

Preschool education improves alphabet letter recognition, study finds

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Many education experts believe children's preschool years are important to their educational development and preparation for success in school. Although the benefits of attending preschool may seem apparent, limited evidence exists to support this based on large scale state-wide studies. Now, a new study from the University of Missouri College of Education has found that, on average, children who completed preschool make large improvements in their alphabet recognition skills compared to children have just begun preschool. The researcher says the results of the study help show the effectiveness of preschool in preparing children to succeed throughout their academic careers and may prevent future academic failure.

For his study, which is one of the largest studies of its kind, Francis Huang, an assistant professor of educational, school, and counseling psychology at MU, examined data from more than 20,000 children who attended the state-funded Virginia Preschool Initiative. About half of the children in the study had just entered the prekindergarten program while the other half had completed the prekindergarten program and were beginning kindergarten. Huang found that, on average, children who had finished a year of [preschool](#) had alphabet recognition skills that were more than 85 percent higher compared to those who had just begun the same program.

"Alphabet recognition has been shown to be one of the strongest and most reliable predictors of reading ability and, on its own, letter name knowledge can be as effective as administering an entire reading

readiness test," Huang said. "On average, the more letters children can recognize and identify at an early age, the better their future reading achievement and the lower the risk of academic failure. Learning letter names can help with learning letter sounds, which benefits overall reading skills. In the study, the effect of preschool attendance on letter name knowledge was both large and practically meaningful."

Huang says that although alphabet recognition is just one part of a child's overall education, it plays an important, foundational role in developing reading skills, which is one of the most important factors that can promote a child's academic success.

"While this study focused on alphabet recognition, [children](#) also learn many other important skills in preschool, such as math and socioemotional [skills](#)," Huang said. "Though this is just one piece of the puzzle, it does help show how valuable [preschool education](#) can be for child development. Many experts generally agree that early intervention can be more successful and cost effective compared to future remediation. Kindergarten teachers should be able to differentiate their instruction in order to meet the needs of students who may begin school with differing ability levels."

The study, "Does attending a state-funded preschool program improve letter name knowledge?" was published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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