

A Comparison of Readers' Theatre and Repeated Reading
on
Reading Fluency of First Grade Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of readers' theatre and repeated reading intervention groups on the reading fluency of first grade students. The participants of this study were enrolled in an Anne Arundel County school for the 2012-2013 school year. Half of the students received readers' theatre instruction, while the other half received repeated reading instruction from a Treasures reading program. Each group participated in a twenty minute group instruction for three days a week beginning in January and ending in May. The measurement tool used was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (D.I.B.E.L.S). This study involved a posttest design to compare data from May 2013, after the interventions were completed. The hypothesis was supported for this study since there was no significant difference between the two reading fluency interventions. Research in the area of reading fluency interventions should continue to support the best methods for reading fluency instruction to help provide struggling elementary students with additional assistance and strategies to improve in the area of reading fluency.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teaching first grade in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, the researcher spends about two to three hours a day focusing on phonics and comprehension skills and strategies during reading instruction. With the majority of instruction on phonics and comprehension, there is not enough time for fluency instruction which would provide students with strategies and skills to improve their reading fluency. The researcher became interested in this reading fluency study because there was a lack of formal structure and direction in fluency programs and strategies in the county schools. The same experience was true for the other four teachers who teach first grade at the school. When students begin to master the ability to read and decode words, they struggle to read fluently due to the inadequate direction in fluency instruction.

DIBELS (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2005) testing confirmed that the first grade students at the researcher's school were struggling with reading fluency in the winter of 2013 when forty six percent of first graders performed at an intensive and strategic level. The creators of DIBELS define a score of intensive as needing substantial intervention and a score of strategic recommends that a student would need additional intervention. Both intensive and strategic scores mean that students are not obtaining the goal recommended by the DIBELS assessment. This inconsistency with fluency instruction left the researcher and the other first grade teachers interested in a research study to determine effective fluency strategies and skills. The researcher wondered if the fluency instruction provided by their Treasures reading program provided students with the best instruction in reading fluency. Since a great deal of fluency research recommended repeated readings and readers' theatre as a means to motivate and instruct students

in fluency strategies and skills, a study was put in place where two instructors work with small groups of students to teach and assess these fluency skills and strategies.

Statement of Problem

The goal of this study was to determine effective strategies and skills to help improve first grade students reading fluency. Since research has shown that repeated readings and readers' theatre help improve students' reading fluency, this study focuses on determining which fluency strategy is more effective.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that after intensive instruction in readers' theatre, first grade students will show no difference in reading fluency than through the Treasures repeated reading instruction.

Operational Definitions

The dependent variable was reading fluency. Reading fluency was measured using DIBELS (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2005), which is a reading assessment program used by Anne Arundel County to monitor students' progress in letter recognition, decoding, nonsense words, and reading fluency. DIBELS provides teachers with testing materials to assess each student's reading abilities.

The independent variable was the fluency reading instruction. The reading instruction was implemented using readers theatre, which is a motivating and engaging literacy program that involves a performance of a written script that demands repeated and assisted reading focusing on delivering meaning to an audience.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines fluency instruction and the importance of assessing and improving students' reading fluency. Section one will describe the definition and importance of fluency instruction. There are many important reading components that help to build reading fluency. Section two will explain the problems with students learning fluency and with teachers teaching fluency. This section will also display the data that has been collected about fluency and how this data has changed fluency instruction. Section three will explore how fluency is assessed and the importance of testing students on fluency. Several assessments will be explored to determine various measurements that should be used to test reading fluency. Section four will discuss how fluency can be improved through the use of strategies and interventions. This section will also determine whether the strategies or interventions are successful at improving reading fluency.

