

# Impact of Summer Camps on Student Learning

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Children are always excited and eager to attend summer camps. We are talking here about the summer camps which are held in government schools just before the summer holidays. In light of the experiences of summer camps held in different states, this article attempts to present an understanding of their usefulness and provides insights on how to organise camps and assess children's learning through them.

A part from the images that come to mind at the mention of summer camps, in the last few years, teachers in government schools have been making special efforts to hold summer camps. In many states, teachers have started organising summer camps for children just before their summer vacations, the results of which have been very positive. Teachers organised these summer camps as a voluntary effort, but when the education department saw its results, in many states, it also started supporting teachers in this effort. If the statistics are to be believed, the number of children participating in summer camps is constantly increasing.

In Chhattisgarh, over the past two years, at least 4,500 teachers across 9 districts served by the Azim Premji Foundation voluntarily organised 2,125 summer camps for 39,000 students from 2,484 schools.

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To my mind, the reasons for this voluntary participation of teachers were, first, the idea was engaging and effective, and all stakeholders, including parents, could see tangible results in schools during the summer camp. Second, teachers were confident enough to introspect on their practices and had the autonomy to decide the content and pedagogy according to the level of their students, irrespective of their grade and age.

The beauty of these summer camps lay in the courage demonstrated by teachers to reflect on and adopt a set of practices that they felt were best suited to their needs and the needs of their students. There were three fundamental questions that we discussed with the teachers with whom we organised the summer camps.

1. Regardless of the grade, what is the current learning level of the children who have agreed to join the summer camps?
2. What content, teaching-learning materials (TLMs), and ideas from the summer camp module can be adapted to meet the pedagogical needs and learning levels of the children?
3. What aspects of the camp can be carried forward as an integral part of their teaching practices once schools reopen after the break?



Figure 1: A student giving his handprint the shape of his imagination.



Figure 2: Children show what they have created in the 'tear and paste' activity.

### Advantages for teachers

A summer camp is designed for teachers to reflect on their practices and explore strategies that can better impact children's learning. Since the engagement is voluntary and focuses on learning rather than syllabus completion, there is more room for introspection and improvement.

### Teachers gained a better understanding of assessment

The assessment of children and the adaptation of suggested activities differed from teacher to teacher, however, most agreed that improving learning levels requires assessing children's current abilities and evaluating teaching practices against the learning outcomes (LOs) of SCERT/NCERT and recommended pedagogy. While teachers still lack full clarity on LOs, recent training programmes have helped them become more familiar with the concept, and they are now making efforts to articulate it in their own words. In many camps, teachers created mind maps or execution plans based on this framework. This was made possible through full-day orientation sessions at Teacher Learning Centres (TLCs) and cluster and block resource centres with support from cluster, block, and district functionaries.

Table 1: Indicators and directions for assessment

Sl no.	What are children expected to learn?	Which activities can help achieve this?	What am I supposed to practise?

The table above serves as a self-assessment tool for teaching practices and reflects children's learning levels, encouraging teachers to start *where children are* rather than just completing the syllabus. I recall two teachers in a *WhatsApp* group praising a senior teacher for his first attempt at reciting a *Bal Geet* with actions and expressions during circle time at the camp. This demonstrated a significant shift in the teacher's approach, which impressed his colleagues.

### Teachers incorporated better practices

Many teachers now incorporate poems, actions, and posters in their classrooms, progressing toward reading

and writing with these tools. In the Berla block of the Bemetara district alone, over 43 teachers use puppets to narrate at least one story per week.

Most teachers who led the summer camps returned to school with a better understanding of their students' needs, mastery of key foundational practices, and a range of engaging activities. Many took pride in offering camps for free (typically costing at least INR 5,000) — an opportunity often available only in private schools. This sense of pride and appreciation was also evident among parents and children.

Many teachers encouraged children to express their thoughts orally and in writing, compiling their work into classroom prints, handwritten magazines, and morning assembly content. Many teachers encouraged their students to write fearlessly without bothering about mistakes. They shared these writings with some magazines and newspapers and displayed some of these on wall magazines. More and more teachers began to use poems and *Bal Geet* to engage children to read and write. Teachers tracked improvements in their practices and students' outcomes.

