

The Effect of a Peer Led Intervention on Reading Comprehension of First Grade At-Risk
Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if a peer led reading intervention would have a positive effect on the comprehension skills of at-risk first grade students. This study was a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test to compare reading comprehension scores. Results were measured using a rubric, which was created according to the first-grade common core standards and assessed students' answers to comprehension questions. Data collection and analysis showed that gains in comprehension were made for students who participated in the peer led reading intervention. Further research is suggested to better analyze how well peer led reading interventions could help a wider range of at-risk students struggling with reading comprehension.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Reading comprehension is the fundamental goal in reading instruction. In first grade and in the elementary years, students are learning the basics of how to decode words, read a variety of texts and genres, and learn how to comprehend what is being read. Unfortunately, many students struggling with reading comprehension, especially those considered at-risk, often fall behind in their academics and in the expected reading levels.

Students who are considered at risk face challenges their peers may not have to face, which hinder their success in school. These students often lack the support at home needed to facilitate their success in the classroom. Students who come from poverty or who come from a non-English speaking home are often at risk of academic delay or failure (Carter, 2008). These students may not receive the same support in reading at home due to their parents' inability to read with them each night.

During this study, the researcher worked in a Title I school. The school's population consisted of 90% FARMS students (receiving free and reduced meals) and 58% students living in non-English-speaking homes. The researcher taught in a first-grade classroom at the time of this study, and the population of the classroom consisted of 85% of the class living in poverty, 37% participating in ESOL, the English language learners program, and 21% receiving special education services. After working with these students, it came to the attention of the researcher that 63% of the students in her class were reading below grade level and struggling with reading comprehension. With so many students living in poverty, in non-English speaking homes, and at risk of reading failure, the researcher became interested in learning how best to help these

students succeed in their academics and improve their reading comprehension skills. This study was designed to test if a peer led intervention would help these students improve their reading comprehension skills, particularly these students who are at-risk based on their living conditions and home environment.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if a partnered peer led intervention would affect comprehension scores of low performing first grade at-risk students.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is that students participating in a partnered peer led reading intervention will not have a significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of students that are at-risk in first grade.

Operational Definitions

The dependent variable in this study is the students' change in their comprehension skills based on the rubric used for a pre- and post-reading assessment. Students read a text on their instructional level as a pre-assessment and were scored using a rubric based on how each student answered comprehension questions. After the intervention was completed, students then read a text on their instructional level and were assessed using the same rubric containing comprehension questions as a post-test. The change in these students' scores on the rubric is the dependent variable in this study.

The independent variable in this study is the intervention the students participated in with a peer. Students who scored a seventy percent or below on the comprehension pre-test were grouped into a control group and a group that participated in a partnered peer led intervention. The students who participated in the intervention worked with a student in fourth grade twice a

week working on sight words as well as reading books and answering comprehension questions, which the older students were trained on how to ask and discuss. This intervention served as the independent variable in this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the components of reading comprehension and the importance of comprehension in reading instruction, particularly for at-risk learners. The following sections describe at-risk learners and learning outcomes associated with the factors that put them at risk, what efficient readers and struggling readers look like, how reading comprehension is connected to fluency and vocabulary instruction, and finally, what reading comprehension instruction should look like in the classroom.

At-risk Learners

A student who is labeled as at-risk is considered at risk of academic failure due to factors in that child's life. Every school is different and every child that educators encounter is unique, coming from different backgrounds, home environments, and cultures. No matter the school, educators are likely to encounter some students who are considered at-risk.

Students At-risk

At-risk students are those who face challenges in their lives that hinder them from making as much academic progress as their peers. At-risk students often have limited resources, especially in their home settings to assist them in their academics and are more likely to fail or drop out of school due to the challenges they face. A variety of factors can place a child at-risk. Students who are considered minorities, by race or ethnicity, are often considered at-risk. Those that live in poverty are also often labeled as at-risk as living in poverty can influence a child's mental, behavioral, and educational development. Families living in poverty are often minorities, single-parent family homes, which are often female-headed families (Carter, 2008).

Immigrants and English language learners are also more likely to live in poverty and are also often at risk of academic delay or failure. These students have a linguistic disadvantage and they can easily fall behind in school due to their limited English proficiency. Students whose parents do not have high school diplomas can also easily become at-risk as well (Carter, 2008).

