ETC 693 Master Project

Kindergarten Readers Theater

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Abstract

This research focused on how the use of Readers Theater would impact students' reading fluency and sight word knowledge. The problem addressed in this action research study was that students were failing to meet their benchmark fluency reading goals which negatively impacted their ability to read and comprehend grade-level texts. The research took place in a diverse kindergarten classroom with twenty-six students. This study was not able to be completed due to schools being closed to stop the spread of Covid-19. However, based on the literature review, it is likely that the results of this study would have supported that Readers Theater would have improved students' reading fluency and sight word knowledge.

Introduction

By the end of kindergarten, students are expected to know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words including the ability to read common high-frequency words by sight and read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding (Common Core State Standards Initiatives, 2020). The Children's Reading Foundation (2020) stated that lack of proficient literacy and early learning skills has extensive negative effects for students as well as society. The impact is that students who start kindergarten already behind their peers form the biggest group of high-school dropouts and have less than a twelve percent possibility of going to a four-year college (The Children's Reading Foundation, 2020).

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), most children are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that sixty-six percent of fourth grader students were not reading proficiently in 2019 (NAEP Report Card, 2019). The National Research Council (1998) has shown that a child not skillfully reading by the end of third grade is unlikely to graduate high school. Research has shown that the first eight years are the most critical for building a foundation for emotional development and future learning (The Annie E. Foundation, 2014). Kindergarten is often the first educational experience for most students so the groundwork must begin here. The goal of this researcher was to explore if Readers Theater is an effective reading intervention for students at various reading levels in a kindergarten classroom.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this action research study was students were not meeting their benchmark fluency reading goals which negatively impacted their ability to read and comprehend grade-level texts.

Rationale

The researcher perceived a great need in this classroom for a reading intervention that could be employed to address the learning barriers for these students. Readers Theater provides an interactive way for students to learn sight words and develop the necessary language skills to be able to read. Readers Theater could be differentiated to meet the varied needs of the students in this class. All students can benefit from repeated readings and Readers Theater provides a more engaging model to utilize repeated readings.

Many of the participants come from families where their parents did not finish high school or go to college. Reading performance for students whose parents did not graduate high school or obtain a college education is often inferior to their peers whose parents did graduate high school or go to college. Students who come from poor families often do not read as well in general (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Hispanic and Black students who are not reading competently in third grade are two times as likely as similar white children to not graduate from high school (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). It is expected that students who begin kindergarten with reduced oral English proficiency fall behind native English speakers at a faster rate than English Language Learners who enter kindergarten more proficient in English (Kieffer, 2008). Kieffer (2008) found that English Language Learners were impacted by their deficiencies in English oral language and that this hindered their English reading development. The participants of this study were facing an array of educational barriers including learning English as an additional language, generational poverty, and parents who lacked education making their need for effective literacy instruction even greater.

Literature Review

Dr. Seuss (1991), a favorite author for many adults and children, once said, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go" (p. 23). During the first months and years of life, children's experiences with literacy and language will begin to form a basis for their later reading success (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1998). Reading is a complex and multifaceted process that requires an approach that integrates many elements for children to learn. (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1998).

Early Reading Skills and Reading in Kindergarten

Early reading includes the direct teaching of words and sounds, and children must be able to distinguish between different sounds of oral language for a purpose of achieving understanding (Slavin, Calderon, & Madden, 2001). Three main skills characterize good readers- they understand the alphabetic system of English to identify printed words, have and use background knowledge and the strategies to obtain meaning from print and read fluently (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1998). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) identified five critical areas for reading instruction for Kindergarten through third grade: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) systematic phonics, (c) oral reading fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) text comprehension. Mastery of print concepts such as directionality, one-to-one matching, and the difference between letters and words, has been labeled a prerequisite for independent reading as well (Gober, 2008). Foundational skills are critical for students in kindergarten.

Foundations of Effective Reading Instruction

Phonemic Awareness

Rose and Magnotta (2012) defined phonemic awareness as the understanding of phonemes, or different sounds, in spoken words. Before children learn to read printed words,

they must first understand that words are made up of phonemes. Tankersley (2003) explained

that phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual phonemes in

spoken words. An example of this would be to blend the sounds of /b/ /a/ /t/ into bat or break

apart the word bat into sounds b-a-t. Phonemic awareness is the learned skill that requires

training and practice (Rose & Magnotta, 2012). Mastery of letter-sound correspondences leads

to the ability to decode unrecognized words. The understanding of letter-sound correlation is

known as the alphabetic principle, and this principle is a required foundational skill in learning to

read fluently (Villaume & Brabham, 2003). Phonemic awareness can be encouraged by

systematic phonics instruction.

