



**Mirjana M. Nikolić<sup>1</sup>, Slađana M. Milenković**  
Preschool Teacher Training and  
Business Informatics College – Sirmium, Sremska Mitrovica

**Professional  
paper**

Paper received: May 25 2018  
Paper accepted: Jan 31 2019  
Article Published: May 20 2019

## ***A Proposal for the Programme for Encouraging the Development of Pre-Reading Skills at Preschool Institutions***

### **Extended summary**

Starting elementary school represents an important period in a child's development. Learning how to read is one of the most important tasks presented at the beginning of one's formal education, and is of great importance for the entire process of knowledge, skill and competence acquisition in further education and in life. In contemporary society, with the aid of digital technology, stimulation from family and/or peers, some children develop reading competences during pre-school education. However, it is not necessary for children to learn how to read before starting school. During the pre-school period, it is much more important to develop pre-reading skills, which will then help in developing literacy. Based on the relevant literature in this field, one can conclude that correct speech-language development, as well as the development of different aspects of phonological awareness (especially phonemic awareness) are considered crucial parts of reading acquisition. Many global research papers highlight the importance of stimulating phonological awareness in the pre-school period, and report positive effects of intervention programmes in this area. Here, up to now, no such programmes have been conducted, even though the results of some research have demonstrated the importance of fostering the phonemic awareness development and the need for conducting a systematic and planned intervention in this area in our own pre-school institutions. Because of this, the aim of this paper is to present an intervention programme proposal that encourages the development of speech-language development and phonological awareness during the preparatory pre-school programme. The first step in implementing this programme is testing the speech-language development and phonological awareness in the pre-school children, with the goal of determining current pre-reading skill development. After initial tests, the next step should

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<sup>1</sup> vs.mirjana.nikolic@gmail.com

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be to establish an experimental group, which will be included in the intervention programme, and a control group, balanced across all relevant parameters (age, sex, intellectual status, socio-economic status, etc.). Next, a system of exercises for encouraging speech-language skill development and phonological awareness is to be put in place, and conducted with the children for at least 2 months (preferably even longer), followed by evaluations. The content should be adapted to the characteristics of the group doing the exercises. After the programme is complete, a final evaluation of all children is planned (both the experimental and control group), with the aim of establishing the speech-language development and phonological awareness after conducting a systematic practice. Comparing the scores of the experimental and control groups in the final evaluation and testing of reading competences would determine the effects of the programme. The group of children that participated the intervention programme would be expected to have noticeably higher levels of the speech-language development and phonological awareness, as well as better developed pre-reading competences at the end of the preparatory pre-school programme. This paper also points to the tests teachers may use when testing pre-reading skills and reading competences, the way in which they are conducted, their analysis and interpretation. The proposed exercises/activities for encouraging the development of the pre-reading skills represent valuable resources for teachers in the process of creating and adapting the programmes to the group of children they are working with. The proposed tests, resources and exercise content may empower teachers and further develop their competences in preparing children for developing reading skills. They may also aid teachers in solving one of the greater dilemmas they face in the final period, which is who and in what way instigates the development of literacy in children, and what the teacher's role is in this process. The focus is also on the development of the pre-reading skills and preparing children for acquiring reading skills, not on the methodological training which, according to their role description, primary school teachers conduct. Determining the programme's effects should be an important research task in the future, the one where the participation of teachers would be imperative, as they are reflective practitioners and academic experts that deal with such issues. Exploring the possibilities of the programme implementation under given circumstances, with the research steps described, leads to experimental action research, which can result in the improvement of preparatory pre-school programmes in the areas dealing with preparing children for the reading skill acquisition.

**Keywords:** pre-reading skills, intervention programme, action research, preparatory preschool programmes.

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