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Oral Proficiency and Reading Recovery

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Abstract

The diverse population of learners includes students who are high performing in reading as well as those who struggle with reading. This research concerns struggling readers. The goal of teachers is to identify struggling readers and discover ways to address the reading needs of those students. Pinnell (2006) stated that teachers have a common goal: to make literacy a true part of the lives of all students. There are many interventions to help struggling readers. Reading Recovery (RR) is a short-term reading intervention program designed to help the children develop effective strategies for reading and reach average levels for their particular peer group (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Research has confirmed the positive impact of RR on readers who struggle (Allington, 2005; Clay, 1993; McKee, 2006; Schwartz, 2005).In particular, Allington (2005) outlined five principles of scientific reading instruction: (a) classroom organization; (b) matching pupils to texts; (c) access to interesting texts, choice, and collaboration; (d) writing and reading; and (e) expert tutoring. Research has shown that RR addresses four of these five principles.

Introduction

Allington (2005) stated matching pupils to texts is critical for those students whose development lags behind their peers. An empirical study conducted by O'Connor et al. (2002) found that struggling readers fail to benefit from lessons using grade-level text. According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), RR matches pupils to the appropriate text level, provides interesting texts to students, gives students a choice in the selection of some texts, and allows teachers and students to collaborate with one another about book choice and selection. Another principle addressed by RR is reading and writing. Tierney and Shanahan (as cited by Allington, 2005) examined the natural reciprocity of reading and

writing. Composing can enhance comprehension, and spelling can facilitate decoding. One element of a RR lesson incorporates a writing segment that encourages the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing.

Statement of the Problem

Educators have to shift their thinking to embrace cultural differences and make adjustments in teaching practices, teaching policies, and teaching procedures. Acknowledging different languages and cultures plays an integral part in educating all students and addressing the needs of all students. Most ELLs in Iran are being labeled as struggling readers. Many factors could be contributing to this problem. Of interest in this study was the level of oral language proficiency exhibited by ELLs. Language plays a central role in mental development. Johnston (2004) suggested, "Talk is a central tool of a teacher's trade. With it they mediate children's activity and experience, and help them make sense of learning, literacy, life, and themselves" (p.4). In conducting this study, the researcher posited the level of oral language acquisition of ELLs would have an impact on the students' successful completion in RR.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the oral language proficiency of Iranian children learning English and the relationship between oral language and success in RR. Examining current RR practices in identifying students for participation in RR provided guidance in addressing reading progress of ELLs. The goal of this study examines the use of the ROL to assess the needs of ELLs participating in RR and the impact this information will have on the success rate of ELLs in RR.

Research Questions

Based on the mentioned objective of the study, the following research questions are presented:

1. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, is there a statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time, as measured by Record of Oral Language (pretest vs. posttest)?

2. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, is there a statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level, by time (pretest vs. posttest)?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the proposed research questions, the following hypotheses are constructed:

1. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, there is no statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time, as measured by Record of Oral Language (pretest vs. posttest).

2. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, there is no statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level, by time (pretest vs. posttest).

Significance of the Study

Reading Recovery is a research-based early literacy intervention that addresses the needs of struggling readers in first grade (Clay, 1993). Research has shown the positive effects of RR with native English-speaking students, but does not address diverse populations (Allington, 2005; Clay, 1993; McKee, 2006; Schwartz, 2005). As populations change, the definition of struggling readers changes. Teachers can no longer ignore the needs of cultural diversification and its impact on the labeling of struggling students. As advocates of learning, teachers need to construct an environment to address the needs of all students and provide assessments that lead to a better understanding of all learners. School populations in Iran continue to change and become more diverse in language, learning styles, backgrounds, and ethnicity. This study will focus on improving reading skills and reading achievement of Iranian children learning English.

The tasks of the OS provide systematic observations of what a child can do and what strategy a child uses to complete the various tasks. Using the OS as an indicator of reading abilities guides RR teachers to make informed decisions on teaching strategies to address the needs of the learner. Cunningham and Allington (1999) stated no other remedial program has come close to achieving the results of Reading Recovery.

Schmitt (2003) conducted a study to determine whether children who had participated in RR in first grade had similar understandings of metacognitive skills as their current classmates in the third and fourth grade. The author stated, "The children who participated in Reading Recovery in the first grade appeared to be on equal footing with their classmates in Grade 3 and 4" (p. 72). Richards (2004) concluded that if students can have the opportunity to complete this short-term intervention in first grade, they might defy predictions of failure. High stakes testing and budget cuts force educators to examine reading programs to ascertain the effectiveness of reading intervention programs.

