

The first Italian scientific study on the effectiveness of summer learning programs has been carried out by FBK-IRVAPP

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The study, recently published in Educational Researcher, involved over a thousand children who took part in the "Educational Archipelago" project, promoted by Save the Children and the Agnelli Foundation in nine Italian cities

Researchers at **FBK-IRVAPP** – the **Institute for Evaluation Research on Public Policies at Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento** – conducted the **first scientific investigation in Italy into the effectiveness of summer learning programs for** students in elementary and middle schools.

The study, titled "[*Starting the School Year on the Right Foot: Effects of a Summer Learning Program Targeting Vulnerable Students in Italy*](#)", was authored by [Davide Azzolini](#), [Martina Bazzoli](#), [Sergiu Burlacu](#), and [Enrico Rettore](#). It focused specifically on the outcomes of the [Educational Archipelago](#) project, implemented in several Italian cities by **Save the Children** and the **Agnelli Foundation** to combat **summer learning loss** in children.

The study found positive effects on learning outcomes in both mathematics and Italian among students who participated in the summer program. These effects were even more pronounced among younger children (elementary schoolers) and students with special educational needs.

The project involved more than a thousand kids across nine cities – Ancona, Aprilia, Bari, Marghera, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Rosarno, and Turin. The evaluation represents a crucial benchmark in the Italian context, which has been relatively under-researched compared to the Anglo-Saxon and Northern European contexts.

*“In Italy,” explained FBK-IRVAPP researcher **Davide Azzolini**, “summer holidays are long for everyone, but they are not the same for everyone. For the luckiest children, the summer months are filled with stimulation, learning, and discovery. For others, they are marked by idleness and isolation. These differing summer experiences can create disparities in learning retention and development, which can affect the return to school in September. So, what can be done to ensure that even the less fortunate students don’t fall behind during the summer? With this study, we tested the effectiveness of a nationwide intervention and provided robust empirical evidence on summer learning support programs and their potential to address educational disparities.”*

The edition of the Educational Archipelago analyzed in the study was implemented during the summer of 2022—a particularly significant period due to the disruptions in school calendars caused by Covid-19. The project offered two types of integrated activities for children. The first consisted of group educational workshops designed to foster social interaction and learning through peer education, cooperative learning, play, and outdoor education. These activities lasted a total of 88 hours, including two days of educational field trips. The second involved 12 hours of personalized tutoring in small groups of two or three children, aimed at reinforcing foundational skills in two key areas: literacy and math/science. The program staff included local educators and social workers familiar with their communities and trained by Save the Children.

The more than one thousand participating students were identified in collaboration with schools and randomly assigned to two groups to ensure comparability. One group attended the summer program during summer 2022, while the other, forming the control group, took part in a learning program at a later date.

When schools resumed in September, students who had participated in the summer program consistently outperformed their peers who had not, showing learning gains of +7% in Italian and +4% in mathematics. These effects—especially notable among elementary schoolers and students with special educational needs—resulted from two contrasting dynamics: a decline in learning over the summer in the non-participant group (especially in mathematics), and concurrent learning gains among participants during the same period (particularly in Italian).

PERMALINK

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