

IN BRIEF

THE FIRST ELOM IN PRACTICE WEBINAR - MEASURING DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE

The inaugural webinar - *Measuring Developmental Change* - of the DataDrive2030 “ELOM in Practice” series was held on 19 March 2025. The series aims to provide a forum for ELOM users to learn from each other’s studies and share their ELOM findings. The Measuring Developmental Change webinar focused on the experience of two South African early childhood development (ECD) organisations, [Singakwenza](#) and [Penreach](#), in conducting pre-post child outcome studies using the ELOM 4&5 Years Assessment tool. What follows is a summary of the main themes and key takeaways from the presentations and discussions.

Main themes and important ideas**1. ELOM 4&5 as a contextually relevant and valuable tool:**

Both Singakwenza and Penreach highlighted the significant advantage of the ELOM 4&5 being a South African-based assessment tool available in all 11 South African languages, which provides benchmarks and norms for their local context. This addressed the limitations and language barriers encountered with previous Eurocentric child assessments that they had used.

2. The utility of pre-post study designs:

Both organisations found conducting pre- and post-assessments using the ELOM 4&5 to be more insightful than brief, once-off, snapshot (or dipstick) studies. This approach allowed them to track developmental changes in children over a calendar year and gain a deeper understanding of the impact of their interventions. As Julie Hay from Singakwenza said: *“One of the things that we found with our programme was that we had quite a lot of qualitative data that showed us that we were doing a good job, but there was no quantitative data and for many people that was really important. We want to measure and understand our impact.”* The ELOM pre-post report’s differentiation between programme effect and natural maturation is seen as a significant strength, providing insights into the potential impact of interventions.

3. Identifying specific developmental needs:

Baseline ELOM 4&5 data proved crucial to both organisations in pinpointing specific developmental domains where children required additional support. This allowed for targeted interventions. Singakwenza described how they had received feedback that one of their domains was significantly lower than the others, and so they focused on that domain over the course of the year.

4. Demonstrating the impact of targeted interventions:

Utilising ELOM results to inform and adapt programme design and delivery is an ongoing process for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of ECD interventions, allowing for tailored support based on identified needs. Singakwenza's experience clearly illustrated the positive impact of developing and implementing specific, play-based interventions to address identified weaknesses. Their targeted VMI (Visual Motor Integration) intervention, using recycled materials, led to significant improvements in children's domain scores. Julie Hay explained how *"...just over 20% of our children were On Track for baseline in FMCVMI and now it's one of our highest achieving domains..."*

5. Highlighting the significance of attendance and dropout:

Conducting ELOM studies, particularly in remote communities, and dealing with participant attrition due to family relocation and absenteeism, are common logistical hurdles. ELOM data collection brought attention to the pervasive issue of dropout and absenteeism in early learning programmes, underscoring its impact on developmental outcomes. Both organisations spoke to the challenges of finding enough baseline children again at endline. Jayde Rocher of Singakwenza added *"...[the study] brought to our attention that there was a significant dropout rate between our baseline and endline. ... And so that's really highlighted the impact of attendance in early intervention in our ECD centres."*

6. The importance of multi-level data dissemination:

Both organisations emphasised the necessity of sharing ELOM findings with various stakeholders and tailoring communication to different audiences to inform practice, secure funding, and advocate for ECD. Modupi Mazibuko of Penreach said of their practitioner feedback *"...we simply tailor the results to their level so that they can understand what these results [are] telling us and what are the gaps and how can we collectively close these gaps in our intervention..."*. Julie Hay added *"we also printed out a few of the graphs from our ELOM reports which were very helpful."*

7. Navigating challenging findings:

A strong existing relationship with practitioners (Singakwenza's mentorship) and a developmental, collaborative approach (Penreach) are crucial for constructively addressing and strategising improvements based on potentially negative findings. Modupi Mazibuko elaborated *"...we're taking an approach that is more developmental: how can we support you? It's not necessarily, you know, to say you're not doing well and pinpointing, but to say how do we resolve this together and support you."* Julie Hay went on to say *"I think because we've got such a good relationship with our practitioners (due to mentoring them for two years, it's much easier to give results that maybe aren't so positive because we are with them in it still..."*



10. The strategic use of in-house assessors:

Training in-house staff as ELOM assessors can streamline fieldwork and build organisational capacity. However, it is crucial to ensure assessors do not evaluate children they directly work with to maintain the validity of the assessment. As Singakwenza explained: *"Currently all our assessors are in-house but we make very sure to swap creches. So our trainers (who are also assessors) will not assess children that they have been involved with, to make sure that the results are valid and reliable."*

Conclusion

The inaugural ELOM in Practice webinar highlighted the practical applications and valuable insights gained by two ECD organisations in South Africa through the implementation of pre- and post-ELOM studies. The discussion underscored the importance of using contextually relevant assessment tools to gather pre-post data for its power in understanding programme effects, and the crucial role of data dissemination in research. Both Singakwenza and Penreach demonstrated how ELOM data can be effectively used to identify specific needs, tailor interventions, and drive continuous programme improvement, ultimately contributing to better developmental outcomes for young children.

