The Effects of Snap Words

on the Sight Word Acquisition of Kindergarten Students

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	2
Hypothesis	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Review of the Literature	4
Introduction and Definition of Sight Words	4
Rationale for Teaching Sight Words	6
Instructional Techniques for Teaching Sight Words	7
Conclusion	10
III. Methods	11
Design	11
Participants	11
Instrument	12
Procedure	13
IV. Results	15
V. Discussion	17
Implications	17
Theoretical Consequences	18
Threats to Validity	18

	Connections to Previous Studies	19
	Implications for Future Research	19
	Conclusion	20
Referen	nces	21
Appendix A		

List of Figures

1. Kindergarten student sight word acquisition pretest and posttest comparison	15
2. Kindergarten student sight word acquisition comparison	16

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to improve the sight word acquisition of kindergarten students. The measurement tool was the kindergarten sight word list from the Anne Arundel County Public Schools curriculum. This study involved use of a quasi-experimental design to measure the mean number of sight words acquired over a six-week treatment period. There were eleven students in the control group and twelve students in the experimental group. Students in the experimental group were instructed with Snap Words and did increase their sight word knowledge. However, students in the control group, who were instructed without Snap Words, increased their sight word knowledge significantly more.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Sight words are taught in early childhood classrooms because they appear with high frequency in text and often have irregular spelling patterns (Murray, McIlwain, Wang, Murray, & Finley, 2019). Students must memorize the spelling of such words as a whole unit. Murray et al. (2019) emphasize that beginning readers are faced with the challenge of learning to read words by "direct visual retrieval," (p. 125) - or with effortless automatic recognition. Students must be able to store printed words in their long-term memory in order to establish a sight vocabulary. This can be difficult because educators do not yet have a clear understanding of this learning process. For this reason, educators use a variety of instructional methods to teach sight words and may lack clarity in what is best practice.

According to the International Literacy Association (1999), readers who have a large sight vocabulary can read many texts fluently. Fluent reading allows the reader to focus on the content of a text rather than the words themselves. These readers typically experience better comprehension. That said, readers who do not have a large sight vocabulary struggle with fluency and often read slowly, word by word. This focus on decoding individual words causes a lack of continuity and thus a lack of comprehension.

This topic is of interest because for students to progress in their reading ability, they must develop a large sight vocabulary. Knowing many sight words increases reading fluency which improves reading comprehension. This domino effect means that teaching sight words is a critical component of the early childhood classroom as educators aim to mold lifelong readers.

There are a variety of instructional approaches for teaching sight words. Popular among these are the flashcard drill method (Fasko & Fasko, 2010), the multisensory method (Feng & Phillips, 2012), and the picture method (Ceprano, 1981). The multisensory method, which provides visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues to students as they practice each word, will be examined in this study.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to improve the sight word acquisition of kindergarten students.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for the current study was that sight word acquisition of kindergarten students who are instructed using Snap Words, a multisensory approach, is not significantly greater than the sight word acquisition of those who receive regular instruction.

Operational Definitions

Sight words are words that students are expected to read as a whole unit automatically, or within three seconds.

Snap Words are a product made by Child 1st Publications, LLC. They are 5.5" by 4.25" cards that display a sight word built into a picture. On the back, there is a sentence and kinesthetic action for students to say and do as they view the word.

The *Word Wall* is a wall or bulletin board in the classroom that has all letters of the alphabet displayed as headings. Under each letter, the teacher adds sight words that begin with the letter as they are taught.

Students also have *personal word walls*, which are word walls made of paper so that students can write or glue words onto them.

Guided reading is daily small-group instruction required by Anne Arundel County Public Schools. The teacher instructs students to read a leveled book that matches their ability level. The instruction usually involves review of relevant phonics, sight words, and comprehension strategies. Students can practice reading under the guidance of the teacher at this time.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the early childhood classroom, teachers are focused on teaching their students the foundations of reading. Learning to read is necessary for both school and life. According to the International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998), a child's ability to function well in school and society can often be predicted by their reading and writing progress. There are many components to teaching reading, including- phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Within the pillar of vocabulary, students are taught to read and understand words. While much vocabulary is related to content, there is also the need for a sight vocabulary. There are several main approaches to teaching sight words to students with some conflict between them.

This literature review aims to give a deeper look into what sight words are and how they are taught. Part one will explain the definition and types of sight words. Part two will further explain why it is important to explicitly teach sight words. Part three will review three methods of sight word instruction and which method appears to be most effective for kindergarten students.