Reading Recovery and English Language Learners

Studies on Reading Recovery (RR) have focused on the effectiveness of Reading Recovery with native English speaking children. In the face of changing school populations, RR is no longer limited to native English speaking students. A different clientele is labeled as struggling readers and that clientele includes English language learners (ELLs). According to Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, and Cirino (2006) research for reading intervention with ELLs is not as extensive as with monolingual English students, although there are studies that have examined the efficacy of reading interventions with ELLs with reading difficulties. A study conducted by Neal and Kelly (1999) found RR is an effective intervention for low-scoring children who are acquiring English concurrent with learning how to read and write in English-speaking classrooms. Ashdown and Simic (2000) examined 25,601 first-grade students who received RR instruction in order to evaluate the performance of the students who were English language learners. The results suggested that RR is an effective intervention that narrows the achievement gap between English speaking students and English language learners.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Quantitative methodology using statistical data will be used in the study. A quantitative approach utilizes strategies of inquiry and collects data on predetermined instruments that generate statistical data (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the quantitative method will be used to examine the relationship between oral language proficiency of Iranian children learning English and student achievement in RR. This study also determined if oral language proficiency predicted text reading level at the conclusion of this reading intervention. According to Creswell (2003) "With pre-experimental designs, the researcher studies a single group and provides an intervention during the experiment" (p. 167). There are three types of pre-experimental designs. These include one-shot case study, one-group pretest-posttest design, and static group or posttest-only with nonequivalent groups (Creswell, 2003). For this study, a single group pretest- posttest design will be utilized. This design includes a pretest followed by a treatment and a posttest for a single group (Creswell, 2003). The single group in the study consists of Iranian children learning English participating in RR. A pretest will be administered followed by the treatment of RR intervention and a posttest for the single group.

Participants of the Study

The site for conducting this study will be English Language Institutes in Bandar Abbas. Participants of this study will include approximately 30 Iranian children learning English receiving intensive interventions in reading through RR. This study used a nonrandom, convenience sample basing the selection of students to receive RR intervention on the results from the Observation Survey (OS) developed by Clay (1993).

Treatment

The treatment used in this single group pretest posttest design will be RR intervention. Students participating in RR will receive instruction in reading and writing for 30 minutes each day from teachers. Students will receive this intervention until for up to 10 weeks.

Instrumentation and Materials

Participation in RR relies on the results from the Observation Survey (OS). There are six tasks entailed in the OS. These six tasks are letter identification, word test, writing vocabulary, concepts about print, hearing and recording sounds in words, and text reading level. According to Clay (2002), "The observation tasks were designed to make a teacher attend to how children work at learning in the classroom" (p.13). For the purpose of this research, three types of instruments will be utilized for this single group pretest posttest design (Table 1). The instruments for this research includes Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (HRSIW) and Text Reading Level (TRL) from the Observation Survey (OS; Clay, 2002) and The Record of Oral Language (ROL; Clay, Gill, Glynn, McNaughton, & Salmon, 1999). These instruments assess phonological awareness, students' reading behaviors, and oral language proficiency.

Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (HRSIW)

This instrument consists of a sentence dictated by the teacher for the student to record. The student is encouraged to write what he can hear in the dictated words. Scores show how successful the student was at hearing the sounds in words and recording those sounds in English spelling. The ability to hear sounds in words and write the sounds is an authentic task one encounters in the real world. The scoring procedure provides one point for each correctly analyzed and recorded phoneme (sound). The possible scores range from 0 to 37 points. Points are given for graphemes that record the sound even if spelling is not correct (e.g., 'skol' for 'school'). The scores indicate the student's ability to analyze the word he or she hears and to record in letters the sounds he can hear. The National Reading Panel's (NRP, 2000) findings identified phonological awareness and letter knowledge as the two best predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first 2 years of

instruction. Reliability measures of HRSIW, determined in 1990, yielded a Cronbach alpha of .96 (Clay, 2005). This instrument is given at the beginning and end of the RR intervention.

