CommonLit & LearnPlatform:
CommonLit Use Related to Student Success on the New York State ELA Assessment

2023
# Table of Contents

**Executive Summary** 1

**Introduction** 1

**Key Questions** 2

**Methods** 2

- Sample 2
- Measures 2
- Analytical Approaches 3

**Key Finding: CommonLit Use Significantly Predicted New York State Test Scores** 3

**Conclusions** 4

**Appendix A: Description of Analytical Approaches and Model Output** 5

- Analytical Outputs 5
- Model Output 6

**References** 6
Executive Summary

CommonLit partnered with LearnPlatform by Instructure to examine the relationship between the use of CommonLit and student literacy outcomes. LearnPlatform rated the study as meeting the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tier III level requirements, providing promising evidence of the effectiveness of CommonLit in promoting student reading proficiency. Specifically, use of CommonLit (the digital library and CommonLit 360 curriculum) significantly predicted students’ performance on the spring 2022 New York state standardized end-of-year English Language Arts (NYS ELA) assessment. In sum, the more CommonLit lessons submitted by students, the higher their end-of-year NYS ELA proficiency.

Introduction

CommonLit is an open access platform that provides ELA instructional materials for grades 3–12. CommonLit offers a digital library for grades 3–12 and a year-long ELA curriculum for grades 6–12 that is referred to as CommonLit 360 (CL 360). The digital library includes thousands of high-interest texts by authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Roald Dahl, Jason Reynolds, O’Henry, Langston Hughes, and many more. CommonLit’s digital library also offers a series of target lessons to aid teachers in focusing instruction on specific standards-aligned skills.

CL360 includes six units per grade level, each designed around high-interest themes and rigorous grade-level content. Each CL 360 grade level includes multi-genre units, novel studies, research units, and evidence-based argument units. Designed to be taught for five to seven weeks, every unit includes reading lessons, writing lessons, vocabulary activities and quizzes, discussion guides, related media explorations, and a culminating task. Full lesson plans, pacing guides, and other materials to support teachers and students are freely downloadable.

CommonLit partnered with LearnPlatform by Instructure, a third-party education technology management and evaluation company, to examine the relationship between the use of CommonLit and student literacy outcomes. In the current study, LearnPlatform researchers examined the reading proficiency of students from two schools from a large New York City (NYC) school district. The schools collaborated with CommonLit as research partners. In kind, teachers received access to CommonLit’s School Essentials PRO package that included assessments, professional development resources, administrator dashboards, and additional support. As part of their research partnership, teachers were asked to teach at least two CL 360 units throughout the school year. Students’ baseline and state standardized ELA scores allowed researchers to evaluate the relationship between CommonLit use and student achievement.
Key Question

After controlling for students’ prior ELA achievement, was the use of CommonLit related to student performance on a standardized end-of-year ELA assessment?

Methods

The study focused on one NYC school district during the 2021-2022 school year — the first year that the district implemented CL 360. The dataset included scores from 1,035 middle-school students who took a baseline assessment (i-Ready Diagnostic in Reading) and the end-of-year NYS ELA standardized assessment. CommonLit teacher and student usage data were also available, which provided a means to examine the relationship between CommonLit use and student achievement, as measured by the NYS ELA end-of-year assessment.

Sample

The 1,035 students were enrolled in grades 6 through 8 at two NYC middle schools. Both schools received Title I funding and were demographically diverse with over 50% of the students identifying as Black or Hispanic. Table 1 summarizes the number of students in each grade across the two schools, the number of students who engaged with CommonLit (“Users of CommonLit”) and the number of students who did not engage with CommonLit (“Non-Users of CommonLit”).

Table 1. Number of students per grade level in the two schools (N = 1,035)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
<th>Non-Users of CommonLit</th>
<th>Users of CommonLit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

Baseline. In Fall 2021, as part of their standard ELA classroom practice, students completed a beginning-of-year reading assessment (i-Ready Diagnostic in Reading). The beginning-of-year reading assessment scores served as a baseline measure of students’ reading proficiency.
Outcome. At the end of the school year in spring 2022, students completed the NYS ELA assessment. The end-of-year standardized state test scores served as an outcome measure of students’ ELA proficiency level. The state standardized ELA test was developed and administered by the New York State Department of Education and is aligned with the state’s learning standards and core curriculum.

CommonLit use. In addition to test scores, CommonLit backend usage data provided a means of measuring the extent to which students and their teachers engaged with CommonLit throughout the school year. Specifically, the number of digital lessons that students submitted (from the digital library and CL 360 curriculum) provided a measure of students’ usage of CommonLit.

Analytical Approaches

Researchers used a series of analytic approaches to answer the research question. Specifically, descriptive statistics and k-means cluster analyses were used to identify distinct usage patterns among students and teachers. A series of regression analyses were then conducted to evaluate the relationship between CommonLit use and students’ literacy achievement. Additional details about analyses are described in the Appendix.

Key Finding: CommonLit Use Significantly Predicted End-of-Year State Test Scores

Students who submitted nine or more digital lessons (from the digital library or CL 360 Curriculum) had statistically significantly higher end-of-year NYS ELA proficiency scores compared to students who submitted fewer lessons. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between students’ digital use of CommonLit and their mean NYS ELA proficiency scores.