Introduction and Definition of Sight Words

Sight words are words that can be recognized at first glance without being broken down by letter or word chunk; in other words, they are memorized as a whole unit (Murray et al., 2019). While any word could technically be considered a "sight word" based on an individual's ability to read it automatically, the sight words that are explicitly taught to students can be categorized in two ways: high frequency words and irregularly spelled words.

High frequency words are words that occur most frequently in the English language.

These include conjunctions (e.g. 'and'), prepositions (e.g. 'by'), pronouns (e.g. 'she'), and verbs (e.g. 'has'). Dolch (1936) refers to these words as "tool words" because they are used in all types of writing no matter the content. Dolch, one of the most notable researchers in the realm of sight words, established a list of 220 high frequency words which is still widely used by educators today. It should be noted that nouns are not included in this list. Dolch claims that nouns are tied to specific subject matter, and therefore cannot be of universal use.

The other type of sight words are irregularly spelled words. These are words that must be memorized simply because of their irregular spelling pattern (Murray et al., 2019). For example, the word 'the' could not be decoded using phonics because the /uh/ sound is not a regular sound for the vowel 'e'. For this reason students must be taught to memorize this word as a whole unit. Quite often these sight words with irregular spelling patterns are also high frequency words. Thus, the two are not mutually exclusive.

To build a sight vocabulary, students must utilize orthographic mapping (Murray et al., 2019). With mapping, students form connections between written units and spoken units. This begins with young students matching letters to the sounds that they make. Eventually, students begin to recognize small parts of words, such as '-at', which helps them to decode simple words, such as 'cat'. Once students can match a complete spelling to its pronunciation, they have made orthographic maps with high lexical quality. This allows readers to make an instant match between a word they encounter and its pronunciation. These words that they can instantly recognize are then "sight words".

Rationale for Teaching Sight Words

The Balanced Literacy Approach

In their position statement, the International Literacy Association (ILA) (1999) recognizes that there is no single method that can successfully teach all children to read. Indeed, teachers cannot rely on any one methodology in the classroom. Focusing only on phonics would not be beneficial when reading irregularly spelled words, whereas focusing on whole language (words as whole units) would not allow children to decode unfamiliar words independently. Teachers must use their expertise to include a variety of methods when teaching students how to read. The ILA indicates that "reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print" (p. 3) that requires an assortment of skills. Of these skills, several are related to teaching sight words. First, the student needs sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension. Having a sight word vocabulary will be necessary in order for students to comprehend. Second, students need the ability to read fluently. Students who have the ability to read many words at first glance will read more fluently than those who cannot. To summarize, students must be taught to use a combination of skills, including phonics and decoding and whole word recognition because some words are not decodable. Teaching these skills in tandem will allow students to participate in the complex skill of reading.

Automaticity

One component of reading is fluent, accurate word identification (International Literacy Association & NAEYC, 1998). In other words, skilled readers must be able to accurately identify many words in text without hesitation. This is known as automaticity. The International Literacy Association and NAEYC (1998) assert that as readers are able to read words with automaticity, they can spend less time focusing on word identification and thus focus more on comprehension.

Automaticity increases fluency, and as readers increase their fluency, they also increase their comprehension. The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension. Therefore, sight word recognition and fluency are vital to one's ability to read and learn.

Instructional Techniques for Teaching Sight Words

Flashcard Drill Method

One method used to develop automaticity of sight words is the Flashcard Drill Method. This method can have some variation in implementation, but generally involves flashing a targeted word to an individual student on an index card and asking the person to identify it automatically (within three seconds). If correct, the student would move on to the next word. If incorrect, the student would be corrected (Fasko & Fasko, 2010).

In the traditional drill method, each target word is modeled ("The word is _____"), then the student is prompted to repeat the word (January, Lovelace, Foster, & Ardoin, 2017). The student then continues to practice each new target word using the flashcards, being corrected when incorrect or verbally reinforced when correct. This type of instruction would continue until the child is able to read all of the targeted words.

In contrast to the traditional drill method, the incremental rehearsal method allows students to practice known words while integrating new target words at a ratio of 9:1. In this case, a student would be shown nine familiar words to every one new targeted word. Both the traditional drill method and the incremental rehearsal method have proven to be effective, although the incremental rehearsal method would take more instructional time to teach the same number of new words (January et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, there are also benefits to the incremental rehearsal method that the traditional drill method lacks. The incremental rehearsal

method provides for both distributed practice by teaching new words over time and expanded practice by reviewing an increasing number of learned words over time (January et al., 2017).

