

Sustained Silent Reading in First Grade

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has on first graders' reading levels. SSR was implemented in order to improve student's fluency and reading abilities. Students instructional level was used to determine a baseline using the Fountas and Pinnell assessment. A pretest and posttest was used in order to determine the growth students made during the duration of the study. Findings from the study indicated an overall increase in student reading levels as a result of using the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) strategy.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Reading is an essential skill that children must learn in order to be successful in school. In order to learn and understand other subjects the student must be able to read. The better the child can read the easier it will be for them to learn.

Sustained silent reading (SSR) encourages students to choose their own reading materials and read independently during class. The teacher models the habits, choices, attitudes, and strategies good readers develop during SSR. As students read each day, they come across new words, ideas, and make connections during reading. When students are given time to read books they enjoy, they will develop a positive view toward reading and ultimately increase reading stamina.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of sustained silent reading on first grade students.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that first-grade students will not improve their mean population reading level on the Fountas and Pinnell assessments through the implementation of sustained silent reading (SSR).

Operational Definitions

The treatment and control groups will both consist of students who are at similar reading levels and scored below-average on the Fountas and Pinnell assessment. The treatment group will be exposed to SSR while the other group will only receive normal reading instruction. Their

reading levels are based on their performance on the Fountas and Pinnell assessment performed in September of 2019.

The independent variable will be the instruction students are receiving during SSR. *Sustained silent reading* focuses on decoding, fluency, comprehension strategies, sight words, and reading stamina. The control group will not receive this focused instruction.

The dependent variable for the study will be *reading achievement* as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell assessment. The test will be used to determine student's reading levels with and without the focused SSR strategy. All participants will be assessed from September 2019 to May of 2020. The assessment will be given in September of 2019 and January of 2020.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This literature review examines the impact sustained silent reading has on first grade students. The first section will explain sustained silent reading and the benefits sustained silent reading has for students. The second section will discuss the relationship between reading comprehension and decoding. The third section will analyze self-monitoring reading through the use of reading logs. Finally, the fourth section will discuss the importance of text-leveling.

Sustained Silent Reading

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is becoming widely implemented across schools and counties today. In the primary grades, students are learning the basic strategies and skills necessary to becoming a fluent reader. Sustained silent reading is part of students' everyday routine as they are designated a time period to read silently in school. In order for SSR, to be effective, the teaching of comprehension and decoding strategies must be occurring. Students are given tools for SSR as they learn comprehension strategies. In order for students to read successfully during SSR, they must use decoding strategies, and make comprehension connections as they are reading.

The foundation of SSR is engagement. Oliver (1970), stated SSR increases attention span, improves self-discipline, improves acceptance and enjoyment of reading, and refines and extends reading skills. Yoon (2002), stated students should be given a fixed period of time for silent reading of self-selected material either for pleasure or for information.

There are many benefits to implementing SSR into your daily routine. First, students do not need to do the same thing every day in multiple classrooms. The structure of SSR in one classroom will not always be the same as another classroom. However, students should be given 15-30 minutes per day to read self-selected texts. Studies show that students who enjoy reading develop better skills in reading comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary (Guthrie & Cox, 2001). In conclusion, highly engaged readers show higher achievement than less engaged readers, especially when motivational factors and appropriate materials are provided.

Reading Comprehension and Decoding

Reading comprehension is when a reader does not simply distinguish the meaning of a text but understands that text. Comprehension depends on the reader's background experiences, purposes, feelings, and needs of the moment. Strong readers use their experiences and knowledge to make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it (Myskow, 2019).

Decoding and reading comprehension are connected in many ways. Students who have trouble learning to decode letters and recognize words often will have difficulty with reading comprehension (Myskow, 2019). When students struggle with decoding they rarely have a chance to interact with difficult texts which leads to low-confidence and low self-esteem as a reader. "As a result, these students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop the language skills and strategies necessary for becoming proficient readers" (Lenz, 2014, p. 1).

In order for reading comprehension to improve students need to understand texts by making connections as they are reading. Comprehension connections must be taught directly by teachers. Providing students' time to read will not improve their comprehension. However, when

time to read is given, followed by introducing a new strategy to focus on during the child's reading, this will improve his/her comprehension.

According to Lenz (2014), the most practical way to teach reading comprehension is to organize instruction into three phases. These three phases are before, during and after reading strategies. Before reading strategies involve the teacher walking students through the text prior to reading. During reading strategies help the student focus on the comprehension piece of the text and determine the author's purpose. Strategies that help a student understand during reading include questioning, predicting, visualizing, paraphrasing, elaborating, changing reading pace, and rereading. Lastly, after reading strategies are used to determine the meaning of the text.

