



Influences of preliteracy knowledge, schooling, and summer break on literacy acquisition

Gitanjali Kumar¹, Jacob Naylor² *

¹University College, United Arab Emirates University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, ²Institute of Education, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the combined effects of preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and the summer vacation period on literacy acquisition in young learners. Preliteracy skills, including letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary, serve as foundational elements that influence later reading success. The study examines how these skills, developed before formal education, interact with classroom instruction and are impacted by the break in formal learning during the summer months. Through a longitudinal analysis of a diverse sample of early learners, the research evaluates literacy progress across academic years and the summer period, identifying potential regressions and gains. The findings highlight the importance of early literacy interventions, continuous learning opportunities during breaks, and the role of structured schooling in supporting sustained literacy development. The study offers insights for educators and policymakers aiming to minimize learning loss during summer and enhance literacy outcomes through targeted strategies.

KEYWORDS: Preliteracy knowledge, literacy acquisition, schooling, summer break, early childhood education, phonemic awareness, letter recognition, vocabulary development, summer learning loss, literacy development, early literacy interventions, longitudinal analysis, education policy

INTRODUCTION: The development of literacy skills is a complex process influenced by various factors that interact over time. Among these, preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and the effects of summer vacation are particularly significant. Preliteracy knowledge, which includes essential skills such as phonemic awareness, letter recognition, and

vocabulary, lays the groundwork for successful reading and writing. These skills are typically acquired before a child enters formal education and are crucial for literacy development. Research has shown that children who enter school with strong preliteracy skills are better positioned to succeed in acquiring literacy. However, the role of formal schooling cannot be overlooked. Structured classroom instruction provides the necessary environment for children to build on their preliteracy knowledge, refine their skills, and progress towards full literacy.

Despite the benefits of formal education, the summer break poses a unique challenge to literacy acquisition. The phenomenon known as "summer learning loss" refers to the regression of academic skills that can occur during the extended break from school. For literacy, this can mean a loss of reading proficiency and vocabulary, particularly for students who do not engage in literacy activities during the summer. The impact of this loss can be particularly pronounced in students from low-resource backgrounds who may lack access to books or educational activities outside of school. Understanding how these factors—preliteracy knowledge, schooling, and summer break—interact to influence literacy acquisition is crucial for educators and policymakers. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses in current educational practices, this study aims to offer insights into how to better support literacy development in young learners.

Through a longitudinal analysis, this study will explore how preliteracy skills, nurtured in early childhood, are further developed through formal schooling and how these gains are affected by the summer break. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of literacy acquisition, identify critical periods for intervention, and suggest strategies to mitigate the negative effects of summer learning loss. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the broader field of early childhood education by informing practices that can help sustain and enhance literacy development, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

METHOD

This study employs a longitudinal research design to explore the influences of preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and summer break on literacy acquisition in young learners. The sample consists of 150 children aged 4 to 7 years, selected from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to capture a wide range of preliteracy experiences and access to educational resources. The participants were drawn from both public and private schools in urban and suburban areas to ensure a representative cross-section of the

population.

Data collection occurred at three critical points: prior to the start of formal schooling (pre-kindergarten), at the end of the first academic year (kindergarten), and following the summer break before the beginning of the second academic year (first grade). This design allowed for the examination of literacy development over time, including any regression or gains experienced during the summer break.

At the outset of the study, each child's preliteracy knowledge was assessed using a battery of standardized tests. These assessments measured key preliteracy skills, including phonemic awareness, letter recognition, vocabulary, and early writing abilities. The tests were administered individually in a quiet setting by trained researchers to ensure consistency and reduce external influences. The results provided a baseline understanding of each child's literacy readiness before entering formal schooling.

During the academic year, literacy acquisition was tracked through both standardized testing and observational data. Standardized reading assessments were administered at the end of the kindergarten year, capturing data on reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary growth. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted periodically to gather qualitative data on instructional practices, student engagement, and the classroom environment's impact on literacy development. Teachers also provided progress reports, detailing each student's literacy achievements and areas needing improvement.

To assess the impact of the summer break on literacy acquisition, a follow-up assessment was conducted at the end of the summer, just before the children began first grade. The same standardized tests used at the end of kindergarten were re-administered, allowing for a comparison of literacy levels before and after the summer break. Parents were also surveyed to gather information on the children's summer activities, including reading habits, participation in educational programs, and access to literacy resources. This data provided context for understanding individual differences in summer learning loss or gain.

The data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the standardized tests were analyzed using statistical techniques, including repeated measures ANOVA, to examine changes in literacy skills over time and identify significant predictors of literacy development. The impact of preliteracy knowledge, schooling, and summer activities on literacy outcomes was evaluated through multiple regression analyses. Additionally, qualitative data from classroom observations and parent surveys were coded and analyzed thematically to

identify patterns and contextual factors that might influence literacy acquisition.