To accommodate the benefits of both traditional drill and incremental rehearsal methods, a new method known as the strategic incremental rehearsal method was created by Kupzyk, Daly, and Andersen (2011). In this method, only unknown words are used, but they are introduced incrementally. Learned words are discarded upon mastery but are then periodically reviewed to account for maintenance. A research study done by January et al. in 2017 demonstrated that both types of Flashcard Drill Methods are effective, however the strategic incremental rehearsal method appears to be more effective and efficient.

Multisensory Method

In contrast to the Flashcard Drill Method, the Multisensory Method uses a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues to teach sight words. This method seems to be supported by professional education groups including ILA and NAEYC. In their 1998 joint position statement, these organizations make clear that some teaching practices are not effective for primary-grade children, especially those in pre-k or kindergarten. This includes intensive drill and practice of isolated skills, i.e. sight words. They assert that young children must be engaged by learning experiences that allow academic content to be assimilated in their schema. The Multisensory Method allows teachers to make what would be an isolated skill (sight words) more meaningful by connecting them to visual, auditory, or kinesthetic cues, thus building on prior knowledge and providing context.

In a 2012 research study by Feng and Phillips, the Multisensory Method was found to be more effective than the Flashcard Drill Method in teaching students sight words. This study was conducted with kindergarten students and aligns with the ideology that young children should be

instructed using engaging experiences rather than drills. The students taught with the Multisensory Method not only learned more words but reported enjoying their instruction more.

Picture Method

The Picture Method is another type of instruction used to teach sight words. This method uses picture cues to accompany sight words in order to teach them. Research on this method is conflicting, with some sources indicating that using picture cues can actually inhibit learning of sight words by diverting the child's attention away from the word itself (Ceprano, 1981). Given this concern, Ceprano suggests that picture cues can be used to enhance instruction but must be done cautiously. She indicates that teachers must not assume children will look at the word itself but should explicitly direct the children to do so. Thus, the picture is used as an additional support but not the main focus of instruction.

In a previous action research study, Kagan (2018) found that kindergarten students were more successful in learning picture-supported sight words than those without pictures. Alternatively, a study by Meadan, Parette, and Stoner (2008) found Pre-kindergarten students to have less success with picture-supported sight words than those without pictures. Both studies used a similar age group with the same method; they both utilized picture cues from the same online program. This discrepancy in results further illustrates the conflict between whether picture cues are helpful or not when teaching sight words. Some researchers such as Richardson et al. (2017) suggest that the Picture Method can be more successful by gradually fading the picture cue from the instruction.

Conclusion

Teaching reading in the early childhood classroom is not only critical but multi-faceted. Research from national organizations such as the ILA and NAEYC suggests a need for a balanced literacy approach in classrooms. Teachers must incorporate a variety of reading and writing strategies to build strong readers who comprehend a variety of texts. Included in this is sight word instruction; the ability to automatically identify words allows readers to focus on the content rather than decoding. However, it is noted that the early childhood classroom is no place for drilling students on isolated skills. This is not developmentally appropriate. Rather, learning should be engaging and connected to prior knowledge. This means that teaching sight words should be no different. For this reason, it appears that the Multisensory Method is the most beneficial way to teach sight words in an early childhood classroom. With this method, students do not rely solely on flashcards or pictures, but instead have the opportunity to respond to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues related to the sight words being taught.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The design of this study is quasi-experimental. The 12 participants in the treatment group were given a pretest, intervention, and a posttest. There were 11 participants in the control group. They were also given a pretest and posttest. The pretest and posttest both assessed students on the number of words accurately identified automatically, or within three seconds. The difference in their pretest and posttest scores was their final score, indicating the total number of sight words learned over the treatment period.

Participants

The study took place at a public early education center in Anne Arundel County on Fort Meade, Maryland. The school has 274 students among ten kindergarten classes, two prekindergarten classrooms, and one early childhood intervention (ECI) classroom. Being on a military base translates to a high transiency rate. Students and their military families are frequently relocated throughout the school year.

Twelve students from one classroom participated in the treatment group. The group consisted of three special education students and nine general education students. The classroom received daily support from a special educator and a teaching assistant. There were two students who were multi-racial, five Hispanic students, one African American student, and four Caucasian students. Seven students in the treatment group qualify for free and reduced meals. Five of the students were male and seven were female.

