

The Impact of direct instruction on Students AP World History Document Based Question
Scores

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Abstract

The Purpose of this study is to investigate how comprehension reading strategies impact students' ability to comprehend social studies texts. The measurement tool was the Advanced Placement World History DBQ and the Advanced Placement World History Document Based Question Rubric. This was a quasi-experimental posttest-only nonequivalent control group study that compared DBQ scores of students who received direction comprehension strategy teaching and graphic organizers to DBQ scores of students who did not. The null hypothesis was that direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and the graphic organizer will not have a significant on DBQ scores. Although there has been research suggesting that direct instruction of comprehension strategies for social studies texts can increase student's comprehension, there has been little research done on strategies to help students analyze social studies texts in order to increase AP World History DBQ scores. More research should be done on this in order improve DBQ scores on the AP World History exam. After completing this study, the null hypothesis was supported that direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and the graphic organizer will not have an effect on students on students DBQ scores.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school prepares students for college level classes and can even earn students' college credit if they score a 3, 4, or 5 on the AP Exam at the end of the course. The AP World History exam is broken up into 2 sections. Section one is composed of 55 multiple choice questions that students must complete in 55 minutes and three short answer questions that students must complete in 20 minutes. The second section is composed of a Document Based Question (DBQ) and a Long Essay Question (LEQ). Both must be completed in 100 minutes; it is suggested that students spend sixty minutes on the DBQ and forty minutes on the LEQ (The Exam, 2018).

College Board does not have any requirements or prerequisites for taking AP World History; deciding which students take AP World History is a district by district or school by school decision. Part of this researcher's school improvement plan is to have all students take an honors or Advanced Placement (AP) course during their time in high school to expose students to the rigor and expectations of a college level course. Students come to this researcher's AP World History class with a variety of skills. It has been observed that many students struggle to earn points on the DBQ, specifically the analysis of the documents points on the rubric and reasoning category.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate how comprehension reading strategies impact students' ability to comprehend social studies texts.

Hypothesis

Direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and the graphic organizer will not have an effect on students on students DBQ scores.

Operational Definition

The independent variables were comprehension reading strategies operationalized by the SOAPStone strategy and graphic organizer. The dependent variable was student's DBQ scores operationalized by the College Board AP World History DBQ rubric.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the topic of reading strategies on students' ability to analyze secondary school level historical texts. "They [researchers] contend that students who read, understand and think historically about print and non-print primary, secondary, and tertiary sources...will be far ahead of those who do not read or write in history class" (Shanahan et al., 2016). Section one provides an overview of comprehension and reading in the secondary social studies classroom, section two discusses having students engage with the texts like historians do, and section three discusses other teaching strategies to help students analyze and comprehend secondary level social studies texts.

Comprehension and Reading in the Secondary Social Studies Classroom

Comprehension is one of the domains of reading.

"Comprehension is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to 1) decode what they read; 2) make connections between what is read and what they already know and 3) think deeply about what they have read. One part of comprehension is having sufficient vocabulary or knowing enough word meanings." (ReadingRockets, 2016).

In secondary education, in order for students to comprehend what they are reading they must make connections between what they have read and what they already know. They must also be able to think deeply and analyze what they have read. Reading in secondary grades include critical thinking and understanding the meaning of texts (Alfassi, 2004). In the social studies classroom this often means reading primary sources (Neumann, 2010). According to Carpenter,

Earhart, and Achugar, one way for students to engage in critical thinking and understand the meaning of the text is to engage in the text the same way historians engage in the texts (2014).

Engaging in Disciplinary Texts Typical of Historians

“Students read documents as if they were historical truths; facts, historians read them as if they were an argument” (Hynd, Holschuh & Hubbard, 2004). Historians organize information about the past in order to describe, compare, and/or explain historical phenomena (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008). Students must learn to read historical documents like historians do; as arguments. To do this, students must analyze the author’s word choice, source and contextualize the historical document, and question the text to fully understand what it is saying.

Analyzing the author’s word choice puts the intentional, communicative techniques of the author front and center, encouraging readers to consider both the function of the author’s choices of words and their potential effect on their audience (Neumann, 2010). This will help students begin to analyze text. Analyzing the author’s word choice will help students to determine that the purpose of the document is to persuade or inform their audience. This will also bring the authors audience front and center as well, as the audience may change the words the author chose to use. According to Carpenter, Earhart, and Achugar, to help students comprehend the text, students should use the functional linguistic approach to disciplinary literacy. Looking at language from this functional perspective requires paying attention to context and thinking about what the meaning of the words are. Students must look at language from three different perspectives. These perspectives include thinking about what is going on, what is the perspective of the author, and how is the text organized (2014). “By analyzing the texts and unpacking how language is being used to construct historical meanings, students can better understand what they

are reading” (p. 92). Analyzing the choice of words used by the author will help students to understand what the text is stating.