---

1 Hedges $g$ comparing 9–15, 17–20, and 21–25 digital lessons with fewer lessons was Hedge’s $g = .49$, $p = .013$, Hedge’s $g = .66$, $p < .001$, and Hedge’s $g = .89$, $p < .001$, respectively.
Conclusions

In the current study, CommonLit use was significantly and positively associated with middle school students’ literacy outcomes on a state standardized ELA test. The study was evaluated by LearnPlatform and rated as meeting ESSA Tier III requirements for “promising evidence.”

Although strong causal claims should not be drawn from the current study, the findings provide additional evidence of a relationship between CommonLit use and student reading growth. To date, CommonLit has Tier III evidence of effectiveness across numerous student populations. Of note is that the students in the current study were from historically underrepresented populations. This study provides support for CommonLit’s mission to provide access to quality, rigorous ELA resources to all students and teachers.

Figure 1. This figure shows the average proficiency score on the NY state assessment for different groups of students based on the number of CommonLit digital lessons they submitted: No Usage (mean = 2.43), 1–8 (mean = 2.43), 9–16 (mean = 2.93), 17–20 (mean = 3.11), and 21–25 (mean = 3.3).

CommonLit usage significantly predicted students’ end-of-year NYS ELA test scores after controlling for students’ baseline reading proficiency, students’ grade level, and whether they were enrolled in an English Language Learner designated roster. Appendix A includes findings from the regression analyses.

Students in this sample also completed the end-of-year ELA assessment from the CommonLit Assessment Series. The same findings were seen when examining students’ performance on the end-of-year CommonLit Assessment Series as an outcome. Students’ scores on the CommonLit Assessment Series were highly correlated with their scores on the NY state standardized assessment, $r = 0.56$. 

2 Students in this sample also completed the end-of-year ELA assessment from the CommonLit Assessment Series. The same findings were seen when examining students’ performance on the end-of-year CommonLit Assessment Series as an outcome. Students’ scores on the CommonLit Assessment Series were highly correlated with their scores on the NY state standardized assessment, $r = 0.56$. 
Appendix A – Description of Analytical Approaches and Model Output

Analytical Approaches

Researchers used a variety of quantitative analytic approaches to answer the research questions, including descriptive statistics, k-means cluster analyses, and regression analyses.

Descriptive statistics and k-means cluster analyses. First, researchers used descriptive statistics to explore student characteristics and the program’s implementation. Second, researchers conducted a series of k-means cluster analyses to identify distinct usage patterns among students and teachers. Clusters were identified for the total number of digital lessons (from the digital library and the CL 360 curriculum) that were submitted by a student. There was support for four clusters: 1–8, 9–16, 17–20, and 21–25 digital lessons submitted by the student.

Regression analyses. Researchers next conducted regression analyses to examine how CommonLit use was related to student literacy achievement on the standardized assessments. Student proficiency level on the end-of-year NYS ELA assessment served as the outcome for each model. The analyses combined grades 6–8 because the proficiency levels accounted for grade level differences. The analyses included student-level demographic variables (i.e., ELL designation and grade level) and beginning-of-year literacy scores (i.e., i-Ready Diagnostic) to control for potential selection bias.

A series of regression models were tested:

- Model 1: The baseline model that was a linear regression with CommonLit usage as a continuous predictor. This model did not include the cluster groupings.
- Model 2: A linear regression with CommonLit usage cluster membership as a categorical predictor. This model included the k-means cluster groupings: 1–8, 9–16, 17–20, and 21-25 digital lessons submitted (from the digital library and CommonLit 360 curriculum).
- Model 3: A multilevel model that accounted for random effects at the classroom level. This model included CommonLit usage as a continuous predictor.
Model Output

Evaluation of model fit. One model was selected based on model fit (i.e., Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC); Neath & Cavanaugh, 2012). Lower BIC values suggest better model-data fit. The final model was championed based upon evaluation of BIC and model interpretability. Table 2 summarizes the findings. The BIC for Model 2 was lowest, suggesting the best model-data fit. However, all three models had significant positive results, suggesting that the results were not dependent on a particular analytical approach. The model R² values for Models 1 and 2 were 0.25 and 0.24, respectively.

Table 2. Model fit statistics for the three different models that examined the relationship between CommonLit usage (number of digital lessons submitted) and students’ scores on the NY ELA assessment, controlling for beginning-of-year iReady scores, grade level, and English Language Learner roster designsations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>BIC</th>
<th>CommonLit Usage Predictor Type</th>
<th>Unstandardized Beta Coefficient</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Model R² value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1. Linear regression with CommonLit usage as a continuous predictor</td>
<td>925.46</td>
<td>Continuous predictor</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2. Linear regression with CommonLit usage cluster membership as a categorical predictor</td>
<td>769.58</td>
<td>9-16 vs. 1-8 digital lessons</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17-20 vs. 1-8 digital lessons</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21-25 vs. 1-8 digital lessons</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3. Multilevel model with CommonLit usage as a continuous predictor</td>
<td>811.03</td>
<td>Continuous predictor</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References