

The Effects of Explicitly Teaching Sight Words on the Reading Levels of Kindergarten Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to determine the impact of explicit and nonexplicit sight word instruction on word acquisition and reading levels of kindergarten students. To compare and highlight the differences in student performance as a result of explicit and nonexplicit teaching, a two-pronged approach was used to complete the study. The first approach used descriptive statistics to assess changes in students' reading levels according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. The second approach used a *t*-test analysis to determine if there were significant differences in the number of sight words students acquired when comparing the two groups. The null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference in growth in reading levels of students reading below grade level when comparing students instructed using explicit sight word instruction to those instructed using nonexplicit sight word instruction was tested and rejected. The data showed significant differences between the pretest and posttest results for both instructional groups. The results indicated that students not taught sight words explicitly had a higher average growth score in reading level and sight word identification than the students taught sight words explicitly.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students enter kindergarten at various ability levels and with different kinds of prior care experiences. Based on students' reading levels upon beginning kindergarten, they receive instruction to best support them as learners and improve their reading levels by the time they move onto first grade. According to the National Reading Panel, there are five components in the development of independent reading that include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Konza, 2014). Students who are struggling to grasp the complex and critical skill of reading, can be supported by reading intervention groups. Such groups use explicit teaching and repetitive routines to build the knowledge of students involved. When learning to read words independently, students will need the skills to decode words and recognize words by sight. There are 13 words that account for approximately 25% of words in all school texts (Johns & Wilke, 2018, p.3). Helping students build their sight vocabulary can increase their fluency, accuracy, and comprehension skills when reading.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of the explicit teaching of sight words on the reading levels of kindergarten students currently reading below grade level.

This project was completed at a school where in the previous academic year, 56% of kindergarten students moved onto first grade reading below grade level as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. It was observed that students were struggling with the identification of sight words in texts they read, which impacted their ability to read the complete text and answer questions about what was read. Teachers saw the need for

interventions and best practices that could influence positive reading outcomes (Hagan-Burke, Coyne, Kwok, Simmons, Kim, Simmons, & McSparran, 2013). Teaching sight words to students as they learn to read can “provide early reading success and enhanced word identification” (Bijl, Alant, & Lloyd, 2006, p.43). The ability to read independently is critical in students’ academic success in kindergarten and in future grades since the independent reading expectation is heightened every year and students are tasked with reading across all subject areas.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there would be no significant difference in growth in reading levels of students reading below grade level when comparing students instructed using explicit sight word instruction to those instructed using nonexplicit sight word instruction as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System.

Operational Definitions

Reading Level: This dependent variable can be operationally defined using an assessment that measures reading levels called The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Using this assessment, students’ independent reading levels are measured by their ability to read independently and comprehend text. This is measured pre-and post-instruction and an alphabetic level is given as the score. The scores range from Concepts of Print (COP) to Z.

Explicit Instruction: This independent variable is defined as the direct teaching, modeling, and practicing of skills broken down into clear components. In this study, practices included small groups, flashcards, games, and use of appropriate leveled texts.

Nonexplicit Instruction: This independent variable is defined as a teaching style in which the learning is embedded in the content and not broken down into simpler concepts. In this study, practices included one large comprehensive lists of all sight words for the school year and

reading of words when embedded in text.

Sight Words: This independent variable is operationally defined by a list of commonly used words provided by the public-school system for students to memorize and automatically recognize.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Children’s literacy development during the elementary school years is the foundation for their academic success and, to an extent, their life success in their later years” (Strickland & Townsend, 2011, p.1). Learning to read is a complex process and critical skill. According to Phillips and Feng (2012), the process of learning to read independently consists of learning to decode words and learning to read words by sight. Through phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, students learn letter sound correspondence, word patterns, and skills to help read words, but there are words used frequently in text that do not follow typical sound patterns and must be memorized by sight. These words that must be memorized by sight are referred to as sight words, or high-frequency words. The purpose of this literature review is to understand the relationship between sight word knowledge and student reading levels. This review will be broken into four main parts to better address independent reading levels, sight word instructional strategies, and the link between the two. The first section will explain early literacy skills, reading levels in elementary school, and the importance of meeting the grade level standard in independent reading abilities. The second section will explain how sight words can often be one of the barriers to achieving grade-level reading status and the importance of sight word instruction. The third section will discuss best practices and effective instructional strategies to use in the teaching of sight words. The fourth section of this review will summarize the link between sight word knowledge and reading levels.

