



FACT SHEET

02 VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN KINDERGARTEN

1 CONTEXT

Children's academic performance is largely determined by what they learned at an early age. Difficulties in a child's school trajectory can have their roots in the first few years of life. It is therefore important to prepare children as much as possible before their entry into the education system, particularly in terms of vocabulary.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: DESROSIERS, Hélène, and Amélie DUCHARME (2006). "Starting school on the right foot: Factors associated with vocabulary acquisition at the end of kindergarten," in *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010)*, Institut de la statistique du Québec, Vol. 4, Fascicle 1. http://www.iamillbe.stat.gouv.qc.ca/pdf/publications/feuillelet/fascicule_ecole_bon_pied_an.pdf

2 HIGHLIGHTS

In kindergarten, approximately 10% of children presented a persistent delay in terms of receptive vocabulary – i.e. understanding words – in comparison with their peers of the same age.

In addition, shyer children or those having higher anxiety levels when separated from their parents or from people to whom they are attached, presented a smaller vocabulary compared to their peers in kindergarten of the same age.

Children with the following characteristics during early childhood were at higher risk of presenting a vocabulary delay in kindergarten:

- Were exposed to a second language.
- Had lived in a low-income household at one time or other since birth.
- Weighed less than 2,500 g at birth.
- Had presented a less favourable health status at one time or another since birth.
- Were in a family that did not get along or communicate well.

In contrast, the following characteristics were associated with a lower risk of presenting a vocabulary delay in kindergarten:

- Was older than other children in kindergarten.
- Had a mother who had a university degree.
- Was regularly read to before the age of 3½ years.

There was no difference between boys and girls in terms of word comprehension at the end of kindergarten.



3 OF NOTE

Monitoring multilingual children throughout their educational trajectory would be needed to determine whether delays recorded at the end of kindergarten persist or can be attributed to transitory difficulties.

4 DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

Delay in vocabulary

In the QLSCD, a delay is defined as being relative, in other words in comparison with other children, not based on clinical criteria. The range of vocabulary was assessed by testing “receptive vocabulary.”

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INTERVENTION PATHS

While targeting a healthy environment at birth and support for families, a productive means of fostering vocabulary development in young children would be early stimulation activities in preschool to instill an interest in reading.