Systematic Phonics

Alphabet knowledge includes understanding that English is an alphabetic language in

which printed letters systematically, but not entirely consistently, represent phonemes (The

National Research Council, 1998). Students need to be able to know the letter names and

understand that they represent sounds that can be combined to make words. Clemens, Lai,

Burke, & Jiun-Yu (2017) argued that knowledge of letter-names functions not only as an index

of exposure to early literacy activities and a level of development in early literacy skills, but also

as a foundational skill that facilitates, promotes, and supports the development of critical early

literacy subskills. Students must learn foundational phonics skill to develop effective reading

fluency.

Oral Reading Fluency

Rose and Magnotta (2012) defined oral reading fluency as reading out loud with speed,

accuracy, and expression. Reading fluently allows students to increase their reading

comprehension by freeing up students' minds to understand the content rather than thinking

about how to read the words. Although there is research that supports the importance of oral

reading fluency, it is also the reading skill often most neglected in instruction (Rose & Magnotta,

2012). The instruction of vocabulary words is a building block for improving reading fluency.

Vocabulary

Each classroom will house students of different backgrounds, upbringings, and economic

statuses which brings a varied exposure to vocabulary. Hart and Risley (1995) found that

students with professional working parents were exposed to fifty percent more words than those

of their classmates with working-class parents. This gap between students will continue to grow

each school year without intervention (Moore, 2014). Wright and Neuman (2014) recommended

the explicit instruction of specific words. Repeated exposure to selected vocabulary words in

multiple settings led to a larger gain of learned words than words taught in a single setting

(Silverman, 2007; Booth, 2009). Comprehension is almost impossible if the reader does not

know the meaning of a sufficient proportion of the words in a text (Stahl & Nagy, 2005). Nagy

(2005) insisted that the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension

is bidirectional with a substantial vocabulary contributing to reading and reading contributing to

a large vocabulary.

Decoding and Text Comprehension

Gough and Tunmer (1986) insisted that reading comprehension was achieved though

learning decoding skills and acquiring language comprehension (Farrell, Hunter, Davidson, &

Osenga, 2019). Decoding is defined as efficient word recognition and differs from the traditional

practice of sounding out words using basic phonics rules (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Efficient

word recognition would include reading known and unknown words quickly and correctly in

both list form and within texts (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

Kindergarten students benefit when they are introduced to reading through sequenced decodable books. Simple decodable books allow new readers to experience engaging and interesting stories even though they may only know a few letter sounds (Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Early readers who are not ready to read through decodable books on their own can still benefit from being read to by teachers or other adults.

As adults read to students, they can introduce characters and elements of the story, model how a reader might self-correct a mistake made while reading, think aloud about what they are reading and even ask students to retell the story or events from the story (Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Gough and Tunmer (1986) believed language comprehension could be achieved when students listened to a passage read aloud and answered oral questions. Background knowledge assists with comprehension and may require carefully planned instruction (Baker, Fien, Nelson, Petscher, Sayko, & Turtura, 2017). Reading comprehension is accomplished when students can derive word meaning from print as opposed to only oral language (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Farrell el al. (2019) explained that strong reading comprehension is only attained when students have both decoding abilities and language comprehension skills. Another foundational skill kindergarten students need to establish are concepts of print.

Concepts of Print

Gober (2008) believed knowledge of print concepts is an important step for reading acquisition. Concepts about print include awareness that: print carries a message; there are conventions of print such as directionality (left to right, top to bottom); differences between letters and words; distinctions between upper and lower case; punctuation; and books have some common characteristics (e.g. author, title, front and back).

The concept of directionality is best described as knowing which way to move your eyes across the page to read words and is a skill that must be taught to young children (Strickland, n.d.). One to one correspondence means that the reader understands that for each written word, there is one spoken word (Merideth, 2016). Alphabet knowledge includes being able to name all uppercase and lowercase letters in the alphabet, the standard order of the alphabet, and be able to differentiate between letters and words (Clay, 1993). Sight words may need to be explicitly taught in addition to these other foundational concepts.

Sight Word Knowledge

Sight words are words that do not fit the general phonetic patterns and therefore need to be memorized (Mulvahill, 2018). Dr. Edward Dolch created a list of two hundred service words (words found across many types of reading materials and books) and ninety-five high-frequency nouns for preschoolers, first, second, and third graders after studying the most frequently used words in the children's books during the 1930's and 1940's (as cited in Mulvahill, 2018). Speece and Ritchey (2005) have reported the significance of including isolated word practice prior to reading a passage to improve reading fluency. Students must first learn to recognize words in isolation before they can begin to read them in the context of books (Hayes, 2016).

