

Increasing Motivation in Students: To Support Reading Comprehension

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## Abstract

In the field of education, many educators have focused their instruction on motivating students to read. Reading is vital to being successful throughout an individual's life, and the emphasis reading has in school sets the stage for lifelong learning. The purpose of this study was to determine if increasing motivation in 5th grade students would improve reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking. The measurement tool to determine motivation levels was the Motivation to read Profile (MRP) and the measurement tool to assess reading ability was the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). This study involved the use of a pretest/posttest design to compare data from September of 2018 (before the intervention was administered) to data from May of 2019 (after the intervention was nearly completed). According to my research, most students who showed greater motivation for reading demonstrated the most growth. Research needs to continue to further prove if motivation is truly the reason for their success.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The ability to read proficiently and understand text is a skill that individuals need to be successful in life. Reading is a vital skill in finding a successful job within your lifetime. In elementary school, there is a vast emphasis on reading instruction. Students are expected to apply their reading skills cross-curricular throughout the school day. Reading materials and expectations have become rigorous requiring intermediate readers to be fluent in decoding as well as have an extensive vocabulary. These skills are necessary to make inferences and think deeply about the text. To master the necessary skills and strategies to become a successful reader, children must be committed to learning to read, thus motivated to read to practice skills and strategies. (Wigfield, 2016)

There continues to be a growing emphasis on the reading related to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The purpose of the K-5 CCSS is to develop a student's ability to read a wide range of texts, with increasing levels of complexity throughout the grades. Foundational reading skills are imperative, so that students can learn from multiple genres of text. There is also an emphasis on deep thinking about text, responding to it in writing and speaking, reading extensively, and in general, engaging in close reading of text. (Haager, 2013). Since there is a strong emphasis on reading and thinking within the standards, it is imperative that students develop the skills and habits to promote successful and proficient readers.

Motivation plays a large role in whether students enjoy what they read. Without motivation, people are unable to fully understand what is being read. The more someone reads, the more skilled they will be; and motivation is the key component to practicing reading. "Research and Theories" suggest that students who believe they are good readers and value

reading will show more motivation to read. This results in them reading more, which in turn helps them become better readers. (Cartwright, K. B., 2016) With this knowledge, students need to be encouraged to enjoy reading so they will become successful readers which will lead to college and career readiness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study is designed to determine if increasing motivation in students improve reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking?

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis was that there would be no effect on reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking with increasing motivation.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Motivation* is assessed with the Motivation to Read Profile.

*Comprehension* is assessed by using the Scholastic Reading Inventory. Fifth grade students are expected to finish the year reading at least 830, according to the Scholastic Reading Inventory. Students enter fifth grade at varying levels based on the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This literature review reviews motivation and how important it is within the education setting. Involvement and commitment on teacher retention. Section one provides an overview of motivation. Section two identifies the connection between reading and motivation. Section three describes problems with motivation, and section four discusses ways to increase motivation in the classroom.

#### **Motivation**

According to Reeve (2016), Motivation is “...any internal process that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior.” Within the classroom motivation allows students to focus on learning. In looking at the definition, Baumeister (2016) suggests the simpler definition of motivation is wanting change in self or change in the environment. Within the second definition, ideas of motivation include any changes considered desirable. This could include not only behavior, but also self-concept, emotions, affect, the surrounding environment, the quality of one’s relationships, etc. Baumeister takes the position that motivation comes first, then emotion. He feels that emotions only occur if events are motivationally relevant. Other emotion theorists often take the other side. Silvan Tomkins (1970), for example, argued that people act to get what they want and need only because they first experience fear of missing something that they need. (Reeve, 2016).

#### **Reading and Motivation**

It is critical that we recognize the importance of reading development in emergent readers, as it plays a significant role in later academic success. Baker and colleagues noted, “The dispositions and interests in reading established in the primary grades determine

achievement not only in grades 3 and 5 but as far into the future as grade 11". (Sperling, Sherwood, & Hood, 2013, p. 461)

Research conducted with intermediate and middle school students addresses the motivation of prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade readers. There is a need to measure reading motivation in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade emergent readers. Emergent reading abilities during these years, support higher reading achievement. Determining the relationship between positive reading motivation and the development of emergent reading skills is needed to predict reading ability. (Sperling, et al. 2013)

