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A Study of the Vocabulary Growth Made by Intermediate Students with Learning Disabilities When Exposed to Repeated Readings

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**A STUDY OF THE VOCABULARY GROWTH MADE
BY INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES
WHEN EXPOSED TO REPEATED READINGS**

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by
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Abstract

For years researchers and educators alike have been looking for successful methods of phonics instruction for students with disabilities. All too often, students with learning disabilities struggle with word attack and focus on the method in isolation, often omitting the other mutually important aspects of reading such as fluency and comprehension. In addition, students with disabilities have not been successful at sounding out multi-syllabic words as a result of their phonetic usage deficits. The purpose of this study was to determine if the method of repeated readings helps students with learning disabilities to develop secondary phonological awareness skills and thus, higher-level vocabulary.

Students with learning disabilities read short “take-home books” with the researcher aloud at least twice per week. When a criterion rate of at least 85 words per minute and no more than five errors was achieved, a new book was started. Students kept track of their progress for each book on a chart posted in the classroom.

After five months, students were given the Word Identification Subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised. These results were compared with a control group of students with learning disabilities who did not receive instruction in the method of repeated readings. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between vocabulary development for the group that participated in the repeated readings method and the group who received no repeated readings practice.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter I	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose.....	1
Null Hypothesis.....	1
Need for the Study.....	1
Definitions.....	3
Limitations of the Study.....	4
Summary.....	5
Chapter II	
Review of the Literature.....	6
Purpose.....	6
What is the Method of Repeated Readings?.....	6
What is the Procedure of Repeated Readings?.....	7
What is Fluency?.....	7
Repeated Readings: Why Now?.....	8
What are the Specific Benefits of Repeated Readings?.....	9
What are the Variations on Repeated Readings?.....	12
What Has Been the Focus of Traditional Reading Instruction?.....	14
How Are Students with Special Needs Impacted by Vocabulary Learning?.....	15
How is Vocabulary Successfully Learned?.....	16

How Can Incidental Vocabulary Development be Fostered in the Classroom?.....	17
Why Combine Vocabulary and Repetition?.....	18
Summary.....	19
 Chapter III	
Design of the Study.....	20
Purpose.....	20
Null Hypothesis.....	20
Methodology.....	20
 Chapter IV	
Analysis of the Data.....	25
Purpose.....	25
Findings.....	25
Researcher Observations.....	26
Summary.....	27
 Chapter V	
Conclusions and Implications.....	28
Purpose.....	28
Conclusions.....	28
Implications for Education.....	29
Implications for Research.....	31
Summary.....	32
 References.....	33

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of the repeated readings method over time would increase higher-level vocabulary knowledge in students with reading difficulties.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean post-test scores on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test for the treatment group and the control group.

Need for the Study

Ask most children with a learning disability in reading and they will tell you the same thing. "I don't like to read out loud." When asked why this is so, a child will inevitably tell you that she can't read fast and that she can't sound out the words. Many researchers taking this fear to heart have utilized a strategy known as "repeated readings" to combat a child's fear.

How does an educator teach students vocabulary within the confines of meaningful text? The method of repeated readings is one that has consistently proven its benefits. Does this method also increase vocabulary for children with learning disabilities if the vocabulary is not considered a common "sight word?"

In other words, can a child's vocabulary grow for words considered less common and more difficult through the use of repeated readings?

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of repeated readings with regard to fluency, comprehension, attitude, and sight word recognition. However, benefits of repeated readings have not yet included vocabulary outside common sight words. It is hoped that through the use of extensive repeated readings, a child with a learning disability will pick up on some secondary phonological awareness and apply this awareness to unknown words. Since children who experience reading difficulties have an especially hard time with word attack skills, a simple method such as repeated readings would prove to be highly beneficial if higher-level vocabulary knowledge is increased.