The Kindergarten Challenge

Kindergarten may be the first structured learning environment many students experience. Wohlwend (2003) noted a trend in U.S. public schools that pushes down first-grade curriculum and reduces time for play in kindergarten. As more academic pressure is put on kindergarten students, it is essential that they leave kindergarten as sufficient readers. Children who come from economically challenged families enter school with less academic skills than their less disadvantaged peers and as a result show gaps in their cognitive and academic competencies

which continue to persist in later school years (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004).
There are many strategies that can be used in kindergarten to combat these common challenges.

Kindergarten Teaching Strategies

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud to students is one of a variety of ways educators can teach concepts about print. Teachers may use big books with enlarged print to model book handling and directionality skills (Gober, 2008). Incorporating spelling, phonemic awareness, and concepts about print into teacher-led models and demonstrations influences word reading in emergent readers (Gober, 2008). Most teachers have a large selection of reading material-picture books, story books, and non-fiction texts. Singing lyrics to a song is a form of reading that can be incorporated into fluency instruction (Rasinski, Homan, & Biggs, 2009). Reading aloud is just one example of a shared reading experience.

Shared Reading

Adult and students interacting with books is called shared reading and is an experience that increases students text reading levels and their motivation to read (Gober, 2008). Teachers can use big books which are oversized books with oversized print that can be seen by all students in a group. Teachers may use leveled book sets while meeting in small guided reading groups. During the assisted reading phase, the teacher may pair up with an individual, pairs or small groups of students and read out loud with the students as they read orally on their own (Rasinski et al., 2009). Shared reading can take place in repeated reading exercises and activities that are modeled by an adult.

Repeated Reading

Repeated reading involves a student re-reading a chosen passage out loud multiple times to a peer or teacher (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). To be the most effective, the chosen reading material should be connected to an appropriate reading level for the student (Lo et al., 2011).

A goal of repeated reading is for students to improve on the number of words read correctly in a certain amount of time such as a one-minute trial (Lo et al., 2011). Stevens, Walker, and Vaughn (2016) stated that fast and accurate word reading released a reader's cognitive resources such as memory to instead focus on the actual word meaning. If the word recognition is slow and labored, decoding becomes the cognitive load and understanding the word meaning is lost (Stevens et al. 2016).

To determine if students are making progress toward the goal, the teacher will need to collect data from each reading, noting how many mistakes were made and providing verbal feedback for the student. Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, & Evans (2006) found that incorporating systematic error correction feedback during repeated readings generated gains in reading rate for below-, on-, and above-grade-level texts. Lo et al. (2011) found that cueing students to concentrate on fluency, to read as fast as they can, and to track their progress with a graph, acts as a motivator for higher achievement during subsequent readings. Stevens et al. (2016) reviewed research surrounding reading fluency intervention from 2001 to 2014 and found that repeated reading was one of the most effective interventions for students struggling with learning disabilities. Lo et al. (2011) found that cueing during performance and graphing have been linked with rises in oral reading fluency for students with and without disabilities. Adult modeling can have an impact on the success of repeated reading exercises.

Adult Modeling

An adult can provide support during repeated readings by modeling how to read which can improve reading fluency (Lo et al., 2011). Lo et al. (2011) found that unison reading, meaning the student reads along with an adult, is beneficial because it provides prosodic cues and a natural reading rate necessary for increasing reading fluency. For younger and struggling readers, repeated readings require the guidance of a teacher or coach so the teacher can directly instruct the reader (Rasinski, Homan, & Biggs, 2009). Rasinski et al. (2009) suggested that an adult can model fluent reading while also aiding, assessing progress within and between passages, giving encouragement and celebrating successes. Students must develop an internalized model of fluent reading. Rasinski et al. (2009) believed this is achieved when adults read to students frequently in a fluent manner and then focuses student's attention to how the reading was fluent-what made it fluent. The opposite can be modeled as well-an adult may read to a student in a non-fluent manner such as too fast or extremely slow. To make this approach meaningful, the adult and student will discuss why the reading was not as rewarding as reading it appropriately. A tape or computer model of fluent reading was found to be an effective alternative method when paired with repeated reading (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002) when in-person adult modeling is not accessible. Play-based learning is another strategy enacted in many primary classrooms.

Play-based activities

If the work of childhood is play, we imagine the students playfully working their way into literacy (Joyce, Hrycauk, & Calhoun, 2003). Wohlwend (2009) suggested that toys that are associated with children's popular animated films or television programs encourage children to play and replay familiar scripts and character roles. Wohlwend referred specifically to Disney

princesses being used to play with scripts, dialogues, and identities. Wohlwend even proposed

an expanded notion of toys being literacy objects: A toy is a text to be read, performed, or

consumed with meanings suggested by its materials and the history of attached story lines and

practices and (b) a text to be written, produced, and revised as children improvise new meanings

during play.