One strategy that supports students analyzing social studies text like historians do is the SOAPStone approach. SOAPStone stands for speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, and tone. This strategy can help students analyze a text through sourcing and contextualizing (Shanahan et al., 2016). Sourcing the document is thinking about the perspective of the author and where the text was written. Students can do this by taking into account who wrote the document and for what purpose. For example, a document about Feudal Europe written by a knight would be very different from a document about Feudal Europe written by a peasant, as they would have a different perspective and most likely opinion about the feudal system in Europe. Contextualizing requires students to have some content knowledge as they must place the historical text in the time period (Hynd Holschuh & Hubbard, 2004). “Interpreting historical events requires knowledge of the specific historical content which is formed by the characteristics of the time and place of the event” (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008 p.95). Interpreting the document based upon its place in history and what was happening at the time helps students connect the historical document to prior knowledge and create their own arguments and their own interpretive framework or lens to look at the source (Shanahan et al., 2016). Identity of the author and the historical context in which the author originally composed a text are relevant in determining the meaning of a text (Neumann, 2010). Corroboration is another skill students need to analyze a text to help them comprehend the historical document. Corroboration is finding evidence within and across documents to support what the historical document says (Shanahan et al., 2016). Sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration of a historical document is important for students to be able to comprehend the text.

Teaching students how to engage with historical documents in the same way historians do through analyzing the author and his/her word choice, sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating will help students to analyze the text like a historian rather than taking the document as pure fact. Analyzing documents using these strategies will also help increase students' comprehension of secondary social studies texts.

Teaching Strategies

There are specific teaching strategies to help students analyze the author and his or his word choice and source, contextualize and corroborate historical documents. "Practices such as explicit cognitive strategy and vocabulary instruction, the use of modeling, and guided practice to demonstrate comprehension processes, use of graphic organizers, text-tasks, and explicit teaching of key ideas and concepts have all proved to enhance reading comprehension" (Taboada et al., 2010 p.33). Explicit instruction and modeling, whole and small group instruction, connecting to students background knowledge, text questions, discussion and graphic organizers are all teaching strategies to enhance student comprehension of secondary social studies texts.

All strategies used to help students analyze and increase comprehension of secondary social studies texts should be first taught through modeling and explicit instruction. Direct explanation model-teacher clearly explains the reasoning and mental processes involved in reading comprehension. Modeling teachers provide detailed explanations of reading strategies applied as well as what the teacher was thinking as they used the strategy (Alfassi, 2004). According to Shanahan, Cribb, Goldman, Heppeler, and Manderino, the teacher models how to engage in reading through a think-aloud, focusing on questions and the text, and clarifying meaning, then explicitly discusses with students what the teacher did and why it helped (2016). When first beginning a new strategy with students, teachers should model using a large portion

of a document or even the entire document during a think-aloud (Neumann, 2010). Explicit instruction is also important because it puts the teacher in front of the class as a vulnerable reader (Toboada et al., 2015). This is important as it shows students that teachers also have to use strategies to read and comprehend a text. This is the first step in the gradual release strategy I Do, We Do, You Do. The teacher first displays sophisticated strategies with clarity and precision, so that students can internalize and begin to practice.

The next step in the gradual release of strategies to help students analyze and comprehend texts is We Do or small group instruction. Students practice the strategy with the teacher. This allows the students to begin working with the strategy while having support from the teacher. The We Do can also incorporate class discussion. “Discussion enables students to practice and internalize higher-level ways of thinking and reading” (Reisman, 2012 p. 241). Class discussion also provides students with opportunities to develop their historical knowledge while analyzing the document by articulating their shifting claims, re-examining evidence after discussion, and integrating their classmates reasoning into their own (Reisman, 2012). According to Ness, cooperative learning allows readers to work together to learn strategies (2008). Finally, once students have had time to practice the strategy to help them analyze and comprehend social studies documents, students practice the strategy themselves.