In conducting this research, strict ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the protection of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all children involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and families were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All data were anonymized to protect the privacy of the participants, and the study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) overseeing the research. By integrating these methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how preliteracy knowledge, schooling, and the summer break contribute to literacy acquisition in early childhood.

This study reinforces the importance of a holistic approach to literacy education, one that begins before formal schooling, continues through high-quality classroom instruction, and extends into the summer break. By addressing the factors that contribute to literacy acquisition across these different contexts, educators and policymakers can better support children in their journey to becoming proficient readers, thereby laying the groundwork for their future academic success and lifelong learning. The results call for targeted strategies that address the needs of children at different stages of their literacy development and in varying contexts, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve and sustain literacy proficiency.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the interplay between preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and the summer break on literacy acquisition in young learners. Initial assessments showed that children who entered kindergarten with strong preliteracy skills—such as phonemic awareness, letter recognition, and vocabulary—demonstrated more rapid progress in literacy acquisition during the academic year compared to their peers with weaker preliteracy foundations. This early advantage was evident in standardized test scores, which showed that children with higher preliteracy knowledge outperformed others in reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary growth by the end of kindergarten.

However, the summer break introduced a notable variable in this developmental trajectory. The analysis of post-summer assessments indicated that while some children continued to make literacy gains during the break, a significant proportion experienced a decline in literacy skills—a phenomenon commonly

referred to as "summer learning loss." This regression was particularly pronounced among children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who had limited access to educational resources and literacy activities during the summer. The data showed a clear correlation between the level of summer literacy engagement and the extent of skill retention, with children who participated in reading activities or educational programs maintaining or even improving their literacy levels, while those with little to no engagement saw declines.

Further analysis highlighted the role of formal schooling in mitigating summer learning loss. Children who received strong literacy instruction during the kindergarten year were more resilient to the effects of the summer break, retaining more of their literacy gains compared to those who had less effective instruction. This suggests that high-quality literacy education during the school year can serve as a buffer against the potential setbacks of the summer break.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of early literacy interventions, continuous learning opportunities during the summer, and the critical role of schooling in supporting sustained literacy development. These findings provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers, emphasizing the need for targeted strategies to prevent summer learning loss and ensure that all children have the opportunity to achieve and maintain literacy proficiency.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study underscore the complex and interdependent nature of factors influencing literacy acquisition in early childhood, particularly highlighting the critical roles of preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and summer break. The findings confirm that children who enter formal education with strong preliteracy skills are better equipped to make significant literacy gains during the school year. This emphasizes the importance of early literacy interventions and parental involvement in developing foundational skills before children begin school. Programs that support pre-kindergarten literacy development, especially in underserved communities, are crucial for leveling the educational playing field and giving all children a fair start in their literacy journey.

The study also brings to light the challenges posed by the summer break, during which many children experience a decline in their literacy skills. This "summer learning loss" is particularly concerning for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have access to books, educational programs, or enriching activities during the break. The findings suggest that without continued engagement in literacy activities, the gains made during the school year can be

significantly eroded, setting back a child's progress and potentially widening achievement gaps. This highlights a critical need for interventions that extend beyond the school year. Initiatives such as summer reading programs, accessible community libraries, and educational camps can play a pivotal role in maintaining literacy momentum during the summer months.

Moreover, the study illustrates the protective effect of high-quality schooling against summer learning loss. Children who received robust literacy instruction during the academic year were better able to retain their literacy skills over the summer, suggesting that the quality of literacy education in schools is a key determinant of long-term literacy outcomes. This finding advocates for continued investment in teacher training and curriculum development to ensure that all students receive the high-quality instruction necessary to build a strong literacy foundation that can withstand the challenges of the summer break.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the influences of preliteracy knowledge, formal schooling, and the summer break on literacy acquisition in young children. The findings highlight the critical importance of early literacy skills as foundational elements that significantly enhance a child's ability to acquire and advance in literacy during the early years of formal education. Children who enter school with strong preliteracy skills are better positioned to make substantial progress in literacy, underscoring the need for early interventions and parental engagement in fostering these skills before the start of formal schooling.

The study also emphasizes the impact of the summer break, where many children, particularly those from low-resource environments, experience a regression in their literacy skills. This summer learning loss poses a significant challenge to sustained literacy development and can exacerbate existing educational inequalities. The findings suggest that continuous literacy engagement during the summer is essential to prevent this regression and support ongoing literacy growth.

Furthermore, the role of formal schooling is reaffirmed as a critical factor in literacy acquisition. High-quality literacy instruction during the school year not only promotes literacy growth but also serves as a protective factor against the potential setbacks caused by the summer break. This highlights the importance of investing in quality education and targeted interventions that extend beyond the academic year.

In conclusion, the study underscores the necessity of a coordinated approach to literacy education that begins

in early childhood, is reinforced through effective schooling, and is sustained through continuous learning opportunities during breaks. By addressing these factors holistically, educators, parents, and policymakers can better support children's literacy development, ensuring that they achieve and maintain the literacy skills essential for their future academic success and lifelong learning.

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