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## THE IMPACT OF USING INNOVATIVE READING PROGRAMS IN PRESCHOOL

*Вплив використання інноваційних програм з читання у дошкільному віці*

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### **Abstract**

*The concept of innovation can take on various meanings, especially when applied to preschool education. It involves the introduction of new ideas, methods, techniques, strategies, and practices within the educational setting to enhance and improve the teaching and learning process. This research focuses on the essential element needed for development and self-renewal, which includes being receptive to fresh ideas, exploring new approaches, and incorporating technological advancements into education.*

*Preschool teachers play a vital role in implementing innovative methods and activities within preschool settings to support learners on their educational journey. There are numerous innovative learning models in preschool education, such as project-based learning, which prioritizes individualization, dedication, and autonomy in teaching. This includes utilizing reading programs that make lessons enjoyable while reinforcing acquired knowledge. One of the notable tools is Raz-kids, which enriches students' lives and aids in their reading development.*

**Key words:** *Development, Progress, Achievement, Instruction, Acquire, Raz-kids.*

## Introduction

One of the most crucial academic abilities taught in schools is reading comprehension (Gibson, Carledge & Keyes, 2011). Reading comprehension is a prerequisite for learning other subjects. For instance, when studying math, science, and social studies, students must read chapter headings, word problems, and textbook passages (Gibson, Carledg & Keyes, 2011). As they advance through the educational system, students who are unable to read independently will usually face difficulties in other academic subjects, leading to an increasing achievement gap (Melekoglu & Wilkerson, 2013). Reading is vital for more reasons than just academics; it's a requirement for becoming a successful, independent adult in our society.

Reading is a difficult skill that requires a variety of abilities, such as deciphering unknown words, identifying sight words, comprehending vocabulary, and remembering details and events from the story. Lacina (2006) lists five principles, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as essential for reading instruction. A child's phonemic awareness starts early. The majority of students are already expected to be familiar with the majority of the alphabet's letters and two phonemes when they start school. To help students decode and encode words, phonics instruction focuses on individual vowel and consonant sounds as well as symbol correspondence. Pupils must apply these phonological skills when reading a word they are unfamiliar with. The link between a student's comprehension of written text and their ability to decode words is called fluency (Melekoglu & Wilkerson, 2013).

Making an effort to read every day and discussing books, words and illustrations with kids can help improve their reading, listening, creative thinking skills as well as their communication skills. Young children enjoy alphabet,

shape, and counting books as well as humorous tales featuring unusual characters.

The process of becoming a proficient independent reader starts far before a child enters school. Research indicates that children who receive regular reading instruction and have early access to books are more likely to develop into proficient self-readers (Fox, 2013). Because adults model fluent reading, display emotions, alter their voice tones, and project positive attitudes toward reading, young children pick up these skills from adults. Children who adopt these positive attitudes, which they picked up from adults, will read more and enjoy it more, which will help them become better readers in the long run (Kotaman, 2013). Additionally, it has been discovered that kids who read books on their own are developing their reading skills more than kids who only use classroom books (Allington, 2011).

Using technology as a tool to assist young children is one of the early reading practices. Websites designed for reading are readily available, as are numerous software programs. An online computer program for young readers is called Raz-Kids. It was introduced in 2004 as a component of the Learning A-Z library. The goal of this program is to increase children's enjoyment and ease of reading. The program's features enable students to record their own reading for practice, listen to reading aloud with fluency, and complete an assessment at the conclusion of their reading (Fox, 2013).

For children as well as parents equally, this app and website are outstanding. Children with disabilities and the ELL population benefit most from it. The feature that allows you to read the books to kids is my favorite thing about this app. It indicates the line it is reading in green and the specific word it is reading in yellow as it reads the books. The child can now follow along perfectly thanks to this. This is crucial at home where one parent is unable to assist their child because of time constraints or academic constraints. Because

they can accumulate points in this game and utilize those points to construct their own robots, the kids are highly motivated to learn (Allington, 2011).

The book can be read as a regular digital book by a proficient reader, and each book comes with an interactive quiz. After completing the quiz, the kids receive extra points, and they receive even more points for revising their earlier work. The website and app are suitable for teachers, parents, and kids alike. How many books the student has read and what level they are at can be seen by the teacher. Naturally, with continued use, this will raise the child's learning to a new level. It offers the teacher total command over the curriculum. Finally, each student receives a code/user name card and personalized letters as part of the program. This is really practical. Mainly differentiated reading instructions of this program meet the individual needs of students (Raz Plus, 2023).

### **Benefits of the Program**

Schools must choose which of the many programs on offer to buy in order to best serve the needs of their students. Regrettably, the companies that sell the products provide the majority of the program reviews that are accessible, and there is a dearth of information on students' learning outcomes that would support the impact on their reading achievement. Examining the Raz-Kids program, which my school uses for first graders, is the aim of this study.

