7th graders who used CommonLit digital lessons had significantly higher reading scores than students who did not use digital lessons

CommonLit contracted with LearnPlatform by Instructure, a third-party edtech research company, to examine whether students who used their English Language Arts program performed significantly better than students who did not. The study was conducted in a mid-sized public school district in Florida during the 2022-23 school year among seventh-grade students. The following document highlights the study findings and outlines the study sample, measures, and methods.

Key Findings

★ Seventh-grade students who had high usage of CommonLit digital lessons (i.e., completed 16–55 digital lessons) had statistically significantly higher spring 2023 FAST reading scores compared to students who did not use CommonLit¹.

★ On average, completing more CommonLit digital lessons was statistically significantly associated with increased reading scores for seventh-grade students². For every 10 additional CommonLit digital lessons a seventh-grade student completed, the model projected that their FAST reading score would have increased by 1.26 percentile points on average³.

The findings from this 2022–23 study meet ESSA Level II (Moderate Evidence) standards given the positive, statistically significant differences between CommonLit users’ and non-users’ end-of-year reading scores for seventh-grade students who had high usage of digital lessons, after ensuring there was baseline equivalence and controlling for significant demographic covariates.

¹ Hedges’ $g = 0.09, p = .04$
² $\beta = .03, p = .02$
³ Researchers used the method detailed by vonHippel (2023) to convert the standard deviation units to percentile points.

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![Chart showing reading scores for non-users, low users, and high users of digital lessons.]

*Figure 1.* Model adjusted FAST reading score means by usage cluster for digital lessons for seventh-grade students. Among the seventh-grade students, 683 were non-users, 622 were low users who completed an average of 4 digital lessons, and 221 were high users who completed an average of 27 digital lessons.

**About the Study**

**Study Sample and Measures**

- 1,526 grade 7 students
- 8 schools from one district in Florida
- 55% of students used CommonLit and 45% did not
- 50% female, 5% English language learners, 69% received free or reduced lunch, and 31% were designated as special education
- 41% White, 33% Black, 13% Hispanic or Latino, 7% multi-racial, and 6% Asian students.

**Usage.** Total number of digital lessons across the 2022–23 school year. There were three distinct digital lesson user groups identified by k-means cluster analysis: non-users (n = 683), low users (n = 622, *digital lessons mean* = 4), and high users (n = 221, *digital lessons mean* = 27).

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4 The study highlights presented here for seventh-grade students are from a larger study that included grade 6-8 students; these findings are included in a separate research report.
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**Outcome.** State standardized assessment reading scores from the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) for spring 2023.

**Covariates.** Florida State Assessment (FSA) for spring 2022 (baseline measure) and demographic data (gender, race, English language learner, free or reduced lunch, special education).

**Methods**

Researchers used a variety of quantitative analytic approaches including descriptive statistics to examine participant characteristics and implementation. To determine different subgroups of users based on similar patterns of usage, researchers used k-means cluster analysis. Since differences in usage were observed between grades, usage clusters were determined separately by grade level. Before the comparative analysis, researchers evaluated baseline equivalence among users and non-users of CommonLit using students’ prior year test scores (i.e., FSA spring 2022) using the acceptable range according to the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) criteria. Researchers used regression analyses to examine whether the use of CommonLit was significantly associated with students’ reading outcomes in spring 2023 (i.e., FAST spring 2023), controlling for prior achievement, race, and English language learner and special education designations.

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5 When a Hedge's $g$ effect size for a baseline characteristic is between 0.05 and 0.25 in absolute value, the WWC requires a statistical adjustment. If the effect size is greater than 0.25 in absolute value, the WWC concludes that the intervention and comparison groups are not equivalent at baseline (WWC Standards Brief for Baseline Equivalence, p. 1).