Educational Outcomes for At-risk Learners

Factors that put students at-risk can cause problems academically and can make being successful in school more difficult for these students. At-risk students tend to be absent more often and are more likely to face grade retention. Statistics and state standardized achievement test results suggest that students who are considered at risk score lower on these tests and are also more likely to drop out of high school. At-risk students are also more at risk of entering the criminal justice system, especially the students who are low academic achievers and minority males (Carter, 2008).

As noted, a large proportion of at-risk students are English language learners. These students often experience lower academic achievement, especially in reading fluency and comprehension. English language learners may often struggle with auditory processing and struggle to learn reading skills at the same pace as their peers. Educators who work with English language learners also face challenges in helping these students. When working with these students, it can be difficult to understand if their underachievement is due to their language barriers or if they have a true learning disability (Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006). Students who are English language learners can often even get misdiagnosed as needing special education services because of language and cultural differences that impact evaluation results and test scores (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006). Parents of English language learners usually do not speak English either, which means English is not used in these students' home

environments. That makes it difficult for parents who can't speak English to feel able to help their children at home with their academics. It is important for educators to help these parents understand ways in which they can still help their children and support their success at school.

Students who live in poverty also make up a large proportion of the students who are at risk of academic failure. Families that live in poverty often have less access to resources that would provide a home environment that promotes student achievement. Parents living in poverty also often can't afford to expose their children to many after school programs or extracurricular enrichment activities. The environments in which students live in poverty can be harmful and very distracting as well. Neighborhoods in poverty often have higher crime and drug use rates, which these students witness on a regular basis. These students also often do not get the proper nutrition they need, and poor nutrition has been connected to low cognitive development. Students living in this type of environment can feel defeated and question the relevance and legitimacy of schooling (Carter, 2008). Overall, living in poverty can cause students to become more distracted, hungry and tired, which can harm their success in school.

Efficient and Struggling Readers

For educators to help struggling readers and at-risk students, they need to know what efficient readers look like. Teachers also need to know what struggling readers look like and how to pinpoint the skills and strategies students are struggling with.

Efficient Readers

According to researcher Sanchez (2010), students who are efficient readers have accurate and fluent word reading skills and set goals prior to reading text. Efficient readers also note the structure and organization of a text before they start to read (Sanchez, 2010). While reading texts, efficient readers use the information from the text they are reading and connect that

information to their own prior knowledge. Such students also monitor their understanding while they read and make mental notes to help better understand the text. Students who are efficient readers can create mental summaries of the information they have read, make inferences, use mental imagery and make predictions while reading. Samuels and Farstrup (2011) note that efficient readers are active readers; they pay attention to what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what to re-read and try to make meaning of any unfamiliar words and concepts (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011). These readers also can read different kinds of texts with appropriate goals and expression.

Struggling Readers

Students who struggle with reading have difficulty with these skills that efficient readers use. Struggling readers often have deficits in decoding skills and reading fluency and usually have inadequate vocabulary knowledge and fewer prior experiences to assist with their word reading and comprehension skills. Struggling readers also do not prepare for what they are reading with any pre-reading strategies. When struggling readers lack the skills they need to read fluently and to understand what they are reading, they also lose interest and any motivation for reading due to the difficulty (Sanchez, 2010).

Relating Comprehension, Fluency, Phonics, and Vocabulary

Reading comprehension is an important goal when reading any type of text. However, comprehension is a complex skill that requires multiple cognitive activities. Reading comprehension is a skill that requires skills in multiple aspects of reading including phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

Comprehension connected to Fluency and Phonics

For comprehension to occur, students need skills in reading fluency and phonics. Multiple reading skills are involved during the reading process, which enable a student to understand a text. Decoding and listening comprehension skills account for a large portion of any discrepancy in students' reading comprehension skills (Sanchez, 2010). Poor word recognition and phonics knowledge makes comprehension difficult. If students cannot automatically recognize words or decode unknown words, they cannot fluently read a text containing those words. To comprehend a text, the reader needs to be able to decode and recognize words fluently and accurately. There is a strong correlation between speed and accuracy of word recognition and reading comprehension, especially in the primary grades. Strong fluent readers are often better at comprehending a text because of this relationship between phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension (Eldredge, 2005).