This study's primary goal is to ascertain whether the program will help students' guided reading level, fluency, and comprehension (Raz Plus, 2023).

At this point we need to understand that reading is not a passive ability; rather, it is regarded as a form of action. The read texts are not read mindlessly, but the content is attempted to be comprehended. Students are piqued by the content they are reading. As we live in a technologically advanced era, there are various online tools and platforms that assist reading proficiency tests, making the seemingly impossible and occasionally challenging process easier.

Mentioning Raz Kids, the most significant of these initiatives, is sufficient. The online reading program Kids A-Z is useful for students with varying levels of linguistic proficiency. This software is helpful for hearing, speaking, and quick reading as well. There are numerous levels and languages of books accessible. Students are given access to a diverse and colorful variety of literature, and each program user is given questions varying in level of difficulty to assess their comprehension of the novels they have read and listened to. In this program, it is even possible to learn the types of writing and get acquainted with the given examples of each type of writing (Raz Plus, 2023) (Hew et al., 2004).

The teacher in this global software records the grammatical, spelling, and pronunciation errors that students make when reading when they join the evaluation part, listen to the book that was assigned to them, read it, record their voices, respond to the questions, and email it back to the teacher. When a language level has been successfully completed, the program offers the option to advance to the next level when the student is ready. Any level can be chosen to improve and test reading skills in this app. Students each have their own username and password at the same time. Even the many styles of writing can be learned in this application, along with samples of each type of writing that are provided (Raz Plus, 2023).

One of the most challenging obstacles a learner of a foreign language must overcome is learning to write. Even native speakers at the university level frequently have significant problems demonstrating a strong command of writing. Therefore, because writing abilities are crucial for academic achievement, language teachers frequently incorporate them in their foreign language curricula (Hew et al., 2004).

The 26 uppercase and lowercase letter symbols that make up each word in the English language are named, recognized, and formed during alphabet instruction. Many reading specialists believe that one of the most significant

predictors of early reading success, in addition to phonemic awareness, is the ability to recognize the alphabet's letters (Adams, 1990).

Schools have an obligation to assist children in learning the names and shapes of letters, beginning in preschool and kindergarten. One of the most effective ways to improve letter recognition is to incorporate writing and printing into letter instruction. One useful tactic for introducing letters is to use letter, keyword, or picture displays (Adams, 1990).

Language's sounds are addressed by phonological awareness. Teaching just the sounds is more important than teaching the symbols that stand in for the sounds. Phonological awareness training covers sound awareness at the word, rhyme, syllable, and phoneme levels. It is among the most significant early markers of reading success, if not the most significant (Stanovich, 1996).

The National Reading Panel report from 2000 concentrates on phonemic awareness, one facet of phonological awareness. Teaching students to identify a specific sound within a word, recognize the same sound in different words, identify a word that starts or ends with a different sound from a group of three or four words, segment and blend the sounds within a word, and manipulate sounds within a word by replacing, adding, or deleting other sounds are all effective strategies for teaching phonemic awareness (Hew et al., 2004).

Students who are phonemically aware are better readers and spellers. The best teaching swiftly transitions the learner from being aware of a specific sound to associating that sound with a letter symbol. Students should be able to manipulate the sounds within words using their understanding of the relationships between sound and symbol once letter symbols are introduced (Allington, 2011).

## **Methods, Design, and Techniques of the Research**

The aim of this study was to ascertain whether the computer program Raz-Kids will help to enhance students' guided reading level, fluency, and comprehension in addition to supporting their independent reading (Allington, 2011).

Raz-kids is a library of digital literacy tools for educators as well as customized content for learners with different reading levels. Raz-kids has a number of important, empirically supported features that help students learn and teachers instruct.

It offers teachers a wide range of developmentally appropriate and standards-aligned virtual reading resources and materials, including leveled books, to integrate into their regular lessons. The reading materials and resources are available in offline (printable) and online (projectable, eBooks, and mobile) formats, giving teachers the freedom to choose the ones that best suit their students' learning objectives. Raz-Kids offers online learning activities that correlate with teacher-led instruction resources and include gaming and incentive features to engage students in the learning process, in addition to resources for teacher-led instruction.

Depending on the needs of their students and the classroom, teachers can use Raz-kids in whole-group, small-group, and individual work formats. The resources are made to meet the needs of students at different stages of literacy development and can be accessed both online and in person.

Sixty students were enrolled in the participating classrooms during the study's spring semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. Parents had the option to opt their child out of the study prior to its commencement. All of Raz-kids' materials, reports, and resources were available to teachers during the implementation period. Students could use the program both within and outside of the classroom.

Instructors were free to choose how best to integrate Raz-kids into their lessons and how their students used it, but they were expected to do so explicitly: teachers were to use Raz-kids for student activities and literacy instruction for at least thirty minutes each day. The students had to log onto the program during each session. Every child had a unique login name and password, and the program was adjusted to match their level of independent reading. Students studied, took quizzes, and listened to readings from the books that were appropriate for their level for fifteen minutes. During these sessions, they were prohibited from using the play features.