Fluency Introduction

The definition of fluency has changed throughout the years based on research and knowledge of the importance that fluency has on reading development. Reading fluency is defined by most reading scholars "as the ability to read the words in a text with sufficient accuracy, automaticity, and prosody to lead to good comprehension" (Rasinski & Young, 2009, p. 4). Over the years, reading scholars and the National Reading Panel have discovered that the definition of fluency should contain several components that are important for successful reading fluency and comprehension. "Speed, effortlessness, autonomy, and lack of conscious awareness" are the four properties needed for students to read automatically (Kuhn, Meisinger, & Schwanenflugel, 2010, p. 230).

In “less than 20 years, reading fluency has gone from neglected to ‘influential’ and the National Reading Panel identifies reading fluency as one of the critical components of effective reading programs” (Lapp & Fisher, 2011, p. 1). Fluency is one of five important components that assist students in becoming successful readers. Fluency instruction is “an important contributor to comprehension, motivation, syntactic development, and vocabulary development” (Fenty et al., 2009, p. 57).

Achieving fluency requires many reading and teaching components for students to become successful at reading fluently. Several teaching components that help to promote fluency are “modelling fluent reading for students, assisted readings, and repeated readings” (Rasinski & Young, 2009, p. 4). Reading fluency should be incorporated with the other components of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary) for students to become effective and fluent readers.

Fluency Matters

As stated earlier, fluency truly matters to reading development and is a vital component of instruction in every child’s education. Once reading scholars began to see how important reading fluency is to students’ educational lives, they began to see the need to research, collect, and analyze data in order to improve students’ fluency and fluency instruction. Reading instruction has changed because of the problems that students have been having with fluency. The National Center for Education Statistics “reported that 37% of 4th grade children read below the basic level” and “26% of these students still do not read at a basic level by grade 8” (Begeny & Silber, 2006, p. 183). This data has been collected by national education centers to help lead our studies of reading instruction towards the correct path. Researchers have also indicated that the fluency component still leaves researchers and educators with a lot of questions. The data

that has been collected about students' fluency and reading ability has "challenged them to develop reading fluency instruction that satisfies the scientific requisite to be effective in terms of increasing proficiency in the skill of reading and at the same time makes fluency instruction an authentic and engaging reading experience that satisfies the aesthetic needs of readers and teachers of reading" (Lapp & Fisher, 2011, p. 2).

This research has helped to incorporate fluency into more reading curricula and it has led others to see how important it is to educate teachers on how to teach and assess fluency. "A study of reading courses in teacher education programs indicated that they seldom include any emphasis on the development of reading fluency, so new teachers are unlikely to begin their careers with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote fluent reading" (Fenty et al., 2009, p. 59). A program called Reading First was created based on reading research where reading fluency was emphasized in order to help promote the important components of reading. This program allowed teachers to become educated about the key components of reading and to give them the ability to incorporate reading fluency with phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension. "Reading First teachers in Florida received professional development related to reading fluency through the Reading Academies and from their reading coaches" (Fenty et al., 2009, p. 60). Reading fluency is continuing to be researched in order to collect more information about reading fluency instruction, interventions, strategies, and assessments.

A "recent nationally representative study of 1,779 fourth grade students suggests that 40% of the U.S. students are 'nonfluent' readers" and that "half of U.S. students would probably benefit from interventions aimed to improve their reading fluency" (Begeny, Krouse, Mitchell, & Ross, 2009, p. 223). Many students struggle with fluency because they are challenged with phonics and phonemic awareness, which in turn causes the children to read "in a staccato, flat,

word-by-word manner” instead of being able to read “more or less like everyday speech” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 230). One important part of fluency is automaticity and students who struggle with recognizing words quickly have a very hard time reading both fluently and for comprehension. “In a number of empirical studies, a strong, positive relationship has been established between oral reading fluency and overall reading competence. Their studies have also demonstrated that a marked relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension exists, and that strong oral reading fluency skills are critical for students to develop reading comprehension skills” (Ardoyn, Dunn, & Eckert, 2006, p. 149). Educators have continuously used running records to assess fluency. Researchers feel that teachers need to use these assessments to determine strategies or interventions that would improve reading fluency.

