The Impact of Explicit Guided Reading Instruction on

Fifth-Grade Students' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of explicit guided reading instruction during small group instruction on fifth-grade students' reading comprehension. The measurement tool used was Fountas and Pinnell's (2017) Benchmark Assessment System and the treatment utilized Richardson's (2016) *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading*. A one-group pre/post design was used to determine the impact of four weeks of explicit guided reading instruction in small group on instructional reading levels. Pre-to-post gains were statistically and practically significant in the areas of instructional reading level and reading comprehension.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Learning to read is a complex task. Many skills are required simultaneously in order to read and understand text. According to the National Reading Panel, there are five critical components necessary for the development of independent reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Konza, 2014). Students begin learning phonemic awareness and phonics at varying levels; some learn these necessary skills in child development programs or preschools, and some learn these skills when they enter kindergarten in elementary schools. Depending on varying levels and gaps in learning, many students who struggle with phonemic awareness and phonics also struggle with fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The goal of reading is to make meaning and comprehend the text. Due to the number of challenges in reading, many students are struggling to become proficient readers according to grade level standards.

Children who are poor readers in early childhood often stay poor readers and rarely catch up. Teachers are tasked with ensuring all students leave reading on grade level. This includes students in upper elementary school who enter fifth grade reading on a first-grade reading level. No curriculum could possibly address the varying needs found within a classroom; therefore, teachers must be skilled in using data to design customized instruction to meet student needs. It is important for teachers to have a complete understanding of the most effective instructional practices and interventions to ensure all students leave elementary school reading on grade level.

Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, that has three fundamental purposes: to meet the varying instructional needs of all students in the classroom, to teach students to read instructional leveled texts with understanding and fluency, and to construct meaning while using problem-solving strategies to figure out unfamiliar words and understand concepts not previously encountered (Iaquinta, 2006). Guided reading incorporates the five critical components of reading development into small group instruction that is individualized based on students' needs. This instructional practice can help students practice the skills necessary to grow and become proficient readers according to grade level standards.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of reading intervention strategies, specifically explicit guided reading instruction, on fifth-grade elementary students' reading comprehension.

Hypothesis

The guided reading intervention will not impact the growth in students' reading comprehension as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's (2017) Benchmark Assessment System.

There will be no difference in students' mean instructional reading levels, based on the comprehension score, as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's (2017) Benchmark Assessment System between pre and post guided reading instruction using *The Next Steps Forward in Guided Reading* by Jan Richardson (2016).

Operational Definitions

The independent variable is daily guided reading instruction. This is operationally

defined as explicit instruction using guided reading lesson planners and comprehension lessons

from *The Next Steps Forward in Guided Reading* by Jan Richardson (2016) The dependent

variable is instructional reading levels as measured by Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark

Assessment System given pre and post instruction, with a focus on the comprehension score of

the assessment. This is operationally defined as an alphabetic reading level A-Z. Instructional

reading levels are acquired using the Benchmark Assessment System. Each student is

individually assessed to determine his/her instructional reading level, based on decoding,

fluency, and reading comprehension. For this study, students' levels were assessed in February to

determine a baseline and assessed again in March after receiving explicit guided reading

instruction in small groups for four weeks.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Many upper elementary school students are falling below grade level in various areas of reading instruction. One area of concern is the lack of growth and achievement in reading comprehension. There are many techniques and interventions to help support reading comprehension for upper elementary students. The question is this: which techniques show the most improvement in below-level upper elementary students' reading comprehension?

This literature review seeks to explore the effect of techniques and interventions, such as a balanced literacy program, guided reading, close reading, strategy instruction, and reciprocal teaching, on students' reading comprehension. Section one defines and explains the concept of reading comprehension. Section two describes why reading comprehension is important and how reading comprehension is assessed. Section three describes some techniques and interventions that impact reading comprehension and how these interventions help to improve students' reading comprehension. Section four outlines the barriers of some of the techniques and explains strategies to help students when there is limited growth in reading comprehension achievement. Section five describes what can make reading comprehension better for upper elementary school students.

What Is Reading Comprehension?

One of the most important skills students learn when they begin elementary school is how to read. When learning how to read, one learns letters, sounds, blends, and how to decode words. Students also learn how to make meaning from those words when the words are put together as sentences and paragraphs. It is the meaning of the words that comprises reading comprehension.

Reading is a complex skill that requires many different processes at one time. Reading is a process which starts with seeing letters, words, and sentences and continues with receiving information based on one's attention and perception of the information. Finally, these processes lead to comprehension in the brain (Kusdemir & Bulut, 2018).

According to McLaughlin (2012), reading comprehension is when meaning is constructed through making connections between prior knowledge and new learning. Good readers use multiple strategies to make meaning from the text such as, predicting, visualizing, activating prior knowledge, summarizing, inferring, synthesizing, and monitoring (Burke, Fiene, Young, & Meyer, 2008). It is through these strategies that teachers teach students how to comprehend what is read and how to make meaning from the text.

Reading comprehension is a complicated skill to teach because not only are there multiple strategies and many different ways to teach students to comprehend the text, but students who have limited background knowledge about different topics are less likely to make connections needed to gain meaning from the text. When students are reading, they must make connections to prior knowledge and experiences in order to gain meaning about the text and learn new information. If a student is reading about animals, he or she can make connections to the animals with which he or she is familiar or has seen in prior life experiences. If a student has never seen or heard of an animal before, he or she is less likely to understand the text or understand animals.

McLaughlin (2012) discusses the importance of student engagement and participation in discussions about the text. When teaching students how to read, it is important to teach students to monitor their comprehension in order to make sure they are understanding what was read. Students can learn to monitor their own comprehension by asking themselves if they understand

what they just read. If they are not making meaning of the text, students can use strategies for decoding, understanding vocabulary, reading with fluency, or accessing background knowledge to make sure they are making sense of the text (McLaughlin, 2012).

One way for teachers to monitor the comprehension of students is to listen and facilitate discussions about the text. It is important to engage students in rich discussions about the text because students make meaning about the text through discussions with other students. Students can listen to others' ideas and gain meaning from other students' background knowledge and experiences. This is another way for teachers to monitor the comprehension of the students and to clarify or provide background knowledge if students are not making meaning from the text.

Why Is Reading Comprehension Important?