It is widely known that vocabulary knowledge is vital to automatic word recognition in reading. Numerous studies have attempted a variety of strategies to increase sight vocabulary in children, but few studies have looked at relative weakness of higher-level vocabulary knowledge in children with learning disabilities. Research has determined why these weaknesses exist. Children with poor memories for repetition ability were found to be significantly slower at learning phonologically unfamiliar objects (Gathercole, Willis, Emslie, & Baddeley, 1991). It stands to reason, then, that students with poor visual memories find it more difficult to commit unfamiliar words to long term memory.

The difficulties these students face is further compounded by the fact that most vocabulary instruction today takes the form of learning definitions, learning antonyms and synonyms, and doing workbook pages. Numerous studies have shown that these strategies fail to produce improvement in reading comprehension or word knowledge (Jackson & Disney, 1963). It was hoped that this study would demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge could be taught less formally and more successfully within the pages of interesting and authentic reading.

This study hoped to confirm that the strategies of repetition and vocabulary development could be done together, embedded in interesting literature.

Definitions

Repeated reading- The rereading of a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. (Samuels, 1979)

Fluency- A combination of speed and accuracy when reading. (Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993)

Anecdotal Records- Notes taken by teachers in the form of prose based on informal observation of students.

Higher-level Vocabulary- Vocabulary more difficult and less common than sight vocabulary. These words typically require some background knowledge and/or phonemic awareness for recognition.

Limitations of the Study

Students used for the control group in this study were taken from two different classrooms and taught by instructors other than the researcher. Though repeated readings were not used in these classrooms, other methods of explicit or implicit vocabulary instruction may have occurred.

In addition, reading levels and levels of vocabulary development varied greatly for both the control and experimental groups of subjects. For some in the experimental group, the take-home books used in the study were readable at the independent level. For others, the books were challenging and at a near-frustration level prior to use of the repeated readings method with each book. In other words, phonological awareness skills differed for each subject and may have impacted the extent of vocabulary growth as measured by the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Test.

A further limitation was the use of different instructors for the method across settings. Though both educator participants were instructed in identical use of the repeated readings method, their record keeping (time and error counts) may have differed slightly. Another instructor may not have counted what one instructor may have considered an error.

As part of the repeated readings method, subjects were instructed to take their individual books home nightly and read to a parent or adult. Though this was considered to be a regular expectation and written down as a homework

assignment, some subjects failed to practice at home regularly. As a result, they may have not gotten through one book as quickly as others and, thus, may not have read as many books as the others over the time of the intervention.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the necessity for a study of the repeated readings strategy with regard to vocabulary development and secondary phonological awareness development. Research has proven the effectiveness of the strategy for other areas of reading development, but none have addressed higher-level vocabulary development.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of the repeated readings method over time would increase higher-level vocabulary knowledge in students with reading difficulties.

What is the Method of Repeated Readings?

The method of repeated readings is based on pioneering work done by S. Jay Samuels in the mid-seventies. Based on a number of studies (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, Samuels, 1976), Samuels drew some significant conclusions. Benefits gained through using the procedure include increases in reading fluency, comprehension, word recognition, and student attitude.

The process of repeated readings at its most basic level is quite simple. Repeated readings is not a method to be used by teachers for teaching all beginning reading skills. Rather, it is intended to be a supplement to a reading program which consists of developmental work in word attack and comprehension (Samuels, 1979). It is useful for students with a wide range of reading abilities, but it is particularly useful for students with learning problems as they typically find fluent oral reading to be a challenge.

What is the Procedure of Repeated Readings?

The repeated readings method consists of reading a short passage several times until a desired reading and error rate are achieved. After, a new passage is introduced and the procedure is repeated. Students typically choose easy stories themselves based on interest. Selections are short (typically 150-200 words), and 85 words read per minute is a typical criterion rate (the rate at which mastery is achieved and a new selection is started).

As students continue to use this technique, it is hoped that the initial rate of reading subsequent new selections would increase as sight vocabulary knowledge and reading confidence increases. In addition, the number of readings taken to reach the criterion rate should decrease accordingly.

What is Fluency?