Eleven students from another classroom participated in this study as the control group. This group consisted of six special education students and five general education students. This

classroom also received daily support from a special educator and a teaching assistant. There were two students who were multi-racial, one Hispanic student, one African American student, and seven Caucasian students. Three students in the control group qualified for free and reduced meals. Eight of the students were male and three were female. These students received regular sight word instruction as dictated by the county curriculum and did not receive supplementary Snap Word instruction like the treatment group.

Instrument

The pretest and posttest scores identified the number of sight words read correctly. These scores were determined using a word list provided by the Anne Arundel County Public Schools kindergarten curriculum. The word list consists of 63 sight words which progress from simplest to most complex. The word list is based on the Fountas and Pinnell Phonics and Word Study curriculum (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018). The word list was divided into 16 sets of words. Each set of words was introduced weekly by the classroom teacher during whole-group instruction throughout the school year. During the study, seven new sets were introduced. Students were given a set of words to take home each week, then were tested on their set at the end of the week. For this test, the students were shown each word from their take-home set on a card and asked to read the word. If students were able to read the word correctly within three seconds, they were given a point. If they were not able to read the word correctly within three seconds, they were not given a point. Students who did not master their set were given another week to practice. Students who did master their set were given a new set to practice. The sight word acquisition scores were computed by taking the difference between their pretest and their posttest scores to identify how many words they learned. The total number of points out of 24 reflects the number of words a student learned over the six-week treatment period.

Procedure

A pretest was given to students at the beginning of the six-week treatment period. The students in the treatment group used a multisensory method intervention: Snap Words. As each set of four sight words were introduced to the class during whole-group instruction, the teacher added each word to the word wall. The teacher then reviewed each word by teaching the Snap Word card sentence and kinesthetic action while showing the word in the picture. Students repeated the sentence and action, then said the word again in isolation. Each student then added the new set of words to his or her personal word wall by writing each word under its beginning letter.

The teacher reinforced sight words during small-group instruction by reviewing Snap Word cards for all sight words found in the guided reading book. The same procedure was followed- the teacher showed the word in the picture while students repeated the sentence and kinesthetic action, then said the word again in isolation.

All students received a set of sight words to practice each week with their nightly homework. Students who did not make adequate progress on their sight word list in the first semester were also given a copy of Snap Words to take home for support when reviewing their sight words. An instructional assistant reviewed Snap Words with these students one-on-one daily.

The students in the control group were taught using the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Word Wall Lessons. These lessons were taught weekly. Each lesson introduced four new words. The teacher added each word to the word wall. The teacher named each word and had students repeat. The students then added each new word to a personal word wall by gluing a word card under its beginning letter. The teacher reviewed sight words during small-group

instruction by having students read, make, and write each word that appeared in their guided reading book. The students in the control group were also given a set of sight words to practice each week with their nightly homework but were not given Snap Words as an additional support.

The posttest was administered to both groups at the end of the six-week treatment period.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether Snap Words, a multisensory method, increases sight word acquisition in kindergarten students.

In the current study, both the control group and the experimental group achieved significant gains in sight word acquisition over the six-week period in which the study was conducted. However, the gains in sight word acquisition were higher for the control group than they were for the experimental group. See Figure 1.



Figure 1

Kindergarten Student Sight Word Acquisition Pretest and Posttest Comparison (N = 23).

The sight word acquisition for the kindergarten class being instructed using Snap Words and the kindergarten class not being instructed with Snap Words were analyzed using a *t* test for independent groups. The *t* test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in number of words between the control group (M = 18.45, SD = 5.09, n = 11), as compared to the experimental group (M = 8.50, SD = 4.78, n = 12) following the use of Snap Words as an instructional method, with a strong effect size, t(21) = 4.84, p < .05, d = 2.02. On average, there was a 9.95-point difference between the groups. See Figure 2. Although the test was statistically significant, it was not in the hypothesized direction. The hypothesis that the use of Snap Words would result in a higher number of words learned was not supported by the data in this study.



Figure 2

Kindergarten Student Sight Word Acquisition Comparison (N = 23)*.*

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if Snap Words, a multisensory method, increases sight word acquisition in Kindergarten students. The null hypothesis that sight word acquisition of Kindergarten students who are instructed using Snap Words, a multisensory approach, is not significantly greater than the sight word acquisition of those who receive regular instruction, was not rejected. The students in the experimental group had a mean sight word acquisition score of 8.50, while the students in the control group had a mean score of 18.45. The mean score of students in the control group was higher than the mean score of students in the experimental group. These results indicate that the Snap Word instructional method was not as effective in increasing sight word acquisition as regular instruction for the students in the current study.