The ultimate goal when reading is to build meaning from the text. Students are taught how to read in order to learn new information and build on meaning. Reading is a skill that is used daily and is the ultimate way individuals gain knowledge and information in our world. Reading comprehension is extremely important in order to learn information from all content areas (Burke et al., 2008). Students need to be able to comprehend what they read, especially as students move to middle and high school. Comprehension is the basis for learning new information in secondary education (Sporer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2009).

According to Katz and Carlisle (2009), "…compared to good readers, poor readers do not see reading as a search for meaning. They do not monitor their own comprehension, engage in strategies when there is a breakdown in comprehension, or modify their choice of strategy to meet the task demands" (p. 326). Reading comprehension is important in order for students to gain meaning from the text. It is also important to teach reading comprehension strategies,

especially to struggling readers, in order to provide students with strategies to help monitor their own comprehension (Katz & Carlisle, 2009).

What Techniques Are Used To Improve Reading Comprehension?

A balanced literacy program allows students to participate in a variety of activities and reading experiences. It is crucial for reading instruction to provide multiple experiences for students to read, write, think, speak, and listen to text during the reading block of instruction. Through these experiences, students participate in whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent work opportunities (Gaffner, Johnson, Torres-Elias, & Dryden, 2014). During the balanced literacy program, there are multiple techniques and strategies that can be used to improve reading comprehension and achievement.

Guided Reading

Guided reading is one technique that can be used to improve reading comprehension. Guided reading is an intervention used for students reading below grade level. Guided reading is an early intervention and should begin as soon as students are targeted as below grade level. In primary grade levels, guided reading is used as small-group instruction for all students in order to practice and develop skills to become a skilled reader. In upper elementary grade-levels, guided reading is used as an intervention to strategically support students below grade level (Gaffner et al., 2014).

According to Richardson (2016), guided reading is "...small-group differentiated instruction that supports students in developing reading proficiency" (p. 13). The ultimate goal of guided reading is to not only expose students to a variety of texts and make meaning from the words, but to also to enable students to think within, beyond, and about the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2013). During this small group instruction, students are placed in flexible groups to

practice reading instructional leveled text, where learning is customized to each student's needs. Well-established groups are the foundation for guided reading instruction (Toney, 2017). Students are grouped based on similar guided reading levels and abilities; however, students have the opportunity to move to other groups depending on each students' progress and growth.

The teacher selects a text for each group based on the group's overall instructional reading level measured through the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) benchmark assessments. The text should be a slightly challenging text, where students can practice problem-solving through decoding and comprehension strategies. Each student reads to him or herself, while the teacher checks in with each student. While the student whisper reads to the teacher, the teacher can provide one-on-one customized instruction based on the student's needs. During this time, the teacher can provide the necessary scaffolds and prompts based on student needs.

After students are finished reading the selected text, the teacher explicitly teaches a targeted skill that relates to the text. It is important for teachers to provide models of comprehension strategies that assist readers in determining the meaning of the text while they read. For example, the teacher can model how to determine the main idea of the text. The students then participate in a discussion or activity about the targeted skill that was taught. The teacher will support students to use the strategies taught to make connections and think beyond the text (Toney, 2017). During this small group guided reading time, students are engaged in instructional level text, where they can receive customized-targeted instruction and engage in rich discussions about the text in order to improve in reading decoding and comprehension (Richardson, 2016).

Based on research from Whitehead (2002), perspective and imagery-thinking strategies taught during guided reading instruction help students become "…strategic, knowledgeable,

motivated and reflective readers," (p. 33). These strategies are used to engage students in the text and to get them thinking about what they are reading. Perspective thinking strategies are when students construct meaning by understanding the perspective from the text and compare this with what they already know. These strategies are beneficial when discussing and solving social problems about the text. For example, gender-perspective thinking allows students to think about the roles of males and females. Students can discuss and think about how the perspectives and parts of the story would change if the character were a different gender. In Whitehead's (2002) research, the students discussed the text, *Little Red Riding Hood*, using the gender-perspective thinking strategy. In order for students to understand the perspective of the girl in little red riding hood, they discussed how things would be different if the main character was a boy.

Imagery thinking strategies are when students use visual imagery to help make sense and understand the text. These strategies are used to help students visualize what is happening in the text and to monitor their comprehension of the text. For example, the moving-imagery thinking strategy can be used to visualize scenes from the text that are moving. During a guided reading lesson, students were asked to use this strategy to visualize penguins diving off an ice shelf and moving underwater. Students visualized this scene and then zoomed in on their visualizations to discuss the movement of the penguins and make predictions about what might occur next in the story (Whitehead, 2002).

According to Conklin and Wilson (2002), the purpose of guided reading is to provide customized instruction on the students' instructional reading level in order to meet each student needs. Guided reading instruction provides a positive reading experience for students. During the small group lesson, the teacher supports students by developing background knowledge, teaching and practicing comprehension strategies such as predicating, summarizing, and inferencing,

facilitating group discussions where students are able to make connections and think beyond the text, and conferencing with each individual student to provide scaffolds and clear up any misconceptions (Conklin & Wilson, 2002).

Close Reading

Close reading is another technique that can be used to improve reading comprehension. The close reading strategy allows students to focus on a part of the text in order to think critically about the text. Close reading is often used as a strategy within a guided reading lesson. According to Baker and McEnery (2017), "…close reading involves reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deeper comprehension," (p. 71). Close reading, when combined with the guided reading lesson, can help students dig deeper into the text and participate in rich discussions about specific excerpts from the text in order to gain a deep understanding of the text.

It is important to teach students at an early age to read closely and to analyze the text to gain a deeper understanding. It is this skill that helps to develop a strong foundation in reading comprehension. When using the strategy of close reading, students are directed to reread and analyze a specific part of the text. This part of the text could be a specific paragraph or a few pages. Then the teacher facilitates a deep discussion using text-based questions to analyze the chosen passage or page and to help students understand important concepts such as, theme, vocabulary, the author's main points, tone, and perspectives (Baker & McEnery, 2017).

Students who are struggling with reading comprehension or making slow progress with growth in reading comprehension need strategies to help link decoding and comprehension. Close reading allows students to reread the excerpt or passage using decoding strategies and

linking these strategies to word meanings. In addition, close reading allows students to participate in a discussion in order to develop meaning and comprehension of the text. Using this strategy, students can practice digging deeper into the text using close reading in order to allow the discussions and strategies to become habitual (Katz & Carlisle, 2009).