In Samuels' Minnesota-based research, fluency was defined using two components: accuracy of word recognition and reading speed (Samuels, 1976). While both components of fluency are considered important, the aspect of speed of reading is emphasized more. The reason is that there seems to be "a trade-off between accuracy and speed. If 100% word recognition accuracy is required before the student can move on to a new passage, the student becomes fearful of making a mistake, and consequently the pace of reading slows down" (Samuels,

1979, p.377). In other words, if accuracy is over-emphasized, fluency has a tendency to be impeded.

Repeated Readings: Why Now?

Work with the method of repeated readings was introduced and utilized more commonly in the seventies, but its popularity faded. Critics of repeated readings (Levy, Nicholls, & Kohen, 1993) fear that reading the same story selection is a tedious and boring process for most readers. However, proponents of repeated readings contend that students, particularly troubled readers, are motivated at the thought of using authentic literature without contrived, controlled vocabulary and are further excited by the prospect of reading smoothly and quickly with minimal errors. Obviously, this skill is one many readers with disabilities would like to possess.

Repeated readings practices have made a resurgence as evidenced in the reprinting of Samuels' pioneering work in issues of The Reading Teacher. Those first articles and studies by Samuels led to a new line of research in the 1990's devoted to emphasis on practice and repetition. The technique is touted as a practical one, finding its way into the most varied of reading programs, from holistic ones to those using skills-based instruction.

In addition, repeated readings bring to light what too many educators have ignored for too long: the issue of fluency.

Oral fluency rarely appears as an instructional objective in reading skills hierarchies, teacher's manuals, daily lesson plans, individualized educational plans, or remedial intervention. Lack of fluency of most poor readers, usually described as word-by-word reading is noted in 10 recently reviewed textbooks on reading difficulties, in teachers' descriptions of poor readers' behaviors in most commercial diagnostic tests of reading ability, and in research describing poor readers. (Allington, 1983, p.556, as cited by Gillette, 1991)

What Are the Specific Benefits of Repeated Readings?

The benefits of repeated readings are wide-ranging, but the most apparent one is the gain in fluency evidenced by teachers of students with automaticity difficulties. "Word recognition must go beyond accuracy to the automatic level. Students may achieve automatic word recognition through extended practice"(Rokicki, 1990, p. 19).

The gains students make in fluency when the repeated readings process is used has been widely documented (Homan, Janell, Klesius, & Hite, 1993; Layton, Koenig, & Allen, 1998; Levy, Nicholls, & Kohen, 1993; Rokicki, 1990). In addition, these gains in fluency are generalized to new settings where repeated readings are not used (Levy, Nicholls, & Kohen, 1993). These gains in fluency can be seen in a short period of time- as little as ten weeks (Homan, Janell, Klesius, & Hite, 1993).

Comprehension of material is also affected by the use of the repeated readings strategy. Most studies have shown growth in this area as students are

exposed to the content of stories or passages repeatedly (Eldredge, 1990; Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993; Levy, Nicholls, & Kohen, 1993; Mefferd, 1997; Rokicki, 1990). As Mefferd (1997, p. 188) states, "...students engage in "real" reading where they practice not simply decoding but meaning construction, supported by a full range of language cues in materials they found interesting and enjoyable," Automatic word recognition leads to better reading comprehension because short-term memory is no longer in conflict with decoding.

Another benefit evidenced with the consistent use of repeated readings is word recognition. Students reading common vocabulary again and again begin to know the words by sight without having to decode them (a skill that students with disabilities find difficult). In one study (Mefferd & Pettegrew, 1997) all subjects showed gains in sight vocabulary as measured by the *Brigance* "Basic Sight Vocabulary" test, a list of 250 high frequency words. In the study, no attempt was made by the teacher to target common words for explicit instruction, although the students chose some from the books they read for inclusion in their personal word banks coincidentally. Other studies have also demonstrated increases in student sight vocabulary knowledge (Eldredge, 1990; Rokicki, 1990; Simons, 1992). Generally, the repeated exposure to printed words accompanied by the pronunciation of the words seems to increase the size of students' sight vocabularies over a period of time. As Clay (1979) states (as cited in Simons, 1992),

A child does not need to recognize a word in isolation before he can read it in text. Because he reads the word using meaning and context on several occasions he can come gradually to attribute a particular identity to that word standing alone. After an accumulation of experiences with the word in context the child can add it to his reading vocabulary... When the word is encountered in a new context, the visual memory will tend to revive memories of the grammatical and meaning contexts that have commonly occurred with that word in the past. This should increase fluency in reading and help with the decoding. (p.159)

One benefit of repeated readings is that this growth in sight vocabulary is evidenced without the use of basal readers with controlled vocabulary. Students find this trait a likeable one, as controlled-vocabulary basals are often dry and boring (especially if they are to be read repeatedly).

