Does Khan Academy Help Kids Learn Math?

SRI offers a detailed exploration of how teachers are using the world's most popular learning tool
With ten million unique users each month and the financial backing of some of the world's wealthiest people, perhaps no education organization has more pressure to show results than Khan Academy.

The renowned research institution, SRI International, published a detailed report on how schools are using Khan for their math classes. The study, funded by the Gates Foundation, spans two school years from 2011 to 2013 and covers nine sites that encompass 20 public, charter and independent schools. Over 70 teachers and 2,000 students in grades 5-10 participated each year.

The in-depth implementation report showcases how four of the nine sites (one of which spent up to 22% of math class time on Khan) deployed the platform, diving into details such as class setup, lab models, instructional methods, schedules and student demographics. It includes charts of comprehensive data on metrics like the median number of videos watched and percentage of time spent on problem sets. Based on these, the authors observe that:

...positive relationships were found between Khan Academy use and better-than-expected achievement and non-achievement outcomes, including level of math anxiety and confidence in one's ability to do math.

The report also mentions the challenges that teachers initially faced--content organization and alignment, professional development, and reporting functions--that Khan Academy later addressed through product updates. "Our close collaboration with schools has been a major driver for many substantial and important changes," says the non-profit on its blog. The report authors commend Khan Academy for

...demonstrat[ing] how a technology provider can collaborate with schools and independent researchers to obtain and respond to feedback to execute rapid cycles of improvement to its digital education offering.

Other major findings from all nine sites include:

- 71% of students liked Khan Academy; 32% liked math more as a result of using it;
- 85% of teachers believe it had a positive impact on student's understanding of math; 86% would recommend it to other teachers;
- The majority of use cases was supplemental: Just 20% of teachers say Khan Academy played a role in introducing new concepts.

The authors caution against drawing direct conclusions about Khan Academy, however: "No single implementation model was used across all the sites, and Khan Academy was not used as the sole, or even primary source of math instruction at
most sites, making it difficult to isolate its effects.”

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