Jewitt (2008) described how play can translate to other academic areas. Play-based

activities can have an impact on academic areas such as literacy and mathematics (Danniels &

Pyle, 2018). Advocates of play-based education for academic development have claimed that

play-based approaches can be used to teach specific academic goals in a developmentally

suitable and engaging manner (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Although some agree that playtime in

the classroom is helpful newspapers have regularly reported the reduction of play time in U.S.

kindergarten settings in the last two decades (Wohlwend, 2009). To combat the loss of play-

based learning time in the classroom, some teachers use small-group learning to engage their

students based on their academic and social levels.

Guided Reading Groups

Gober (2008) suggested that individual books can be used during guided reading as well

as charts, language experience stories, poetry, pocket charts, writing workshops, or any other

engaging text to teach concepts directly or indirectly about print. Slavin & Calderon (2001)

thought teachers should conduct guided reading so that students follow along in their books

while they model fluency. Teachers can help students' comprehension of stories by clarifying

concepts, teaching unknown words, asking questions about the story, and letting children

connect these stories with their own experiences. Baker et al. (2017) found that some students

may need to be taught what certain words mean to establish background knowledge which can

lead to increased language comprehension skills. Guided reading centers could be used to specifically address the needs of students who are struggling with word meanings when read orally. Struggling readers need direct instruction in order to make gains in comprehension and fluency (Rasinski, Homan, & Boggs, 2009), which can be achieved in a small group setting as opposed to a large group setting where they may only be passively learning (Baker et al.,2017). Many struggling readers are English Language Learners.

How reading relates to English Language Learners

The population of English Language Learners in schools continue to increase, making our schools more ethically and linguistically diverse than ever before (Islam & Park, 2015). Islam and Park (2015) stated that numerous studies indicated that effective differentiated instruction for English Language Learners must include culturally responsive teaching, high-quality multicultural literature, small group instruction, individual progress monitoring, and one-on-one support. Another recommended approach to increase comprehension and engagement is the use of culturally relevant texts and multicultural literature since often minority children have few opportunities to read about characters like themselves or see themselves in books (Au, 1993). Shim & Shur (2017) emphasized that the knowledge English Language Learners have in their first language transfers to their second language. Any reading skills students have learned in their first language do not need to be taught in the new language. English Language Learners may require more oral language activities during language acquisition.

Oral Language Activities

There are many activities that can benefit all learners, especially English Language Learners. Students can list objects in an environment whose names begin or end with the same sound or clapping to indicate the number of syllables (or phonemes) in a spoken word (National

Research Council, 1998). Some other ideas Slavin and Calderon (2001) suggested are role

playing or pantomiming, using gestures, showing real objects along with the English word,

pointing to pictures, doing quick drawings of a vocabulary words, or using a word from the

students language and then asking students to say the English word.

Readers Theater

Readers Theater is a strategy that combines reading practice with performing. Its goal is

to enhance students' reading skills and confidence by having them practice reading and re-

reading with a purpose. Readers Theater gives students a reason to read aloud to others (Bafile,

2018). Readers Theater is a staged reading of a play or dramatic piece of work designed to

entertain, inform, or influence. It came after World War II from the speech and drama fields of

oral interpretation and conventional theater but differs from traditional plays in that the readers

typically read directly from a script instead of memorizing lines (Kerry-Moran, 2006).

How to Implement Readers Theater in the Kindergarten Classroom

Dr. Peggy Sharp, a former classroom teacher and librarian and library gave some tips on

getting started with Readers Theater (Bafile, 2018). Educators should start with very easy scripts

with words that students will know, recognize, or not have to try to understand. They should

choose scripts that involve many readers so students will have less words to read at first. Until

students understand how readers theater words, it is best to choose short scripts. Teachers may

create their own scripts from stories that students are familiar with to increase student

engagement. Each student should have their own script with their parts highlighted. Students

should be given ample time to read their parts and listen to how they should be read so that they

feel comfortable performing in front of their peers (Bafile, 2018).