Comprehension and Vocabulary

Students also need to have a good understanding of vocabulary for reading comprehension and fluency to occur. Research states “without the ability to connect each new word, sentence, or page with those that came before, children cannot build a comprehensive understanding of the words they read” (Willis, 2008, p.127). Research has also shown that the vocabulary students understand at the end of first grade can be a significant predictor of how well students will comprehend what they read even ten years later.

If vocabulary is not taught and enriched by third grade, students' reading comprehension scores can decline in their later elementary years. “Rich vocabulary [also] reflects success in almost every region of the brain, from rote memory through working and relational memory, categorizing, connecting, patterning, storage, and executive function” (Willis, 2008, p.80). The

National Reading Panel states that if a student has a larger vocabulary, they are more likely to be able to comprehend text easier. If students have a larger vocabulary, they are also able to communicate their ideas and understandings more efficiently. If a student wants to understand and comprehend what they are reading, they need to be equipped with the appropriate vocabulary needed to understand any text. Vocabulary is an important part in reading comprehension; as there are many words in our English language. If students are expected to understand and express their understanding, teachers need to deliberately, implicitly and explicitly teach vocabulary to students (Kusumawati & Widiati, 2017). Teaching vocabulary to students is important not only for comprehension but for fluency as well. Those who enter school with limited vocabulary knowledge tend to fall behind over time in both reading fluency and comprehension (Willis, 2008).

When instructing students, it is important to understand the connection between all aspects of reading. Reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge are necessary for comprehension to occur.

Reading Comprehension Instruction and Intervention

Using their understanding of the different reading components and the aspects of reading that connect to comprehension, it is an educator's job to help instruct and model reading strategies and skills that their students can use to become efficient readers. It is also the instructor and school's responsibility to identify students who are at risk of reading failure and develop interventions to assist these students in becoming successful readers.

Reading Comprehension Instruction

The goal of reading teachers is to teach students to read with understanding. Educators need to assess their students' skills and strengths and identify any weaknesses their students may

display when reading. They need to identify who may be at-risk for reading difficulties and then decide what type of instruction is appropriate and effective for each individual student. Educators also need to know what motivates their students to help motivate them to read. Building relationships with students and getting to know them personally helps educators to better understand how to connect their students' prior knowledge to new information in texts.

When instructing students and teaching them to comprehend texts, students should learn pre-, during and post-reading strategies. Pre-reading strategies that assist in comprehension include previewing the text, building interest in the text, exploring key words, and establishing reading goals. While students read, teachers should teach them how to make and explain predictions and summarize. Summarizing what a student has read connects the reading and their memory by linking their understanding of a text to their ability to remember key details. Another skill educators should teach during reading is how to compare aspects of a text to make associations between elements of the story, characters, settings, and themes of the text.

During the reading process students should learn how to make inferences and ask questions. This can help build a student's interest in texts they read by using problem-solving thinking processes as they read. After students read a text, they should participate in cognitive tasks related to the reading that are concrete and engaging. Graphic or visual organizers can also be very helpful in increasing comprehension. They help increase students' abilities to organize, summarize, prioritize, memorize, and analyze texts by helping them to construct and visualize relationships in a text. Graphic organizers such as story webs, Venn diagrams, timelines, and many others can be used to help organize a students' understanding of a text. The instructor should model these strategies so that students can learn how to properly use these strategies and how to identify which strategies are most useful for different comprehension tasks and for

different types of text (Willis, 2008). Many instructors and researchers agree on the strategies and skills that are needed to foster reading comprehension. Two researchers, Samuels and Farstrup (2011), have suggested that every teacher should engage in ten specific elements of effective reading instruction to foster and teach reading comprehension. These ten elements of instruction include building disciplinary and word knowledge, providing exposure to a volume and range of texts, providing motivating texts and contexts for reading, teaching strategies for comprehension, teaching text structure, engaging students in discussion, building vocabulary and language knowledge, integrating reading and writing, observing and assessing student progress, and differentiating instruction (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011). These specific instructional strategies help build reading success in all students and are suggested by researchers and instructors.