Assessing Fluency

Fluency is an important component to determine a student’s level of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody while reading various texts. Fluency is one of the ground-work stages that lead to reading for comprehension and enjoyment. “Many reading researchers suggest that all early readers should develop fluency with grade-appropriate, connected text sometime between first and third grade, with second grade identified as the approximate time when most readers should develop this skill” (Begeny et al., 2010, p. 137). This suggestion allows educators to see the importance of assessing our students’ fluency during the early elementary years in order to determine if the child may struggle in the future with reading fluently.

Many fluency assessments that educators use to determine their students’ fluency levels are the one-minute timed reading sample. This test is commonly used throughout the United States to determine how many words a child can read in a minute and also how many errors have been made. One commonly used one minute timed test is the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of

Basic Early Literacy Skills) subtests. “The DIBELS subtests use cut-off points to identify children as needing no further assistance beyond typical classroom instruction, needing supplemental instruction, or needing intensive instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” (Coulter, Gichuru, & Shavin, 2009, p. 71). This test can be administered by anyone who has reviewed the administering procedures presented with the test. Many teachers find this test to be convenient for measuring fluency because the subtests only take one-minute to complete individually with each student.

Another assessment that has been used to test fluency is the GORT (Gray Oral Reading Test). This assessment has “eight separate measures of early reading and includes distinct measures of reading performance: a measure of reading fluency and a measure of reading comprehension” (Begeny, 2011, p. 149). Since it is important to not only measure a student’s fluency but also their comprehension, this test allows a teacher to determine if their student is reading fluently as well as understanding the text. Both of these assessments can be used to determine a child’s fluency levels and would be useful to use these assessments before, during, and after any type of strategies or interventions.

Improving Fluency

Fluency is a reading component that is always evolving to create strategies, programs, and interventions in order to help students’ reading fluency skills and create strategies to help them become better readers. Due to ongoing research, studies have determined that repeated readings, modelled readings, listening passage previews, and listening-only passages are just some strategies that can be used in many different educational settings. These strategies are incorporated into many different programs and interventions to help assist students who are

having extreme difficulties with fluency. Some interventions and programs are RAVE-O (Retrieval, Automaticity, Vocabulary, Engagement, and Orthography), Readers Theatre, HELPS, and Great Leaps.

Each of these strategies, programs, and interventions can be performed in any educational setting. “Repeated reading involves having a student re-read a short passage two or more times, sometimes reading the passage until a suitable reading fluency level is met” (Benegy et al., 2009, p. 212). There has been evidence that suggests that supplemental reading instruction with repeated readings as a core component can result in improvement in both students’ generalized reading fluency and comprehension (Ardoin, Cole, & Eckert, 2008). Passage previewing and modelling are strategies where the student listens to a more skilled reader read a passage, while following along silently. Listening-only passages involve another person reading a story aloud with the student just listening to the story without following along. The RAVE-O program is “suggested for the use in combination with a systematic phonologically based reading program and is intended to improve students’ accuracy and fluency in reading sub skills” (Begeny & Silber 2006, p. 184). The readers’ theatre intervention is used with the whole class and the students are taught to use fluency through repeated readings, assisted readings, and modelled readings. “Readers’ theatre is a performance of a written script that demands repeated and assisted reading that is focused on delivering meaning to an audience” (Rasinski & Young, 2009, p. 4). Great Leaps is an intervention that includes “model reading, goal setting, and performance feedback with graphical displays of student progress” (Begeny et al., 2010, p. 139). Great Leaps is a program that uses error correction and a reward program for student accomplishments. The HELPS program was introduced in 2009 to “assist readers of early elementary age improve their reading fluency” and is unique “because it integrates the eight fluency components of effective

reading fluency instruction” (Begeny et al., 2010, p. 140).

