Chapter 10
Impacts of Summer Reading Camp Programs in Community Libraries in Ghana

ABSTRACT
In August and September 2010, 200 Primary 5 students in northern Ghana attended 2-week summer reading camps hosted by 3 community libraries. The goal of the camps was to encourage reading among schoolchildren in a low-literacy environment. The camps appeared to be highly effective in improving reading abilities and habits. Reading scores on a written and oral test were considerably higher compared with a control group. Camps also had randomized programs and reading incentives, varying from day to day and camp to camp. This variation permitted analysis of student reading patterns when offered different reading contexts. Contrary to a commonly held belief, when students had available books by African authors and on Africa-related themes (compared with European/American books), they did not read more books. Intrinsic motivation treatments, where students were encouraged to engage in a variety of exercises (writing reviews for friends, reading with parents) produced small positive effects. A simple extrinsic motivational device of a “reading tree,” where students posted “leaves” with the book title and their name upon completion of a book, had no statistically discernible effect. The absence of large effects of reading camp program components suggests the need for further research.

INTRODUCTION
Deterioration of reading skills during breaks in the school year is a common problem confronting educators around the world. In very poor agrarian communities, in particular, children work on farms during the summer break. During the school year, students are constantly exposed to text on blackboards, textbooks and wall charts. Once the school year ends, however, most children have little access to reading material (Arua & Arua, 2011). The problem is especially acute in regions such as northern Ghana, where parents are very poor and often illiterate. Students spend much of
the summer break working on the farms of their parents, and their reading skills deteriorate considerably, according to teachers. Even in very developed countries, such as the United States, significant deterioration of reading skills occurs during summer breaks. In response, educators and librarians have been experimenting with a variety of reading programs, including book distributions, guided activities, and organized camps (Kim, 2006; McCombs, et al. 2011).

This chapter reports on the short-term effects of summer reading camps that served 200 students in the Primary 5 grade-level in northern Ghana during the period August-September 2010. The students are approximately 12 years old. The camps were held in three village libraries. The camps had two purposes. The first was to enable students to improve their reading skills by encouraging them (with fun camp activities, free lunches, and t-shirts) to spend two weeks reading simple and appropriate fiction. The second was to expose schoolchildren to the village library. The goal was that students would begin to perceive the library as a friendly and accessible place, with a wide range of books available. Students would then continue to use the library regularly for after-school studying and reading. The camps adopted an “extensive reading” strategy of encouraging vocabulary acquisition through contextual learning during reading. The merits of the strategy have been debated for older second language learners, but appear to be valid for younger learners (Elley, 1996; McQuillan & Krashen, 2008; Parry, 1997; Neuman, 1999).

The program of the reading camps was designed to have a variety of activities throughout the day, and the activities varied from camp to camp and day to day. The variation in daily programs permitted measurement of the effects of the reading programs on the number of books read during the camp. Books read during the camps were recorded by a team of camp assistants. School grades for the school year 2009-10 were collected prior to the beginning of the camps. Students took a reading test in October, two months after the camps had ended. A short evaluative questionnaire was also completed by students in October.

Analysis of the data collected before, during and after the camps reveals that the reading abilities of students enrolled in the camps appeared to have improved significantly, when compared with students from schools in the same villages who were not enrolled in the camps. The non-camp students had similar grades in reading and math performance at the end of the 2009-10 school year, before the camps. But scores on the October reading test were significantly higher for camp participants. It must be noted, however, that the control group students were from neighboring schools that were not selected for the program (each village had two primary schools, one was selected for the program, and all students were invited to attend.)

When students had access to books by African authors and on Africa-related themes they did not read more books, contrary to a commonly-held view. The various motivation programs practiced during the camps had limited effects in changing the pattern of reading. Intrinsic motivation activities, where students were encouraged to engage in a variety of authentic exercises (writing reviews for friends, or reading with parents) produced small positive effects. A simple motivational device of a “reading tree,” where students posted “leaves” with the book title and their name upon completion of a book, had no statistically discernible effect.

Reading camps thus seemed to be very effective at improving reading capabilities and practices, but which specific activities in the
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