Activating prior knowledge is key to helping students analyze and comprehend social studies texts as it helps prepare students to engage in inquiry by cultivating interest in the topic (Reisman, 2012). According to Alfassi, activating student’s background knowledge helps students comprehend the text and “to achieve comprehension, individuals invent a model or explanation that organizes the information selected from the text in a way that makes sense to them and fits their world knowledge” (2004 p.175). This occurs as readers build relations with

parts of the text and between the text with their prior knowledge and experience. Teachers can activate prior knowledge through the use of text features by generating text-based questions and organizing the information graphically such as comparing and contrasting to prior knowledge (Toboada et al., 2015). Text dependent questions can help students analyze the text and also activate prior knowledge; this is known as reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching is an instructional technique where reading comprehension is seen as a problem-solving activity where thinking is promoted while reading. Thinking is promoted to increase comprehension by having students generate questions, summarize, attempt to clarify word meaning or confusing text, and predict what might appear in the next paragraph (Alfassi, 2004). Being able to connect the new content from the text to prior knowledge will help students comprehend the new text while also using reciprocal teaching to promote analysis and comprehension of the text.

Finally, the use of graphic organizers or concept maps can help students analyze and enhance reading comprehension (Barber, 2015). “According to the visual argument theory, graphic representations can communicate information more effectively...because they visuospatially manifest the structural information underlying the text, and reduce readers’ cognitive effort while they are interpreting or capturing the unarticulated message” (Tzeng, 2009 p. 128). Graphic organizers or concept maps make it easier for students analyze the documents so students can focus on interpreting the unsaid information in the text to achieve meaningful learning. Concept maps use students’ visual memory and enhance semantic learning to provide a scaffold for cognitive operations to provide multiple retrieval paths for accessing knowledge and to improve reading comprehension. Along with scaffolding, concept maps can also help students analyze and synthesize knowledge. These skills are important for students to be able to analyze text and create a claim about history like historians do.

Summary

To help students analyze and comprehend texts, students must read sources like historians do, as an argument instead of as factual texts. To help students achieve this, students must learn to analyze the document by looking at word choice of the author and the time period that the source was written. There are many strategies to help teach students to analyze social studies texts like historians. These strategies include teacher modeling, small group instruction, concept maps, and discussion.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The design of the study was quasi-experimental posttest-only nonequivalent control group design. This applies to the research problem because one group is receiving direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and a graphic organizer to analyze historical documents with before writing the DBQ. The other group will not receive direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and a graphic organizer to analyze historical documents with before writing the DBQ. The variables were comprehension reading strategies and DBQ scores.

Participants

The study was conducted with high school AP World History students in grades eleven and twelve. There are 18 females, 16 males, 2 students had 504 plans, 3 students receive Free and Reduced Lunch. The sampling strategy is nonequivalent control group. The class chosen to teach the SOAPStone strategy and a graphic organizer to analyze historical documents with before writing the DBQ and the class that does not receive direct instruction will be randomly selected by flipping a coin. Once the class is selected the students that were in class that day received the direct instruction on SOAPStone strategy and a graphic organizer to analyze historical documents with before writing the DBQ.

Instrument

The instrument used in the study was the Advanced Placement World History DBQ and the Advanced Placement World History Document Based Question Rubric. The study compared DBQ scores of students who received direction comprehension strategy teaching and graphic organizers to DBQ scores of students who did not. The Advanced Placement Program was

started in 1955 to give students the opportunity to take college level classes in high school and earn credit at more than 3,600 colleges and universities worldwide if you pass the rigorous exam (APCollegeBoard, n.d.). The 30 Advanced Placement courses are offered around the world. The Advanced Placement program is a well-recognized measurement of student's comprehension and skills at the college level.

Procedure

The first step in this study was to flip a coin to decide which class received the direct instruction and which class would be the control group. Heads meant 3A would be the control group, tails meant 3B would be the control group. Once the groups were established, direct instruction of the SOAPStone and graphic organizer began. First the class received instruction on the SOAPStone strategy by explaining that S stands for subject, O stands for occasion, A stands for audience, P stands for purpose, S stands for speaker, and Tone stands for tone of the source, then students practiced as a whole group, small group, and individually with social studies primary source texts. While practicing, students also used a SOAPStone graphic organizer for each document. Students practiced with a total of six primary source texts, each one was reviewed by the teacher. After direct instruction was complete both the control group and the experimental group wrote the same AP World History (DBQ). The researcher then graded the DBQs using the College Board AP World History DBQ Rubric.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how comprehension reading strategies impact students' ability to comprehend social studies texts. The independent variables were comprehension reading strategies operationalized by the SOAPStone strategy and graphic organizer. The dependent variable was student's DBQ scores operationalized by the College Board AP World History DBQ rubric. After completing this study, the null hypothesis was supported as the mean DBQ scores for the treatment and non treatment groups were only different by .27 points with $p=0.684$ (See Figure 1). A median test was used to gather the findings.