Strategy Instruction and Reciprocal Teaching

Another technique that can be used to improve reading comprehension is strategy instruction and reciprocal teaching. According to Sporer et al. (2009), "Reading comprehension is correlated with a number of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as activating background knowledge, summarizing text, and generating questions to capture the main idea of the passage" (p. 273). In order for students to comprehend the text, they need to be familiar with strategies and ways to make meaning from the text. It is important for teachers to model, practice, provide feedback, and give students multiple opportunities to use a variety of strategies to comprehend the text. Strategies such as accessing prior knowledge, understanding vocabulary, decoding, and making inferences result in reading comprehension (Sporer et al., 2009). Guided reading instruction also focuses on a strategy for each lesson, where the teacher models the strategy, practices using the strategy with the students, and provides feedback to students on how they use the strategy.

Reciprocal teaching is a strategy that uses scaffolded instruction to teach targeted comprehension strategies. The four strategies that are focused in reciprocal teaching include questioning the text, summarizing parts of the text, clarifying word meanings and confusing parts of the text, and making predictions about what comes next in the text. During reciprocal teaching, the teacher models the strategy and provides opportunities to practice the strategy with scaffolded supports. Eventually the teacher fades out, and the students take turns leading

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discussions around the strategy. Once the students have adequate practice with the strategy, the teacher allows students to independently apply the strategy to another passage. The overall goal of reciprocal teaching is to provide scaffolded instruction and collaboration in order to lead to self-directed and flexible use of the learned strategies independently, which will help to increase reading comprehension (Sporer et al., 2009).

What Can Go Wrong with the Techniques?

Some challenges can occur when implementing techniques such as guided reading and close reading. Some students continue through guided reading groups; however, they make little to no progress in increasing their guided reading level. It is these students who continue to make the same reading errors and feel defeated during each guided reading lesson. When guided reading or other techniques are not working for students who are struggling, educators need to step back and reflect on why progress is not being made (Wall, 2014). According to Wall (2014), the problem often lies in the way educators are delivering the guided reading instruction. Educators need to focus guided reading instruction on a problem-solving mindset, where students are given the necessary tools and strategies to independently use when they are struggling to comprehend the text.

When educators think about instruction, it is often thought that students must master the skills and strategies being taught in order to make progress and be successful. However, the purpose of guided reading instruction is not to enforce the mastery of skills and strategies, but to focus more on changing students' reading behaviors. We want students to grow and make progress in order to become better readers. According to Wall (2014), educators should ask themselves the following questions about their students: "What are students doing with what they know? Are they actively problem-solving text? Who is doing the majority of the reading

work?" (p. 136). Guided reading instruction needs to focus on providing students with the necessary skills and strategies needed to help them problem-solve through text that is difficult and challenging. Guided reading needs to provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge of strategic reading practices to authentic reading experiences (Wall, 2014).

What Can Make Reading Comprehension Better?

While there are many different strategies and techniques to improve reading comprehension, one aspect that can make reading comprehension better is to provide students with multiple reading experiences and opportunities to apply their reading strategies and skills. When planning reading experiences, it is also important to make sure students have adequate prior knowledge about the topic in order to make meaning from the text. When students do not have the necessary background knowledge for the text, it is the job of educators to plan ways to present the background knowledge to students. (McLaughlin, 2012). This is part of the guided reading instruction. Teachers provide opportunities for students to gain background knowledge about the text.

According to Kusdemir and Bulut (2018), another way to make reading comprehension better is to make sure students are motivated when reading. Motivation is the drive and desire to maintain an activity and reach a desired goal. Students need to be motivated to make growth and increase their reading comprehension. One way to motivate students to make growth in reading is through high-interest text. Students need to be engaged and interested in the text. Educators can survey students based on their interests and find texts and passages based on what the students find interesting (Kusdemir & Bulut, 2018).

Students can be motivated to increase their growth in reading comprehension through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation will occur when students are interested in

the topic of the text. Students will be engaged and want to read the text because it interests them. Extrinsic motivation is the desire to gain rewards and incentives from other people such as teachers or parents. Educators can extrinsically motivate students to make growth in reading comprehension by offering an incentive for making growth on the benchmark assessments during guided reading instruction (Kusdemir & Bulut, 2018).

Conclusion

Reading comprehension is a complex skill that requires hard work and effort from educators and students. Whether students are learning reading or another subject, Kusdemir and Bulut (2018) state, "For real learning to occur, students should have positive attitudes towards themselves as learners, their abilities needed to be successful at school and the objectives set by themselves, their teachers and school" (p. 98). Students who have motivation and positive attitudes toward making growth will be more likely to increase reading comprehension achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of explicit guided reading instruction during small group learning on fifth-grade students' instructional reading comprehension as measured by Fountas and Pinnell (2017) guided reading levels.

Design

A pre-experimental design was used to determine the impact of explicit guided reading instruction on reading comprehension as measured by instructional reading levels. The independent variable was the guided reading instruction. The dependent variable was the students' reading comprehension as measured by the instructional reading level. Pretest and posttest data were collected in February and March. This data was collected using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System. When the pretest data was collected in February, students were placed into similar reading level small groups and students received daily, explicit guided reading instruction during small group instruction by the teacher. The teacher utilized the resource *The Next Steps Forward in Guided Reading* by Jan Richardson (2016), to provide 20 minutes of explicit guided reading instruction per group. The teacher created lesson plans using the lesson planners from this resource.

Participants

This research was conducted in a fifth-grade classroom at a Title I school in Baltimore County. The sample was convenience. There were 20 students who participated in the study; 12 males and eight females. The class demographic was comprised of various races and ethnicities; 15 students identified as African American, two students identified as Caucasian, one student

identified as Hispanic, and two students identified as multirace. Also, within this group, seven

students receive special education services and have Individualized Education Plans. One of the

students receiving special education services also receives ESOL services. Within this group of

students, the February Benchmark Assessment indicated 18 students performing below grade

level, two students performing on grade level, and zero students performing above grade level.

