ELLM is a research- and standards-based curriculum and professional development delivery system that helps build young children's emergent literacy skills. At the heart of ELLM are program components, focusing on active learning, that work together to improve the quality of learning programs.

**Introduction to the Research**

In 2002, the U.S. DOE awarded the Florida Institute of Education at the University of North Florida a Preschool Curriculum Evaluation and Research (PCER) grant to expand and rigorously evaluate ELLM. The five-year study, presented here, was designed to determine whether participation in ELLM resulted in higher pretest emergent literacy scores for 4-year-old at-risk children.

**METHODOLOGY**

This evaluation of ELLM used an experimental design based on the random assignment of classrooms to ELLM and to waitlist control status.

**PARTICIPANTS**

Three geographical locations in a southeastern state participated in the study. The three locations represent differing degrees of urban development.

**Randomization**

- In each location, a low-performing elementary school having at least one early intervention prekindergarten class was chosen for participation. Subsequently, two feed schools and two elementary schools in the school's neighborhood were selected. The schools and their companion neighborhood sites were randomly assigned to either ELLM or control status.
- There were 444 children with both pretest and posttest scores.

**Measurement**

Data were collected on the children's early literacy ability and their ability to recognize the letters of the alphabet.

- The Test of Early Reading Ability—Third Edition, Form A (TERA-3) is composed of three subtests and a composite score. The composition is:
  - Alphabet subtest, measuring graphophonic knowledge.
  - Conventions subtest, measuring knowledge of conventions of English print.
  - Meaning subtest, measuring ability to comprehend meaning of print.
- The Readability Quotient, forming a composite of the three subtests.

- The Alphabet Letter Recognition Inventory (ALR) measured children's ability to recognize all 26 uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet when arranged in non-alphabetical order.

Pretest data were collected during October and November 2003, and posttest data were collected during May 2003.

**RESULTS**

The children experienced both the ELLM literacy curriculum and instructional support system achieved higher mean posttest levels of emergent literacy skills than the control children.

- Especially significant were the differences in the Reading Quotient and Alphabet subtest mean posttest scores, where the resulting effect sizes were one fifth and one fourth of a standard deviation, respectively.

To determine if improvement in ELLM children's reading readiness occurred across the ability continuum, TERA-3 scores were displayed in seven categories.

The distribution of the Alphabet posttest scores approximated a normal distribution, with 28% of the scores in the bottom quartile (25% expected), 47.94% in the middle two quartiles (50% expected), and 24.05% in the top quartile (25% expected).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The principal finding of this study is that ELLM was more effective than comprehensive curricula alone in helping 4-year-old preschool children from poor families acquire emergent literacy skills. Because of the random assignment, this superior achievement can be attributed to the children's participation in ELLM classrooms. Specific findings include:

- The mean TERA-3 Reading Quotient posttest score of ELLM children was higher than the waitlist control children's score - effect size = 0.21.
- The mean TERA-3 Alphabet posttest score of ELLM children was higher than the waitlist control children's score - effect size = 0.33.
- The mean TERA-3 Conventions posttest score of ELLM children was higher than the waitlist control children's score - effect size = 0.13.
- The mean TERA-3 Meaning posttest score of ELLM children was higher than the waitlist control children's score - effect size = 0.16.
- The typical ELLM child could recognize 65% of the letters.

Combining pieces of ELLM with what is currently working in classrooms can provide young children a higher quality of early literacy instruction.