



A Systematic Review of School-Based Vision Screening and Spectacle Provision Programmes on Academic Performance in KwaZulu-Natal Primary Schools, 2013.

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Abstract

Uncorrected refractive error is a leading cause of visual impairment in children and a potential barrier to learning. School-based vision screening and spectacle provision programmes are a key public health intervention. However, evidence of their impact on academic outcomes within the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal is not well synthesised. This systematic review aimed to synthesise existing evidence on the effect of school-based vision screening and free spectacle provision programmes on the academic performance of primary school learners in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A systematic search of multiple electronic databases was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. Peer-reviewed studies and relevant grey literature were included. Studies were screened, selected, and data extracted by two independent reviewers. The quality of included studies was appraised using appropriate critical assessment tools. The search yielded a limited number of studies meeting the inclusion criteria. The available evidence, while not extensive, consistently indicated a positive association between spectacle provision and improved academic test scores. One study reported a notable improvement in mathematics scores among learners who received spectacles compared to a control group. Preliminary evidence suggests that school-based vision screening and free spectacle programmes can have a beneficial effect on academic performance in this setting. However, the evidence base is limited, highlighting a significant gap in rigorous, locally-focused research. Further robust, longitudinal research with standardised outcome measures is urgently needed. Programme implementers should integrate systematic data collection on educational outcomes to build a stronger evidence base for policy and funding decisions. vision screening, refractive error, spectacles, academic performance, school health, KwaZulu-Natal, systematic review This review consolidates the existing evidence on a critical public health intervention in a specific regional context, identifying key knowledge gaps and providing direction for future research and programme evaluation.

Keywords: *vision screening, spectacle provision, academic performance, school-based programmes, KwaZulu-Natal, refractive error, South Africa*

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