Students’ Independent Reading Levels

Kindergarten students can read, or listen to a parent read, about 150 books a year (Wolf, 1998). This exposure to books at a young age can help develop an interest in reading and

readiness for early literacy skills. As Gentile and Hoot (1983) explain, students enter kindergarten at various levels of reading abilities, some learn to read before and some learn to read during the kindergarten school year. Those who have had prior exposure to books have an advantage over students growing up in a home with few opportunities to be read to or look at books. It is important to support the needs of learners in reading despite what prior experiences they may have or lack. Children's early reading acquisition is complex and multidimensional, but evidence has shown the positive influences of early intervention on reading outcomes (Hagan-Burke et al., 2013). Students struggling to build and master skills necessary to read independently benefit from working in reading intervention programs which focus on using direct instruction and meeting the specific needs of the learners. In a study conducted by VanGorp, Segers and Verhoeven (2014) kindergarten students struggling with early literacy skills participated in repeated reading intervention. Results from their study indicate that "a repeated reading intervention in kindergarten, in which pre-readers are brought into a full alphabetic stage, is an effective method to improve reading speed and reading accuracy" (p.260).

The use of early intervention programs and developmentally appropriate literacy curriculum have been effective in promoting student growth in word recognition, book interest, and reading levels (Shea & Cole, 2014). Students' reading levels are measured to determine the complexity of text they can read and comprehend independently. Students must be able to apply reading skills and strategies to read each word and discuss/answer questions about what they read. Students are expected to read on a certain reading level as determined by each grade. That grade level standard can be used to determine which students are reading above grade level, on grade level, or below grade level. Struggling readers do not yet have all the skills mastered they need to be independent readers and research demonstrates that once failure sets in, a great deal of

intervention and support is needed for students to catch up to their peers. Therefore, it is imperative that educators support young learners in developing all necessary skills to read on a level appropriate for their grade.

The Impact of Sight Word Knowledge on Reading Skills

Knowledge of sight words is considered a necessary skill for students to read on a level appropriate for their grade level standard. “High-frequency words are critical if students are to become efficient and effective readers” (Johns & Wilke, 2018, p.3). Sight words are seen repeatedly in text and if students do not know them, it can be difficult and discouraging for them to try to read. Many word count studies show that proficient readers can recognize around 50,000 words at sight, or automatically. The lack of sight word knowledge beginning readers and struggling readers have can be a barrier standing in the way of them reading independently. When children are confident in their ability to master a skill, they are more likely to engage in activities that require that skill and are eager to persist through challenges and difficulties (Metsala, Wigfield & McCann, 1996). Students who have a strong sense of reading ability are motivated to read more and “more reading leads to better reading” (Sanden, 2012, p.223). When students do not know sight words, they do not yet have the confidence in their skills and ability to read independently. Lack of confidence in reading ability can lead to less desire to read. Knowledge of sight words is necessary and learning sight words that are seen repeatedly in text gives students automaticity. Students’ independent reading levels are measured by their ability to read words and comprehend text. If students are struggling to read each word they encounter, it will be challenging for them to focus on the content and recall what they have read. According to Johns and Wilke (2018), there are 13 words that account for about 25% of words in all school texts. By teaching students to identify sight words by memory, they will be able to recognize and

read them in text.

Instructional Strategies for Teaching Sight Words

The ability to identify words is necessary for reading and comprehension, so students must be taught words they will encounter frequently when reading (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). Children learn best in a variety of ways and have different learning styles, so educators must design learning programs that offer developmentally appropriate practices and learning experiences to both support and challenge learners (Shea & Cole, 2014). Developmentally appropriate practices involve instruction that responds to children's needs, provides organized and structured environments, and allows students to be actively involved in the learning. Effective teachers provide explicit instruction on sight words and give students meaningful opportunities to practice and apply their skills. Students struggling with reading are more likely to master essential reading skills and strategies if explicit instruction is used.