Additionally, guided reading sessions in small groups with an emphasis on enhancing comprehension and fluency were given to the students. Stories from both fiction and non-fiction were chosen to impart particular skills, like: (a) asking and responding to questions about important details in text, (b) recounting a story, (c) utilizing essential details to describe characters, settings, and significant events in a story; and (d) describing characters, settings, and events in a story with illustrations and details.

The level of the students was assessed once before the implementation period and once after that. The strike improvement was noticed during the first month, the speed of the reading and students' pronunciation improved. Implementation quality was assessed via classroom observations. The teachers created a protocol for classroom observations in order to assess the level of mastery of reading. Also The Developmental Reading Assessment was given at the end of each month to evaluate student performance on a guided reading level, fluency and comprehension. A four-point rating system was used for each observation item: excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory. Following their three observations in the classroom, the teachers reached a decision. The mean inter-rater reliability scores for exact and adjacent categories were 88.0% and 100%, correspondingly.

Every teacher received an invitation to take part in a 30-minute interview. Teachers who participated in interviews discussed their experiences implementing Raz-kids, recommended resources to help with implementation, and their opinions on the results for the participating students. Themes that surfaced from the interview data were found using thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that the students who took part improved their levels of guided reading fluency. For struggling readers, the Raz-Kids program appears to be a helpful addition to reading instruction and small group guided reading.

**Table 1.** *Reading Rubric for Preschool*

Criteria	Excellent (4 points)	Good (3 points)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Unsatisfactory (1 point)
<b>Recognition of Sight Words</b>	Identifies most sight words correctly.	Identifies many sight words correctly.	Demonstrates basic recognition of common sight words.	Struggles to recognize sight words.
<b>Comprehension</b>	Demonstrates excellent understanding of the story. Can retell the story accurately.	Demonstrates good understanding of the story. Can retell main events.	Demonstrates basic understanding of the story with some details.	Demonstrates limited understanding of the story.
<b>Fluency</b>	Reads with expression and appropriate pacing.	Reads with some expression and mostly appropriate pacing.	Reads with limited expression and pacing.	Struggles with expression and pacing.

Criteria	Excellent (4 points)	Good (3 points)	Satisfactory (2 points)	Unsatisfactory (1 point)
<b>Phonemic Awareness</b>	Demonstrates excellent ability to manipulate sounds and blend phonemes.	Demonstrates good ability with occasional assistance needed.	Demonstrates basic ability to manipulate sounds with frequent assistance.	Struggles to manipulate sounds and blend phonemes.
<b>Engagement</b>	Shows high level of engagement and enthusiasm for reading.	Shows good engagement and interest in reading.	Shows some engagement but may lose interest.	Shows little to no interest or engagement in reading.

This rubric is designed to assess students on reading comprehension and fluency. The performance levels range from Excellent to Unsatisfactory. This rubric also helps in identifying areas of strength and areas that need improvement in preschoolers' reading abilities.

**Table 2.** *Activities Student Completed in Raz-Kids*

	Books (listened)	Books (read)	Quizzes taken	Total Time
<b>Student A</b>	172	35	57	14 hours 35 minutes
<b>Student B</b>	135	57	165	12 hours 47 minutes

The table shows the indicators of students results of read, listened books and taken quizzes, and the total time spent on that program.

## Results

This study's main objective was to evaluate the impact and efficacy of the Raz-kids program on preschoolers' reading abilities. It appears that E-books can

be utilized in a manner that would provide students an opportunity to listen to stories when a fluent model of reading, such as the teacher, parent, or another adult is not available. It has been found that students make the most progress and increase their reading fluency and comprehension when they are given the opportunity to choose their reading material at their appropriate level.

In order to achieve scores for guided reading level, fluency, and comprehension during the baseline and intervention, each student underwent a monthly assessment using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Average fluency and comprehension scores were also reported, along with growth in the guided reading level. Additionally, information is provided about Raz-kids products, including the quantity of books read, listened to, and quizzes passed. Additionally, the total amount of time spent was noted.

## **Conclusion**

The development of technology has brought about a significant shift in the definition of reading. E-books, which require little preparation and training on the part of both teachers and students, may develop into another method of differentiating instruction as the needs of students in a classroom continue to change. The current study will keep using an electronic book program to assess how well it helps children starting from preschool learn to read fluently and develop comprehension. For young readers, the Raz-Kids program appears to be a helpful addition to reading instruction and small-group guided reading.

Students could be given these books to use at home for extra practice. There are many ways to teach reading that will inspire readers to read for pleasure. Students who use technology for reading are able to read more, spend more time reading, and improve their fluency when listening to stories on the computer. Technology-assisted reading can also give teachers insight into how well each student is doing in their reading lessons.

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