Reading Comprehension Interventions

All students are taught reading comprehension using the school provided curriculum and programs. However, students who are at-risk of reading failure and struggle with comprehension may need additional instruction and some type of intervention. Students who receive instruction and additional help typically receive instruction within a 3-tiered model. The first tier is simply the core reading program all students participate in. The second tier is an intervention put in place for those students who are not making progress. If the intervention still does not help these struggling students, they can be referred to special education services or provided with a tier-3 intervention, which is a more intensive type of intervention. There are many types of interventions that can be put in place for struggling readers.

Supplemental instruction/Increased instructional time

One example of an intervention would be supplemental reading instruction, which is additional instruction provided by the instructor. Linan-Thompson et al. (2006) used this

intervention on 53 English language learners who were at-risk of reading comprehension failure. These students received supplemental reading intervention daily for fifty minutes in small groups for 6 months, while other students in a comparison condition received the school's existing instructional program for struggling readers. After the intervention was complete, 50 of the 53 participants responded and increased their reading skills (Linan-Thompson et al., 2006).

Peer tutoring

Another example of an intervention that could be used for at-risk and struggling readers is known as total class peer tutoring. This intervention is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy that involves students in serving as an academic tutor and tutee. Typically, in peer tutoring, a higher performing student is paired with a lower performing student to review critical academic or behavioral concepts together. This type of intervention allows students to receive one-on-one assistance with a peer, promotes academic and social development for all students involved, promotes student engagement, increases self-confidence and self-efficacy, and increases students' time on task (Hott, Walker, & Sahni, 2012). Researchers Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao (2007) used this intervention with elementary students in urban schools who were at-risk of reading comprehension failure. Students who participated in this study participated in peer tutoring sessions that were held thirty minutes per day, three times a week. These students simply worked with each other on sight word recognition. After the intervention was completed and the students were reassessed, all students' reading fluency and comprehension scores improved (Kourea et al., 2007).

These interventions are just two specific examples. They and similar interventions should be used in conjunction with the previously discussed instructional strategies to help struggling and at-risk students become successful, fluent readers who can comprehend a variety of texts.

Summary

Reading comprehension is key to being a successful reader and student. Comprehension is a complex process involving many cognitive activities and is impacted by all other components of reading. For a student to comprehend what they have read, they also need to be fluent readers with strong vocabulary knowledge. Teaching students to comprehend texts requires teachers to model and teach pre-, during and post-reading strategies that help build understanding of a text. Educators often encounter students who are at-risk of reading failure who need additional interventions. It is important for educators to understand what makes these students at-risk and learn what types of interventions and strategies work best to help these students become efficient readers.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study was designed to test the affects of a peer led intervention on the comprehension skills of at-risk first grade students. First grade students struggling with reading comprehension participated in a partnered intervention with fourth grade students to determine if this form of intervention could improve their comprehension skills.

Design

This study was a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test to compare reading comprehension scores. Two groups of students were selected for this design, grouped into a control group and a group of students participating in the experimental intervention. The independent variable in this study is the intervention the students participated in with a peer. The dependent variable in this study is the students' change in their comprehension skills based on the rubric used for a pre and post reading assessment.

Participants

The study took place in a public Title I elementary school in the Annapolis area of Maryland. Thirteen students from a first-grade classroom participated in the study. These thirteen students were divided in two groups; six students participated in a control group and the remaining seven students represented the group that participated in the intervention. All thirteen students who participated in this study were considered "at-risk" based on their living conditions, on economic status and/or because they come from a non-English speaking home. All thirteen students were categorized as FARMS students (those receiving free and reduced meals) and lived in poverty. Five out of the fourteen students live in non-English speaking homes with parents who cannot read in English with their students at home. The students who participated in

the study consisted of seven African American students and six Hispanic students who receive ESOL services; seven students were female while six were male.

Participants were chosen based on at-risk factors and comprehension scores using the rubric created for the pre- and post-test. At-risk students who scored a 70% or lower on the comprehension rubric were selected to participate in this study. Fourteen out of the nineteen students in the researcher's first grade class scored a 70% or lower on the comprehension rubric. Thirteen out of the fourteen students that scored a 70% or below were considered at-risk based on the previously mentioned at-risk factors; these thirteen students were chosen to participate in the study.