In primary grades, students show literacy skills that have proven to be predictors of later reading comprehension abilities. Literacy skills such as word identification, oral language, fluency, and vocabulary predict reading comprehension accurately in adolescence. If these stay undeveloped, comprehension will suffer. As students enter adolescence, the focus on word identification decrease but does not disappear. When readers develop basic word identification skills such as phonological awareness, orthographic processing, and phonological decoding, they can increase in reading fluency. After a student has mastered word identification, the importance of fluency increases. Reading fluently will give students an opportunity to process the information quickly and allow for efficient comprehension of extended texts. Another predictor of effective reading is reading vocabulary. Reading contributes to growth in vocabulary and understanding relating to background knowledge. When readers have mastered each predictor, we can expect readers to be effective when analyzing and understanding text. To be an effective reader, individuals must prove their understanding through literal and inferential thinking. Inferential thinking within text is a more complex skill that we expect readers to achieve. Studies of young readers show that skilled readers are better at inferential understanding

compared to literal text comprehension which proves that these predictors are necessary to achieve. (Duncan, McGeown, Griffiths, Stothard, & Dobai, 2016). In determining predictors, it is important to understand why some readers show emergent reading skills while others do not and whether motivation plays a role in the ability to learn to read.

The expectations on the ability to read change as children get older. We can start to see changes and differences that occur between the ability to read (decode) words and reading comprehension skills. We know that higher-order reading skills are also important to become a successful reader and critical for students entering higher education. The finding that is most consistent among researchers is that “the construction of coherent representations of text in memory is central to successful reading comprehension. “A useful mental representation contains the various pieces of information provided in the text, is integrated with the reader’s prior knowledge and is easily accessed and applied in a variety of situations” (Wasserman, 2012, p. 43).

According to Theodore Wasserman (2012), Reading Comprehension is described as “reading coherence”. Coherence in reading is making meaningful connections to what is read. Tapiero (2007) identified three generations of coherence models which span different abilities in readers. The first-generation emphasized the mental images of texts and activating the reader’s prior knowledge. This interpretation is on a personal level which highlights memory. Second-generation models use higher-level organization within thinking using schema to understand text. The third-generation models describe comprehension as a “continuous and dynamic fluctuation of activation patterns.” (Wasserman, 2012, p. 43). Within every coherence model, readers need to be aware of the need for attention and working memory as they pertained to reading. Attention is defined as “engagement of cognitive resources on certain information” (Wasserman,

2012, p. 44). Readers need to not focus on extraneous information that is not pertinent to understanding the big picture. As authors explain, reading coherence also includes a motivational emphasis. Incorporating high-interest material would attract readers and would aid readers in working memory resulting in improved reading comprehension and effective learning. (Wasserman, 2012).

Motivation occurs for many reasons. Intrinsic motivation focuses on behaviors driven by internal rewards. Extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards. Children are born with the intrinsic motivation to learn (Harter, 1978), however studies show that this begins to decline around third grade continuing through eighth grade. Intrinsic motivation is the “foundation for a desire to learn and find information independently. The goal is to assist all students in becoming active and creative locators, evaluators, and users of information to solve problems and to satisfy their own curiosity”,” (Crow, 2017, p. 52) Intrinsic reading motivation focuses on the student’s willingness to read or complete an activity because it is enjoyable. According to Bråten (2017) intrinsic reading motivation contributes to the ability to comprehend text. Without intrinsic motivation, children rely on external rewards to motivate them in reading such as grades. One theory on motivation is the Self Determination Theory. Crow (2017), described this theory as the idea that individuals have certain needs, autonomy, perceived competence, and relatedness, that must be met to intrinsically motivate others. Autonomy refers to the desire to do a task. At times that desire has extrinsic reasons such as deadlines or rewards for doing the task. In the classroom, when the student feels compelled to do the task it decreases their creativity, problem solving, abstract thinking and processing. When considering autonomy, choice within tasks enhance a sense of self-initiation. Students then feel responsible for their own actions and take ownership in their decisions. When people have choice in a task, they

enjoy doing it. When they oversee the task, they are encouraged to ask their own questions as they investigate, they are more interested, and they may learn more. Perceived competence is feeling that the person can conduct a task. People need to feel they can do a job before they begin doing it. (Crow, 2017)