Perhaps most important, the method of repeated readings seems to increase shy readers' self-confidence (Gilette, 1991; Laffey, Kelly, & Perry, 1979). Researchers have witnessed observable changes in the affective behavior of students participating in repeated readings. Collections of anecdotal records indicate positive changes in student attitudes toward reading as well as their self-concepts. In one study (Laffey, Kelly, & Perry, 1979) students actually returned to a reading room for reading sessions voluntarily. Prior to the repeated readings program, this did not occur. Students in this study enjoyed the stories, took pride in reading them well, and competed among themselves to read the most books.

What Are the Variations on Repeated Readings?

Repeated readings can take a variety of forms that differ from Samuels' original description. One of the most popular variations involves taped repeated readings (Laffey, Kelly & Perry, 1979; Rokicki, 1990). Generally, in this method students repeatedly read along with a story as an adult reads it on a pre-recorded tape. The most obvious benefit of this method is that the amount of teacher time involved with each student is minimal. In traditional repeated readings, the teacher is required to be with the student for each of the child's successive readings.

Group or paired repeated readings are also popular (Eldredge, 1990; Mefferd & Pettegrew, 1997). In this method, pairs or groups of students read together and then take turns listening to and correcting one another. Again, the main advantage of this strategy is the minimal amount of teacher time involved. A drawback of this method, however, is the inability of the teacher to hear each student individually and to correct errors.

As a result of concerns regarding the potential for growing tired of reading the same selection repeatedly, Homan, Klesius, and Hite (1993) researched the benefits of repeated readings in comparison with other reading strategies. These strategies included echo reading (material is read by the teacher and subsequently by the student once), unison reading (teacher and students read material once together while the teacher assumes the lead role), and assisted cloze reading

(teacher reads a selection and stops intermittently to allow the students to read the next word in the text). Results of the study showed that the gains typically seen in comprehension and vocabulary with repeated readings were similarly seen with the assisted nonrepetitive reading methods. Homan, Klesius, and Hite concluded that the specific type of instructional reading method seems to be of secondary importance. The growth that subjects experienced in this study may have been caused by the fact that students received focused, connected, and individualized reading instruction three times per week for 20 minutes. Unfortunately, most teachers do not have this time to devote to each student.

As mentioned previously, language develops partially as a result of repeated contact with a limited number of words. For the child with a learning disability, this word exposure must be more frequent and more explicit. Unfortunately, for basals with controlled vocabulary, the common words are seen frequently, but the basals "...produce syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically unnatural language and awkward, ill formed stories which are inconsistent with children's language knowledge and expectations about sentence and story structure and are disruptive of the reading acquisition process" (Simmons, 1992, p.2).

What Has Been the Focus of Traditional Vocabulary Instruction?

Clark reads a story for his teacher about a canary in a space station; Claribel, the canary, is the central figure in the story. Although Clarke is reading about peeps and whistles, yellow feathers, and beaks, he cannot say “canary” the first three times he encounters the word. After two pages and much struggling, he tries again, saying “creature.” Three paragraphs later when he meets “canary” again, he says “carney... car... canary, there it is, that’s it!” He puts it all together. He is able to “get” this word because it is a word in his listening and speaking vocabulary, because he is able to depend on his knowledge of initial sound, and because he continues to put the context clues together to guess at a word. (Irvin, 1990, p. 5)