According to the 2018-2019 Maryland School Report Card, the school's total earned percent

for overall progress is 53%. This overall percent included academic achievement, academic

progress, progress in achieving English language proficiency, and school quality and student

success. As a school, the percent of students proficient in English Language Arts is 23 and the

percent of students who made growth in English Language Arts is 40. The school's percentile

rank for elementary schools is 21, and the school has earned three out of five stars on the MD

State Report Card.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark

Assessment System. This assessment system is used to determine students' independent and

instructional reading levels. Through a running record and comprehension conversation, teachers

observe student reading behaviors, such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension, in order to

determine each student's reading level to make informed instructional decisions. Data was

collected in February for baseline data and four weeks later at the beginning of March for the

post data. The data collected indicated the students' instructional reading level according to the

Fountas and Pinnell text level gradient.

Procedure

During the month of February, baseline data was collected to determine students' current instructional reading levels. This data was collected using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System. The teacher met with each student one-on-one to observe the student's reading behaviors and determine his or her current reading level. The data was analyzed by the teacher to create small reading groups within the classroom. Students were grouped based on similar guided reading levels and placed into three groups. Group one consisted of four students on guided reading levels F-I, group two consisted of ten students on guided reading levels O-R, and group three consisted of six students on guided reading levels S-T.

Over the course of four weeks, students received daily explicit guided reading instruction in a small group. This instruction was in addition to the reading strategy and instruction that occurred as a whole group during shared learning. During the guided reading instruction, the teacher met with each small group for 20 minutes. The teacher began the small group lesson by introducing the text, which was on the instructional reading level of the students in the group and introducing vocabulary words from the text, which were chosen by the teacher. While the students read the text independently, the teacher conferenced with each student in the group. During this mini conference, the teacher provided individualized, customized instruction based on the needs of the student. The teacher listened to the student read, provided scaffolds or clarification when needed, and asked questions by having a comprehension conversation with the student.

Once students were finished reading the assigned pages or chapter, the teacher introduced and taught the comprehension strategy for the text and facilitated a group discussion focused on

the strategy. Students took turns participating in the discussion and referring back to the text to support his or her ideas. At the end of the small group lesson, the teacher reviewed a word work skill and students practiced the skill independently or with a partner.

During the small group instruction, each text was used over two or three days. During the second day of guided reading instruction, the students reread the text and focused more on the strategy and skill for the text. On the third day of the small group, the teacher explained and modeled a writing strategy and students had the opportunity to practice writing in their journal while the teacher checked in with each student and provided customized writing instruction based on student needs.

At the end of the four weeks, data was collected once again using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System by meeting individually with each student. This data was used to record growth of students' instructional reading levels.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of explicit guided reading instruction during small group learning on fifth-grade students' instructional reading comprehension. Reading comprehension was measured by using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System to determine each student's instructional reading levels before and after four weeks of explicit guided reading instruction in small groups. The participants in the study were one class of 20 fifth-grade students at a Title I elementary school in Baltimore County Maryland. All students received the treatment, and pre and post data was collected by the teacher. Data were analyzed for measures of central tendency and the dependent or paired-*t* test was used in Excel to analyze the data. Figure 1 displays the data. There is also data relative to the students' instructional reading level growth, which is displayed in figures 2-6 below. The data represents pre to post reading level growth.

There were 20 students tested during the pre and post treatment. All students individually met with the teacher to complete the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark assessment for the pre and post treatment data collection. During the assessment, students were asked to read aloud a text, continue reading the text independently, and then asked a series of questions during the comprehension conversation. Students receive an accuracy percentage, fluency score, and comprehension score. These three scores are used to determine the student's guided reading level, which is a letter of the alphabet that corresponds with a grade level to determine the student's instructional reading level.

The paired *t*-test was used to determine whether the pre-to-post mean change was statistically significant at the 0.05 *p*-value. For the dependent variable, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System instructional reading levels, the mean gains from pre-to-post treatment were significantly different statistically at the customary *p*-value of 0.000.

Figure 1

Measures of Central Tendency and Dependent (Paired) t *test Analysis*

	Pretest	*Post Test*
Mean	0.7655	0.828
Variance	0.03941553	0.05368
Observations	20	20
Pearson Correlation	0.95841482	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	19	
t Stat	-3.9828312	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000*	
t Critical two-tail	2.09302405	
* p at .000 is less than p<.05 thus significantly different statistically		

In order to analyze the individual data, each guided reading level was given a percentage. The end of the third marking period benchmark guided reading level for fifth grade is a level U. This means that by the end of the third marking period a fifth grader should be reading on a guided reading level U to be considered reading on grade level. The figure below

shows each guided reading level and the percentage for that reading level, when a guided reading level U is 100% since it is the goal by the end of the third marking period.

Figure 2

Guided Reading Percentages

| Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level	Percentage (when U=100%)	Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level	Percentage (when U=100%)
A	5%	L	57%
B	10%	M	62%
C	14%	N	67%
D	19%	O	71%
E	24%	P	76%
F	29%	Q	81%
G	33%	R	86%
H	38%	S	90%
I	43%	T	95%
J	48%	U *	100%
K	52%	V	105%

*= Target guided reading level for fifth grade

The overall average guided reading level for the pre-assessment data was 76.50%. The overall average guided reading level for the post assessment data was 82.08%. This shows that from the pre to post assessment, on average, students grew 5.58% in their guided reading level. Eighteen out of 20 students made growth on his or her reading level. The graph below (Figure 3)

