The purpose of the Smart Start School Readiness Study was to determine if using the Early Literacy Quick Assessment (ELQA) throughout the school year to guide instruction would lead to an increase in the acquisition of early literacy skills in pre-kindergarten students. Researchers hypothesized that teachers who used the ELQA to differentiate instruction would realize greater student gains on the ELQA subtests than teachers who did not.

Thirty-two teachers participated in the study -- 16 were in the treatment group and 16 were in the comparison group. Teachers in the treatment group used the ELQA as a tool to inform instruction throughout the school year and received assistance from literacy coaches on effectively using the ELQA to differentiate instruction. Teachers in the comparison group did not use the ELQA during the school year; instead, these teachers continued using their normal teaching practices and assessments.

Research questions related to student outcomes, coaches’ and teachers’ perceptions of the ELQA and coaching, and the concurrent validity of the ELQA as measured against comparable assessments. The following questions were addressed.

Did outcomes differ for students whose teachers and used the ELQA to guide instruction compared to teachers who did not?

- Students in both the treatment and comparison groups had significantly higher scores on all ELQA subtests in the spring than in the fall.
- Students in the treatment group had significantly higher scores on all subtests than the comparison group on both the fall and spring assessments.
- Students in the treatment group had higher gains than the comparison group on four subtests: print concepts, rhyming, uppercase letters, and receptive vocabulary. Figure 1 shows the percent correct on fall ELQA scores and the gains that were made from fall to spring. For example, on the fall assessment, the comparison group correctly answered 34% of the questions on the print concepts subtest. On the spring assessment, they correctly answered 59%.
What were the coaches' perceptions of the ELQA and their coaching sessions?
- Coaches reported that the ELQA was relevant to their coaching practices and felt confident using it.
- Coaches used the ELQA for coaching purposes and recommended its use.

What were the teachers' perceptions of the ELQA and the coaching they received?
- Teachers reported that the ELQA was relevant to their teaching practices and felt confident using it.
- Teachers planned to use the ELQA reports at parent-teacher conferences, reported that the ELQA was easy to use, and believed students easily understood the content.

Did the ELQA demonstrate concurrent validity as measured against comparable assessments?
- All ELQA subtests correlated significantly with similar subtests on comparable assessments.

Results indicate that when teachers use the ELQA to differentiate instruction throughout the school year, students may be better prepared to learn to read in kindergarten. The ELQA demonstrates good concurrent validity with similar instruments and is effective in helping teachers identify students who need additional instruction on early literacy fundamentals.

The Educational Training, Evaluation, Assessment and Measurement (E-TEAM) department at the University of Oklahoma’s College of Continuing Education designs research and evaluations to help organizations understand and use information and data to solve real-world problems (University of Oklahoma, College of Continuing Education, Educational Training, Evaluation, Assessment and Measurement, n.d.).

The E-TEAM designed and conducted this study and prepared this report detailing the findings.