Current research regarding vocabulary instruction sits in stark contrast next to traditional methods. Unfortunately, those “old” methods are still widely used in classrooms today. Vocabulary instruction has traditionally been of an explicit nature, whereby students are introduced to new words and they are subsequently looked up in a dictionary or “studied” on worksheets. Most early research centered on the choice of words to teach beginning readers and the implementation of readability formulas (Irvin, 1990). As a result, materials created for children had controlled vocabularies and text difficulties. The constraints put on authentic literature led to material that was, for most children, dull and dry to read. In addition, using this method, students learn at most 500 words per school year, and most of these words are not committed to long-term memory (Nagy & Herman, 1987). It is needless to say, then, that those 500 words

learned do not adequately prepare students for the wide reading done on a daily basis in schools today. Researchers are currently looking at vocabulary instruction in the context of authentic language learning.

How Are Students with Special Needs Impacted by Vocabulary Learning?

Nagy and Herman (1984) estimated that there was a gap of about 4,500 to 5,400 words between high and low achieving students in grades four through twelve. Most average learners *do* take in information with relative ease when vocabulary is instructed using the traditional methods described above. However, students with reading difficulties are negatively impacted because they know less about fewer words than do more able readers, and poor readers are frequently unmotivated or unable to do the amount of contextual reading required to extend their vocabularies (Blachowicz & Lee, 1991). In addition, McKeown (1985) found that disabled readers lagged behind able readers in the use of strategies that allow readers to gain new word meanings from text. To put it simply, students with special needs are getting overlooked when vocabulary is taught at too high a level and without taking into consideration their memory abilities. Teachers for students with special needs are often at a loss when trying to find methods of successful vocabulary instruction for their students.

How is Vocabulary Successfully Learned?

Since children can only learn about 500 words per year through traditional vocabulary instruction, researchers have suspected that some other method of vocabulary learning must be taking place (Jenkins & Dixon, 1983; Nagy & Herman, 1987). There seems to be some evidence that teachers do not spend much time teaching vocabulary (Jenkins & Dixon, 1983). In addition, even if students are being explicitly taught new words, that number of words does not come close to reaching the *true* number of words students learn per year. Nagy and Herman (1987) estimate that students learn approximately 2,700 to 3,000 new words annually. Since explicit vocabulary instruction does not in itself contribute substantially to the overall size of students' vocabularies, where, then, are children learning words?

Research has indicated that students learn words *incidentally* through reading. Through this wide reading, Anderson and Freebody (1981) indicated that an average fifth grader could encounter almost 10,000 new words per year while completing normal school assignments. It stands to reason, then, that incidental learning of words from context while reading is, or can be, a major mode of vocabulary growth once children have begun to read. "If students were to spend 25 minutes a day reading at a rate of 200 words per minute for 200 days out of the year, they would read a million words of text annually" (Nagy & Herman, 1987). As Irvin (1990) states, "With this amount of reading, students

would encounter between 15,000 and 30,000 unfamiliar words and if they learned 1 in 20 of these words, their yearly gain in vocabulary would be between 750 and 1,500 words” (p. 11).

The simple fact remains, then, that the student who engages in a large amount of free reading will most likely have a large receptive, if not expressive, vocabulary.

Students with reading difficulties are faced with two factors that negatively impact their reading achievement. First, they do not learn vocabulary words as easily as an average learner does. Second, their one biggest resource for vocabulary learning, wide reading, is a challenging one because the act of reading is already difficult in and of itself.

How Can Incidental Vocabulary Development Be Fostered in the Classroom?

Even though most vocabulary learning is done incidentally through extensive reading in and out of the classroom, teachers can foster vocabulary development. First, teachers must know that vocabulary instruction must be extensive and include frequent encounters with the word to affect knowledge and comprehension (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982). In addition, they must understand that vocabulary instruction can be made most effective when words

are related to each other meaningfully. So, repeated exposures to words in meaningful text fosters word learning.

In one study by Hicks and Wadlington (1994), the researchers altered repeated reading methods traditionally used in primary classrooms. Namely, they adapted shared reading strategies using Big Books for use with high school students. Though the results of the study were inconclusive, the students had high interest in the method as a result of its authenticity.