shows the pre-assessment results of each student's guided reading level (measured as a percent) compared to the post-assessment results. A number (1-20) was given to identify each student in the class. The red horizontal line is the percentage that students should be reading by the end of the third marking period of fifth grade. Six out of 20 students achieved the benchmark score of 100%, which is a guided reading level U, on the post assessment. Out of these six students, two of the students achieved 105%, which is a guided reading level V. A guided reading level V is the benchmark reading level for the end of fifth grade; therefore, two out of 20 students are reading slightly above grade level when assessed towards the end of the third marking period.
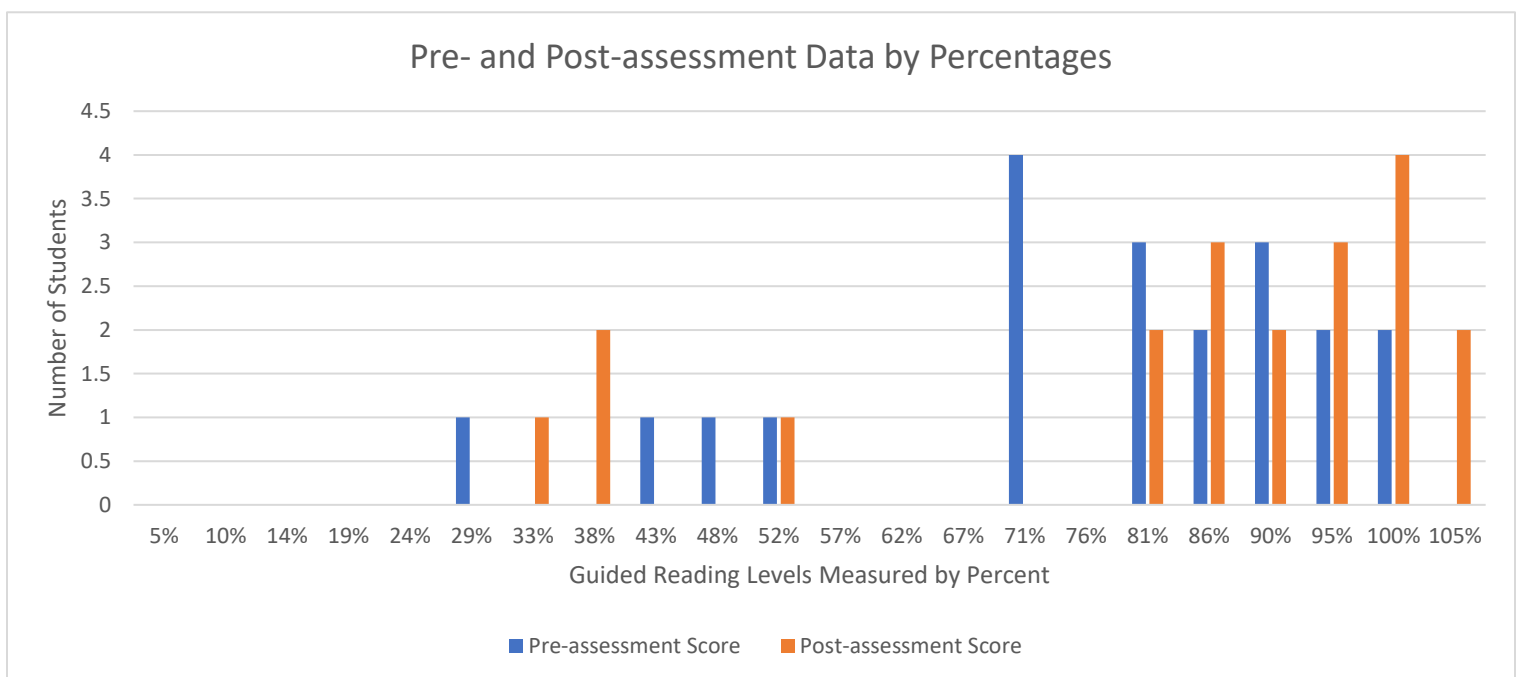
Figure 3

Comparison of Pre- and Post-assessment Individual Student Guided Reading Levels Measured in Percent
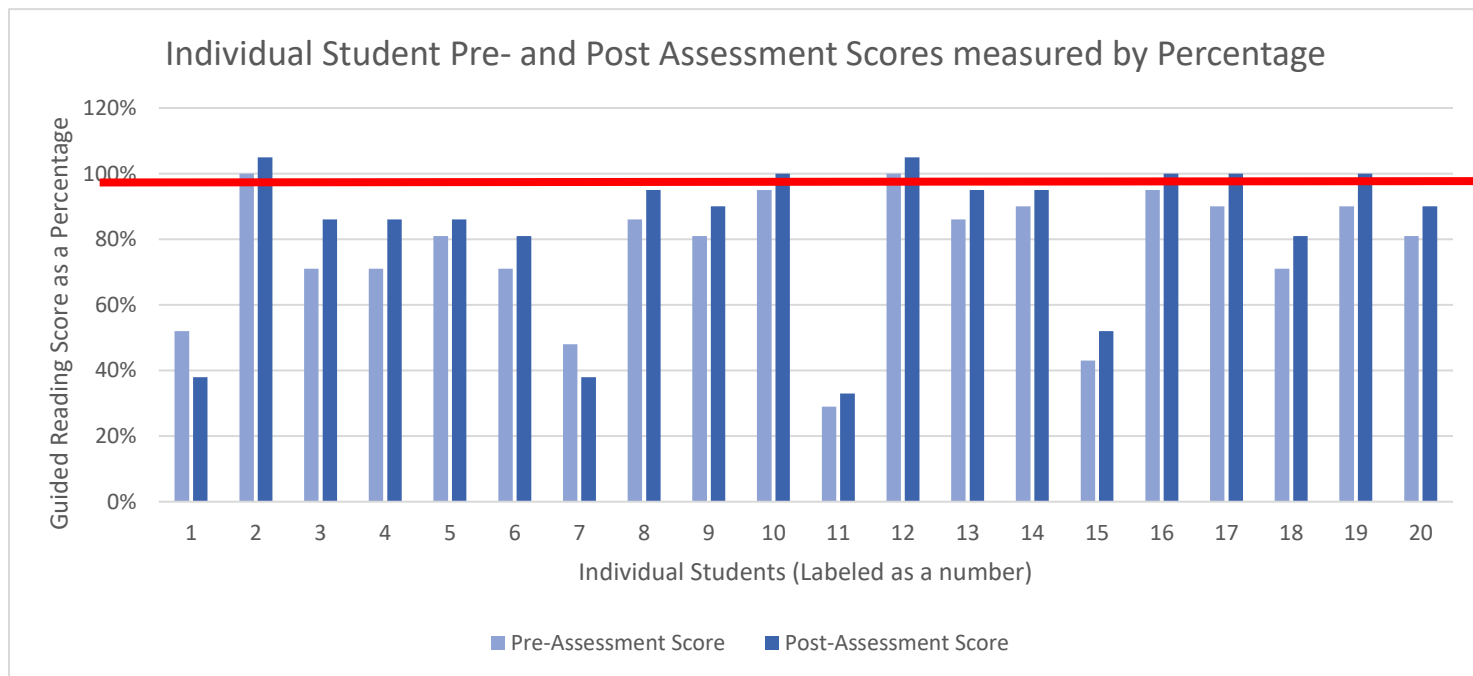
The graph below shows the pre-assessment and post-assessment data as measured by the number of students on each instructional guided reading percentage. A fifth-grade guided reading level consists of guided reading levels T, U, and V. By the end of the third marking period, students should be reading a guided reading level U to be considered on grade level. According to the graph below, there were four out of 20 students reading on a fifth-grade level (Guided Reading levels T, U, or V) after the pre-assessment data was collected. After the post-assessment data was collected in March, nine out of 20 students were reading on a fifth-grade reading level (Guided Reading levels T, U, or V).

