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**A comparison of reading attainment in two first grade classes in a state and
a Montessori school in Switzerland**

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Judith Mary Elben

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to examine whether the age at which children start to learn to read affects their later progress - specifically, whether an earlier start at reading gives children an advantage when they enter first grade at the age of six years. The study was conducted in Zürich, Switzerland, and compared a first grade class in a local school with two first grade classes in a Montessori school. There were 42 participants aged between six and seven years, 22 girls and 20 boys. The children were given a series of alphabet knowledge, reading and phoneme tests at the beginning and end of the year to measure the reading progress of each group. It was found that although the Montessori children who had already attended the Montessori kindergarten had an advantage over the local children, this advantage was only significant for alphabet knowledge, and was not translated into a significant advantage in either phonemic awareness or reading ability. Reasons for this were considered including the relative efficiency with which children learned to read in German at the local school, possible failings in the Montessori instruction, and the fact that many of the local children had already learned to read at home before starting school something that may be related to the high socioeconomic status (SES) and home literacy environment (HLE) of both groups.

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