Classroom research today is calling for authenticity in every subject area. With regard to vocabulary instruction, any tasks surrounding authentic reading must engage readers in active, meaningful ways: “The setting, problems, and actions of stories; the structure and content of exposition; and the imagery and affective appeal of literature all provide situational contexts to build and retain word knowledge.” (Blachowicz & Lee, 1991, p.1990)

Why Combine Vocabulary and Repetition?

There have been a limited number of studies that combine the method of wide reading with vocabulary development. However, studies have repeatedly demonstrated the effectiveness of repetition with regard to word mastery (Belfore, Skinner, & Ferkis, 1995; Rinder, 1994). If students with special needs require frequent repetition to learn most anything, and if research shows that students learn best through the use of wide reading and authentic literature, why not

combine the two? This idea leads to the present study that will seek to determine if repeated readings increase higher-level vocabulary development in students with special needs.

Summary

This chapter examined the characteristics and benefits of the method of repeated readings. It also described traditional and current theories of vocabulary instruction, and why repetition fits in naturally with current theories.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated effectiveness of the repeated readings method with regard to comprehension and sight vocabulary development. Research has also shown that vocabulary is best learned through wide reading of authentic literature. However, research has yet to determine if there is a positive link between wide reading, authentic literature, repetition, and higher-level vocabulary development.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of the repeated readings method over time would increase higher-level vocabulary knowledge in students with reading difficulties.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean post-test scores on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (Word Identification Subtest) for the treatment group and the control group.

Methodology

Subjects

For this study, thirty-two students ranging in age from 9 to 11 were chosen from three classrooms in the same suburban Western New York school. All of the students were classified as learning disabled and had individualized education plans. They varied in reading level and vocabulary development.

Of the 32 students, 15 were chosen as the instructional group. They were the students of the researcher, and would thus be receiving instruction from her daily. This group makes up the researcher's entire class list of students with learning disabilities. The group received instruction in repeated readings. The remaining 17 students were the control group. They were chosen from two other

classrooms because they were classified as students with learning disabilities.

The control group received no explicit repeated readings instruction.

Materials/Instruments

As a post-intervention vocabulary measure, the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT-R) was used. Only Test 3, the Word Identification subtest, was used to measure vocabulary development.

Repeated readings were done with short “Take-Home Books” provided by Harcourt-Brace. The books range in reading level from 4.0 to 5.0, as measured by the Fry Readability Graph (Fry, 1977).

Student progress was charted daily using a teacher-made progress chart.

Procedures

Prior to testing or intervention, the subjects’ parents were given a letter describing in detail the reasons for doing repeated readings and the procedures used in the method both at school and at home.

The WRMT-R (Word Identification Subtest) was used as a posttest measure for all students in the control and experimental conditions. A teacher’s aide trained in test administration gave the subtest. A computer scored the subtest. Students were tested outside of the classroom in a quiet area with minimal distractions.

Those in the control group received no instruction in repeated readings during the intervention phase of the experiment. They did, however, receive

explicit vocabulary instruction for novel-related vocabulary, as did students in the experimental group.

Students in the experimental group received traditional repeated readings instruction at least twice per week for 16 weeks. The take-home books used by students in the experimental group varied in number of words, with 485 being the average number of words per book. When first introduced to a take-home book, students read the story in unison with the experimenter. Error responses were orally corrected at that time by the experimenter. An initial reading time was recorded, and the experimenter charted with the student the number of minutes and seconds it took to read the book. The number of errors made by the student was also recorded. Students were required to take the take-home books home nightly and to read the book to a parent or adult. As evidence of this practice, parents were asked to sign the book and to send it back to school the following day with the students. Students were asked to read once during a weekend.

