

Effects of Summer School Programs

Although common sense suggests that summer school programs should be effective in reducing summer learning losses or facilitating reading gains over the summer break, existing research on the topic has produced mixed results. There have been few experimental or quasi-experimental studies in this area, leaving many unanswered questions regarding summer school program effectiveness. Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck (2000) performed a meta-analysis of research on 93 summer school programs (with only a small number of studies that had comparison groups), finding average gains of one-fifth of a standard deviation for participating students. This review suggested that middle-class students benefited from summer school more than their lower-SES peers. Other authors have suggested that the quality of summer school programs tends to be higher in schools that serve higher-income populations (e.g., Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Lauer et al. (2006) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of the effects of reading and mathematics intervention provided outside of the regular school day, both after school and during summer school. Only studies that included comparison groups were included, but few had true experimental designs. The majority were conducted with students who were either low-performing or from low-income families. The researchers identified 30 studies with reading outcomes published between 1986 and 2003 that met their inclusionary criteria. Based on their analyses, Lauer and colleagues reported a mean effect size for out-of-school reading interventions (combining summer school and after school programs) of .13, with somewhat larger effects (.22) for studies involving students in the lower elementary grades. The meta-analysis included five studies that specifically examined the effects of summer school reading intervention for students in kindergarten through first grade, with widely varying effect sizes (ranging from .17 to .73).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In an experimental study, Schacter and Jo (2005) demonstrated the efficacy of a summer school reading intervention for first-grade students at risk for reading difficulties. Students who were randomly assigned to an experimental condition participated in a 2 hour reading program 5 days per week for 7 weeks. Instruction in both word- and text-level reading skills was provided in both whole-group and small-group formats. The program consisted of 40 minutes of small-group reading instruction, 15 minutes of independent phonics practice, 10 minutes of paired reading using decodable text, 10 minutes of teacher read-aloud, and 30 minutes of writing activities. Results indicated significant differences between the experimental and control groups at posttest on measures of decoding and comprehension. Furthermore, these gains were maintained at 3 months and at the end of the following academic school year. This study was unique in that the intervention addressed both word-level and text-level skills. Extant research suggests that summer reading programs for at-risk populations tend to concentrate instructional time on word-level reading skills with less attention to vocabulary and comprehension (Roderick et al., 1999).

Given the limited and contradictory research base relative to summer school reading programs, as well as the continued prevalence of reading difficulties among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, there is a need for further research examining the efficacy of summer school reading intervention provided in the early grades. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine the effects of an implementation of a kindergarten summer school reading program that focused on both word-level (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics) and text-level (i.e., vocabulary, comprehension) skills in four high-poverty urban schools. We addressed the following research question: Is participation in the experimental summer school