### **Problems with Motivation**

Proficient reading comprehension is crucial for success in every academic area, however there are multiple factors that affect student's intrinsic motivations to succeed. One factor is the ability to read accurately. As students advance in their education, they are expected to read and write across content areas with increasing rigor. Readers must be fluent in decoding and recognizing words to understand text. As text becomes more demanding and their vocabulary and knowledge base grows. These cognitive strategies allow them to make inferences and analyze text critically. Children must commit time and effort to these skills and strategies to master them. Many children struggle with reading early in their education due to the rigor and expectations. Difficulties in reading effects their motivation to persevere and think critically. Children become less positive and less enthusiastic about reading as they grow older. For instance, in a study on attitudes toward reading, children reported a decline in liking reading in the late elementary years. The 2015 NAEP report indicated that children in middle school do not engage in reading if it is not mandatory. In another study, middle school students described the texts they read in science classes as boring, irrelevant, and difficult to understand. (Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016)

There are several factors that affect intrinsic motivation. Instructional practices are one factor that can affect intrinsic motivation. The instructional practice can be as simple as the teacher being unable to "hook" the learner within the lesson. Teachers using unappealing text or

limiting students' choice negatively affect intrinsic motivation and autonomy. Lastly, when students do not believe that what they are learning is relevant, they are less engaged. Student's intrinsic motivation correlates positively with their reading achievement and predicts their reading achievement for the future. Gender is another factor that affects motivation. Females show greater reading motivation and have more positive views about reading than boys. In one study, boys and girls had similar beliefs about their abilities in reading early in elementary school, but boys' beliefs in reading changed more quickly than girls as they grew older. Another factor that effects motivation is ethnic differences in reading. For example, in one study, African American students often report greater self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and valuing of reading than European Americans. With this knowledge, we can determine that ethnicity helps to shape students' motivation to read which then affects academic performance. (Wigfield, et al., 2016) Another factor that affects motivation is the willingness to put forth the mental effort. To achieve, students need to value the tasks and set goals to achieve by completing them.

As described above, there are many factors that effect a student's ability to understand text. The key part to students believing that they can conduct complex tasks that involve critical-analytic thinking is motivation. When they believe they are capable and show interest they are more likely to work hard and be successful. (Miele, & Wigfield, 2014)

### **Ways to Increase Motivation**

Research has shown that motivation contributes to school accomplishments and predicts reading achievement in third through fifth grade. Students who are motivated to initiate reading tend to be exposed to a greater volume of text. When students are not intrinsically motivated to read, there are instructional practices that increase motivation for reading and reading comprehension. First, using content goals for reading instruction expands students' interest and

motivation. When students are interested in the topic, they focus on gaining meaning, knowledge, and understanding deeply rather than on learning skills. Second, allowing students to make choices in the classroom is a motivational practice. When students can make choices such as the text they read, the tasks they perform, or their partners during instruction, their intrinsic motivation for reading rises. Third, using the properties of the text can increase interest. Students will be more motivated to read text when a topic is interesting and relevant, and the format is appealing. Fourth, the social goals or cooperative learning structures within reading instruction increase student motivation and achievement. Fifth, the students' perception of the teacher is associated with intrinsic motivation for academic activities. Students need to know that the teacher understands them and cares about their progress. Sixth, activities such as reading for Pizza Hut prizes or working for recognition increase motivation. These extrinsic rewards for reading can be controversial because long-term they do not increase intrinsic motivation. Lastly, highlighting goals for mastery in the classroom is a practice supported by most motivational theorists. When students read proficiently, they gain knowledge from text, understand stories fully, and grasp the main ideas or themes of the text. (Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, and al, 2006).

Another way to increase motivation in the classroom is by supplying stimulating tasks. This was one of the most highly rated practices that increase motivation for unmotivated students. Stimulating tasks may increase situational interest. According to elementary and secondary school teachers, hands-on activities for students are stimulating for students. According to Zahorik, hands on activities consisted of a range of interactions in which students used manipulatives, as well as engaged in projects such as growing seedlings in science. Sixty-eight teachers in third through sixth grade reported that the motivation of low-achieving students

increased when books were related to their preferred extracurricular activity (Guthrie, et al., 2006). For example, children who rode horses liked to read books about horses, and children who watched or played football liked to read about football.