Decoding is key when learning how to read at an early age. It is important for students to use their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to correctly pronounce written words. Through explicit instruction in the classroom, kids will learn how to decode. Decoding starts with the ability to match printed letters and their sounds (Kelly, 2014). Decoding also involves being able to segment and blend sounds together. Beginning readers start with decoding one-syllable words and work their way up to larger words.

In a study involving 1,200 children ages 6-7, 8-9, and 10-12.5 researchers examined the developmental shifts in the importance of linguistic components of words to single word decoding (Williams, 2014). The results indicated that at each of the three reading levels, phonemes accounted for the greatest amount of significant variance that indicates that it played a major role in word recognition. The study connects to the research as phonemes focus on the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words, and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds.

During a study, six first grade classes were randomly assigned to three groups (Thorn, 1969). One group focused on special lessons in oral language, while the other control group followed the usual language program. At the beginning of the study, achievement in listening, vocabulary, and reading were measured as well as at the end of the study. Based on the results, listening comprehension of the experimental group significantly improved.

Self-Monitoring Reading/ Reading Logs

Reading logs are used to monitor what students are reading as well as a specific strategy taught during the mini-lesson. Students use reading logs to maintain a written record of their personal reactions to the text (Lyutaya, 2011). Students are able to build their knowledge, express opinions, and ask questions as well as take risks by making connections between what they know and what they are learning. Students have the ability to grow as readers and independent learners. When students are responding to the text and recording their ideas in their reading log, they are able to integrate different sources of information and organize their thoughts. There are many versions of reading logs that introduce strategies to help students recognize key features of the text such as, the setting, characters, plot, theme, story elements and main idea.

As discussed, comprehension plays a key role when learning to read and understand a text. There are components to a reading log for students who are beginning readers. Some of these components are predicting, responding to a passage or sentence from the text, writing questions, and answers, giving opinions, and using vocabulary strategies (Lyutaya, 2011). Reading logs can be analyzed by using a scale: (1-4) for a basic rubric: (a.) excellent, (b.) very good, (c.) good, (d.) needs work, with one being the highest score and four being the lowest

score. “Students can devise their own components to suit their needs and interests and to express other feelings elicited by the story” (p.6).

Reading logs format should be personalized to the student’s reading ability. Students should complete their reading logs regularly, but logs should be personalized and diary-like (Lyutaya, 2011). Teachers need to remember the main purpose of reading is to enjoy reading and written tasks should not become overwhelming. Everyday teachers differentiate their lessons to meet the needs of all students. Lyutaya recommends varying the format of the reading logs by introducing new and more complex components. Students can use their reading logs in various ways and do not need to be organized in the same manner for all students.

Text Leveling

The purpose of using leveled texts is to enable children to read texts at their appropriate reading level. Zrna (2012) states that children should be reading texts that provide them with appropriate support as well as appropriate challenge such as texts with which they can problem-solve and read without becoming frustrated or losing meaning. Teachers are able to easily notice and select reading materials that match children’s abilities to best suit their learning level. Teachers are able to make appropriate selections for instructional experiences. It is important to know when matching children to their reading level, a book may not always be appropriate. Students interest and background knowledge need to be taken into consideration when selecting appropriate material. Leveled texts are to assist teachers in providing children with texts that allow them to work within their Zone of Proximal Development. “The Zone of Proximal Development is the maximum level of development the child can reach with assistance. When a child is assisted to work in their Zone of Proximal Development, higher levels of understanding occur” (p.3).

Leveled texts help teachers teach effectively by providing a wide and diverse range of books for children in the class. When leveling texts, teachers are able to assist and group children together based on their strengths, needs and abilities. It is important to keep the groups flexible throughout the year as children progress. (Zrna, 2012) states the National Reading Panel (NRP) identified five essential elements to reading instruction. These elements include phonological awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction and comprehension instruction, placing all five elements at the same priority level. Zrna states, “The use of leveled texts enables children to read at an appropriate text level that ensures comprehension is placed at the foreground of a child’s reading” (p. 3).

Leveled texts should be used in the classroom as they assist the teacher to select supportive material for Reading Aloud, Shared Reading, and Independent Reading (Zrna, 2012). Supportive texts should include relevant texts that match the children’s reading ability and interest, use continuous text, build on oral language, are culturally inclusive, relevant, and engaged with familiar topics, support meaning and fluency as part of the reading process as well as structure and visual information. Students are motivated to read when they can select books of their choice. The leveling of texts helps children select material which is at ‘just-the-right’ level but which is still interesting to them.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of sustained silent reading (SSR) on first grade students.