An intervention, strategy, or program is used when they are determined to be successful. Repeated reading “improves reading fluency and comprehension skills for students with and without learning difficulties” and it is believed to be one of the best strategies to improve reading fluency (Begeny et al., 2010, p. 138). The readers’ theatre intervention was very successful in its study. The classroom teacher in the readers’ theatre study stated that the “readers’ theatre had a profound positive effect on all readers and gave an opportunity for struggling readers to read fearlessly in the limelight”. The “readers’ theatre program led to a doubling of the mean reading rate” (Rasinski & Young, 2009, p. 12). The HELPS program was more successful than Great Leaps because the “HELPS students performed better on each of the fluency based measures of early reading” (Begeny et al., 2010, p. 149). Research will continue to determine more fluency strategies, programs, and interventions that educators can use to help improve fluency. It is important that educators always understand the process of teaching fluency and the importance of any intervention or program that they use in their classroom.

Understanding fluency and determining the importance of fluency in reading instruction are important concepts that researchers and educators need to understand in order to assess and create new strategies, interventions or programs in order to improve students’ reading fluency. Fluency will continue to grow and develop through more studies and research. It is important for educators to educate themselves on the new advances in reading fluency in order to properly educate their students.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

A quasi-experimental design was utilized, consisting of two groups that were receiving different reading fluency strategies. The independent variable in this design was the fluency interventions that the students received. Some students received intense readers' theater instruction, while others received repeated reading instruction from the Treasures teacher guide (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 2011). The dependent variable was the students reading for fluency measured with DIBELS Next assessment administered in May (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2005). The study was implemented for nine weeks.

Participants

The participants in this study attended first grade in an Anne Arundel county elementary school. The school is located in the northeast cluster of Anne Arundel County and serves approximately 700 students. For this study, the researcher used 10 students in her first grade classroom and 10 students in another first grade classroom (all students were between the ages of 6 and 7). There were 5 girls and 5 boys in the group that received readers' theatre instruction from the researcher, which will be called Group 1. There were also 5 girls and 5 boys in the group that received repeated reading instruction from the other first grade teacher, which will be called Group 2. All 20 students in this study received reading instruction in the kindergarten Treasures program in the previous school year. The students in both first grade classrooms were comprised of 13 Caucasian students, 3 African American students, 2 Latino students, and 2 Asian American students.

Instrument

One instrument that was used in this study was the DIBELS assessment (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2005). Anne Arundel County used the DIBELS assessment to help track student readiness and growth in reading (phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency). The researcher only used the oral fluency subtest of the DIBELS assessment to assess the participants' in fluency. Students in Anne Arundel County are tested on the DIBELS assessment from kindergarten to second grade in order to determine whether phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency skills have been acquired.

In the mental measurements yearbook and test prints Shanahan discussed in his review of the DIBELS assessment that "the average concurrent validity coefficients were .80 and the predictive validity coefficients were .66 for the oral reading fluency subtest". He also stated that the oral reading fluency subtest showed "remarkable levels of reliability given the nature of the test" and the oral reading fluency subtest "showed the most reliability out of all the subtests with a .92 to .97" (Shanahan, 2005). Shanahan also states that DIBELS Next allows educators to see comparisons by "entering scores into an online system" allowing a "comparison with 300 school districts, 600 schools, and 32,000 children."

Procedure

This research study began in February 2013 when all 20 students were given the winter DIBELS Next Assessment (Dynamic Measurement Group, 2005). The researcher then selected 10 on level students from her class and the other first grade teacher and the researcher selected 10 on level students from the other first grade teacher's class. The other first grade teacher taught Group 2, which received the repeated readings instruction. The researcher instructed Group 1 by, providing them with the readers' theatre instruction. Group 1 met with the

researcher three days a week for 20 minutes a day on readers' theatre. Group 2 met with the other first grade teacher three days a week for 20 minutes a day and received instruction in repeated readings. Groups 1 and 2 met with their teachers for 9 weeks total.