Impact on Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Judy Freeman, a children's literature consultant, thinks that Readers Theater allows children to linger over a story; acting it out numerous times so they come to understand all its nuances (Bafile, 2018). With Readers Theater, they are living the story, not just reading it (Bafile, 2018). Marshall (2017) strongly suggested that effective instructional methods for fluency include two reading methods: oral reading fluency and repeated reading. Bafile (2018) quoted retired educator and author, Susan Finny stated, "A great deal of fluency research reiterates the need for repeated reading. Without fluency, there is little comprehension. The value of Readers Theater is increased tenfold when used as a strategy for increasing understanding of what is being read" (para. 6). Repeated reading has repeatedly been reported as an effective intervention to improve reading fluency for beginning readers and those readers who are struggling with reading disabilities or difficulties (Chafouleas, Martens, Dobson, Weinstein, & Gardner, 2004; Nelson, Alber, & Gordy, 2004). Readers Theater requires that students read over the same script or story over and over which leads to fluency of the material (Robertston, 2017). Scripts can be scaffolded so that students of various reading abilities are able to participate and work on individualized skills (Bafile, 2018).

As students continue their repeated readings of the script, they are improving their reading skills and comprehension. They also will have the opportunity to practice speaking skills, such as pronunciation, inflection, expression, and varied volume. Since the activity is meant to practice reading, students do not need to memorize their lines, which keeps the spotlight on the reading practice, not the performance. Marshall (2017) stated that Readers Theater is an extension of repeated reading translated into performance art. Rasinski et al. (2009) stated "if the passage is meant to be performed, it has to be rehearsed or practiced

repeatedly. The performance of a passage makes the practice meaningful to students" (p. 9).

Readers Theater scripts will be read over and over until the reader is able to fluently read their

lines and perform them for an audience of peers. Kerry-Moran (2017) specified that fluency is

assessed through reading aloud during Readers Theater and requires the combination of sight

word recognition, comprehension, and verbal expression. Lo et al. (2011) found that a bundle

consisting of sight word instruction, adult modeling, and repeated reading delivered greater gains

in reading fluency more than other combinations of interventions.

Benefits of Readers Theater on English Language Learners

English Language Learners benefit from Readers Theater activities in several ways,

including fluency practice, comprehension, engaging in a story, with a focus on vocal and

physical expression (Robertson, 2017). Rasinski et al. (2009) argued that repeated readings work

most effectively when the practice is aimed at refashioning the voice of the author who wrote the

text-to read with appropriate meaning and expression. While English Language Learners read,

they may have a difficult time engaging with a story if they lack the background knowledge

about the topic to understand the plot, setting, and characters, they lack practice "putting

themselves in the story" or if they get limited opportunities to read a text before the class moves

on to something new (Robertson, 2017). Robertson (2017) believed that Readers Theater is for

all English Language Learners, regardless of their language level. Robertson pointed to the

benefit of Readers Theater for English Language Learners because they have opportunities to

read a text many times which helps them develop fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Beginning English speakers can have a smaller role with fewer sentences.

Question

How will Readers Theater impact students' reading fluency? How will the use of Readers Theater impact sight word knowledge?

Purpose

The purpose of this action research study was to determine if the use of Readers Theater, when differentiated based on academic need or skill, improved the student's reading fluency and sight word knowledge.

Methodology

Design

The researcher utilized qualitative action research to determine if Readers Theater was an effective intervention to improve reading fluency and increase sight word knowledge in a kindergarten classroom.

Context

This kindergarten classroom was in an elementary school located in the Pacific Northwest in a suburban area. Seventy-four percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction). 37% of the students identified as Hispanic or Latino, 21% Asian, 16% African American, 14% white, 8% two or more races, 5% are Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Indian (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction).

Participants

I was employed in the school district where this study took place. The elementary school where this research took place is very racially and ethnically diverse with a high population of immigrant and refugee students. The school resides in a district where the majority of students

are minorities and over one-hundred languages are spoken (Shaw, 2009). Within this one

classroom, most of the students are learning English as a second language. Many students'

families immigrated to the United States and one student is a refugee from a small region in

Ethiopia. This student population is also greatly impacted by poverty with the schools free and

reduced lunch rate sitting at seventy-seven percent.

There were twenty-six kindergarten students in this classroom with ages ranging from

five to six. All the students in my class participated in the study. There were thirteen boys and

thirteen girls. Sixteen students were English Language Learners. Students' first languages

included English, Bengali, Somali, Dari, Turkish, Burmese, Cantonese, Spanish, Filipino, and

Mandarin. Nineteen students were non-Hispanic, one was Latin American, one was

Hispanic/Latino and five were Mexican. One student was a refugee from Africa. Three students

were on a teacher implemented behavior plan.

Many of the students in this study did not participate in preschool making kindergarten

their first educational experience. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2015) claimed that

more than one in three American children start kindergarten without the language skills they

need to learn to read. At the beginning of the kindergarten school year, reading data was

collected for these students using the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA)

Framework (Hileman & Cline, 2013). Twelve of the twenty-six students, forty-six percent of the

class, were starting their schooling at an at-risk level.