Instrument

A pre-test and a post-test were used for this study to determine if an intervention would affect the comprehension scores of first grade students. The researcher read a book with each student at his/her instructional level, and the students were then asked comprehension questions and scored based on their answers using a rubric. The instructor and the school's reading teacher designed this rubric using the first-grade common core reading standards. The rubric also mimicked the design of the comprehension questions used in the Fountas and Pinnell reading benchmark assessments. Students participating in the intervention used scholastic guided reading leveled books when reading with their partner and practiced sight words using the Dolch sight word lists.

Procedure

Based on the results of the pre-test, students were grouped into a control group and an intervention group. The students who were placed in the control group did not participate in any interventions and simply followed the daily instruction in the general education classroom. The

students who were chosen for the intervention took part in a peer led intervention, which lasted four and a half weeks. The interventions took place two days a week for 25 minutes each day. Three of the seven students participating in the intervention worked with their partner every Tuesday and Thursday morning and the remaining four students worked with their partner every Wednesday and Friday morning. Each student was partnered with a fourth-grade student, and because the first grade and fourth grade schedules did not coincide, the intervention was held in the morning during arrival and breakfast time from 8:40 a.m. to 9:05 a.m.

Prior to the start of the intervention, the fourth-grade students were trained by the researcher on how to carry out and lead the intervention. Once the intervention began, the students would first read their sight words to their fourth-grade partner. Each student in the class had a word ring, containing Dolch sight words that each student had not yet mastered. The fourth-grade students would then introduce a book chosen by the instructor and meeting the first-grade students' individual levels. The students would go over any vocabulary words from the book given to the fourth graders by the instructor. The first-grade students would then read the book to their fourth-grade partner as the partner helped them to sound out any unknown words by guiding the first graders to use the reading strategies the school uses in daily instruction. After the book was finished, the fourth-grade students then asked their partners a series of comprehension questions about the book. To help guide their intervention, the fourth-grade students used a bookmark containing the steps just mentioned and example comprehension questions to ask their first grade partners about the given books. At the end of the four and a half week intervention, the first grade students in both the intervention group and the control group were given the post-test. The researcher read with each student one-on-one using a scholastic book at each student's individual level. The researcher then asked comprehension questions and

scored the students' answers using the same rubric used during the pre-test. The post-test was given to both the control group of students and the students participating in the intervention. The researcher then compared the scores of each group and the growth from the pre-test to the post-test.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether participating in a partnered peer led reading intervention has a significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of students that are at-risk in first grade. After the students were given a pre-test of comprehension and scored, students were placed in two separate groups. Seven at-risk students participated in a peer led reading intervention working on reading strategies, sight word recognition, and answering comprehension questions. Six at-risk students acted as the control group and did not participate in any extra interventions.

To test the main hypothesis, which stated the peer led intervention would not have a significant effect on the reading comprehension scores of the at-risk students, a median test was conducted due to a small sample size and non-normal distributions. The results are presented in the tables below.

Figure 1

Mean Scores of Participants' Results on the Comprehension Pre and Posttest.