Group 1: Readers' Theatre

The researcher introduced Group 1 to a new readers' theatre play each week on day one. The researcher began by taking the students through a picture walk of the book. The students and researcher looked at the pictures in the play each week and discussed the ideas in order to build background knowledge of the play. The characters in each week's plays were then introduced to the students and the characters of the play were discussed. The researcher also introduced a readers' theatre play poster to the students the first day of each week. The poster explained the importance of reading with tone (the student's voice based on the emotions in the story), speed of reading, accuracy, and voice (level of your voice). The researcher demonstrated these skills with the students and then had them practice these skills while reading. The researcher and students read the plays together and discussed the plays. At the end of reading the plays, students selected a character for each play that they read. Each student highlighted their parts in the plays that they were to read. On day two of each week, the students were instructed to individually practice their parts in the play and then Group 1 practiced all the parts together. The researcher facilitated the students during day two while the students practiced their parts of the play. During this time, the researcher focused on having the students practice the skills of reading with tone, speed, accuracy, and voice. The students also created masks for their characters and designed a background setting during morning work time and workshop time (small reading instruction). On day three of each week, Group 1 performed their plays to the other classmates. They set up their background setting and used the highlighted parts of the play

to perform using their character masks.

Group 2: Repeated Reading

On day one, Group 2 was introduced to a new “on level” Treasures book each week. The teacher introduced the strategy of repeated readings to the students on a poster first day of each week. The teacher explained that repeated readings means to reread a story over and over again individually, with a partner, or with a whole group. The teacher and students practiced repeated reading by reading half of a new Treasures book together twice and then discussing the story while reading. While reading, the teacher and students discussed any confusing words or events in the story. On day two, the teacher revisited the repeated readings poster and then instructed the students to read the other half of the story together two times. Again the teacher and students discussed the story and talked about any confusing words or events in the story. On day three, students chose a partner from their group and completed a repeated reading of the whole story with them. They switched partners and completed another repeated reading of the whole story. Each group of partners discussed the story together as they were reading the story by answering questions provided by the teacher. Lastly, the whole group answered questions to the story together, reading the whole story together one last time. The students also individually read the weekly story to the teacher each morning to complete another repeated reading. These activities were conducted each week for nine weeks with both groups of students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The analysis compared results on the DIBELS (Dynamic Measure Group, 2005) based on the type of instruction. The results concluded that there was no significant difference between the two reading fluency groups of readers' theatre and repeated reading. The readers' theatre group obtained a mean score of 48.0 and the repeated reading group obtained a mean score of 41.9, $t(18) = .68$, $p = .50$ (Figure 1).

The analysis examined the results by gender and revealed that there was no significant difference between females in the readers' theatre group and females in the repeated reading group, $t(8) = -.75$, $p = .47$. The females in the readers' theatre group obtained a mean score of 37.4 and the females in the repeated reading group obtained a mean score of 43.4.

There was also no significant difference between males in the readers' theatre group and males in the repeated reading group. The males in the readers' theatre group acquired a mean score of 58.8 and the males in the repeated reading group acquired a mean score of 40.4, $t(8) = 1.17$, $p = .28$. The results for males and females in the readers' theatre group also confirmed that there was no significance between the two genders. Although there was a slight difference between the males mean score of 58.8 and the females mean score of 37.4, $t(8) = -1.76$, $p = .12$. The analysis also confirmed that there was no significant difference between males and females in the repeated reading group, $t(8) = .24$, $p = .82$ (Figure 2).

The analysis also examined the results of race and there was no significant difference between the Caucasian group in the readers' theatre group and the Caucasian group in the repeated reading group. (Caucasian group was the only group that could be compared due to the imbalance of other race groups), $t(11) = .29$, $p = .77$.

