

#2 **BOOK-SHARING IMPROVES CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Several important findings emerged from the study of dialogic book-sharing conducted in Khayelitsha (Vally et al, 2015*). This infographic summarises the study's findings on children's language skills.

To understand how the study was setup, see Infographic #1 of this series.

What was the context to the research?

SOUTH AFRICA IS CONSIDERED A 'LOWER MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRY' (LMIC). RESEARCH HAS FOUND THAT IN LMICS TYPICALLY:



11-33%

of carers actively involve their children in 'cognitively stimulating activities' - such as reading time or interactive playtime, or other activities that stimulate the child's brain.



10-41%

of carers provide materials to their children that are 'cognitively stimulating' (such as books or interactive toys).

THESE LOW RATES CAN BE DUE TO A VARIETY OF REASONS, SUCH AS A LACK OF RESOURCES OR TIME.

Why might book-sharing be beneficial to children's language development?



Young children's language skills develop through social interactions with their carers. In particular, new words and concepts are learned by a child when they are encouraged to think and talk about things that they can see in front of them. Through this process, children are introduced to new words and concepts.

Research has shown that the children who engage in conversational turn-taking with their carers, between birth and the age of three, develop language skills especially rapidly. These children's educational development progresses particularly well when they start school. The conversations that take place during book-sharing may, therefore, be especially beneficial to children's development.

*The original article is: *The impact of dialogic book-sharing training on infant language and attention: A randomized controlled trial in a deprived South African community* by Zahir Vally, Lynne Murray, Mark Tomlinson and Peter Cooper. It was published in 2015, in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

How was child language assessed in the study?



To measure a child's language abilities, the researchers used the 'MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory'. This assesses how many words a child can say (i.e., expressive language) and how many words a child understands (i.e., receptive language). This assessment was translated into isiXhosa, and it was adjusted slightly to make it culturally appropriate.

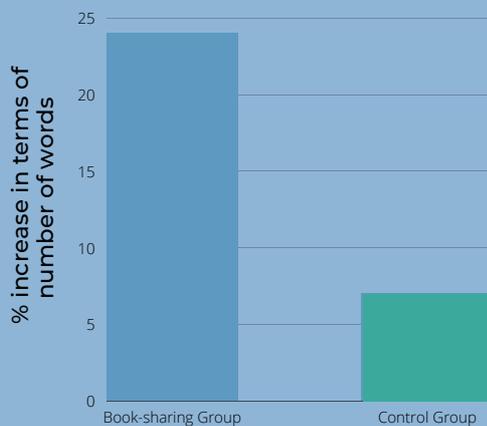


The performance of the children whose carers received the book-sharing training was compared before and after the training. In addition, the performance of these children was compared to the performance of the children whose carers did not receive the training.

What were the outcomes?

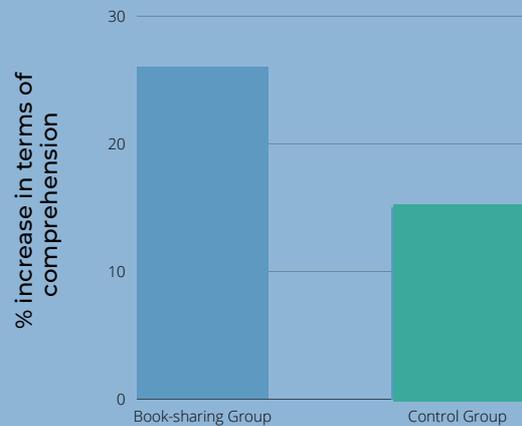
EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Increase in the number of words a child understands and can say.



RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE (COMPREHENSION)

Increase in the number of words a child understands.



ANALYSIS

It can be seen from the figures above that, over the period between the two assessments, the control group improved somewhat in their expressive language - reflecting the extent of natural development. However, children whose carers had received the book-sharing training improved much more.

Conclusion

The study showed that, in Khayelitsha in South Africa, training carers of one year old children in dialogic book-sharing markedly improved the children's language abilities. This is especially important because early language is a good predictor of the extent to which children's education progresses when they begin school. Dialogic book-sharing skills can be taught to parents and other carers relatively briefly and inexpensively. The authors of the journal article that reported the findings of this study concluded that "the training programme, which is simple and inexpensive to deliver, has the potential to benefit child cognitive development in LMIC contexts where such development is commonly compromised."

Dialogic book-sharing is simple and inexpensive to deliver – and has great benefits to children's cognitive development.



THIS IS GREAT NEWS FOR COUNTRIES WITH LESS DEVELOPED ECONOMIES!

About this series

The 'Making Sense at Mikhulu' infographic series includes a summary of the following research findings:

- #1** How we gathered data for our first major research project on book-sharing in South Africa
- #2** Book-sharing improves children's language skills
- #3** Book-sharing improves children's attention span
- #4** Book-sharing improves carer-child relationships
- #5** Book-sharing makes children more emotionally aware
- #6** Book-sharing has an especially large benefit for children with the lowest language and attention skills
- #7** Could book-sharing contribute to the challenge of reducing levels of violence?



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