The Effects of Sustained Silent Reading, with Self-Selected Text, on Reading

Comprehension of At Risk Second Graders

By: Jeredine N. Williams

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Education

May 2019

Graduate Programs in Education

Goucher College

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

The objective of this research was to determine the effects of sustained silent reading, with self-selected text, on reading comprehension of at risk second graders. This study is a quasi-experimental design which included a pretest and posttest to compare reading comprehension of second grade students throughout the year. The measurement tools used to assess comprehension were the 2nd edition Fountas & Pinell Benchmark Assessment System and the Anne Arundel County Second Grade Benchmark. The posttest scores were significantly higher than the pretest score for both the Fountas & Pinell and Anne Arundel County benchmark assessments. Research on self-selected independent reading should continue to determine if self-selected independent reading can positively impact a student's ability to comprehend a variety of texts.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Reading comprehension has been a topic of high importance for many years in elementary education. Studies have shown that the between kindergarten and first grade, children show the most growth in reading (Skibbe et al., 2008). After first grade, students' growth in reading decreases. As students mature academically, literacy becomes essential for learning. Students are tasked with reading across all subject areas. This study aims to determine if self-selected silent reading helps to increase reading comprehension in second grade students. In second grade, students are given more tasks to complete using text and are not always given the time to explore books without a thinking job.

According to Eric Jensen, when children enter school, they should have been exposed to five million words and be able to use about 13,000 of those words. In children of poverty, this is not always true for an array of reason. One reason being the lack of exposure to and experiences with print outside of school. Poverty has been linked to negatively impacting the development of reading skills in a child's brain (Noble, Wolmetz, Och, Farah & McCandliss, 2006).

A student's ability to read has lasting effects on a child's life. In third grade, specifically, reading instruction shifts from learning how to read to reading on a topic to gain information. Reading is needed for all subject areas—including math. By third grade there is the assumption by the teacher that students have mastered the mechanics of how to read and therefore there is little to no explicit instruction in this area. According to Farstrup (2002) students who are

struggling in the basics of reading begin to fall behind. This continues through their life if not given the right remediation.

Some of the most affected by reading failure are children who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to West (2007), there is a significant achievement gap between children from lower socioeconomic family backgrounds and those who live in higher socioeconomic families. It was reported in a study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that students who are proficient in reading by the end of third grade are much more likely to graduate from high school, and to be economically successful as adults. Therefore it is increasingly important to focus on reading comprehension in education.

Young children often are less motivated to read if instructed to do so with prescribed material. Students often become motivated by giving them the option to choose their own reading material (Krashen, S., 2009). Teachers should provide an environment that is conducive to self-selected silent reading such as a selection of interesting books so that students are more motivated to read.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine whether self-selected independent reading affects the reading achievement/comprehension of At-Risk second grade students.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that self-selected independent reading will have no effect on the reading comprehension of At-Risk second grade students.

Operational Definitions

Independent:

Self-Selected Reading- a student choosing and reading by themselves, both fiction and
expository text, for at least 15 minutes

Dependent:

Reading Comprehension: understanding what is read. This will be measure by the Fountas &
Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System which provides teachers with tools and texts to observe
and quantify specific reading behaviors. Teachers are able to observe students' patterns while
reading as well as students' comprehension while engaging in comprehension conversations that
go beyond retelling.

CHAPTER II

The purpose of this literature review is to examine reading comprehension of low-income students at the primary level. Often focused on phonemic awareness and decoding skills, primary-teachers have long neglected reading comprehension instruction as an integral part of reading instruction (Duke, Bolck, 2012). Explicit reading comprehension instruction is needed for success in intermediate grades and beyond. For low income students simply finding adequate reading materials can be just the first of many hurdles when it comes to reading and reading comprehension. The first section of this literature review defines reading comprehension and its importance. In the second section reasons for reading comprehension difficulties are examined. The final section looks at current interventions schools employ to increase reading comprehension.

What is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension is an important part of academic, as well as, life-long learning. Reading comprehension is a complex process often regarded as the "essence of reading" (Durkin, 1993) and is the key to children obtaining an education. Dolores Durkin (1993) further defines reading comprehension as "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and the reader." Therefore, reading should be an active thinking process in which readers intentionally relate to the text and apply problem-solving thinking skills. Readers relate to the text through their use of previous experiences (often referred to as "prior knowledge" or schema), a range of cues from the text, and the situational context in which reading occurs. This allows the reader to construct a mental model of meaning from the text (Dole,1991).

