

## Experimental Impacts of a Preschool Intervention in Chile on Children's Language Outcomes: Moderation by Student Absenteeism

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MaryCatherine Arbour, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, John Willett, Christina Weiland, Catherine Snow, Susana Mendive, M. Clara Barata, and Ernesto Treviño

Summary by: Hang (Heather) Do

### What was this study about?

Chronic absenteeism (missing more than 10% of school days or more in one year) negatively impacts children's school achievement and development. Yet, little is known about how absenteeism influences the effectiveness of interventions. In this study, the authors examined whether absenteeism affected the impacts of an intensive two-year professional development (PD) intervention aiming to improve the quality of Chilean public preschool and kindergarten and enhance the language and literacy outcomes of participating children (UBC (Un Buen Comienzo/A Good Start)).

### How does absenteeism influence the effectiveness of a PD intervention?

Prior research from the experimental evaluation of UBC found that, on average, the intervention had no discernable effect on child language and literacy skills. The present analyses, however, suggest that this average may have masked important differences between students. Specifically, this paper provides *suggestive* evidence that UBC was effective at improving letter word identification and dictation for children with a low likelihood of absenteeism.

### How did the authors conduct this study?

This research was based on a random assignment evaluation of UBC. Municipalities with high rates of "niños prioritarios" ("priority children" defined by the Chilean Ministry of Education using a specific "vulnerability index" that includes household composition, income, etc.) in Santiago were recruited for the study.

Next, schools were randomly assigned to the UBC treatment (received the UBC intervention) or control groups (did not receive the UBC intervention) through a public lottery. Children within these schools who had parental consent participated in the evaluation. The final sample included 1,861 children, 140 teachers, 110 aides in 64 schools within 6 low-income municipalities. 86% of eligible families participated in the study and 83% of them completed the assessment after two years.

Children's daily attendance and four language and literacy skills were measured directly: picture vocabulary, dictation, oral comprehension, and letter-word identification. The researchers generated a likelihood of absenteeism index for each student in the study with a predictive model that predicted absenteeism with background (pre-treatment) child, family, and community characteristics. The impact of UBC was then estimated for children with different likelihoods of absenteeism. This was achieved by comparing the outcomes of language and literacy skills for children in the intervention and control groups with various likelihoods of absenteeism.

#### Full Article Citation:

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