Another model shared to increase motivation is Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). This instruction is long-term, and is an extensive reading comprehension intervention where students read and discuss self-selected texts that they are interested in. This method increases student knowledge about academic topics presented through hands-on activities. Teachers begin with hands-on activities before reading to increase students' intrinsic motivation to read a text. This creates openings for more questions, attention to task and active learning. This gets students excited about reading which in turn improves reading comprehension because they increase students' engagement with text and deepen their understanding. (Bråten, et al., 2017)

Another way to motivate students is by using electronic devices to read from the computer screen to make reading more accessible and different. Studies have shown, that reading comprehension levels of the students reading from a screen in informative text type were statistically higher than the levels of the students reading from the printed material. In the study that Greenlee Moore and Smith (1996) conducted, a group of students (9-10 years of age) read from an electronic device, while the other group read from the printed material. The results showed that, when text was more complex it was easier understood within the electronic environment. In a study conducted by Pearman in 2008, 2nd grade students used electronic story books to strengthen the reading comprehension of students. Matthew (1995) completed another study with third grade students. In both situations, books included mobile elements, and interactions which created interest in the students (Aydemir, Ozturk, & Horzum, 2013). Both

studies prove that struggling readers implemented comprehension strategies better online than with traditional texts. At times, electronic texts can be shorter and not as overwhelming. In our classrooms we see more time spent with digital text than with traditional texts (Duncan, et al., 2016).

Another process to motivate learners is through Game Based Learning (GBL). With the concept for discovery learning, Piaget developed a constructivist learning theory in which children learn through experience and social interaction. Additionally, Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of social interaction. He believed games, simulations, and problem-solving activities are examples of social constructivist classroom. This evolved to games to enhance learning. Such games are introduced through media sources that catch students' attention and interest in a variety of subject areas. GBL engages students through interactive, problem-solving situations that encourage critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and adaptability for functional knowledge acquisition. The game-players are usually highly motivated to engage in the gaming activities. In this study, six traditional games were presented to children that their parents, or grandparents played while growing up. They are familiar so they can be played at home with their parents or classmates. Through this study it shows that integration of traditional games in the elementary schools provide increased learning outcomes. This is seen, not just on test scores, but also in children's interest and engagement, as well as interaction with the teacher and classmates. (Trajkovik, Malinovski, Vasileva-Stojanovska, & Vasileva, 2018).

It is imperative that students independently practice motivation strategies to be successful. Self-regulation learning strategies are necessary tools for students' success and have a close relationship with self-efficacy and academic achievement. When students acquire skills

and learning strategies, they realize that they have greater control over learning and success. They can achieve success using it and consider themselves as self-efficacy learners. Self-regulation of students predicts their self-efficacy and their future motivation. This then leads to deeper learning and higher academic performance. (Mirhosseini, Lavasani, & Hejazi, 2018).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to determine if increasing motivation in students will improve reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking.

#### **Design**

This is a quasi-experimental study used a pretest to determine students' motivation to read, and a random sample to assess motivational activities. The pretest was administered to determine students' thoughts and feelings toward reading. Students will be encouraged to read at home using a reward calendar based on minutes read and motivated to read at school through a book club. After the 6 weeks of motivation activities, the same assessment on thoughts and feeling was administered to see if students 'mindset changed. Progress was then measured using both the Scholastic Reading Inventory and Fountas and Pinnell.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study were a sample of fifth grade students at a public elementary school in Bel Air, Maryland. The sample consisted of 11 males and 9 females who were ages ten and eleven. The sample is composed of Caucasian, African American, Asian, and Hispanic students. Within this group, thirteen of the students were reading below grade level and seven students were reading on grade level. Eight of the students have an Individualized Education Plans which five of those involve deficits in reading and two students 504 Plan. Of these students, 7 received free lunch through FARMs.

#### **Instruments**

The original Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) was developed by Henk and Melnick in 1996. This profile assesses self-concept and task value of reading. The MRP consists of two

basic instruments: the Reading Survey and the Conversational Interview. Since then the survey has had revisions to reflect cultural and linguistic changes such as digital reading. The Reading Survey is a self-report, group-administered instrument. The Conversational Interview is designed for individual administration. It is designed to be administered to grades 2 through 6. Malloy (2013) shares “It is practical for classroom use, group administered, and able to reflect value of reading and self-concept as a reader.”