In the 1950s education looked to psychology to uncover answers about overcoming academic difficulties—including reading comprehension. With influence of research conducted by many psychologists, most notably B. F. Skinner, instructional psychology took a decidedly more behavioral and task-analytic approach with the introduction of programmed instruction, mastery learning, and behavior modification (Dole, 1991). In this approach, readers were viewed as passive recipients of information in text accessed merely through the ability to decode text (Dole, 1991). Reading comprehension is now believed to be derived not only from the building blocks of decoding and vocabulary instruction but also through accessing prior knowledge, actively thinking, and receiving explicit instruction.

What are Some Reasons for Reading Comprehension Difficulties?

Reading comprehension is present in students' daily lives and is the key to academic and professional success (Snyder & Golightly, 2017). Whether reading maps and diagrams in social studies or tackling a word problem in math, students are expected to comprehend a variety of texts. It is for children, especially those who are financially disadvantaged, acquiring this skill can be difficult. The relationship children of poverty have with reading, or the lack thereof, has contributed to overwhelmingly lower rates of academic success in disadvantaged communities. Children of poverty struggle with access to materials and lower rates of vocabulary acquisition. Both of which serve as a significant hurdle to obtaining reading comprehension and, most importantly, academic success (Worthy, Turner, & Moorman, 1998).

Children of low-income families tend to have less access and exposure to reading materials than their affluent counter parts. The absence of a disposable income lessens the ability for families to purchase books, rigorous supplemental learning materials, and lessons that engage

children in learning and reading (Neuman, Celano, 2006). Students who have greater exposure to print have been found to have greater vocabulary sizes. Vocabulary is recognizing and understanding the meaning of words. This is an integral component of reading comprehension. Children with greater experiences with print can comprehend a variety of text better because they are able to recognize frequently used words (high frequency words) quickly, create meaning for unfamiliar words, and put words together to discern the meaning of sentences (Kuperman, Van Dyke, 2013). These skills also allow for students to move quickly through a text regardless of the reader's familiarity with the subject-matter or vocabulary (Hart, Rissley 2003). These skills also help aid students in fluency, which is linked to increased reading comprehension (Baker et al., 2008)

Lower print exposure and vocabulary acquisition have been founded to have long term effects. In a study conducted by Cunning and Stanovich, "1st grade reading comprehension was a significant predictor of 11th grade reading, and print exposure predicted a significant amount of additional variance in 11th grade reading comprehension" (Sparks, 2014). This further shows the importance of early exposure to print and its impact on one's trajectory for academic and lifelong success.

What are Some Current Interventions and Methods to Increase Reading Comprehension?

According to Farstrup (2002) "Qualified and talented teachers are essential if, effective, evidence-based reading instruction is to occur." Teachers play an important role in delivering adequate instruction that develops students' ability to comprehend a variety of texts. There are several interventions that have yielded favorable results in improving comprehension.

An existing research-based intervention called Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) strives to increase students reading comprehension through increasing student's daily reading volume as well as systematically teaching reading strategies through close reading (Institute of Education Services, 2017). Increased exposure to print subsequently leads to an increase in comprehension because children are being exposed to more vocabulary (Nueman, Celano, 2006). Direct small group instruction helps children to develop essential skills needed to aid in comprehension such as self-questioning. Although this intervention had had some success, because of its fast pace additional encouragement is sometimes needed to build stamina when face with longer texts.

Another intervention involves self-selected reading. This intervention occurs independently although some instruction on how to select correct books on the child's reading ability level may occur. Krashen (2009) based his assertion that engaging in interesting material is the one method of increasing reading ability on the fact that studies have shown that those who read more, read better. In many schools self-selected reading is prescribed through set aside time called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R). This method allows children to read for pleasure with little to no accountability. This allows for students to become fully engaged in reading and more motivated to read in abundance (Arnstead, 2005). Simply, self-selected reading aims to increase comprehension through student's own ability to select reading materials on a variety of topics that interest them.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension is the key to academic and lifelong success. As students continue to navigate through school, the expectation for them to comprehend a variety of text becomes

more prevalent and rigorous. For economically disadvantaged children, closing the gap early on the basics of reading comprehension, such as vocabulary and decoding, are important as they continue to need these skills throughout their academic career. According to the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), a teacher should seek to learn more about the reasons for reading deficits to become an effective instructor of reading. By helping students employ reading comprehension strategies, provide meaningful interventions, and supply a wide range of reading materials, teachers can help eliminate learning gaps and begin to help children end the cycle of poverty later in life.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The objective of this research is to determine the effects of sustained silent reading, with self-selected text, on reading comprehension of at risk 2nd graders. This study is a quasi-experimental design which included a pretest and posttest to compare data from October to June.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select the 17 participants. All students were enrolled in the class of the researcher. This allowed for easy access to the students and allowed the researcher time to include 15-20 minutes of self-selected silent reading daily. The 17 participants of the study were second grade students from a suburban elementary school in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. The population of this school included grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade with 82% of students being African American.