Figure 1: Mean Score of Readers' Theatre and Repeated Reading Groups

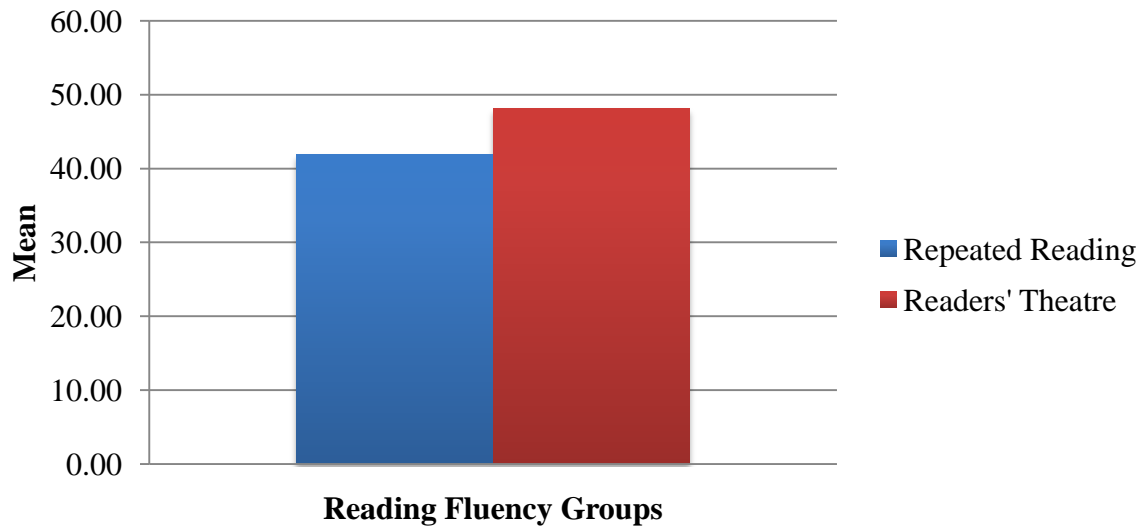
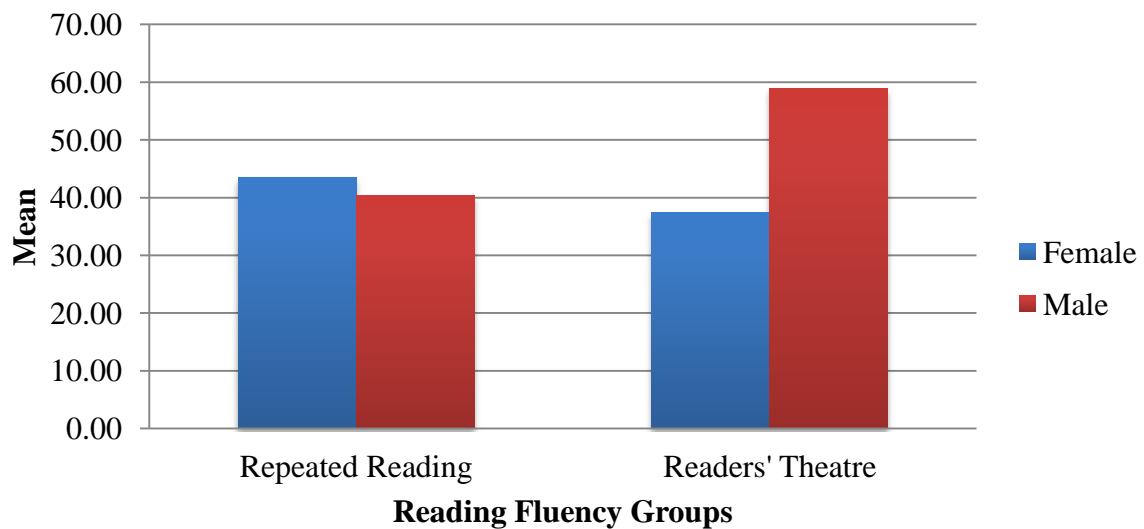


Figure 2: Mean Score of Males and Females in Reading Fluency Groups



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis in this study was supported because the hypothesis predicted that there would be no significant difference between the readers' theatre group and the repeated reading group. The data collected supports that there was no significant difference between the two groups, genders, and race.