Teaching sight words to students using appropriate texts makes the words meaningful and the encouragement to read books can increase automaticity and build confidence. Repeated exposure to sight words in text allows students to recognize orthographic patterns in the words and as a result improve their sight vocabulary. Johns and Wilke (2018) explain that research supports the use of sight word games in improving students' sight word achievement. Some games that can be used to teach sight words include, word searches, treasure hunts, sight word bingo, memory card games, and go fish. Repetition in sight word practice is also important and words learned by students should be reviewed regularly. Flashcards can be used to review sight words with students at school and at home. Philips and Feng (2012) support the use of a multi-sensory approach to learning sight words in which students receive direct instruction from the teacher paired with writing, drawing, games, songs and movement activities.

Summary: The Link Between Sight Word Knowledge and Meeting Grade Level Reading Standards

“Research has indicated that good readers are superior at identifying words” (Rupley et al., 2009, p.131). As beginning readers and struggling readers are explicitly taught new sight words and given opportunities to practice, their knowledge of sight words will improve. As students’ sight vocabularies improve, they are able to read as well as comprehend texts that increase in the level of difficulty (Ehri, 2011). Reading at grade level standards requires students to independently read texts and comprehend what was read. According to John and Wilke (2018), students who know a core of about 200 sight words by mastery, will possess a solid foundation for reading. Knowledge of words by sight allows students to read independently and comprehend independently. Sight word knowledge and application when reading is a skill that can be a barrier when the words are unfamiliar to students, but once words are mastered, the sight words will become a tool for students to recognize words instantly and become successful readers. Meeting grade level standards in reading independently increases in difficulty with each school year but giving students the knowledge and ability to read words automatically from memory allows them to become skilled readers.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study was designed to analyze the effects of explicitly teaching sight words on the reading levels of kindergarten students grouped homogeneously. A quasi-experimental, pretest - posttest design was used for this research project where students were given a pretest in October and a posttest in May. Two groups of kindergarten students were assessed in this study. One group of students, who had been performing below grade level expectations in reading, participated in a reading group that explicitly taught sight words daily. The second group of kindergarten students were of similar abilities, with slightly higher prereading skills and they participated in a reading group that did not explicitly teach sight words daily. The test results from the pretest and posttest were then compared to determine if teaching sight words explicitly had an impact on the reading level of the kindergarten students as measured by The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Data was analyzed using a two-prong approach including descriptive statistics highlighting differences in students' posttest reading levels as well as a t-test analysis aimed at detecting significant differences in sight words learned based on group assignment. In this study, the independent variable was the explicit teaching of sight words and the dependent variable was the reading level of the students.

Participants

Thirty-six kindergarten students ranging in age from five to six years old and split into two groups, one of which received explicit sight word instruction and one of which did not, participated in this study. The study was conducted at a public school in a suburban area in kindergarten classrooms during reading group time. Participating in the study were students

grouped for reading homogeneously. In September, all 76 kindergarten students were individually assessed on letter and sound identification, sight word knowledge, and decoding skills to determine placement in four leveled reading groups. The reading groups, which consisted of 36 students split into two classes, were comprised of the lowest performing students having little to no prereading skills. Students in these groups had a range of prior experiences, some of them attended preschool, some attended daycare, and some had no prior care experiences outside of the home. Of the 18 students participating in the reading group explicitly taught sight words daily, there were 6 females and 12 males, five students with disabilities who had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), four students who received speech services, and one student who received ESOL services. The class had 14 Caucasian students, 3 African American students, and 1 Asian student. Of the 18 students participating in the reading group not explicitly taught sight words daily, there were 7 females and 11 males, no students with disabilities who had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), one student who received speech services, and no students who received ESOL services. The class had 15 Caucasian students, 2 African American students, and 1 Hispanic student. The 36 participants represented a wide range of socioeconomic strata.