Of the 17 participants, 71% of students were African American with the remaining 29% being Hispanic. All students qualified for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) under state guidelines and six students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data for the pre and posttests was the Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Assessment System and the Anne Arundel County grade 2 reading benchmark

assessment. The Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Assessment places children on a scale from A-Z based on their reading and comprehension skills. This assessment is administered one on one and allows the teacher to observe reading behaviors, collect data on word accuracy, and engage in comprehension conversations that go beyond retelling a story. The percentage of words read accurately and the student's response to comprehension questions helps determine the student's independent, instructional, and frustration levels.
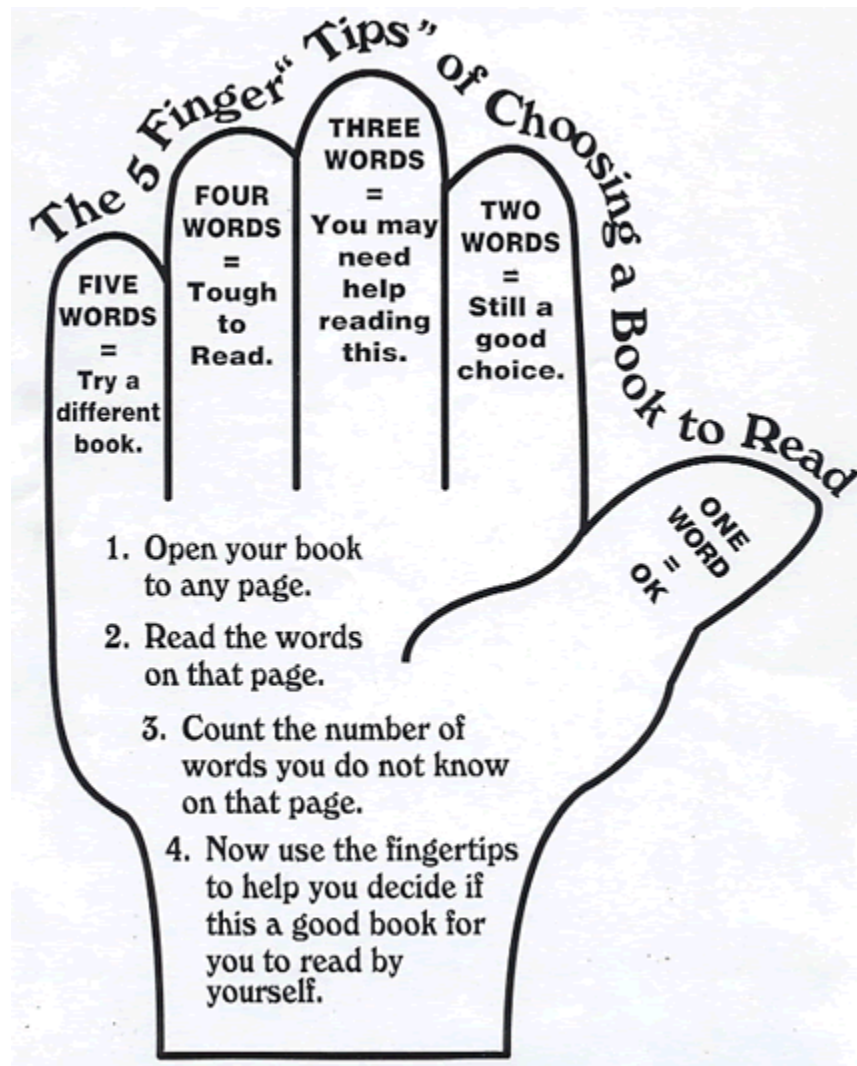
The Anne Arundel County Benchmark grade 2 benchmark is an assessment that measures comprehension. Students are asked to read a selection and answer multiple choice comprehension questions based on the text. This assessment is administered in a whole group setting unless a student's IEP or 504 plan states otherwise.