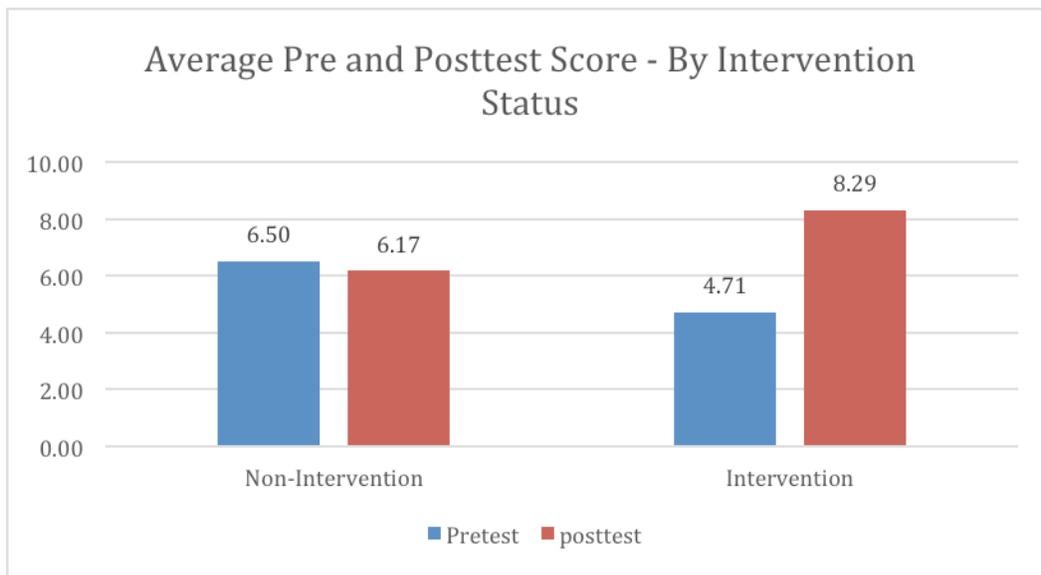


Figure 2

Median scores of Participants' Results on the Comprehension Pre and Posttest.

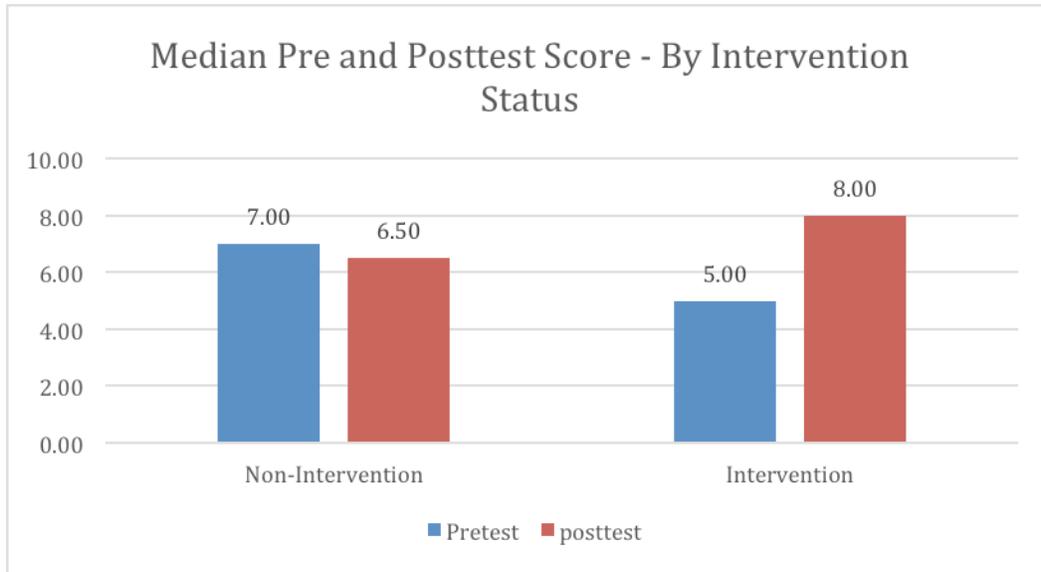


Table 1

Median Test Between Intervention and Non-intervention Student Growth

Statistics

			Intervention		Median Test on the Growth between Intervention Group and Non-Intervention Group
			No	Yes	
N	Valid	Pretest	6	7	
Mean		Pretest	6.50	4.71	
		Posttest	6.17	8.29	
		Growth	-0.33	3.57	
Median		Pretest	7.00	5.00	
		Posttest	6.50	8.00	
		Growth	-0.50	3.00	P=0.005*
Std. Deviation		Pretest	0.837	1.496	
		Posttest	1.472	0.951	
		Growth	0.816	1.902	

*Significant since p=0.005

Students participating in the peer led intervention worked with their partners on reading comprehension for five weeks. Results from the pretest and posttest were then analyzed and compared. From the pretest to the posttest, students who acted as the control group's mean score

decreased from 6.5 to 6.17. However, students who participated in the intervention showed growth from the pretest to the posttest, with a mean score increasing from 4.71 to 8.29. Non-intervention students' median scores decreased from 7.00 to 6.50, and the median score of the students participating in the intervention increased from 5.00 to 8.00. Results from the median test indicated a p-value of 0.005 (<0.05), indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected; participating in a peer led reading intervention has a significantly positive effect on the reading comprehension scores of at-risk students in first grade.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a peer led reading intervention on first grade at-risk students. Fourth grade students partnered with at-risk first graders to work on reading comprehension skills. After a pre and posttest were given, data analysis was conducted. Analysis of the data collected rejected the null hypothesis that the peer led reading intervention would not have a significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of the at-risk first grade students.