Instrument

The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System was used as both the pretest and posttest in this study. It is a standardized assessment used county-wide where this study was conducted. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is used to determine student's independent and instructional reading levels and must be administered one-on-one by an educator who has been trained in the administration of the assessment. To complete the assessment, students read aloud texts that increase in difficulty from level A to level Z.

According to the assessment and county expectations, students in kindergarten should be reading a level D book independently by the end of the school year to meet grade level expectations. The assessment includes both fiction and nonfiction texts for each level and the student is asked to read the text aloud while the testing administrator observes reading behavior, records any errors and self-corrections, and makes notes on fluency. When the students have finished reading the text, they engage in conversation with the administrator on what they recall and answer prompting questions which are recorded and scored as well. Based on the score from the students' reading accuracy and comprehension responses after reading, it is determined if each text is on the students' independent levels, instructional levels, or if it is too difficult. This formative reading assessment is proven to be reliable and provides stable and consistent information on the reading levels of students (Clay, Fountas, Pinnell, Gomez-Bellenge, Thomas, Rodgers, Wang, Shultz, Pikilski, Wixson, Campbell, Gough, Beatty, 2019.)

Procedure

In September, 76 kindergarten students at the school were given a county-wide assessment called the Kindergarten Literacy Assessment (KLA). The KLA was used to determine their placement in reading groups based on current ability levels. Eighteen students knowing between 0 to 9 letters, 0 to 3 sounds, and 0 to 2 sight words, were placed in the lowest reading group and received explicit sight word instruction daily. Eighteen students knowing between 15 to 24 letters, 4 to 18 sounds, and 3 to 15 sight words, were placed in the second to the lowest reading group and did not receive explicit sight word instruction daily.

In October, the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment was administered one-on-one with each child by the classroom teacher. The students were shown two level A books, one fiction, and one nonfiction and were then asked to select which one they wanted to read. The

students were read the title by the teacher and asked to read the text aloud while the teacher recorded reading behaviors, errors, and self-corrections. The teacher then conducted a comprehension conversation and recorded and scored the responses. Based on the students' reading and comprehension scores their independent, instructional, and frustration levels were determined. If the level A text was too hard and resulted in a frustration level, the students' reading levels would be considered Concepts of Print (COP). If their scores from the level A text resulted in an independent level, the students would move onto the next level until they hit a level text that was too hard and considered to be their level of frustration. Upon testing students in October, their independent reading levels were all determined to be Concepts of Print.

After the pretest data was collected, the 18 lowest performing students were explicitly taught sight words daily while working in their reading group with the classroom teacher, reading specialist, and special educator. Sight word instruction occurred daily through whole group instruction, flash cards, games, poems, small groups, and one-on-one practice. A sight word wall was hung, and two new sight words were explicitly taught and practiced each week. Weekly homework was sent home having the students focus on the two assigned sight words of the week. During whole group instruction, the sight words for the week were read, spelled, chanted, and written daily. During small group instruction, students used the "mix it and fix it" strategy from Dr. Jan Richardson's reading program utilizing dry erase board, markers, and letter tiles to practice reading, building, and unscrambling the words. Simple poems and texts based on students' reading levels were used which included the sight words being focused on that week. Games like BINGO, KABOOM, relay races, memory match, roll and record, and write the room were utilized for weekly sight word stations. Sight word songs were played and sung each day upon leaving the reading group to return to homeroom. Students were also pulled to work one-

on-one every week to work on their own stack of sight word index cards which included only words they had mastered and introduced one new word each time they played.

After the pretest data was collected, the 18 students not explicitly taught sight words worked in their reading group with the classroom teacher. They had a list of 63 grade level sight words displayed in their classroom. Rather than explicitly teaching two sight words weekly and reviewing those specific words with weekly sight word stations, the teacher embedded sight word teaching into reading comprehension time. While reading big books, anthologies, or simple decodables the students each had copies of, the teacher would point out and read any sight words seen in text. A list with all 63 sight words was sent home with students when reading groups began in October as homework for students to practice but focus on specific words and a set introduction for each sight word was not used. Rather than explicitly teaching the sight words at a scheduled pace, the teacher incorporated the reading of the words into reading instruction time.

