Recreational Tutoring to Fight Early-Age School Difficulties in France (APFEE)

Researchers:

Dominique Goux

Marc Gurgand

Eric Maurin

Sector(s): Education

Location: France

Sample: 5,101 students from 261 classes in 109 primary schools

Target group: Primary schools Students

Outcome of interest: Student learning

Intervention type: Training

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0000222

Data: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.09.007

Research Papers: Reading enjoyment and reading skills: Lessons from an experiment with first gra...

Partner organization(s): Association Pour Favoriser l'Egalité des Chances à l'Ecole (APFEE), Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse (FEJ), Rectorat de l'academie de Créteil, Rectorat de l'académie de Lille, Rectorat de l'académie de Versailles

Researchers assessed the impact of a recreational tutoring program on students' academic achievements and interest for school work provided by the NGO Apfee. Researchers found that children identified as falling behind by their teachers in schools where the tutoring program was offered did not improve their reading or math skills, although they developed a taste for reading and academic subjects. These results hold two years after the implementation of the program.

Policy issue

Difficulty with reading and writing can emerge very early in a child's educational career. If these problems are not addressed at an early stage, children can fall further and further behind in class, making it even more difficult for them to succeed to school. Additionally, unaddressed learning difficulties can lead to low self-confidence and frustration, which could compound the problem. For this reason, identifying and addressing learning difficulties early in school is an important challenge for any education system.

Context of the evaluation

The evaluation took place in the school districts of Créteil, Lille, and Versailles. Most schools included in the program serve locations with high portions of recent and second-generation immigrants, with many low-income households.



Selected students received personalized tutoring from APFEE

Photo credit: Aude Guerrucci

Details of the intervention

Researchers assessed the impact of a recreational tutoring program on students' academic achievements and interest for schoolwork provided by the NGO *Apfee*.

Early in the school year, 261 grade 1 teachers from 109 primary schools selected five students from their class who were having significant trouble with their schoolwork. These students were then sorted into 189 groups of five students each. Two-thirds of the schools (125 groups of students) were randomly assigned to receive the recreational tutoring program throughout the year, while the remaining schools (64 groups of students) were assigned to the comparison group, and did not receive the program.

Children whose school was randomly selected to participate in the recreational tutoring program received four 1.5-hour sessions each week for the remainder of the year. During the sessions, children did not follow a structured training program, as recommended by some of the educational literature, but rather read books and played games around words. The objective was to compensate for low socioeconomic background by offering the kind of informal activities that are usually performed in families from a higher socioeconomic status. These tutoring sessions took place after school hours, and were led primarily by school teachers recruited by the NGO. In addition, counseling was provided to parents on how they could support their child's learning process at home.

Researchers then followed students over the course of two years. The data collected includes individual surveys, standardized tests in reading and writing, as well as administrative datasets.

Results and policy lessons

The after-school tutoring program was implemented alongside other remedial education programs offered in all public schools. Selected students in intervention and comparison schools received personalized tutoring, either through the after-school tutoring program (in intervention schools) or through institutional in-school and after-school tutoring programs (in comparison schools). This evaluation therefore measured the impact of substituting the after-school tutoring program designed by *Apfee* in place of the standard remedial education schemes offered in all schools.

Researchers found that children identified as falling behind by their teachers in schools where the tutoring program was offered did not improve their reading or math skills, although they developed a taste for reading and academic subjects. These results hold two years after the implementation of the program.