Figure 4

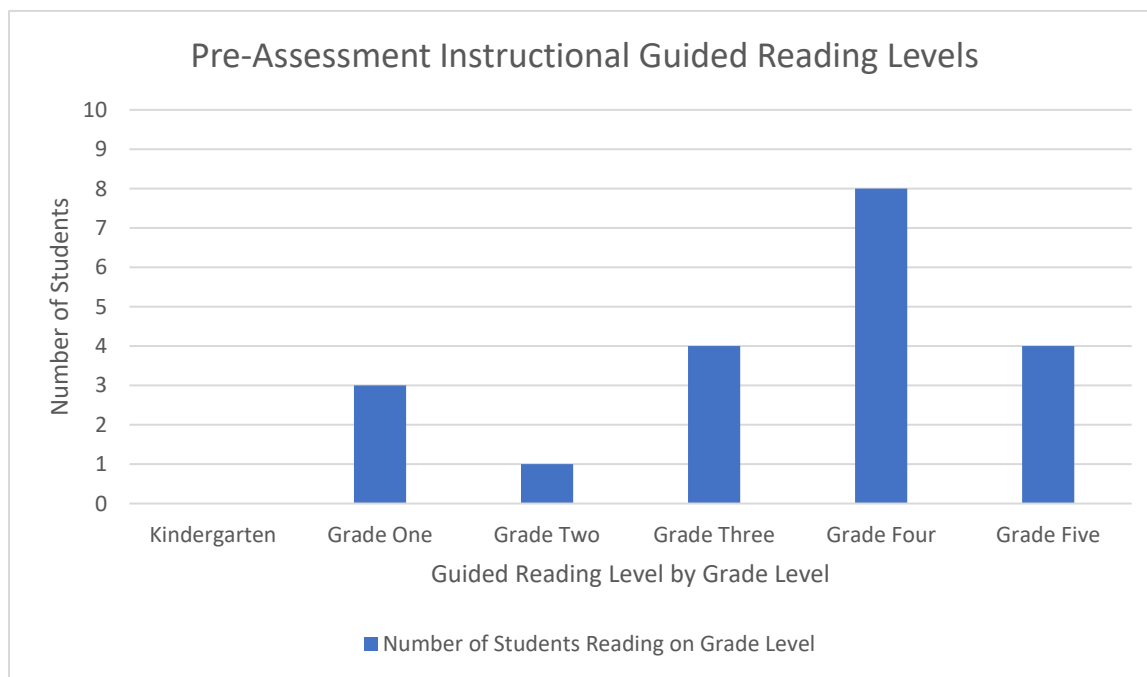*Pre-assessment and Post-assessment Data by Percentages*

This figure below shows the pre-assessment guided reading data by grade levels. On the pre-assessment, the average guided reading level was 76.05%, which is around a guided reading

level P or Q, which is on a third- or fourth-grade guided reading level (see figure 7). According to the pre-assessment data, 80% of the students were reading on a third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade reading level, as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. The mode of the pre-assessment data was on a fourth-grade reading level. Eight out of twenty students, which is 40% of the students, were reading on a fourth-grade reading level, which is only one grade level behind a fifth-grade reading level. Consequently, 20% of the students were reading below a third-grade reading level. Three out of 20 students were reading on a first-grade reading level, as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment.

Figure 5

Pre-assessment Instructional Guided Reading Data by Grade Levels

This figure below shows the post-assessment guided reading data by grade levels. On the post-assessment, the average guided reading level was 82.08%, which is around a guided reading

level Q or R, which is on a fourth-grade guided reading level (see figure 7). According to the post-assessment data, 80% of the students were reading on a fourth- or fifth-grade reading level, as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. The mode of the post-assessment data was on a fifth-grade reading level. Nine out of 20 students, which is 45% of the students, were reading on a fifth-grade reading level. Consequently, 20% of the students were still reading below a third-grade reading level. There were still three out of 20 students reading on a first-grade reading level, as measured by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment.

