

BRIEFCASE

J-PAL POLICY BRIEFCASE | JUNE 2012



BOOKED FOR LEARNING

A month-long classroom “Read-A-Thon” program improved children’s reading habits and skills in the Philippines.

Like many developing countries, the Philippines has made considerable progress toward the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary school: In 2008, the country achieved a 92 percent primary school enrollment rate. However, the challenge for education policy does not end with increasing enrollment and filling classrooms. Helping schools find cost-effective ways to improve student learning is also vitally important in light of the resource constraints that many school systems face.

Literacy is an especially critical skill, given the importance of reading for learning in every subject, for future employment, and for children’s ability to navigate successfully through life. Simply providing more resources without changing the learning environment has not proven effective in improving most children’s reading skills, so more innovative approaches are required.

A randomized evaluation by Ama Baafra Abeberese (Columbia University), Todd J. Kumler (Columbia University), and J-PAL affiliate Leigh Linden (University of Texas at Austin) investigated the impact of a one-month “read-a-thon” program sponsored by an NGO in the Philippines. Can an intensive, short-term reading program improve children’s reading habits and reading skills?



- **The read-a-thon immediately increased reading activity and improved reading test scores.** At the end of the program, children in the read-a-thon schools reported reading an additional 7.2 books at school in the past month and scored 0.13 standard deviations higher than children in the comparison group on tests of reading proficiency.
- **Children in the read-a-thon schools read more books at home.** Despite the fact that the children could rarely take books home from school, the read-a-thon participants reported reading an average of 1.2 more books at home during the month of the program.
- **Children continued to read more books after the program ended.** Three months after the read-a-thon ended, children in program schools were still much more likely to be reading than children in the comparison group. However, the impact had faded: children in program schools read 1.2 more books in the past month at school, and scored 0.06 standard deviations higher on reading tests.

Booked for Learning in the Philippines

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- **Children continued to read more books after the program ended.** Three months after the read-a-thon ended, children in program schools were still much more likely to be reading than children in the comparison group. However, the impact had faded: children in program schools read 3.1 more books in the past month at school, and scored 0.06 standard deviations higher on reading tests.

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