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Is Student Achievement on Standardized EQAO Testing Reflected in Their Annual Academic Performance?: A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract: In Ontario, Canada, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is responsible for testing student literacy and numeracy skills across the province. Since its inception, this standardized testing has generated much controversy. The scientific community takes a critical look at various aspects of the process. This longitudinal study addresses one of these concerns: the link between students' academic performance in literacy in 1st to 6th grade as compared to their achievement on EQAO testing in literacy. The sample of 2052 students is particular in that all were enrolled in French schools across Northern Ontario when writing the French EQAO test; however, in many cases this was not always their first or dominant language. For the purposes of this study, the sample was divided into 2 groups: students without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and students with an IEP. This study also aims to analyze the influence of factors such as gender, language, and classroom accommodations on literacy measures (i.e. reading and writing tasks). Though the provincial testing program in literacy and numeracy has been developed in Ontario, Canada over the past ten years, little is known on how accurately this costly process reflects students' academic achievement. When comparing classroom results in grades 1 to 6 to EQAO testing results in grades 3 and 6, the results of this study varied, showing very weak correlations in some cases (i.e. $G = 0.19^$) to strong and statistically significant correlations in others (i.e. $G = 0.79^{***}$).*

Keywords: EQAO, Provincial Testing, Literacy

Context

Language, the vehicle of knowledge, is the foundation of academic success in all subjects. Developed in primary school and enriched in high school, written language is a skill that is essential to achievement, not only in the school setting, but also in the work force (Finnie and Meng 2006; Ministère de l'éducation de l'Ontario 2011b). Over half of 15 year-old Canadians have not mastered a level of proficiency in reading that allows them to pursue post-secondary education, and over 25% of them have only acquired the most basic literacy skills required to carry on with activities of daily living (Willms 2004). A strong correlation has been demonstrated between abilities relating to mathematics (McCain and Mustard 1999), as well as oral and written language (Billard 2007; Callu, Jacquier-Roux, Ciannopulu, and Dellatolas 2003). Not surprisingly, 40% to 75% of language impaired students also struggle with learning to read (Bishop and Adams 1990; Catts, Fey, Zhang and Tomblin 1999; Catts and Kamhi 2005). Among students struggling with oral language, written language skills are often also compromised (Gillam and Johnston 1992; Mackie and Dockrell 2004; Scott and Windsor 2000; Teberosky 2002), putting them at risk of failure in other subjects targeted by the school curriculum (Knox 2002; Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase and Kaplan 1998).

The undeniable importance of literacy explains the popularity of studies pertaining to it as well as the fact that it is monitored closely by educational systems worldwide (Pierre 2004; Ewart and de Rocquigny 2011; Zanchetta, Kaszapm, Mohamed, Racine, Maheu, Masny, Cèsar, Maltais, Sngwa-Lugoma, Lussier and Kinslikh 2012). Studies have shown that children who struggle with written language read less than their peers, which in turn increases difficulties in other subjects (Knox 2002; Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase and Kaplan 1998). This