Design

This study is based on the quasi-experimental design. Students were assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) assessment to determine their instructional reading level in September 2019. The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test design to compare growth in Fountas and Pinnell scores for students in the treatment group, who utilized SSR during their reading block and students in the control group who received the usual reading instruction but did not have SSR. Students were assessed in January 2020, changes in F&P scores were compared for each group.

Participants

In this study, the participants were forty-two first grade students. The school used in this research is in a suburban area in Harford County. The participants were diverse in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and academic ability. Participants included five students of Hispanic descent, four African American students, and 33 Caucasian students. Of those 42 students, five had an individualized education plan (IEP) for academic purposes and four additional students had an IEP for speech purposes.

The twenty-one students were selected to participate in SSR due to their scores on the fall administration of the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment. These students performed below the current grade level expectation for reading. Of the twenty-one students, 12 students were boys and nine students were girls. The ages of the students were 6 years old and 7 years old. The

racess of the students are as follows: one student was Hispanic, two were African American, and 18 were Caucasian. Five of the students had an IEP for academics and two students had an IEP for speech purposes. One of the students was in the English Language Learners (ELL) program.

Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was the Fountas and Pinnell assessment. This is the benchmark assessment that is used in the primary grades throughout multiple grade levels to assess student growth in reading. The researcher used this reading assessment for both pre-test and post-test data.

Procedure

Students' Fountas and Pinnell instructional reading level scores were used to determine who would participate in this research project. Twenty-one students were selected since they were reading at least one level below the current grade level expectation for first grade. This classroom of students received additional support (SSR) during their reading instruction to help improve their reading fluency and comprehension in order to increase their reading level scores.

The control group consisted of students who were at a similar reading level but were not being exposed to SSR. The researcher wanted to see the impact of SSR and see if the instruction led to higher results. The implementation of SSR began right away and strategies were applied in addition to their regular reading instruction. SSR instruction included decoding strategies, comprehension connections, as well as responding and thinking while reading texts.

The duration of this action research project lasted approximately 13 weeks. The treatment group had SSR instruction with the researcher three times a week for thirty minutes. During this time, the researcher would go over decoding strategies, comprehension connections, demonstrate how to read with expression and characteristics of a fluent reader, responding and thinking while

reading texts and conferenced with students individually to reach specific reading goals. The researcher closely monitored all twenty-one students through informal observations and conferences during this time. The post-test was administered in January using the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment to analyze progress.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether first grade students receiving Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) daily would make significant improvement in their reading level compared to another first grade class not receiving SSR. This study was based on a quasi-experimental design and measured the students' reading level based on Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) assessments. The students who participated in this study were chosen based on their reading performance on the beginning of the year Fountas & Pinnell benchmark reading assessment. This assessment was given prior to SSR starting for one classroom.

The Fountas & Pinnell reading assessment produces reading categories that estimate grade level goals. For example, levels A-D equate to kindergarten, E-J to first grade, all the way to Z+ that is Grades 9-12 and adults.

Table 1.

F&P Pretest Reading Levels Control vs. Treatment

group	FP_pre			Total
	B	C	D	
control	3	6	12	21
treat	4	8	9	21
Total	7	14	21	42

Pearson chi2(2) = 0.8571 Pr = 0.651

The null hypothesis that the F&P pre-reading levels were unrelated to group membership was not rejected at the customary $\alpha=0.05$ level. Therefore, the control and treatment groups began the study with even reading levels.

Table 2.

F&P Posttest Reading Levels Control vs. Treatment

group	FP_post							Total
	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
control	3	8	4	4	2	0	0	21
treat	0	1	3	4	4	5	4	21
Total	3	9	7	8	6	5	4	42

Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 18.2540$ Pr = 0.006

The null hypothesis that the F&P post reading levels were unrelated to group membership was rejected at the customary $\alpha=0.05$ level. Therefore, the control and treatment groups reading levels were unequal after the treatment was implemented. Fifteen members of the control group were at the kindergarten reading level compared with 4 pupils in the treatment group. Six control students were at the first-grade reading level contrasted with 17 treatment pupils. Clearly the treatment students had gained more reading levels than the control pupils.

Table 3.**F&P Pre-to-Post Reading Levels for the Controls**

FP_pre	FP_post					Total
	B	C	D	E	F	
B	1	2	0	0	0	3
C	1	3	2	0	0	6
D	1	3	2	4	2	12
4	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	8	4	4	2	21

	chi2	df	Prob>chi2
Symmetry (asymptotic)	7.53	5	0.1839
Marginal homogeneity (Stuart-Maxwell)	6.70	4	0.1529

The controls did not significantly gain F&P reading levels from pre-to-post.