In May the posttest was administered, and students completed the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment one-on-one with the classroom teacher. The same procedures were followed for both the pretests and posttests. The students began reading the text at the level right above what had been marked as their independent reading level in October. Students who were leveled at Concepts of Print in October began at a level A text and the students reading independently at level A began at level B. After reading the appropriate texts with each student, recording their errors and corrections, and conducting the comprehension discussion, the scores were calculated, and independent reading levels determined. The independent reading levels of the two groups, according to Fountas and Pinnell, in May were then compared to see if students receiving explicit instruction outperformed those students who did not. The KLA was also re-administered and the number of sight words students knew were totaled to compare to their

scores of known sight words from September.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The data displayed in this chapter provides information related to the scores of participants who were instructed using an explicit approach in teaching sight words and those who were not. In an effort to truly highlight the impact of receiving explicit sight word instruction, the researcher collected and analyzed data using a two-prong approach. The first approach used descriptive statistics to assess changes in students' reading levels according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. The second approach used a *t*-test analysis to determine if there were significant differences in the number of sight words students acquired when comparing the two groups.

The pretest and posttest reading levels of students explicitly taught sight words in their reading group are shown in Table 1. Eighteen students were placed in this reading group based on their performance on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, which identified them as reading below grade level. Student improvement or lack of improvement can be seen in the difference between their pretest and posttest reading levels. The number and percentages of students showing each reading level improvement can be seen in Table 1 presented on the following page. Two students (11%) made no growth according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and scored Concepts of Print (COP) on both the pretest and posttest. One student (6%) moved from COP to level A, eight students (44%) moved from COP to level B, four students (22%) moved from COP to level C, and three students (12%) moved from COP to level D.

Table 1***Student Group Taught Sight Words Explicitly***

Pretest Reading Level	Posttest Reading Level	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
COP	COP	2	11%
COP	A	1	6%
COP	B	8	44%
COP	C	4	22%
COP	D	3	12%

The pretest and posttest reading levels of students who were not part of the reading group that was explicitly taught sight words are presented in Table 2. These 18 students were placed in their reading group based on their performance on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment, which identified them as reading below grade level but having slightly more pre-reading skills than the 18 students shown in Table 1. Student improvement can be seen in the difference between their pretest and posttest reading levels. The number and percentages of students showing each reading level improvement can be seen below. According to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, zero students remained at the Concepts of Print level (COP), two students (11%) moved from COP to level A, 11 students (61%) moved from COP to level B, four students (22%) moved from COP to level C, and one student (6%) moved from COP to level D.

Table 2***Student Group Not Taught Sight Words Explicitly***

Pretest Reading	Posttest Reading	Number of Students	Percentage of
Level	Level		Students
COP	COP	0	0%
COP	A	2	11%
COP	B	11	61%
COP	C	4	22%
COP	D	1	6%

An independent *t*-test analysis was used to determine if there were significant differences in the number of sight words acquired, from the pretest to posttest, when comparing the explicit instruction group to the nonexplicit instruction group. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that in this study, there was a statistically significant difference in student acquisition of sight words in favor of the group that did not receive explicit instruction. The growth mean for sight words acquired was 38.44 with a standard deviation of 10.21 for students not receiving explicit instruction. The growth mean for sight words acquired was 25.61 with a standard deviation of 11.98 for students receiving explicit instruction. The significance level for this *t*-test analysis was $p < .05$ at .001, and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3***Independent t-test Analysis Comparing Explicit vs. Nonexplicit Group***

Instruction Type	N	Average Growth Score	SD	t	df	P
Explicit Group	18	25.61	11.98	-3.460	34	.001
Nonexplicit Group	18	38.44	10.21			

The results showed significant differences between the pretest and posttest results for both groups of students. Based on these results, the students not taught sight words explicitly had a higher average growth score than the students taught sight words explicitly. The findings from this study and the implications from the data collected will be compared, interpreted, and discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The researcher completed this study to determine what kind of impact the explicit teaching of sight words would have on students' sight word acquisition and reading level. The null hypothesis of this study was that there would be no significant difference in growth in reading levels of students reading below grade level when comparing students instructed using explicit sight word instruction to those instructed using nonexplicit sight word instruction. The pretest and posttest reading levels were measured using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P).