The researcher followed ethical guidelines and protocols developed by the school district

where the study took place. The researcher informed the students' guardians of the study so that

they could decide to have their student included or excluded from the study. All guardians

agreed to let their students partake in the intervention. The students were informed that they

would be participating in Readers Theater to help them learn more sight words and become

better readers. No student names were used in any of the data presented in this study.

Intervention

Readers Theater scripts (Bell, 2020) were used to increase sight word knowledge and

reading fluency. On the Scholastic (2019) website, Readers Theater was defined as readers

reading a script adapted from literature, and the audience picturing the action from hearing the

script being read aloud. It requires no sets, costumes, props, or memorized lines. Scripts were

chosen for the students based on their skill level and need. Students were assigned their lines to

read for Readers Theater. One script served the students for a two-week period. Students were

grouped by similar skill level and read with this group of students for the first week and first half

of the second week during guided reading centers with the researcher.

Guided reading centers occurred for forty minutes each school day. Students were placed

in groups of five to ten children. Students met with the researcher for twenty minutes at a time.

Each student had their own script with their parts highlighted. Each student was expected to read

along as each student performed their section. Students were asked to track each word with their

finger. While small groups of students met with the researcher, the other students would be

working independently, or in a small group with a paraeducator.

During the forty-minute guided reading time, one rotation would occur so that the

researcher could see two groups each day. The researcher would pull small groups of students

together to practice their scripts during independent reading time as well. Each group received

this intervention three times a week. At the end of the second week, each small group was ready

to perform their script in front of the other groups of students. The researcher made

observational notes during the small group meetings about areas where students were struggling,

or any teacher support provided. Sight word knowledge was to be collected at the end of the

two-week period for each script using the IRLA kindergarten sight word list (Hileman & Cline,

2013). Marshall (2017) stated that readers theater is an extension of repeated reading because

the students are performing what they are reading. Kerry-Moran (2017) stated that fluency is

assessed through reading aloud during readers theater and requires the combination of sight word

recognition, comprehension, and verbal expression.

Timeline

Date	Action
January 6-10	Started Guided Reading Centers with students
January 13-18	Guided Reading Centers with Students
January 20-25	Created and adjusted differentiated groups based on need and availability
January 27-31	of Language Assistance Program and English Language Learner
February 3-7	paraprofessionals.
February 10-14	Conference Week: Early Dismissal for students
February 17-21	Mid-Winter Break: No school for students
February 24-28	Collected Sight Word knowledge, performed reading fluency assessment on students
March 2-6	Collected Sight Word knowledge, performed reading fluency assessment on students
March 9-13	Began Script 1
March 13	The Washington state governor closed all schools to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Data Gathering Instruments/Assessments

Sight word data was collected using the American Reading Company's Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) kindergarten sight word list (Hileman & Cline, 2013) at the beginning of the study. Each student was also assessed on their reading level using the IRLA running record (Hileman & Cline, 2013). Sight word knowledge was to be reassessed every other week so that the scripts for the following week could be adjusted based on students' needs or growth. Following the completion of the six-week intervention, students were to be reassessed on their reading level with the running record. Attendance was collected each day the intervention was used (Appendix A). During the small-group practice readings of each script, the researcher took observational notes of the student's reading (Appendix C). The researcher made note of any mistakes, patterns of struggling, and areas of growth.

Assessment #1: IRLA Sight Word Data. This assessment measured how many sight words the student had memorized. Students were assessed on their sight word knowledge with the Kindergarten list of words provided from the American Reading Company's Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) (Hileman & Cline, 2013). The researcher split the words into twelve lists of ten words each. As students memorized the words on each list, they moved on to the next list.

Assessment #2: IRLA Running Record. This assessment measured the students' independent reading level.

Assessment #3: Observational Notes (Appendix C). This assessment measured trends displayed by students during each cycle of the intervention. The researcher took observational notes during guided reading centers, small group practices, and performances.

Validity: To ensure validity in a research study, the researcher must show that findings are an exact account of what transpired rather than the outcome of the researcher's interest, bias, or motivation (Hendricks, 2013). The researcher focused on using truth-value validity, outcome validity, catalytic validity. Truth-value validity ensures that results are accurate and truthful. Data was collected from multiple sources including checking in one-on-one with each student to test sight word recognition, listening to them read unfamiliar texts to test for independent reading levels, and gathering observational notes while they read their scripts during Readers Theaters practices and performances. Outcome validity questions how the researcher will use the results for continued planning, ongoing reflection, and deepening understanding. Readers Theater scripts were based on the needs of the students. Depending on the results from the first two weeks, scripts would have been altered to fit the needs of the students. The amount of time each day and/or week could have been altered depending on if students were making the predicted amount of progress or not. Catalytic validity questions how processes and outcomes will change the researcher's practice. Collecting multiple forms of data increases credibility because it "ensures that you have not studied only a fraction of the complexity that you seek to understand" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 65). The researcher collected sight word data, reading fluency levels, and took observational notes to compare the data across numerous systems.