Implications of Results

The data collected from this study suggested that a peer led reading intervention would be beneficial to first grade at-risk students. Using the comprehension pretest and posttest, which had a total of ten points, the mean comprehension scores increased from 4.71 to 8.29 for the at-risk students who participated in the peer led intervention. The students in the control group who did not participate in the intervention had a decrease in their mean comprehension scores from 6.5 to 6.17.

Based on observations, the first-grade students, as well as the fourth-grade student mentors, really enjoyed working on this intervention. The fourth graders were eager to come visit their partners, and the first-grade students were excited to get started when their partners arrived. Each morning the fourth graders were able to work with their first-grade partners and were able to read a book and discuss aspects of the text using comprehension questions. The students were also able to practice using reading strategies and identifying sight words.

Based on the analysis of the data collected from both groups and on observations, one could conclude that peer led reading interventions could be beneficial for at-risk students

struggling in comprehension. However, further investigation would help determine the successfulness of peer led interventions for all at-risk students.

Theoretical Consequences

This study provided evidence that a peer led reading intervention had a significant effect on at-risk first grade students' reading comprehension skills. This study was consistent with previous research done using similar intervention strategies. In 2007 for example, researchers Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao conducted a similar study using a peer led intervention working on sight word recognition. This study resulted in growth in reading fluency and reading comprehension. Such as in this current case study, at-risk students from an urban school participated in Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao's peer tutoring intervention (Kourea et al., 2007). Previous studies, such as this case study, acted as theoretical background for conducting the peer led intervention with the at-risk first grade students in this current study.

Threats to the Validity

A few factors could have posed threats to the validity of this study. These threats include the duration and location of the intervention, the size of the group for this study, and interruptions that occurred throughout the study. Even though the results showed an increase in comprehension scores for the students that participated in the intervention, these threats to validity could have impacted the range of growth these students could have made.

The first threat to the validity of this study was the duration and location of the intervention. The intervention only lasted five weeks and the students were only able to meet with their partners twice a week in the morning. The students participating in the intervention also had to meet with their partners during breakfast and arrival time. This study took place in a title 1 school where breakfast is provided in the classrooms. There is an allotted 20 minutes for

arrival and breakfast time, and this is when the intervention took place. The students were given five extra minutes to make a total of 25 minutes for the intervention. Depending on when the students arrived, however, is when the students were able to start the intervention. Therefore, often the students were not using the full 25 minutes allotted for the intervention. Students also had to eat breakfast as they were conducting the intervention. With students in the study arriving at different times as well as absences at times, the distraction of the remaining students in the classroom eating breakfast and talking amongst themselves, and having to eat while working with their partners, the students could easily become distracted and not fully capable of focusing on the intervention. A much longer intervention with a solid block of time in a more private location could be more effective. These threats of duration and location could impact the amount of growth these students could have truly made.

The size of the group in this study could have impacted the results as well and could be a threat to the validity of the study. Even though the results showed an overall gain in comprehension scores, the number of students participating in the study was not a large enough group to determine that comprehension scores would improve for all students at-risk. A total of thirteen students participated in the study and only seven students participated in the intervention. Even though all seven students' comprehension scores improved after participating in the intervention, seven students are not a large enough population to definitively state that this type of intervention would work for all at-risk first graders.

Throughout the study, different interruptions and distractions in the classroom could also have impacted the results and could have posed as a threat to the validity of this study. Students participating in the intervention showed growth in their comprehension, but each student showed a different level of growth. The amount of growth each student made could have been impacted

by these distractions and interruptions. As mentioned above, students had to participate in the intervention in the classroom during breakfast time. Other students eating their breakfast, arriving, unpacking, and talking could have posed as a distraction for the students participating in the intervention. During this time, announcements, which were made on the smartboard as a student-led news broadcast, were also played while the students were trying to participate in the intervention. Students would have to stop to recite the pledges in the middle of working on the intervention as well as listen to the announcements in the background as they continued the intervention. Often students were absent or arrived at school late, which caused them to miss the intervention for that day as well. These types of interruptions and distractions could have posed as a threat to the validity of this study and may have caused the differences in comprehension growth amongst the students.