Figure 6

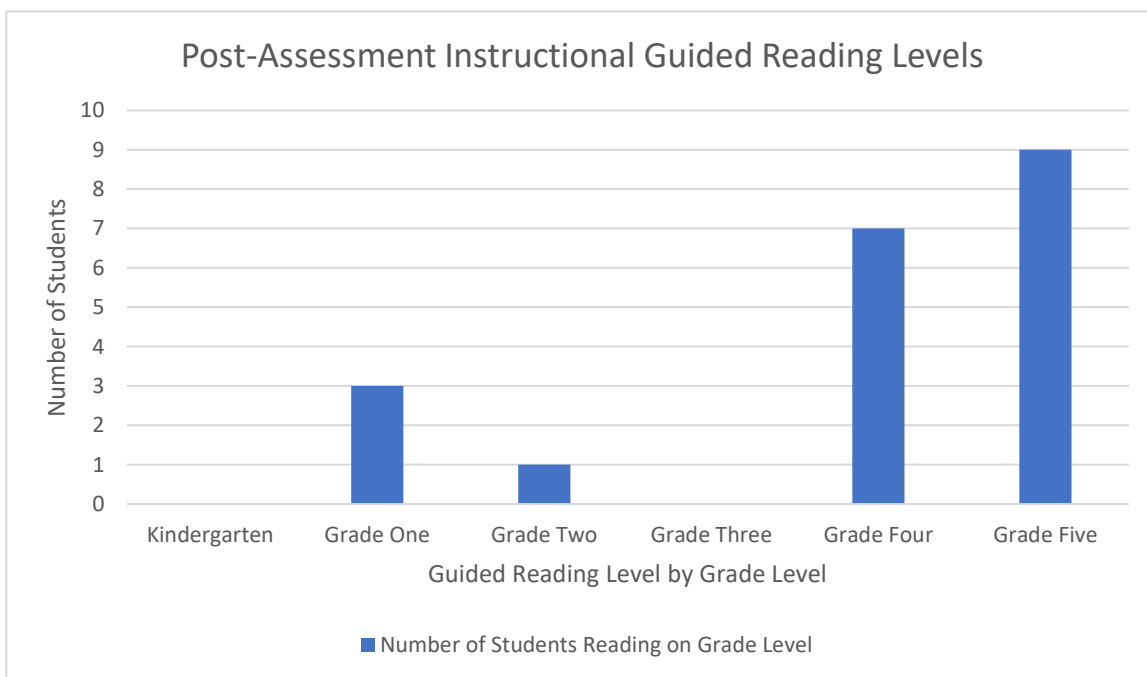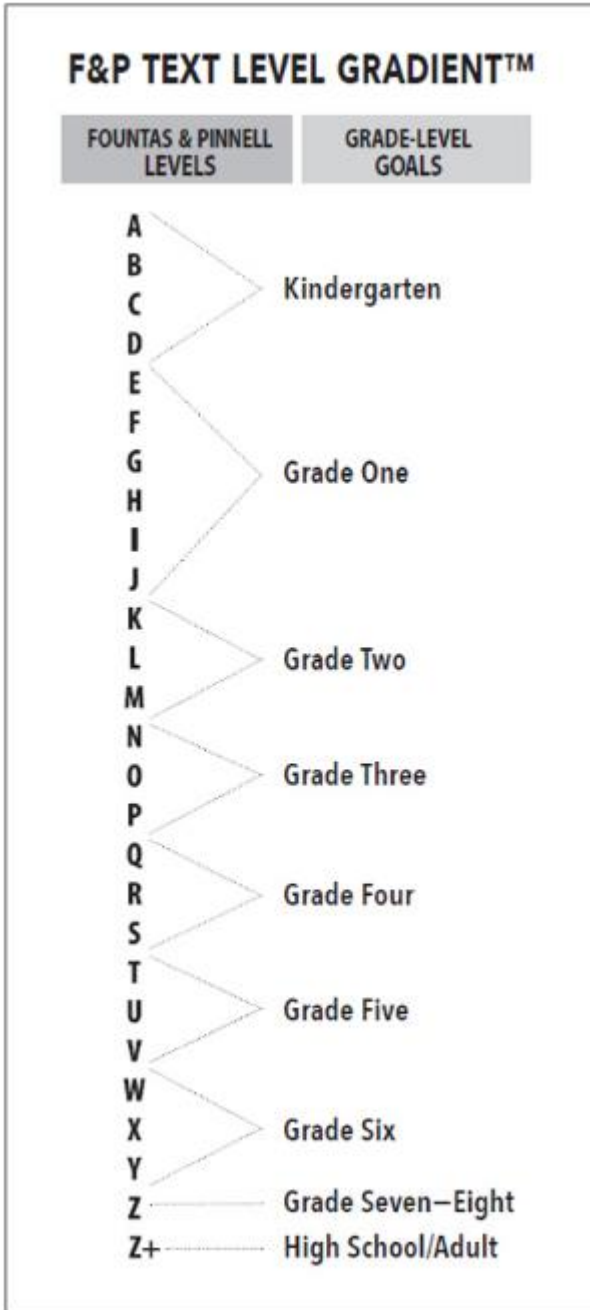*Post-assessment Instruction Guided reading Data by Grade Levels*

Figure 7

Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient (2012)

F&P TEXT LEVEL GRADIENT™

FOUNTAS & PINNELL LEVELS	GRADE-LEVEL GOALS
A B C D	Kindergarten
E F G H I J	Grade One
K L M	Grade Two
N O P	Grade Three
Q R S	Grade Four
T U V	Grade Five
W X Y	Grade Six
Z	Grade Seven–Eight
Z+	High School/Adult

Summary

An analysis of the data reveals that there was some growth on students' reading levels relative to the students' instructional reading level growth as measured by the Fountas and

Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. The data supports there was a 5.58% average pre to post reading level growth. An analysis of individual student data shows only two out of 20 students did not make growth from the pre to post assessments. Instead, these two students showed a decrease in their guided reading level. It is unclear the circumstances that supported this decrease in reading levels.

For the dependent variables, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment System instructional reading levels, the mean gains from pre-to-post treatment were at the customary *p*-value of 0.000. The value of p at 0.000 is less than p<.05 thus significantly different statistically. This design was also a one-group pre and post assessment. Thus, there were no data on the growth of the outcomes without the instructional treatment. The pre-to-post gains were statistically minimal when the treatment was applied. It cannot be said, however, what would occur in the absence of the treatment.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact of reading intervention strategies on fifth-grade elementary students' reading comprehension. Reading comprehension was measured by students' guided reading levels using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. The reading intervention strategy was explicit guided reading small group instruction as outlined by the book *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading*, by Jan Richardson (2016). Analysis of the data in Chapter IV indicated through statistical analysis that the null hypothesis should be rejected and the alternative hypothesis that the reading strategies would have an impact on reading comprehension be accepted.

Implications of the Results

The data implies that explicit reading strategies, such as guided reading instruction, in small group may have had an impact on students' instructional reading levels and reading comprehension. This implication can be supported by the posttest data result that 90% of students gained at least one instructional reading level. Seven out of 20 students progressed one reading level based on Fountas and Pinnell's (2017) Benchmark Assessment, and 11 out of 20 students progressed two reading levels. There were two students who decreased reading levels: one student decreased by three levels and one student decreased by two reading levels.

The treatment was provided over four weeks. The use of Jan Richardson's (2016) resource *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading* was used to provide explicit guided reading instruction to small groups of students. This resource, which provides template lesson planners to plan explicit guided reading lessons and model reading strategy lessons in conjunction with other

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research and evidence based instructional practices, contributed to the students' acquisition of literacy and comprehension skills. This enabled students to become more fluent readers and strategic thinkers by participating in comprehension discussions, thus increasing the instructional level of texts students could read and comprehend independently. Daily, explicit guided reading instruction combined with modeled, shared, interactive, guided, and independent reading and writing allowed students the opportunity to master reading strategies that support strong decoding and comprehension. The data indicates that explicit guided reading instruction coupled with additional best practices occurring within the fifth-grade classroom yielded improvement in instructional reading levels. There is no evidence that only using guided reading instruction would yield similar results.