### Extending summer camps

We can continue the summer camps during the holidays



Figure 3: A group activity during a summer camp.



Figure 4: The fun of fitting different shapes to fill a frame.

with teachers who wish to teach their students grade-level competencies and some other higher-order skills. However, the real challenge lies elsewhere. Data suggests that attendance immediately after the annual examination and before school closure is significantly low. It ranges from 25-40 percent in many schools that I have visited. On the other hand, despite being on vacation, the children were excited to join the summer camp. One of the main reasons for the drop in attendance is the lack of planned activities in the classroom. Teachers often focus on grading exam papers, making the children feel that the school year is over. I would argue, however, that the content and pedagogy used in the classroom are key factors in motivating children to attend school. They eagerly look forward to an energetic, engaging, and meaningful learning environment.

All our experiences from summer camps suggest that assessment leads to improvements in teaching methods, and this ultimately affects learning. Moving forward, we should capitalise on the 15-25 days we have in our schools after the annual exams and before the summer break. To operationalise this idea, we must analyse children's responses in their annual exams, identify areas of difficulty and list the desired teaching practices to address gaps in competencies. If we manage to do this, we can implement a time-bound drive to achieve specific outcomes and practices. As teachers, let us ask ourselves two questions:

1. How can I best utilise the 15-20 days after the annual examination and before the school closes to teach children, and what is my concrete plan to do so?
2. What are the 'problem' competencies that I could map from the responses given by children in their

annual examination on which I could work during this time?

### Using insights from annual exams

In my view, to achieve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and grade level competencies at scale, and to improve our own practices, we can use the framework as shown in *Table 2* to assess the level of children towards the end of the year and have a time-bound action plan to work on.

Table 2:

Sl. no	Student	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
1	Amal	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2	Anamika	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
3	Hafeefa	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
4	Joseph	Yes	No	No	No	No
5	Nikita	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Let us take some examples from the ground to understand the struggle. This will help us develop appropriate methods, content, and activities to address the issue.

In the half-yearly examination, one of the questions in class V Hindi paper was to describe the *Dasara* festival in Mysore, which students had learned about in one of the



Figure 5: A child learning to count using the one-to-one correspondence method.

chapters. This question is partly memory-based but also assesses students' ability to comprehend the text. They can only remember a text they have truly understood. If comprehension is a significant struggle for class V children, we have to plan specific activities to help them improve their reading and understanding skills.



Figure 6: Children read books from the Reading Corner.

A simple approach could be that while teachers focus on grading papers in their classrooms, children can read any text of their choice from textbooks or books from their *Reading Corner*.

This could begin with modelling, where the teacher reads a book, retells the story in her own words, and even writes it down. The teacher can create 3-5 objective-type questions from the content, tailored to students at or near grade level.

Many teachers lack interest in fostering a reading habit because they have either lost it themselves or never developed it during their own school years. Teachers could set up a reading challenge for themselves where they read one book from the *Reading Corner* each day, aiming for 20 books in 20 days. This would impact children's perception of both the teacher and the *Reading Corner* positively.

The approach may differ slightly for early grades (I-III), where we can set a goal for 90 percent of the children to read and write simple sentences within 15 days.

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They could begin by reading and writing from over 100 flashcards provided by the state in FLN kits, focusing on thematic cards with pictures and text. Once students are comfortable with the words, we can apply the words to form simple sentence structures, such as, *This is a mango*, and substitute the names of other fruits in the sentence.

This approach promotes both reading and writing when teachers guide this process. Similarly, in mathematics, we can focus on expanding numbers from 2 to 4 digits based on grade level, followed by an understanding of place value, basic operations, and word problems. Each

child should complete at least 25 'word problems' per operation, totalling 100 problems. Imagine a booklet containing 1,500 'word problems' created by 15 children of class V within 15 to 20 days. Another project could involve measurement and data handling.

Everything must be driven by insights from the annual examination, and our commitment should be inward-looking, focused on improving our practices to bridge the gaps we identify rather than labelling children for what they have not yet achieved.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



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