Figure 1. DBQ Score Distribution for Treatment Group

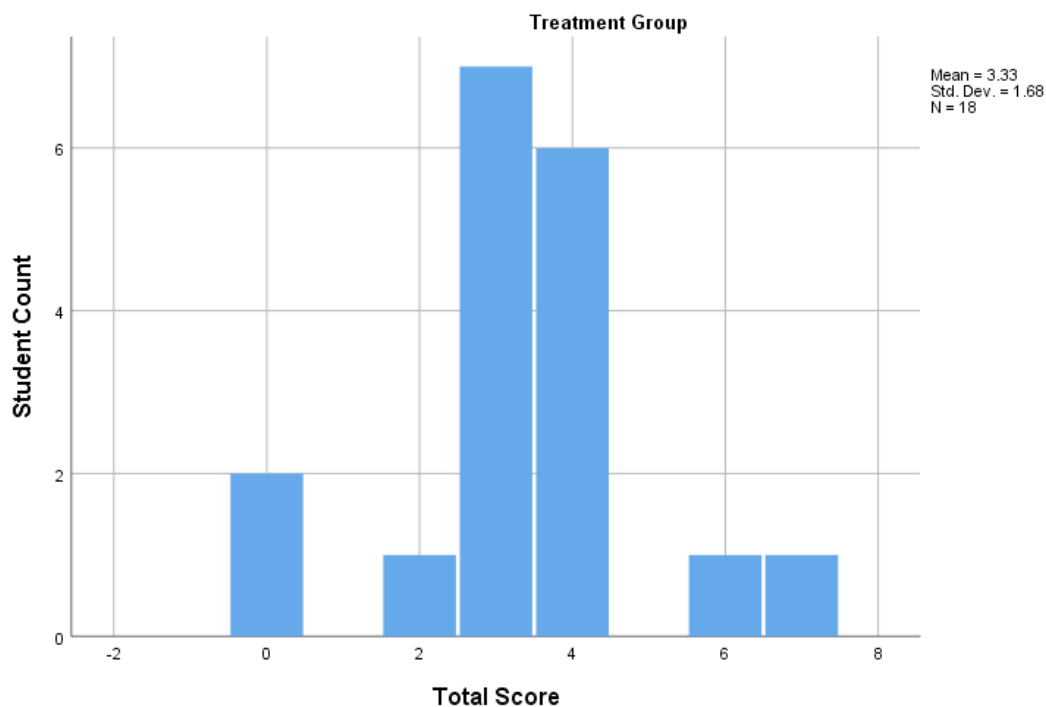
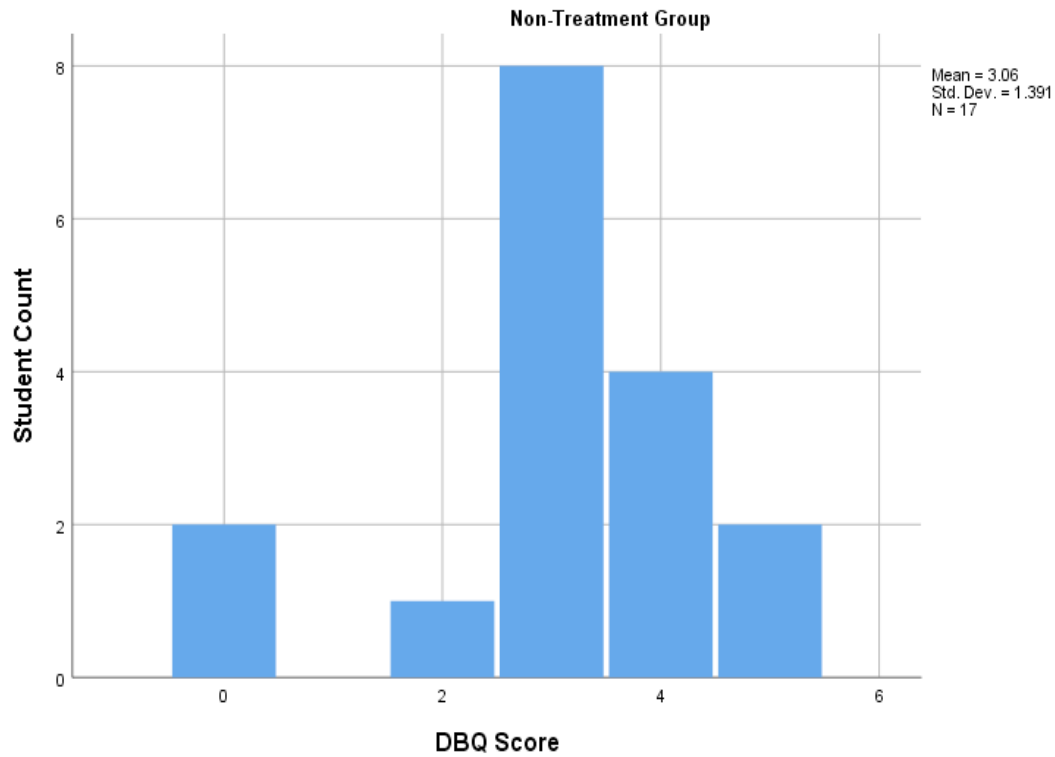


Figure 2. DBQ Score Distribution for Non-Treatment Group



When comparing genders in the treatment and non-treatment groups, there was also no significant differences.

