Benefits of Summer Programs on Low-income Elementary Aged Youth

Nicole E. Cohen and Emily A. Gilbert
Advised by: Susan M. Wolfgram, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Stout

RESEARCH QUESTION
What are the Benefits of Summer Programs on Low-income Elementary Aged Youth?

PURPOSE
To recognize the benefits of summer programs for low-income elementary aged students;
To create an email qualitative interview protocol that examined the personal perspective of someone who is working directly with low-income elementary aged students in summer programs;
To add to the current literature providing additional information about the importance of educational involvement in summer programs;
To explore what parents think about the need for programs and assessed. Results of the study indicated that students in the intensive program made significant progress in word reading and listening comprehension.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Social Learning Theory suggests that behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors all act upon one another. A fundamental idea in Social Learning Theory is modeling. Most human behavior is learned through observing others. From observing others, an individual forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed and the response to this behavior. Social Learning Theory would predict that environmental factors, such as socioeconomic status and personal factors, such as motivation to learn, would be linked to one another. (Bandura, 1977).

RESEARCH PROBLEM
Although recent educational initiatives have recognized the importance of early reading instruction during the summer months, there remains a substantial disparity in reading achievement between students from high and low income families (Denton, Solari, Ciancio, Hecht, Swank, 2010).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
- Sandberg-Patton and Reschly. (2013) A goal of this research was to see how family factors impacted reading change over the summer. This study found that lower elementary grade students lost more reading skills than higher elementary grade students during the summer.
- Zvoch (2011) This was a replication of previous work on the efficacy of summer school. The program was for struggling readers who received 70 hours of instruction during the summer. The study concluded that all participants gained literacy skills and summer learning loss was prevented.
- Allington et al. (2010) Over the course of three years, researchers gave twelve books each summer to low SES students to read over the course of the summer. The results showed positive achievement in students from the lowest SES status in the study.
- Denton et al. (2010) Researchers conducted a pilot study focused on kindergarten summer school reading programs. The study set up an intensive summer reading program and a typical summer school program for kindergarten students to attend. Students were randomly assigned to programs and assessed. Results of the study indicated that students in the intensive program made significant progress in word reading and listening comprehension.
- Borman et al. (2005) This study found that if families were involved in community programs, such as church, or had multiple children in the family, then the family was more likely to take advantage of summer programs. This in return had a positive impact on the child’s summer learning loss.

METHODS
Participant sampling types: Purposive and snowball sampling types were used. The purposeful sampling method was used because the researcher could go to those individuals who were likely to have the information needed and would be willing to share their personal and detailed lived experience. The snowball sampling method can also be applied, as the researcher was an insider for the participant.

Research Design: A cross-sectional research design was used with data collected from the participant at one point in time. An email interview was used for data collection. The reason for this method is that email, rather than a face-to-face interviews, was deemed most appropriate when under time restrictions and for convenience (Meho, 2006).

Data analysis plan: Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative email responses and inter-rater reliability to 100% was established between the researcher and adviser. The researcher then identified representative quotes from the interview for each of the themes (Kvale, 1996).

SELECTED FINDINGS
The participant identified key barriers and needs in eliminating summer setback;
- Focused community programs.
- Summer programs with an emphasis on continuing education.
  “Various community programs focus more and more on curbing the learning loss youth experience when they are not in school.”
- Lack of proactive adult behavior.
- Low involvement from parents has been found to lead to low motivation in students during the summer.
  “Summer setback is caused by a lack of proactive behavior by adults in a youth’s life.”
- Direct involvement.
- Working one on one with your child to learn necessary skills.
  “Be involved at a more direct level instead of giving them a movie to prevent them from distracting you from other things.”

IMPLICATIONS
Implications for Practitioners
The participant’s recommendations for practitioners in the best interest of families;
- Parents need to be directly involved in their child’s education.
- The more the parent invests in their child’s education, the more the child will invest in their own learning.
- There are a variety of programs available in the communities that are offered at little to no cost.
- Encouraging children to partake in these programs will not only lesson the learning gap but could also introduce the children to new activities.
- A variety of programs needs to be offered throughout the community with a focus on all aspects of a youth’s development. These programs should range from educational to social along with physical. Offering a wide range of programs will help the child become well rounded.

Implications for Future Research
The researchers collected data from one individual who works in a Wisconsin youth center, limiting the generalizability.
- An implication for future research could be going to the parents of the students. Going to the parents would help get an understanding of why parents are not using programs to understand what resources parents might need to access, as well as get a parental view on their child’s achievements.

CONCLUSION
This study has taken a look at the benefits of summer programs for low-income elementary aged youth with the hope to add to the research on reducing the summer slide gap. The summer slide gap continues to be an issue for our low-income families; however, with summer programs and greater educational involvement we are making progress. Parents of all socioeconomic statuses can take action in order to promote their child’s learning during the summer (Borman et al, 2005). The findings of the study will help increase awareness of the importance of educational programs, especially for low-income students. We as researchers need to continue to provide educators with feedback on their programs in order to show the need for summer programs and the benefits they are creating for all students.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANT
| Gender, Age | Female, 25 |
| Education Level | Undergraduate |
| Specific Job Title | Center Director |
| Type of Agency | Non-Profit |
| Years of Experience | 7 years |

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