Students in the experimental group did subsequent repeated readings with the experimenter and/or the classroom teacher's aide. Subjects did readings on an individual basis. They were pulled from their classrooms to a separate, quiet setting for the length of the reading. Subjects were corrected for reading errors during reading. The corrections were done immediately following the error and were repeated until the subject corrected the error. All typical reading mispronunciations, omissions, and substitutions were counted as errors. In

addition, repetitions were counted as errors, as were mispronunciations of the same words after researcher corrections. After reading, subjects were told their reading and miscue rates. These statistics were recorded on charts posted in the classroom behind the experimenter's desk. After repeated readings, subjects plotted their own progress on their charts so that they could easily see their gains in fluency.

Once a reading rate of 85 words per minute was achieved and subjects made no more than five errors, a new take-home book was started. In addition, a new chart was posted in the room.

Students met with an adult an average of two times per week and read at home at least five times per week.

After intervention, students were given the WRMT-R Word Identification subtest. Posttest scores for the experimental and control groups were compared to determine if any statistically significant vocabulary growth resulted.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of the repeated readings method over time would increase higher-level vocabulary knowledge in students with reading difficulties.

Findings

The results of the findings are presented in Table 1. The null hypothesis was tested with independent *t* tests at the .05 level of significance.

The null hypothesis states that there will be no statistically significant difference between two groups of students with learning disabilities ranging in age from 9 to 11 on higher-level vocabulary development when one group is taught through traditional reading instruction and one group is taught using the method of repeated readings.

Table 1

Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (Word Identification Subtest) Results

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>t</i>
Treatment	60.47	10.61	
Control	11.84	11.84	
			1.24 (N. S.)

Critical value of *t* = 2.045; α is less than .05

Analysis and Interpretation of Hypothesis

Table 1 presents the results of the null hypothesis. Since a t of 2.045 is required to be statistically significant, and the t obtained from the study was 1.24, the null hypothesis is not rejected. There is not a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Researcher Observations

Several observations were made throughout the 5-month study:

1. The students looked forward to reading aloud to the teacher and asked if they could read their books repeatedly.
2. Informal observations indicated to the researcher that students were making gains in reading fluency. When many students began reading their first books, their reading times averaged around 11 to 12 minutes from beginning to end of the story. After observing initial reading times for the final story, students' initial reading times dropped to about eight minutes per initial reading.
3. Students moved through subsequent books more rapidly than the initial book. For example, one student took about one month to reach a rate of 85 words per minute and fewer than five errors. In later books, the same student reached the criterion rate after two weeks.
4. Several students monitored their own progress, asking the teacher what their criterion rates were and trying to improve those rates.

5. When asked informal comprehension questions after reading each time, students were able to respond with more detail and inferences than after initial readings of stories.

Summary

The results of this study showed that after five months of instruction in repeated readings, the experimental group showed no statistically significant growth in higher-level vocabulary development. However, the students did experience some positive informal results through the use of the repeated readings strategy.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of the repeated readings method over time would increase higher-level vocabulary knowledge in students with reading difficulties.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from analyzing the data provided by the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Test (Word Identification Subtest) and the repeated readings method:

1. The students' higher-level vocabulary knowledge did not grow significantly as a result of the repeated readings method. There were not statistically significant results on the posttests.
2. Higher-level vocabulary (namely multi-syllabic words) is not learned as a result of the repeated readings of small books.
3. Implicit instruction in higher-level vocabulary may prove to be ineffective. Students may not simply "pick up" new words and apply them across settings when exposed to those words a finite number of times in one book.
4. Some secondary benefits accrued through the use of repeated readings. These benefits included an increased interest in reading, motivation to achieve a goal, reading fluency, sight vocabulary recognition, and increased comprehension.

These benefits were witnessed through informal observation; but not through controlled study.

Implications for Education

Teachers need to evaluate the relative worth of every activity they do in the classroom. Especially in these curriculum- and standards-driven times, teachers must be conscious of the time they spend on various tasks and be confident that any activity proves to be “time well-spent.” The study was a time-consuming one, taking an average of 10 minutes of reading per student per session. Teachers must look closely at the time they devote to any classroom activity and be inherently sure that the activity will serve a purpose for the good of the classroom

Traditional reading programs have excluded fluency as a focus, yet the skill is an important one with regard to comprehension and reading confidence. All too often, teachers focus on word attack skills and not on the “flow” of words coming from a student’s mouth. Though inconclusive, the results of this study did demonstrate a growth in, and a need for, instruction in fluency for all readers.