Procedure

This study began with the administering of the pretest in October 2017 and concluded with the posttest given in May 2018. After the Fountas and Pinell pretest, each student was given a guided reading level. Students were then explicitly taught about how to engage in independent silent reading—including how to select a good book. A whole group lesson was taught on using the 5-finger rules, as seen in Figure 2, to select a text that was "just right" to read to themselves independently. The teacher explained that they should select a book, open to any page, and put a finger up for every unfamiliar word they came across on the page. If they had no fingers up, then it meant the book was too easy for them and that they should select another book. If they did not know one or two words on the page, then the book was just right, and they should read the book. Three or four hard words meant that they could give it a try and five or more unknown words meant the book was too hard and that they should select another one.

The students were given their current reading level which they wrote on the front of their guided reading notebook. Students were instructed to select books from the leveled library but were not instructed to select books on their guided reading level. The researcher scheduled independent reading time from 12:30 to 12:50 p.m. daily.

Figure 1. *The 5 Finger Tips of Choosing a Book to Read*

The 5 Finger "Tips" of Choosing a Book to Read

FIVE WORDS = Try a different book.

FOUR WORDS = Tough to Read.

THREE WORDS = You may need help reading this.

TWO WORDS = Still a good choice.

ONE WORD = OK

1. Open your book to any page.
2. Read the words on that page.
3. Count the number of words you do not know on that page.
4. Now use the fingertips to help you decide if this a good book for you to read by yourself.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The objective of this research was to determine the effects of sustained silent reading, with self-selected text, on reading comprehension of at risk second graders.

The pretest and posttest reading scores on the Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Assessment System and the Anne Arundel County second grade reading quarterly assessment for second graders whose reading instruction included self-selection of text are presented below in Table I. The results were analyzed by a t test for the paired test subjects.

Table 1. *Pre and Posttest Reading Results of Students Self-Selecting Passages*

Test	Time	Mean	Number	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Assessment	Pretest	9.3	15	4.69	6.82	0.000*
	Posttest	11.2	15	4.13		
Anne Arundel County Reading Benchmark	Pretest	41.4	17	24.07	2.16	0.046*
	Posttest	52.6	17	27.37		

*Probability is less than 0.05

The null hypothesis, self-selected independent reading will have no effect on the reading comprehension of At-Risk second grade students, is rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Results

The researcher wanted to determine the effects of sustained silent reading, with self-selected text, on reading comprehension of at risk second graders. The posttest scores were significantly higher than the pretest scores on both the Fountas and Pinnell and Anne Arundel County benchmark assessment. Out of the 17 students who participated in the study, 82.3% showed growth in their instructional guided reading level. Of the 82.3%, 64% increased 2 or more levels. On the Anne Arundel County 2nd Grade reading assessment, the mean score improved by 11.2% from the pretest in October to the posttest in June. Therefore, students who participate in sustained silent reading with self-selected books for at least 15 minutes a day will improve in their comprehension.

Implications of the Results

The results of this study suggest that providing independent reading time with self-selected reading material will help students improve their comprehension. This was seen in both the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment as well as the Anne Arundel County Reading Assessment. There was a significant proportion of students who improved their guided reading level and another proportion of that group improved two or more guided reading levels. This implies that students who participated in silent reading with self-selected text gained the

necessary skills to comprehend a variety of texts—including decoding, vocabulary, and inner

dialogue and questioning while reading texts.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity can greatly impact the outcome of any study. There were internal and external threats to the validity in this study including the sampling method, mortality of data, timing and maturation.

The sampling method utilized in this study was convenience. The subjects were second grade students in the researcher's class and there was no randomization when choosing the test subjects. Furthermore, the sample size was limited to 17 students. This sample size was too small to make an accurate generalization about the effects of sustained silent reading on at risk second grade students.

This study was conducted over the course of an academic year. By the end of the study, data for some students was missing. There were two main factors for data mortality in this study. One of which was some of the students moved away and were no longer in the researcher's class and the other factor was refusal to take the posttest.

Lastly, timing and maturation were significant threats to validity. Without the expectation of daily independent reading of self-selected texts in every classroom, students are anticipated to naturally mature in their comprehension over the course of the year anyway. It is a countywide initiative that all second graders advance to level M (which is considered on grade level of second grade students as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment) by the end of the year. Also, over the course of the year, students did not always have the opportunity to participate in independent reading 15 minutes a day mainly due to external factors. There were scheduled and unscheduled breaks in instruction, field trips, assemblies, and other activities.

Silent reading was also not done during 2-hour delay or dismissal days due to the shortened instructional period.

Relationship to Existing Literature

Similar to this study, there have been various studies that have tried to explain the relationship between sustain silent reading and self-selected text on reading comprehension. In a study by McCullum, Sharp, Bell, and George, silent reading was founded to be a more efficient way to increase student comprehension. Although there was no significant difference in comprehension, students who read silently were able to comprehend text faster than their counterparts. This has a major implication when it comes to assessment—especially ones that assess reading comprehension skills because students will not have to worry about not finishing in time.