Results

Due to the Covid-19 and the resulting school closures in March, the researcher was not able to complete this study past the first week of intervention. Baseline data was collected at the beginning of the study (Appendix B).

The baseline data showed that students had sight word knowledge ranging from zero to sixty-eight words. The end of year expectation for students was to be able to read eight-five

sight words. It is anticipated that all students would gain sight word knowledge as a result of the intervention. Rehearsal of unknown and known sight words presents the words multiple times allowing for the student to master the word (Hayes, 2016). Students would be exposed to the same sight words multiple times over a two-week period. Yaw, Skinner, Orsega, Parkhurst, Booher and Chambers (2012) argued that supplementing sight word instruction with literacy instruction enhanced sight word knowledge which in turn increased students' confidence while reading. The acquisition of sight words is the foundation on which fluency can develop (Hayes, 2016).

The baseline data showed that seven students in this class were reading above grade level expectations, eleven students were proficiently reading, and eight students were reading below grade level expectations. It is anticipated that students' fluency would be impacted positively. Hayes (2016) said language and literacy acquisition happen as children are exposed to written and oral language. Youth librarian Sue Abrahamson said Readers Theater allows struggling students to shine which boosts their confidence and students can begin to like reading better (Kozikowski, 2015). Freeman and Bauer (2015) said Readers Theater allows for students to unknowingly practice reading aloud with expression, fluency, and comprehension. Repeated readings occur naturally with Readers Theater because students spend an extended amount of time working with one script. Lo et al. (2011) studied the results of repeated readings and generally found that they improved reading fluency. After six weeks of intervention, it is anticipated that Readers Theater would have had positive effects on all students' reading confidence, which should have helped increase reading fluency.

Discussion

Conclusions

The effectiveness of the intervention was inconclusive since data collection was only done during the first week after the implementation of the intervention due to Covid-19 and the resulting school closures. The data surrounding the use of Readers Theater in other classrooms does show it as a good option for intervention in kindergarten (Bafile, 2018; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Since Readers Theater can be differentiated based on academic need or level, it could be an effective tool for teachers to use to help kindergarten students improve their sight word acquisition and reading fluency. The data surrounding the use of repeated reading have proven to be helpful in increasing sight word knowledge and reading fluency (Keehn, 2003; Vaughn, Chard, Bryant, Coleman, Tyler, Linan-Thompson, & Kouzekanani, 2000).

Implications

This study was relevant because the focus was to determine if Readers Theater, differentiated for skill level, was an effective method for improving students' reading fluency and sight word knowledge. If Readers Theater was effective, then other teachers could be encouraged to use the program with their students. Students may improve their reading skills through the use of Readers Theater.

Limitations

There were five limitations for this study. The first limitation was Covid-19. Due to the presence of this global pandemic, all Washington State school districts closed their buildings and halted in-person teaching and student attendance as of March 16, 2020. The elementary school where this intervention was taking place was closed as of Thursday, March 12, 2020. School resumed remotely but the readers theater intervention did not continue. The second limitation

was the high absence rate among the students in this study so students may not have received an equal amount of intervention. The third limitation was the small number of participants-only twenty-six students. Since the study was small scale, it might not produce accurate information. The fourth limitation was the length of the intervention because it only lasted six weeks which may have reduced the amount of growth of the students. The fifth limitation was that the Readers Theater scripts were produced by another source rather than the researcher which could have limited the specific sight words used in the scripts.

Recommendations

There are a few recommendations for future studies. One recommendation would be for scripts to be more individualized. The researcher could create their own scripts to customize the scripts to the participant's exact needs. Scripts could be written using books, stories, or characters the students were familiar with to create more interest and engagement from the students.

Another recommendation would be for the researcher to include paraeducators or parent volunteers to work with students in small groups. While this may reduce the consistency of the intervention style, it would increase the number of times students accessed the intervention. If the researcher had more adult assistance, the group sizes could be much smaller with more personal attention given to each student.

An additional recommendation would be to continue using Readers Theater for the remainder of the school year if the research showed the intervention to be successful. It could also be introduced earlier in the school year next year to be able to use this intervention for a longer period.

Another recommendation would be to introduce the intervention to the other grade-level teachers so they could employ Readers Theater in their classrooms. The teachers could collaborate to develop scripts to provide additional differentiated options.

