Evaluation of a Summer Literacy Camp for Struggling Readers

by

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Abstract

Summer reading programs have many purposes. One purpose is to counteract what has become increasingly known as summer slide, also known as summer loss, in academic achievement. The theoretical framework used included the Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope. The intent was to provide struggling readers with specific, targeted intervention in their area of need. This evaluation study of a community summer reading camp for children ages 7-10 aimed to determine if student reading scores could be affected in a 4-week program. Pre and post tests were used to determine statistical significance.

Research Aim

The aim of this evaluation study of a community summer reading camp for children ages 7-10 was to determine if student reading scores could be affected in a short four-week program. Participants attended a four-week, three hours per day camp that focused on individual tutoring and small group sessions for reading and writing. Participants were given pretests and posttests using the Wilson Assessment for Decoding and Encoding (WADE) and two items from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT-III).

Problem or Issue

Reading is a valuable skill that many students struggle with. Summer reading programs are essential for students, as they provide the means for them to maintain their reading skills during their summer break. Summer reading programs have gained popularity over the years. They are particularly important because they serve multiple purposes. According to Malin, Iacullo, and Drapastsky (2007), students who participated in a summer reading group no longer perceived reading as a chore, but rather as an enjoyable activity. They also realized that it provided them with the opportunity to think critically about various topics. They also commented that it helped them not just deepen their understanding about some topics in general, but it also helped them understand more about their own personal perspectives.

Another purpose of summer reading programs is that they counter what has become increasingly known as summer slide, also known as summer loss in academic achievement. Borman and Boulay (2004) define summer slide as the decrease in students' reading achievement or skills that occurs during summer break. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2003) define summer loss as the "decline in children's reading development that can occur during summer vacation times when children are away from the classroom and not participating in formal literacy programs (Mraz and Rasinski, 2007, p 784).

Paris et al. (2004) states that Heyns (1978) found that students who were poor or came from minority backgrounds were the ones who were more prone to summer loss when it comes

to their academic achievement. This is more commonly known as the "achievement gap" or the "Mathew effect" because "the academically rich get richer and the poor get poorer" (Paris et al, 2004, p 122). Stanovich (1986) suggests, based on existing literature, that students who have poor reading skills are more likely to be vulnerable to summer slide. This is believed to be due to their lack of motivation when it comes to reading because of the difficulties they experienced.

Dynia, Piasta, and Justice (2015) believe that summer reading programs can counter summer slide, since they increase students' participating in reading activities. Heyns (1978) and Allington et al. (2010) believe that students' lack of access to books over summer break may also be a factor in their susceptibility to summer slide. Mraz and Rasinski (2007) believe that access to reading material is an essential factor in the development of reading skills. Coats and Taylor-Clark (2001) found that students with poor reading skills are generally those who are not offered the opportunity to read outside the classroom in order to improve their reading skills. McQuillan (1998) found that students who come from lower-income families tend to have a more limited selection of reading materials at home.

While Dynia, Piasta, and Justice's (2015) note that there is still little research on the effectiveness of library-based summer reading programs, they found that participants' literacy achievement was average for coding and comprehension. They also found that were "several significant correlations between literacy activities and achievements" (Dynia, Piasta, and Justice, 2015, p 398).

Summer programs can be instrumental in overcoming the summer slide. They can also be beneficial for students who struggle with reading and want to maintain and/or improve their reading skill level so that they do not struggle more when the school year starts. They can also provide a means for students from lower-income families to improve their reading proficiency and fluency, as they will have more access to reading materials while attending summer reading programs. It is important to note that not only will students have access to reading materials that they may not otherwise have access to, but that such materials would be age-appropriate and at the students' reading level.

The research hypothesis being addressed in this study is that student scores will improve after participating in the four-week, three-hour per day summer camp.

Research Findings

The theoretical framework that supported this research included The Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Reading Rope, as the intent was to provide struggling readers with specific, targeted intervention in their area of need. Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading divides reading into two components: word recognition and language comprehension. Word recognition consists of phonological awareness, decoding, sight word reading, and fluency. Language comprehension incorporates background knowledge, syntax, vocabulary, and text structure. Scarborough's (2001) Reading Rope utilizes the various strands discussed in the Simple View of Reading. More specifically, it explains how each component is a smaller strand that intertwines to become tightly woven with the others. This continues until the various component strands form the larger the two rope strands, one for word recognition and the other for language comprehension. Those two rope strands continue to intertwine until, they too, are tightly woven together to achieve fluency and skilled reading.