Table 4.**F&P Pre-to-Post Reading Levels for the Treatment**

FP_pre	FP_post							Total
	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
B	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
C	0	0	1	3	2	2	0	8
D	0	0	0	0	2	3	4	9
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	3	4	4	5	4	21

	chi2	df	Prob>chi2
Symmetry (asymptotic)	21.00	10	0.0211
Marginal homogeneity (Stuart-Maxwell)	19.87	6	0.0029

The treatment group significantly gained F&P reading levels from pre-to-post-assessment. The Symmetry Test must have the same number of rows and columns. If the data do not cover the same number of rows and columns, the test populates the table with zero cells to obtain symmetry. The zero cells do not alter the analyses.

In summary, the results indicated that the control and treatment groups were evenly distributed across the F&P reading levels on the pretest. The posttest, however, showed that the treatment group gained more F&P reading levels than the control group. On the pretest, all 21 members of the control and all 21 of the treatment group pupils were at the kindergarten reading levels. On the posttest, by contrast, 6 of the 21 control group members had improved to the first-grade reading level, while 17 of the 21 treatment group pupils had increased to the first-grade reading level. The implications will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This research was focused on examining the effect of SSR on student reading achievement. Students were selected to participate in this quasi-experimental design study based on their fall Fountas & Pinnell reading levels. The students were selected as their reading levels were below the current grade level expectation of level E. There was a treatment (Sustained Silent Reading) group of 21 students and an equivalent group of 21 control students.

Implications of Results

The results from this research explicitly show the differential effectiveness of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). The null hypothesis stated that first-grade students using SSR and similar students in the control group would not differ in their posttest mean population reading level on the Fountas and Pinnell assessments. The theoretical population was all first-grade classrooms similar to the ones used in the study. The null hypothesis was rejected because students in the treatment group attained higher reading levels than students in the control group. The pretest null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that the treatment and control groups began the study at similar reading levels.

Threats to Validity

There were several threats to validity that emerged during this study. One such threat was time for SSR as this research was done with a regrouping class and some students received hours with the Special Educator.

The first threat to validity was the amount of time for SSR. This time was short and possibly could have limited effectiveness of the delivery or the amount of student growth. There were days school was closed, experienced a delayed opening, weather conditions leading to school being closed, early dismissal days, and holiday breaks. Due to the loss of time, not every student received the same amount of time with the researcher as others. This caused some students to receive more time than others.

The other threat to validity was that two students received hours with the Special Education teacher. Two students in the treatment group received additional support from the Special Educator twice a week. They were pulled from the classroom to participate in a research-based intervention called SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words). This intervention program works explicitly on improving decoding strategies.

Even though there were two threats to validity, all students in the treatment sample improved their reading levels while involved with SSR.

Connections to Existing Literature

Results from a similar study conducted by Jablonski (2018) indicated that second grade students' reading achievement levels improved by participating in a silent reading program. The researcher confirmed giving students 15 minutes every day to stop and read books at their level would result in growth in reading achievement. There were 21 students who participated in this study. Students' reading levels varied from below grade level to above grade level. Students in this study were exposed to silent reading time as well as guidance from the researcher when selecting appropriate books.

The study identified above showed a lot of parallels to this study of sustained silent reading. In both studies, some students were reading below grade level. In addition, the use of silent reading time was proven effective in both studies. A major difference between both studies is Jablonski allowed fifteen minutes in the daily schedule for students to stop and read whereas this study did not permit SSR every day due to schedule conflicts.

Implications for Future Research

When reflecting on this study, there were a few implications to consider for further research. Additional research could include a larger sample size, samples in a different grade, participants on the same reading level, or parental involvement at home.

For this study, the researcher collected pre-and post-test data using the reading assessment of Fountas and Pinnell with two 1st grade classrooms. The researcher found that it may be beneficial to conduct this study in other grades. Also, having participants who are reading on the same level can also show the effectiveness of SSR for participants who are already reading on grade level. As well, by conducting this study with a larger sample size would also show the effectiveness of SSR. For example, conducting the study as a grade-level or school-wide initiative. This could provide more information about how well this study could benefit others.

The last variable to be considered for future research would be parental involvement at home. This study was strictly conducted in the classroom, and the references, as well as resources were left at school. The researcher is curious to know what impact parental involvement could have on the student's reading level increasing if these resources and references were also provided for home use. If the participants took these materials home every

night and weekend to use at home with their parents, what impact would such a strategy have on overall reading achievement.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine if instructional time dedicated to SSR would impact struggling readers and increase their reading level scores. The results showed students who received SSR did differentially increase their reading abilities compared with a similar group of students who did not use SSR.

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