### **Procedure**

Fifth grade students will have the ability to take part in motivational activities through a six-week period. Before the activities take place, students will all be administered the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP). During the first five minutes of class, students will listen to book talks given by their teachers. This talk will be used to catch reader’s attention. After the book talks are complete, students will be given the option to choose a book to read as well as participate in a book club. Book club will meet once a week during the students’ lunch time. The teacher will lead and facilitate a discussion to get students excited about what they are reading. Students will also take part in added motivational activities during the reading class period. After the six-week period, students will again take the MRP. Student’s motivation levels will be assessed as well as achievement levels on Fountas and Pinnell and the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study is designed to determine if increasing motivation in students improve reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking. The data gathered included the “Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)” as the independent variable. Book Club Participation and reading achievement measured by achievement levels on the Scholastic Reading Inventory were dependent variables.

Table 1 depicts the dependent (paired) t test for Reading Achievement using the Scholastic Reading Inventory. There was statistically significant growth from Fall to Spring.

Table 1

*Independent (Paired) t test for Scholastic Reading Inventory*

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
SRI Spring 2019 - SRI Fall 2018	140.3	106.78	23.9	190.3	90.3	5.9	19	.000

Book Club Participation and Meeting Grade Level Expectations were categorical data in that the data was “Yes” or “No.” Thus, chi square analyses were run, and no statistically significant findings were obtained.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study is designed to determine if increasing motivation in students improves reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking. The data gathered included the “Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)” as the independent variable. Dependent variables were the Book Club Participation and their reading achievement were measured by achievement levels on the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

Data analysis in Chapter 4 found statistically significant growth from pre to post on the Scholastic Reading Inventory Assessment. However, chi square analyses of Book Club Participation and Grade Level Standards found no statistically significant differences.

#### **Threats to Validity**

All educational research studies suffer from two types of threats to validity. Those are referred to as external and internal validity threats. Threats to external validity are due to Selection Bias and Situational factors. Selection bias happens when the sample is not randomized. Situational factors are based on the situation in which the testing occurs such as time and location.

The Selection Bias that poses as an external threat to the study include a homogeneously group of 20 fifth grade students who are performing at or below grade level. This group of students are readers who are reading on or below grade level expectations. Historically, readers who are below grade level are not motivated which affects the number of students willing to demonstrate a form of motivation. Additionally, 8 of those students receive special education services and one student who receives ELL services. This sample does not provide an exact representation of the whole 5th grade or students at this age level.

The Situational factor that created an added external threat was the absence of a student. This resulted in the test being taken at a different time than the whole class. During the time of testing, students were separated to be allowed for extended time and some students were required to read aloud to the special educator while others read internally.

Circumstances that would affect the internal validity of the study relates to testing and the choice of subjects. Testing relates directly on the outcome of the testing situation due to the test itself. The selection of subjects was affected due to the size of the sample.

The Scholastic Reading Inventory is an assessment that students begin taking in second grade. While the passages are different, every question is laid out in a similar manner. During instruction, teachers also focus on “teaching to the test,” as a means of helping students to be successful with the format of the test.

Furthermore, another internal threat to validity was the choice of subjects. Being that the sample size was only 20 students, there was limited information in determining if motivation was a key component to reading comprehension.

### **Comparison of the Results of This Study to the Research in Chapter II**

The study was created to determine if motivation plays a key role in reading comprehension. According to the literature presented, motivation is important for students to have to succeed in reading. When students believe they are capable of reading and show interest in reading, they are more likely to be successful. (Miele, & Wigfield, 2014). This literature, along with others, support the findings of my research as follows. Within the study sample, 50% of the students showed a higher self-concept of reading as well as a higher value of reading. Of those students, 90% either met grade level expectations or grew in reading skills up to one year above. Student showing a higher value of reading also demonstrated over a year's growth. Two

students within the sample did not show any motivation through the profile or growth in reading ability. The research also showed that the book club did not play a role in achievement, or long-term motivation.

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Directions for Future Research**

The purpose of this research was to determine if increasing motivation in students improves reading comprehension, inferential understanding, and deep thinking. According to my research, motivation plays a large role in a student's ability to prove reading comprehension abilities. As educators, we focus our instruction on motivating students to be the key component to their success in learning. The more that students read, the higher their vocabulary will be, which in turn supports their ability to comprehend text. Researchers have completed research to identify and determine that motivation increases student learning. Being that motivation is something people have and exhibit over an extended period, future research that continues to monitor for motivation can further prove if motivation is truly the reason for their success.

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