Ruth and Juth (2014) also strived to explain the correlation between silent reading with self-selected text and comprehension. The study outlined effective practices of sustained silent reading that were used in the class with the participants. One of which was explicit instruction of how students should choose their book. The method of teaching the "just right" strategy was also used in this study. Secondly, students were highly motivated to silently read because they were allowed to choose a book of interest to them. The two evidence-based reading interventions described in their study (Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR) and R5), resulted in an increase in reading comprehension. In contrast to this study, students were explicitly held accountable for their sustained silent reading by completing writing or discussing it afterwards with peers or a teacher.

Further Research

There several aspects of this study that could have been changed in order to get a better picture of how sustained silent reading with self-selected text effects reading comprehension. The study is not able to be generalized because the sampling size of 17 participants is too small. Also, there could have been an accountability measure as mentioned in Ruth and Juth's study. Students were highly motivated to self-select their own books but there was very little progress monitoring with the same measuring instrument for comprehension. Students were fully reassessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment about every 12 weeks. Holding students accountable for sustained silent reading with self-selected text with a standardized writing component would allow the teacher to frequently assess a student's comprehension.

References

Arnstead, C. (2005). Influences on students' self-selected, recreational reading material:

Literature R.. *School Libraries in Canada, 25*(1), 26-31. Retrieved from https://search-

proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/222535186?accountid=11164

Baker, S. K., Smolkowski, K., Katz, R., Fien, H., Seeley, J. R., Kame'enui, E. J., & Beck, C. T.

(2008). Reading fluency as a predictor of reading proficiency in low-performing, high-

poverty schools. *School Psychology Review, 37*(1), 18-37. Retrieved

from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.or

g/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=31706982&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Dole J, Duffy G, Roehler L, Pearson P. Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading

comprehension instruction. Review of Educational Research. 1991; 61:239–264

Duke, N. K. & Block, M. K. (2012). Improving Reading in the Primary Grades. The Future of

Children 22(2), 55-72. Princeton University. Retrieved December 17, 2017, from Project

MUSE database.

Durkin, D. (1993). Teaching them to read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Farstrup, A., & Samuels, S.J. (Eds.). (2002). What research has to say about reading instruction

(3rd ed.). Newark, *DE: International Reading Association.*

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (2003). The early catastrophe. *Education Review, 17*(1), 110-118.

Retrieved

from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.or
g/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=12156871&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Institute of Education Sciences Leveled Literacy Intervention Beginning Reading. (2017,
September). Retrieved December 7, 2017, from

Jensen, Eric, 1950-. (2009). Teaching with poverty in mind : what being poor does to kids' brains
and what schools can do about it. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD,

Kuperman, V., & Van Dyke, J. A. (2013a). Reassessing word frequency as a determinant of
word recognition for skilled and unskilled readers. *Journal of Experimental
Psychology.Human Perception & Performance, 39*(3), 802-823. doi:10.1037/a0030859

Neuman, S. B., & Celano, D. (2006). The knowledge gap: Implications of leveling the playing
field for low-income and middle-income children. *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*(2), 176-
201. doi:10.1598/RRQ.41.2.2

Noble, K.G., Wolmetz, M., Ochs, L.G., Farah, M.J., & McCandliss, B.D. (2006). Brain-behavior
relationships in reading acquisition are modulated by socioeconomic factors. *Developmental
science, 9 6*, 642-54 .

Skibbe, L. E., Grimm, K. J., Stanton-Chapman, T. L., Justice, L. M., Pence, K. L., & Bowles, R.
P. (2008). Reading trajectories of children with language difficulties from preschool through
fifth grade. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools, 39*(4), 475-86. Retrieved
from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-
com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/232589362?accountid=11164

Snyder, E., & Golightly, A. F. (2017). The effectiveness of a balanced approach to reading

    intervention in a second-grade student: A case study. *Education, 138*(1), 53-67. Retrieved

    from https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.goucher.idm.oclc.or

    g/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=125376919&site=ehost-live&scope=site

West, A. (2007). Poverty and educational achievement: Why do children from low income

    families tend to do less well in school. The Journal o f Poverty & Social Justice, 15(3), 283-

    297.

Worthy, J., Turner, M., & Moorman, M. (1998). The precarious place of self-selected

    reading. *Language Arts, 75*(4), 296-304. Retrieved from https://search-proquest-

    com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/196848868?accountid=11164