54% of reading between only 0-10 words correctly.

Reading Comprehension

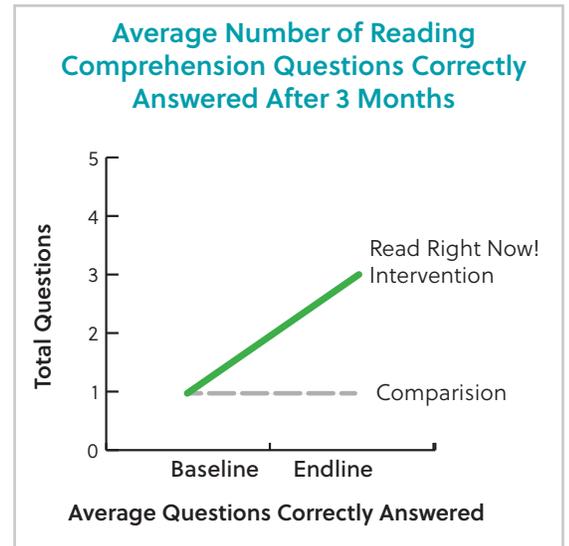
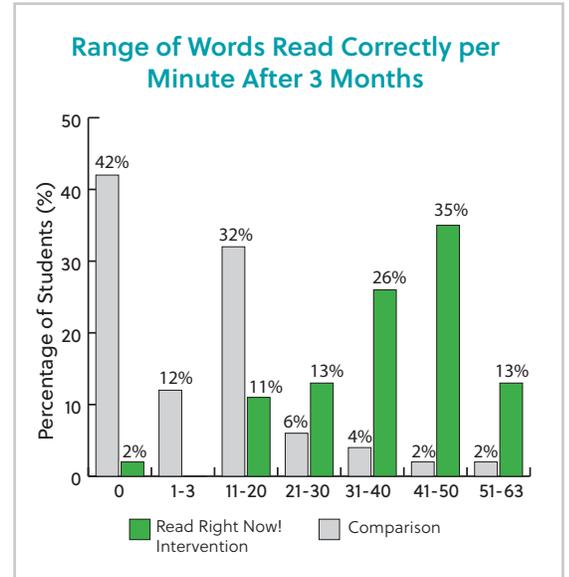
Fluency gains were paralleled by comprehension improvements. After only 3 months of instruction, intervention students showed significantly better reading comprehension than comparison students. Intervention students on average approached or met the 2014 “desirable” RPLD for comprehension, while comparison students remained “below minimum.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 5-step RRN/TTL approach recognizes that Zambian teachers often have minimal professional experience in reading instruction, and need structure and explicit guidance in order to teach reading well. It provides a reliable, research-based daily structure without being tied to specific printed material, which is important in low-resource, text-poor classrooms. The approach helps participating teachers develop discrete teaching skills for integrating reading, writing, speaking and listening—the core literacy skills—into their 60-minute lessons from their very first day of instruction.

The coaching and support element of the program enhances teacher performance by providing a regular feedback loop, resources, and structure for teachers to explore and improve their practice. zonal in-service coordinators (ZICs), head teachers, and parents community school committee members all become familiar with the goals and methods of the RRN/TTL approach and can successfully support it in schools.

Because this approach relies on human resources that already exist within the Zambian education system, it holds promise for expansion. Improvements in student performance over such a short period provide a compelling case for addressing time and transport barriers that have limited school-level coaching by ZICs. The additional costs of digital materials can be leveraged within broader education budgets, and, when amortized over several years, are more cost-effective than traditional paper resources.



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readrightnow!

Time to Learn and Zambia Can Read are applications of EDC's Read Right Now! early grade and youth literacy initiative. Read Right Now! is an adaptable, evidence based literacy program for low capacity and resource-lean environments.