Throughout the duration of the camp, students received one-on-one Wilson Reading System (WRS) intervention daily. They also received one hour of group intervention with a

reading specialist for writing strategies and another hour for reading strategies. This intervention focused on enhancing the students' ability to decode and encode in order to improve their overall language and language comprehension skills. WRS targets students starting the 2nd grade and adults who have language-based learning disabilities.

As previously stated, it was hypothesized that students who participated in the camp will show gains in their posttests when compared to their pretests. Students were given pre-tests to determine their intervention eligibility prior to the start of the camp. Posttests were then given at the end of the camp. As previously stated, the WADE and WRMT-III were used for both the pre and post-tests. From the WRMT-III, only the Word Identification (word reading) and Word Attack (nonsense words) items were used. Paired T-tests were used to determine statistical significance. Raw scores on all subtests of a curriculum-based assessment (WADE) showed statistical significance between the pretests and posttests. On the standardized, normed reading test (WRMT-III), no statistical significance was found between pre and post scores.

Conclusion/Discussion

Based on the analysis of the quantitative data alone, students benefited from the camp. As previously stated, the pretest and posttest results for the WADE showed statistical significance when analyzed using paired T-tests (see Table for Reading 1,Table 2 for Spelling, and Table 3 for Tota Reading and Spelling). This confirmed that the students did in fact achieve gains throughout the duration of their intervention. While the WRMT-III results were not statistically significant, we did see gains in the Word Attack scores (see Table 4). It was not expected that the WRMT-III would show significant results, since it is a standardized test meant to show yearly gains and we used it in a four-month period instead with only four weeks of intervention.

Our limitations included our small sample size, since we only had 15 students enrolled in our camp. Due to attendance issues, some students were absent on testing days. Thus, we had incomplete data for some students and subtests.

Table 1: WADE Reading: Paired Samples T-Test

Test Component	N	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Real Words	12	72.58 (36.395)	93.08 (31.245)	-2.879	.0075*
Nonsense words	12	22.83 (18.775)	36.42 (15.132)	-4.537	.0005*
Sight Words	12	67 (6.755	69.08 (4.441)	-1.923	.0405*

* The mean difference is significant at p = 0.05

Table 2: WADE Spelling: Paired Samples T-Test

Test Component	N	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Real Words	9	29.56 (26.001)	41.44 (26.120)	-2.423	.021*

Test Component	N	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Nonsense words	10	51.90 (15.545)	60.70 (10.425)	-3.348	.0045*
Sight Words	9	3.67 (3.354)	7.56 (6.023)	-2.634	.015*

* The mean difference is significant at p = 0.05

Table 3: WADE Total: Paired Samples T-Test

Test Component	N	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Reading	11	157.55 (57.951)	195.55 (57.951)	-3.600	.0025*
Spelling	9	80.11 (36.092)	105.33 (36.024)	-4.463	.001*

* The mean difference is significant at p = 0.05

Table 4: WRMT-III: Paired Samples T-Test

Test Component	N	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	t	Sig. (1-tailed)
Word ID	12	25 (5.222)	24.67 (4.773)	.374	.356
Word Attack	14	14 (4.899)	15.43 (5.585)	-1.272	.113

Research Implications

There are several research implications for this study, such as implications regarding summer camps in general, our camp in specific, and for myself as an emerging researcher. This could potentially be a possible means to counter the effects of the summer slide and perhaps the Matthew effect. We are planning on retesting the students who participated in the camp before the end of the school year to assess whether they have maintained the gains they achieved over summer. We are also planning on replicating our study in the summer of 2019 with a larger sample.

References

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Biography

Alia Ammar earned her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in English Literature (2007) and Master of Arts in International and Comparative Education with a concentration in international education development and policy (2014) from the American University in Cairo. Alia served as an International Baccalaureate (IB) English Language and Literature Department Leader and taught IB English Language and Literature, Humanities, and Drama for six years at Green Land Pré Vert International School (GPIS) in Cairo, Egypt. Since coming to Drexel, she has been working with Drs. Lori Severino and MJ DeCarlo on the Adolescent Comprehension Evaluation (ACE) and reading intervention summer camp. She also works as a teaching assistant for Dr. Severino and recently taught Fundamentals of Special Education at Drexel. Her research interests include special education policy and reading intervention programs. She is currently finishing her 2nd year in the PhD program and working on her Wilson Reading System certification.