Another recommendation would be that kindergarten teachers provide explicit instruction of sight words along with daily practice of reading skills using guided reading centers and multiple reading interventions to provide effective literacy instruction.

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Appendix A

Attendance

Student	Week 1			Week 2			Week 3			Week 4			Week 5			Week 6			Total
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
A		✓	✓																2
B	✓	✓	✓																3
C		✓	✓																2
D		✓	✓																2
E	✓	✓	✓																3
F	✓	✓	✓																3
G	✓	✓	✓																3
H			✓																1
I	✓	✓	✓																3
J	✓	✓	✓																3
K	✓		✓																2
L																			0
M	✓		✓																2
N	✓	✓																	2
O	✓	✓	✓																3
P	✓	✓	✓																3
Q	✓	✓	✓																3
R	✓		✓																2
S	✓	✓	✓																3
T	✓	✓	✓																3
U	✓	✓	✓																3
V	✓	✓	✓																3
W	✓	✓	✓																3
X	✓	✓	✓																3
Y	✓	✓	✓																3
Z	✓	✓																	2

Appendix B

Baseline Data-March 2020

Student	IRLA Fluency Level	Sight Word Knowledge
A	3Y	28
B	2Y	10
C	1G	49
D	RTM	0
E	3Y	50
F	3Y	30
G	1Y	3
H	3Y	20
I	2Y	10
J	1Y	10
K	3Y	20
L	1G	49
M	3Y	20
N	3Y	29
O	3Y	20
P	2Y	1
Q	1G	68
R	1G	30
S	2Y	19
T	1G	50
U	3Y	18
V	3Y	20
W	3Y	30
X	1Y	2
Y	1G	58
Z	1G	37

Note. RTM (Read to Me): enjoys being read to, 1Y: able to finish a pattern in a pattern book by looking at the pictures for clues, 2Y: able to track words while reading, 3Y: uses first letter sound to figure out unknown words, 1G: knows twenty-five sight words.

Appendix C

Observational Notes

Script Title/ Group Members	Week 1: Script 1		
	Day 1	**Day 2**	**Day 3**
Far Below Grade Level · **My Gym Shoes** Student D Student G Student J Student P Student X	·Absent: D ·Pre-taught sight words: my, are. ·Reviewed English color words. ·P struggled with remembering pattern. X needed reminders about tracking.	·Reviewed: my, are ·D struggled with remembering pattern. ·All needed reminders about tracking.	·Reviewed: my, are ·P was able to remember 'my' and 'are' before review. ·D did not have pattern. ·J needed to be moved up to a harder script. ·All needed reminders about tracking words.
Below Grade Level · **At the Zoo** Student B Student I Student S Student U Student W	·Pre-taught: is, at, the ·B knew the sight words in isolation but not within the script. ·S mistook 'at' for 'it' multiple times and did not know the English words for the animal names.	·Reviewed: is, at, the ·I and U needed reminders about tracking words. ·S was reading 'at' correctly. ·W could easily complete the pattern.	·Reviewed: is, at, the ·All students were able to quickly read the words in isolation. ·Students read through script three times, the last time without assistance.
At Grade Level · **I Went Walking** Student A Student E Student F Student H Student K Student O	Absent: A, E ·Pre-taught: went, what, did, saw, looking, lots ·Pre-taught -ing ending. ·Practiced adding -ing onto words to practice how it changes the word. ·K changed her line to "There is a pig looking at me" multiple times.	Absent: O ·Reviewed: went, what, saw, looking, lots, -ing ending. ·A read 'see' instead of saw. ·All students were tracking as they read.	·Reviewed: went, what, saw, looking, lots, -ing ending. ·All students were tracking words. ·E and F were able to read entire script without help, to be switched to a more difficult script.

At or Above Grade Level	**Polar Bear, Polar Bear** Student C Student L Student M Student N Student Q Student R Student T Student V Student Y Student Z	Absent: C, L ·Pre-taught: animal names and -ing ending ·These students each had two parts they would read for, so we practiced reading in unison for the group lines. ·Group may have been too large with too many varying skill levels. ·L, Q, and T able to read all words fluently. .M and V struggling with unknown sight words.	Absent: L, M, R ·Reviewed: animal names and -ing ending. ·Researcher read the parts of the absent participants. ·C is nervous about reading in front of others. ·R said, "this is so fun" and helped others to remember which lines they needed to read for.	Absent: L, N, Z ·Reviewed: animal names and -ing ending. ·Researcher read the parts of the absent participants. ·M is tried to read others' lines and had difficulty sticking with the sequence. ·Q and T were able to read all words within the script and in isolation.