Implications

These results are important because they suggest that Snap Words may not be the most effective instructional method for increasing sight word acquisition in kindergarten. Students who were not instructed using Snap Words showed significantly more gain than those who were instructed using Snap Words.

Both groups were exposed to sight words on a classroom word wall, practiced writing the words by adding them to their personal word wall, and were able to practice their sight words for homework using take-home sight word cards. The difference between the groups was that the control group was not exposed to Snap Words. It is possible that the pictures on the Snap Word cards hindered students in the experimental group's ability to recognize the word in isolation on the posttest because they were relying on the picture cue to identify the word when practicing it.

It is notable that students in the control group who were taught sight words as isolated units without the Snap Word picture cues were much more successful in identifying the words during the post test.

Theoretical Consequences

This study further supports the theory that picture cues can hinder a student's ability to memorize sight words (Ceprano, 1981). Sight words should be taught as isolated units without accompanying images or other distracting features. However, some students struggle with sight word acquisition and require alternative strategies, particularly those receiving special education. If educators choose to use picture cues to support these students, they should consider gradually fading the picture cue for the student to recognize the word without it (Richardson et al., 2017).

Threats to Validity

The limitation on the posttest score could be a threat to validity. This study took place in the middle of the school year using the year-long kindergarten sight word list. Most students had already mastered some of the word list by the time this study began, meaning they did not start with word one for the study. Several students in the experimental group reached the end of the kindergarten sight word list during the treatment period, meaning their score could have potentially been higher if more words had been added to the list.

Another threat to validity is the natural ability level of students in each group. Students are grouped heterogeneously in classrooms, so there was no way to ensure that the two groups were of a similar ability level. A random sampling method would have provided a more accurately matched experimental group and control group.

Finally, the small size of each classroom used in this study poses a threat to validity. There were only 11 students in the control group and 12 students in the experimental group. A larger sample size could increase the validity of this study.

Connection to Previous Studies

This study is related to previous studies on sight word acquisition. Meadan et al. (2008) found that picture cues inhibited the sight word acquisition of pre-kindergarten students. Similarly, Ceprano (1981) also found that picture cues could prevent students from learning sight words. However, other studies have found picture cues to improve sight word acquisition in young children, such as Kagan (2018). While there is mixed data on the effectiveness of picture cues, most of these studies show that they are more harmful than they are helpful. This study supports the idea of previous research that picture cues do not help students learn sight words.

While picture cues seem to be the issue, this study was focused on a multisensory method. Snap Words incorporated a verbal sentence and kinesthetic action along with the word and picture. The multisensory method was found to be more effective than other methods, such as the flashcard drill method. This was highlighted in a 2012 study by Feng and Phillips. However, it should be noted that Feng and Phillips focused more on the auditory and kinesthetic cues than visual cues. Their visual cue was simply showing the word in isolation to students on a flash card; no picture or other visual cue was added to the word.

Implications for Future Research

If this study were replicated, a different type of multisensory instruction could be tested. Although Snap Words were unsuccessful in this study, there are other ways to incorporate visual, auditory, and kinesthetic cues with sight word instruction to meet the criteria for a multisensory method. For example, students could practice each sight word three different ways: view it on

the word wall, hear it in a song, and then create an action to accompany the word. This study could also be done with a different grade level. Snap Words could potentially be more beneficial to younger or older students than they were to kindergarten students. Finally, the study could be conducted over a longer time period. If this study spanned a full school year it could provide a better picture of sight word acquisition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experimental group instructed with Snap Words had a lower mean word acquisition score than the control group not instructed with Snap Words in this study. While threats to validity exist, the mean score was significantly different. Kindergarten teachers should consider different methods of sight word instruction other than Snap Words.

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Appendix A

Sight Word List

<u>Set 1</u>		<u>Set 4</u>	<u>Set 7</u>	<u>Set 10</u>	<u>Set 13</u>	<u>Set 16</u>	
а		no	on	what	had	there	
it		go	not	that	her	were	
Ι		he	will	they	him	their	
me		my	look	this	one		
<u>Set 2</u>		<u>Set 5</u>	<u>Set 8</u>	<u>Set 11</u>	<u>Set 14</u>		
to		up	how	with	out		
and		we	came	when	but		
can		you	have	from	his		
in		an	said	all	if		
<u>Set 3</u>		<u>Set 6</u>	<u>Set 9</u>	<u>Set 12</u>	<u>Set 15</u>		
is		do	was	be	saw		
the		see	come	for	then		
am		SO	she	are	went		
at		like	your	got	of		