Figure 3. Group Statistics

Group Statistics					
Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig difference between treatment and non-treatment?
F	Non-Treatment	5	2.80	1.643	No (p=0.823)
	Treatment	13	3.00	1.633	
M	Non-Treatment	12	3.17	1.337	No (p=0.257)
	Treatment	5	4.20	1.643	
Both	Non-Treatment	17	3.06	1.391	No (p=0.684)
	Treatment	18	3.33	1.68	

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Implications of the Results

The null hypothesis that direct instruction on the SOAPStone strategy and the graphic organizer will not have a significant effect on students on students' DBQ scores was supported. The data indicates that there is no significant relationship between direct instruction using the SOAPStone strategy and the graphic organizer on DBQ scores. The lack of a significant finding suggests no indication that direct instruction of the comprehension strategy SOAPStone increases students' DBQ scores.

Theoretical Consequences

The results of this study shows not significant difference between the variables, as the mean scores between the two groups were only separated by .27. Based on the data there is also no relationship between gender and increased DBQ scores after receiving the treatment.

Threats to the Validity

On significant threat to validity would be that in a quasi-experimental posttest-only nonequivalent control group design there is no way to make sure that groups are the same before starting the treatment. One class had a majority of students who are districted to go to this high school while the other class had a majority of students who are in the magnet program that has students from all over the county. The treatment class has 3 magnet school students, while the non-treatment class who did not receive the treatment has 15 magnet school students. The students in the magnet school are required to take all honors and Advanced Placement courses. Their classes also have more writing components in the curriculum; so, over the years, many of

the magnet school students had received more writing instruction.. This is major threat to validity as some, not in the magnet program are beginning the year with a major gap in writing skills.

The second threat to validity would be sample size. Only 18 students received the treatment and they were compared to only 17 students. Such a small sample of students could have an effect on the validity of the findings. Along with a sample size, the time of the treatment was very short. The treatment group received one class period (90 minutes) of direct instruction. Finally, although the students had written BDQs in their 9th grade US History Class this was the first DBQ they have written this school year this school year using the College Board AP World History rubric.

This type of study only uses a posttest after the treatment. This can be a threat to internal validity because there is no pretest before the treatment was given, making this quasi-experimental posttest only nonequivalent control group weaker than a pretest posttest nonequivalent control group study.

Due to the fact that this experiment was a quasi-experimental posttest-only nonequivalent control group the groups were randomly selected. This helps the study to resemble the general population of AP World History students. One threat to the external validity is that counties and states across the country use different curriculums resulting in students receiving different writing instruction so this study can only be associated with students in Anne Arundel County Maryland.

Connection to Previous Research

Little research has been done specifically on strategies to help increase students DBQ scores, but there has been research on strategies to help students comprehend social studies texts. Taboada et al. examined the role of an intervention designed to increase reading comprehension,

reading self-efficacy beliefs, and engagement in social studies. They noticed changes in history reading comprehension and reading self-efficacy beliefs were identified for both English Language Learners (ELL) and English native speakers. Findings in this study show promise for multifaceted comprehension instruction in social studies for middle school (2015).

Implications for Future Research

This study showed no significant relationship between direct instruction of comprehension strategies of historical primary sources and the increase in DBQ scores. Although there has been research suggesting that direct instruction of comprehension strategies for social studies texts can increase student's comprehension, there has been little research done on strategies to help students analyze social studies texts in order to increase AP World History DBQ scores. More research should be done on this in order improve DBQ scores on the AP World History exam.

The literature available on this topic will suggest that students should be taught to analyze a source the way historians do, but the literature varies on strategies to use with students to analyze documents like a historian would.

Conclusion

This study suggests that there is no significant findings between the direct instruction of the SOAPStone strategy to analyze documents and the increase in DBQ scores did not occur. However, the data of this conclusion comes from a small sample size and a short period of intervention. More research needs to be done on strategies to help students analyze social studies texts to improve DBQ scores.

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