Study results were not all negative in that students’ motivation level to read increased. This motivation to continue the activity impacted all areas of the language arts program, instilling a sense of ownership in the students and urging them to achieve more. Educators should look at the motivation students experience in every school activity and partially judge the worth of an activity by

that level of motivation. Many students have a difficult time understanding why things are the way they are in a classroom. When students understand reasons behind an activity and feel control over their success in that activity, interest and success seem to increase. In the study, students had ownership over their rates of reading and their error rates. They were motivated to improve their scores not because of teacher prompting, but because of the internal rewards garnered from success.

If higher-level vocabulary is not learned successfully as a result of repeated readings, how can it then be fostered in the classroom? First, it is safe to say that having students read the same words repeatedly may help them learn those words in particular, but it does not seem to help them generalize phonemic awareness to other settings. Similarly, when phonemic awareness is taught in isolation, students do not easily transfer this knowledge to unknown words. It stands to reason, then, that any skills must be taught specifically and then transferred deliberately to other situations. It is up to educators to create that situation where skills are addressed and then practiced while embedded in authentic activities. Contrary to previous practice and former beliefs, this study does demonstrate that phonics must be explicitly taught and that wide reading in isolation does not necessarily increase phonemic awareness.

The study once more demonstrated that parent involvement is critical in any success a child experiences in school. In this particular situation, students

who read their books at home regularly to a parent achieved criterion rates of reading and error rates more quickly than those students who read only in school. Though this had no impact on higher-level vocabulary development, this home-school connection would most certainly have an influence on a child's rate of reading and general language experience. To put it simply, the more a child reads the better that reader becomes.

The results of this study indicate that the method of repeated readings does not increase higher-level vocabulary development in students with learning disabilities. However, it does prove to have a number of informal benefits and implications.

Implications for Research

This study did not demonstrate that the method of repeated readings is an effective strategy for increasing phonological awareness in multi-syllabic words. However, the results do lead to a preponderance of new questions.

Future research might focus on what strategies exist which do increase phonological awareness for larger words. Many students with disabilities have basic sight vocabulary successfully memorized, but they still find the decoding of larger words more difficult. Many approaches (such as a pattern approach to phonics instruction using a word wall) have been suggested, but none seem to address the issue of transfer of skills to new and different settings.

In addition, much research (including this research more informally) has concluded that the method of repeated readings has a positive impact on reading fluency. Research has yet to determine if reading fluency in turn has an impact on reading achievement. Since many benefits of the method have been proven, one might consider what overall impact the strategy has on reading success.

One of the greatest benefits shown in this study was the one-to-one attention that the strategy afforded the instructors and the participating students. Future research should examine the impact that class size has on reading achievement for students with learning disabilities.

Again, the method of repeated readings has proven to be successful with regard to fluency, comprehension, and sight vocabulary development. One wonders if these successes could be transferred to the content areas where extensive, phonically irregular vocabulary is frequently taught. Future studies may prove that the method is successful when trying to teach content-area vocabulary in context.

Increased fluency has been proven to be a positive result of the method of repeated readings. However, this fluency begs the question: Is fluency actual word recognition or is it memorization of the text at hand? If students are actually putting sight vocabulary into long-term memory, then the strategy is effective. However if students are simply memorizing passages they read with frequency, the strategy would be a waste of time.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students who have participated in the repeated readings method have demonstrated behaviors congruent with reading enjoyment. Qualitative research on student attitudes toward reading as a result of strategy usage could be very telling. If nothing else, a strategy which boosts reading confidence and enjoyment is highly beneficial.

Summary

The use of the method of repeated readings does not increase phonemic awareness in students with learning disabilities. This knowledge of multi-syllabic word attack must be explicitly transferred to new and varied settings. However, the strategy is motivating for students, and it has a number of informal benefits.

Future research should focus on the benefits of the strategy in a variety of settings as well as on the best methods of higher-level vocabulary instruction.

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