Implications of the Study

The results in this research study suggest that there was no significant difference between the two reading fluency programs and that each method has a positive effect on reading fluency. Since neither group reflected a significant gain vis-a-vis the other group, each program had a similar effect on students struggling with reading fluency. Even though the results showed that there was no significant difference between males in repeated reading and readers' theatre the results do suggest that males are more effective with readers' theatre than the males in the repeated reading group. These results could imply that males improve in the area of reading fluency as a result of emphasis on the movement and creativeness that is required from the readers' theatre group. Since there was not a significant difference between males and females in the repeated reading group, it could be implied that both males' and females' reading fluency improves at the same pace while working in a repeated reading group. The results also suggest that females' reading fluency scores improve at around the same pace whether they were in the readers' theatre group or the repeated reading group. These results reflect the fact that females could be placed in either program to help them improve their reading fluency. Study results also demonstrated that Caucasians succeeded in both reading programs at approximately the same pace.

Theoretical Consequences

These results did not support some of the theories that were discussed in Chapter Two. It was believed that repeated reading would be one of the best strategies to improve reading fluency. The results of this study have demonstrated that repeated reading was not considered one of the best strategies to improve reading fluency. This strategy did allow for improvement in reading fluency but the results were very similar to the strategy of readers' theatre. The theories discussed in Chapter Two also stated that readers' had a profound effect on all struggling readers. The readers' theatre program did not lead to more significant reading gains than the repeated reading program. This study demonstrates that readers' theatre and repeated reading are very comparable reading strategies and will help to improve reading fluency at a comparable rate.

Threats to Validity

Throughout this study some of the major threats to internal validity were: maturation and differential selection. The time frame was used for this study was nine weeks. This short period could have affected the results of the study since there could have been natural improvement from the students over this time. Since first grade students tend to improve at a rapid rate throughout the end of the year, it is hard to determine if they improved based on the reading programs or if it was just natural progression. The student selection process for this study was less than perfect. The students were selected based on the researchers' convenience and the researcher was limited to using the students in her classroom and another teacher's classroom. Ideally, a more diverse student selection would have been to choose students in different grades randomly selected based on reading fluency.

The major threat in this research study to external validity was the generalization of the

overall population, due to a small sample size of only ten students per group. The sample size was limited since the researcher was only able to use twenty first grade students in total, due to limited instruction time. A better sample would have been to use all the students in first grade that were struggling with reading fluency.

Implications for Future Research

This research lends itself to future investigation on improving reading fluency. Future research could include: random selection, an extended time frame, enlarging the sample size, balancing race, and focusing more on male students through readers' theatre.

By selecting students at random and enlarging the sample size of students for future research, it might have helped to determine which reading fluency strategy was more influential in improving reading fluency. A larger sample would provide a greater population of students struggling with reading fluency. Completing further research with an extended time frame would also allow for determining if the reading fluency strategies were affecting growth in reading fluency development. This research study shows that there is a need for future research in the area of reading fluency but with a more balance of race because the researcher's limitations of racial groups only allowed for Caucasians to be compared. It would be beneficial to observe several racial groups attend a study similar to this research study. Furthermore, it would be highly beneficial to compare the difference from this research study, which had males achieving at a slightly higher rate in the readers' theatre group than the repeated reading group. It would be valuable to see if that data would hold to be true with a larger sample group, random selection, balance of race, and an extended time frame.

Conclusion

Since the hypothesis was supported in this research study, showing that readers' theatre

and repeated reading are beneficial in supporting and increasing reading fluency at about the same pace. From this study, the researcher learned that each of the groups that were compared improved at a consistent rate. The slight difference between the males in the readers' theatre group and the repeated reading group leads the researcher to believe that males may benefit more from reading fluency instruction with readers' theatre. The researcher now knows that future studies should focus on larger and more random samples allowing for more data and analysis to determine if the benefit to males can be confirmed.

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