Connections to Previous Studies and Existing Literature

Numerous studies have been conducted on different types of comprehension instruction and interventions. A peer-led intervention such as the one conducted in this study, is just one specific type of reading intervention that has been shown to be productive in previous and current research and studies.

As previously mentioned, researchers Kourea et al. (2007) used a version of a peer led intervention known as total class peer tutoring. Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao conducted a study by implementing this intervention with elementary students in urban schools who were at-risk of reading comprehension failure. Peer-led tutoring sessions were held three times a week for thirty minutes each day. These students worked with each other on sight word recognition. After the intervention was completed and the students were reassessed, all students' reading fluency and comprehension scores improved (Kourea et al., 2007).

Researchers Flores and Duran (2016) also conducted research and a quasi-experimental design study, using peer tutoring with 577 students, aged 9 through 12 years old, in primary schools. Reading comprehension was assessed using a pre and posttest to assess the successfulness of the peer tutoring. Students who participated in the intervention improved in their comprehension scores; both the tutors and the tutees improved in comprehension and in their self-concept as a reader, which was also tested in this study. Some of the data did not show a significant change, however each group showed some amount of growth after the intervention (Flores & Duran, 2016).

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that a peer led reading intervention is beneficial for at-risk students, however several implications for future research should be taken into consideration. The duration and location of this study should be taken into consideration for further research on this topic. This study was only conducted for five weeks and students were only able to work with their peers twice a week in the classroom for 25 minutes at the most. For further research on peer led interventions such as the one used in this study, it would be beneficial to have a designated 30-minute block in a more secluded and less distracting location that students could conduct the intervention. It would also be beneficial to conduct the intervention more often than twice a week for only five weeks. These implications would allow students more time to grow in their comprehension skills and provide a less distracting atmosphere to do so.

The students who participated in the study all displayed growth in their comprehension scores, and the researcher was able to compare the growth of these students to those in a control group who did not participate in the intervention. Even though a significant difference was

displayed between the two groups, a larger population for further research would be suggested. Using a larger population would allow future researchers to have a better comparison among groups and show a more valid display of growth for students participating in the intervention.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine the effects of a peer led reading intervention on the reading comprehension scores of at-risk first grade students. Despite various threats to validity such as distractions, poor location, a short duration and a small study population, all students participating in the peer led intervention showed significant growth in their reading comprehension scores from the pretest to the posttest. Peer led interventions and peer tutoring is a well-researched intervention strategy that has proved successful in numerous studies and is again suggested as beneficial for at-risk students struggling in reading according to this study. Further research and studies are suggested however to better analyze how well peer led reading interventions could help a wider range of at-risk students struggling with reading comprehension.

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APPENDIX A

Comprehension Rubric

Name: _____

Date: _____

Comprehension Questions	Standard	Score
<p>1. Retell what the story was about</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">a. First....</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">b. Then...</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">c. Next...</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">d. Last....</p>	RL.1.2	4 points (one point for each detail given in correct order)
<p>2. What was the story mostly about?</p>	RL.1.2 RL.1.3	<p>0—Does not give an answer or main idea does not make sense</p> <p>1—Approaching the standard. Talks about the topic but does not state what the main idea of the story is.</p> <p>2—Meets the standard. Describes the main idea of the text.</p>
<p>3. What are some details that support the main idea?</p>	RL.1.1 RL.1.2 RL.1.3	<p>0—Does not describe any details or details do not relate to main idea of the text</p> <p>1—Approaching the standard. Talks about details from the text but do not relate them to the main idea or only provides one detail.</p> <p>2—Meets the standard. Describes multiple details from the text relating to the main idea.</p>
<p>4. How do you think the character felt when (provide an event in the text)?</p>	RL.1.4 RL.1.7	<p>0—Does not have an answer or answer does not make sense.</p> <p>1—Approaching the standard. Describes how the character felt but does not elaborate how they know.</p> <p>2—Meets the standards. Describes</p>

		how a character felt in the example given and describes how or why he/she knows the character feels this way.
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Total Score: ___ /10