After collecting and analyzing data on the pretest and posttest scores of the students, the null hypothesis was rejected since the significance level for the *t*-test analysis shown in chapter 4 was $p < .05$ at .001. The data presented in chapter 4 showed that there was a statistically significant difference in student acquisition of sight words in favor of the group that did not receive explicit instruction. Also, 100% of kindergarten students not taught sight words explicitly made growth in their reading level from the pretest to the posttest whereas only 89% of students taught sight words explicitly made growth in their reading level. The researcher wanted to compare the pretest and posttest scores of two groups of similar achieving students to gauge the impact of teaching sight words explicitly versus not teaching sight words explicitly.

Implications of the Results

The results of this study suggest that teaching sight words explicitly is beneficial in both improving students' sight word knowledge and reading levels. Eighteen out of 18 students taught sight words explicitly were able to improve their sight word recognition skills and 16 out of 18 students taught sight words explicitly were able to improve their reading levels. The students

participating in this group began kindergarten with minimal prereading skills and scored below grade level expectation on the pretest F&P assessment. Their growth shows that teaching sight words explicitly can be beneficial for struggling readers and may be useful in reading instruction to support learning.

Although explicit instruction can be beneficial, the data from this study supports the use of nonexplicit sight word instruction. The data in chapter 4 show that the group of students not explicitly taught sight words made greater improvement in both their reading levels and sight word identification skills. This shows that embedding sight word teaching into reading instructions and drawing attention to the words in text rather than teaching each word individually through a variety of hands on opportunities, was more beneficial for struggling readers. Just as the group of students who were taught sight words explicitly, this group of 18 students also had minimal prereading skills and began the school year reading below grade level expectations. In this group, eighteen out of 18 students were able to improve their sight word recognition skills and 18 out of 18 students were able to improve their reading levels. Students not explicitly taught sight words all made a growth of one reading level or more, whereas of the students explicitly taught sight words, two of them made no growth in their reading levels as measured by F&P. By building sight word identification into texts being read, students were able to successfully read the words in isolation as well as in leveled books. Showing students the sight words while reading or being read to allowed them to become more familiar with those words and recall them when reading independently.

All 36 students who participated in this study began the school year reading below grade level expectations and scoring COP on the pretest. According to the F&P standards and county expectations, kindergarten students should be reading at level D by the end of the kindergarten

school year. Of the 36 students, 4 students were reading on level D by the end of the year. Three of the four students reading at the grade level expectation were part of the group that was taught sight words explicitly. Although level D was the end of year goal, reading at level C was a celebrated accomplishment as well for the students. Eight of the 36 students were reading at level C on the posttest, four of which were in the group explicitly taught sight words and four of which were not. Nineteen of the 36 students were reading at level B by the end of the year, eight of which were in the group explicitly taught sight words and 11 of which were not. These findings show that although teaching sight words explicitly to struggling readers may be helpful, the nonexplicit and embedded teaching of sight words during reading instruction proved to be more impactful in improving students' independent reading skills. These results can be helpful in shaping the type of instruction used when teaching sight words and supports the idea to focus less on explicitly teaching individual sight words, but rather identifying them in student texts throughout lessons.

Threats to the Validity

External Threats

One threat to the validity of the study was the small number of students participating. Only two kindergarten classes were used to collect and analyze data. Having more students in the study would give more statistical power and make it easier to identify differences in pretest and posttest scores as well as compare scores from the groups taught sight words explicitly and not.

Another threat to validity would be the group of students used. This study was completed using 36 students, all of which were reading below grade level expectations and considered to be struggling readers. Eleven students included in the study also had learning difficulties including

developmental delays, English not being their primary language, and qualifying for speech services. These students represented a diverse population of gender, ethnicity, and social standings, but the results cannot be generalized to other populations of average or above average kindergarten readers. The sample of students was used to complete this study was very specific.

