

Sent to the New York Times, January 21, 2020.

The questionable value of early instruction:

Dr. Perri Klass is impressed with the “carefully structured” preschool curriculum for 2- and 3-year-olds in Shanghai, noting that the children mastered (at least some) English letters and knew the days of the week and months of the year (“... a tinge of regret,” Jan 20).

But the research shows that there is no advantage to early instruction in either first or second language development. Children who start later “catch up” easily when the conditions are right. In fact, early instruction may have a negative effect.

Here is an example: We analyzed predictors of the PIRLS reading test, given to 10-year-olds in over 40 countries in their own language. We found, not surprisingly, that middle class children and those with more access to reading material (school libraries) did better on the test. The amount of literacy instruction either did not matter or had a negative effect.

Of importance to this discussion, children who could recognize and write letters and read some words and sentences when entering school did worse on the PIRLS reading examination five years later.

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Some sources:

Krashen, S. Lee, SY, and Lao, C. 2017. Comprehensible and Compelling. The Causes and Effects of Free Voluntary Reading. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited. ABC-CLLIO, LLC.

Krashen, S., Lee, S.Y. and McQuillan, J. 2012. Is the library important? Multivariate studies at the national and international level. Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 8(1): 26-36.

http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/multivariate_studies.pdf

Krashen, S. and McQuillan, J. 2007. Late intervention. Educational Leadership 65 (2): 68-73. http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/late_intervention.pdf

Original article: <https://tinyurl.com/qp5re94>