Threats to Validity

All studies suffer from threats to the validity of the study. In particular, those threats are divided into threats involving external validity and threats involving internal validity. In terms of this study, the threats to external validity include the small sample size and the one-group pre/post design. This study included 20 fifth-grade students from one classroom. All 20 students received the treatment, so the study did not conduct a comparison between a treatment and non-treatment group. The results of the study may have looked different if one group did not receive the treatment of the guided reading instruction. Also, the students did not represent a wide range of ability. Majority of the students were reading either on a fifth-grade reading level or one grade level behind. When using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment, students tend to move through the lower guided reading levels faster than the higher guided reading levels. The results may be different with a larger sample of students with a wide range of abilities.

In terms of this study, the threats to internal validity include experimenter bias and the instrumentation of the study. Experimental bias is a threat to internal validity because the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment is scored based on the teacher's opinion about the students' responses during the comprehension conversation. The administrator of the assessment scores the student's comprehension responses out of three points. Each level assessment has three sections of comprehension questions: one section about the text, one section within the text, and one section beyond the text. The student receives an overall score out of nine possible points for the comprehension conversation. The score on the comprehension portion of the assessment is based on the administrator's discretion.

Another threat to internal validity involves the person who administered the instrument to assess the students' guided reading levels using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. The special education teacher administered the assessment to students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and receive special education services. The classroom teacher administered the assessment to the general education students in the classroom. The administrator of the assessment determines the students' score on the assessment; therefore, the different administrators could have different opinions when scoring the comprehension conversation of the assessment.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

This study focused on the impact of explicit guided reading instruction on students' reading comprehension as measured by the students' instructional reading levels using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2013), the ultimate goal of guided reading is to not only expose students to a variety of texts and make meaning from the words, but also enable students to think within, beyond, and about the text.

Over a decade ago, the Report of the National Reading Panel (as cited in Konza, 2014) identified five critical components necessary for the development of independent reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. All of these reading components are part of a guided reading small group lesson. The guided reading lesson provides the opportunity for the teacher to provide customized instruction based on the needs of each individual student in order to help the student with phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and the ultimate goal of comprehension. These five components are used as a predictor for later reading success.

Previous studies and research about guided reading have found that students across the nation are scoring below average on reading assessments. According to Conklin and Wilson (2002), the probable causes of these below average scores include insufficient instruction time in reading, inappropriate reading materials due to the text being too difficult, and a limited knowledge of reading strategies to support comprehension. Guided reading targets students who are reading below grade level by providing 20 minutes of daily, explicit instruction on the students' instructional reading level.

Conklin and Wilson (2002) state, "Students cannot become better readers if they cannot read from the books in which they are given" (p. 15). Through guided reading lessons, teachers can provide customized instruction for each student based on his or her needs, with a text that is on the students' instructional reading level. When students are given text that is too difficult due to challenging vocabulary or inadequate background knowledge about the topic, students lack confidence and perseverance to continue reading the text. Students need to be explicitly taught comprehension strategies to build confidence to continue persevering when the text is challenging. Guided reading small group instruction allows the teacher to provide each student

the opportunity for a positive reading experience by developing background knowledge about the topic of the text, modeling and practicing strategies such as previewing, predicting, summarizing, or sequencing events, and facilitating discussions about the text to encourage students to think about what they read.

Each guided reading lesson is unique and is tailored to meet the needs of the students in the small group. According to Toney (2017), a benefit to guided reading instruction is the well-established groups. The Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment provides an instructional guided reading level (A-Z) according to the students' reading ability in decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Using these levels, teachers can group students based on level and ability. When planning guided reading instruction, the teacher will plan based on the needs of the students in the group. Guided reading instruction is a time when teachers will model and practice effective strategies to make connections, comprehend the text, and think beyond the text (Toney, 2017).

Previous studies investigated the use of guided reading instruction in a small group setting on students' reading achievement and growth. In the study conducted by Conklin and Wilkins (2002), each of the 23 participants demonstrated growth based on the measurement of The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). It was noted that the teacher guided the students through the small group lessons and reading comprehension strategies such as predicting, sequencing, and summarizing were explicitly taught during the lessons.

In the study conducted by Toney (2017), guided reading instruction was proven as a tool to help close the reading achievement gaps in Tennessee. There were 500 third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students from two different schools who participated in the study. A casual-comparative study was used to determine the impact of guided reading instruction on students'

reading achievement. One school used guided reading instruction for more than two years, and the second school used guided reading instruction for less than two years. The results of the study indicated that the school who used guided reading instruction for more than two years had students score significantly higher than the students of the school who used guided reading instruction less than two years (Toney, 2017).

Implications for Future Research

Future research should continue to investigate the impact of explicit guided reading instruction on reading success, especially in intermediate classrooms, such as a fifth-grade classroom. Based on the results of this study, guided reading instruction, among other best practices, provides fifth-grade students with reading skills needed to make growth in reading comprehension as measured by instructional reading levels using the Fountas and Pinnell (2017) Benchmark Assessment. While this assessment and the guided reading instruction provided information about students' reading comprehension, it should not be the only assessment used to measure reading comprehension. Other interventions such as close reading and other assessments should be further studied to determine the impact on students' reading comprehension.

Future studies should also consider a larger group of participants and a non-treatment group to gain additional information. This study was limited to one fifth-grade class, but a larger sample would provide better information about which students would most benefit from explicit guided reading instruction in small group. A non-treatment group could be studied to determine the impact the guided reading instruction had on students' reading levels. Additionally, future studies may want to manipulate the length of the explicit instruction to determine whether there is a relationship between the amount of instructional time and student achievement. In this study, small group instruction was given daily for twenty minutes. Future studies could determine

whether a longer amount of instruction would impact students' growth in reading comprehension and on guided reading levels.

Conclusion

This study focused on the impact of explicit guided reading small group instruction on students' reading comprehension as measured by Fountas and Pinnell's (2017) Benchmark Assessment to identify each student's instructional guided reading level. Eighteen out of 20 participants gained at least one instructional reading level from the pre- to posttest. Based on the literature review and study findings, explicit guided reading instruction is a critical component of the instructional reading block. This study emphasized explicit instruction occurring during small group instruction which allowed the teacher to customize what the group of students needed beyond what was provided during the whole group instruction. It also gave the teacher the opportunity to provide on the spot feedback to students as a means of clarifying errors and misconceptions. Learning to read is a complex task, and explicit guided reading instruction positively impacts students' reading comprehension and ability to become successful readers.

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