Internal Threats

A final threat to the validity would be the consistency students received the explicit teaching of sight words during reading groups. Of the 18 students taught sight words explicitly, 3 had chronic absenteeism and frequently missed school days or arrived late after reading groups had taken place. An inconsistent schedule also impacted the regularity of students receiving explicit sight word instruction. School closings, assemblies, and early dismissals all had impacts on the daily schedule of students and their participation in reading groups, which may have affected their posttest scores.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Hagan-Burke et al., conducted a study in 2013 in which they compared the impact of two reading intervention programs. The participants in this study included 206 kindergarten students identified as at risk for reading difficulties. Data was collected using pretest and posttest scores from assessments that measured letter naming, decoding, fluency, word identification, phonemic awareness, and comprehension. The pretest and posttest assessment scores were compared to determine the impacts of the two types of reading interventions. The two types of interventions used in the study were similar in nature to the two instructional strategies compared in this action research project. One reading intervention students received was described as an intervention focusing on explicit and systematic instruction and the other intervention was described as a typical school intervention. The intervention focusing on explicit instruction utilized small

groups and direct teaching. The typical school intervention did not utilize small groups or pull-out sessions and did not utilize the systematic and structured approach as laid out in the other intervention. After analyzing the data, students in the explicit and systematic intervention outperformed the school-designed typical intervention on all measures except word identification and passage comprehension.

According to the study, students in the reading intervention groups not receiving explicit instruction performed better on the assessments measuring word identification and reading comprehension. The data supports the findings in this action research project comparing the explicit and nonexplicit teaching of sight words, where the reading group not receiving explicit instruction scored higher on both sight words identification and reading level growth. The reading level assessment used, the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, measures reading level by texts read independently and reading comprehension questions answered.

Implications for Future Research

In a future study the researcher could consider using a bigger sample size to compare the impact of different sight word instruction. The researcher could include average readers as well as students in other primary grade levels who are struggling with sight vocabulary and reading skills. More varied participants could provide more data and insight into the effectiveness of explicit versus nonexplicit sight word teaching on reading levels. A larger group of participants in both the explicit teaching group and the nonexplicit teaching group could give a more valid comparison between the two methods.

Conclusions

This study focused on the impact of explicitly teaching sight words on kindergarten reading levels and this teaching method did prove to have a positive impact according to the

data. Despite the positive impact of explicit sight word instruction, the data collected showed that the nonexplicit teaching of sight words was more effective with similar performing readers. The approach of embedding sight words into reading instruction rather than teaching it directly produced a higher mean number of sight words identified by students as well as a greater number of students who improved their reading levels from pretest to posttest. The students in the nonexplicit sight word group were encouraged to identify sight words in text, which may have helped in their ability to recognize the words when reading independently. Rather than practicing a set number of sight words weekly in a structured and hands on approach, students were given a comprehensive list of sight words at the beginning of the school year then read the words as seen in their reading comprehensions and word work times. The comprehensive list may have given students more words to practice with and work on mastering from the beginning to the end of the year. This embedded teaching of sight words would be useful for educators to use to teach students how to be independent readers and become familiar with words they will see frequently in text. In a future study, the researcher could further study the differences in the two approaches and how it impacts learners.

The null hypothesis formed for this research study was rejected. All participants in the study improved their sight word recognition skills and 34 of the 36 improved their reading levels. One hundred percent of students in the group not receiving explicit sight word instruction made gains on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and had a higher mean score on their sight word recognition assessments. Although the data show that explicitly teaching sight words may be a beneficial approach when working with struggling readers, the use of nonexplicit instruction was the most impactful. Providing students and families with a comprehensive sight word list to start the school year and incorporating sight word reading into other lessons proved

to support kindergarten students in improving their reading skills and would be practical and inexpensive for teachers to incorporate. Holding students responsible for a large number of sight words and giving them multiple opportunities to recognize those words in text throughout the entire reading instruction time is beneficial in supporting students' retention of sight words that will, in turn, benefit their independent reading levels.

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