Text Reading Level

The instrument of text reading level uses methods of recording a student's reading behaviors; such as correct reading, errors, substitutions, omissions, self-corrections, and so on. Reading behaviors are recorded as students read a book from a packet of test books used by all RR teachers. The reading behaviors are recorded on a running record form (Clay, 2002). Running records encapsulate what readers said and did while reading continuous text. The running record is used as a check on whether the text is appropriate in difficulty, neither too difficult nor too easy. A conversion chart is used to convert error rate to a percentage accuracy score. The highest text level with 90% accuracy or above is the text level score. Text reading level is assessed at the beginning of RR intervention and at the end of the intervention.

The Record of Oral Language

Attention is given to oral language in circumstances where the language a child uses in the home is different from the language used in the classroom. Being proficient in oral language is considered important for communicating ideas and for self-expression. The Record of Oral Language (Clay, et al., 2005) is a normative, standardized test. The ROL aids teachers in observing aspects of a child's control over oral language and assessing a child's ability to handle selected grammatical structures (Clay, et al., 2005). There are three levels of sentences, with Level 1 sentences being the easiest. Each level consists of fourteen sentences. The administration of this task involves the teacher reading each sentence aloud to the student and the student attempts to repeat each sentence. Clay, et al. (2005) recommended beginning with Level 2 sentences. Each correctly repeated sentence is given a score of one point. If a student scores between 3 and 11 points, Level 1 sentences are administered followed by Level 3 sentences. If a child scores between 0 and

2 points, Level 1 sentences are administered. A score of 12 or more points credits the child with passing Level 1 sentences.

Data Collection and Analysis

For participation in this study, the researcher will collect the related data. The data collection will occur prior to RR intervention and at the end of the intervention. Data will be entered into The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The descriptive statistics will include the frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations. Descriptive statistics are statistical procedures used to organize, summarize, and simplify data (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2008). Research question 1, 2, and 3 involve dependent samples t tests. The dependent

sample t test for correlated means is an appropriate statistical analysis if each of the two samples can be matched on a particular characteristic (Pagano, 2010

Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the oral language proficiency of Iranian children learning English and the relationship between oral language and success in RR. This section presents the major findings of the study.

The following research questions and hypotheses were addressed in this study:

1. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, is there a statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time, as measured by Record of Oral Language (pretest vs. posttest)?

2. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, is there a statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level, by time (pretest vs. posttest)?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the proposed research questions, the following hypotheses are constructed:

1. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, there is no statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time, as measured by Record of Oral Language (pretest vs. posttest).

2. For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, there is no statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level, by time (pretest vs. posttest).

The participants were assessed at pretest and at posttest with three instruments:

Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (HRSIW), Text Reading Level (TRL), and Record of Oral Language (ROL). Outliers were removed prior to analysis for all dependent variables and achieved by transforming the values to standardized z scores and deleting items that were above the value of 3.29. For the HRSIW at pretest the minimum score was 2.0 and the maximum score was 36.00 (M = 21.63, SD = 10.54) and at posttest the minimum score was 26.00 and the maximum score was 37.00 (M = 34.45, SD = 2.73. For the TRL at pretest, the minimum score was 0.00 and the maximum score was 5.00 (M = 1.07, SD = 1.41), while the posttest minimum score was 4.00 and the maximum score was 24.00 (M = 13.98, SD = 4.23). For the ROL, the pretest minimum score was 0.00 with a maximum of 32.00 (M = 11.65, SD = 7.07) and at posttest, the minimum score was 5.00 and the maximum was 36.00 (M = 16.54, SD = 7.55). Means and standard deviation for pretest and posttest scores are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest and Posttest Scores on the Instruments (N = 57)

	Pretest		Posttest	
Instrument	M	SD	M	SD
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (HRSIW)	21.63	10.54	34.45	2.73
Text Reading Level (TRL)	1.07	1.41	13.98	4.23
Record of Oral Language	11.65	7.07	16.54	7.55

Descriptive Data and Findings
Hypothesis 1

A dependent samples *t* test was conducted to investigate Hypothesis 1 and to determine if For Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery intervention, there is any statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time, as measured by Record of Oral Language (pretest vs. posttest). The mean difference was t (55) = - 10.60, p = .001, d = .32. The mean difference was -4.68 with a 95% confidence interval of -5.56 and -3.79 points. The mean ROL posttest score (M = 16.54, SD = 7.55) was statistically significantly greater than the mean ROL pretest score (M = 11.86, SD = 6.96). Using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size of .32, indicating the difference, although statistically significant, is small. The null hypothesis was rejected; for the entire sample, there was a statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency, as measured by ROL before and after the Reading Recovery Intervention. Students received higher scores at posttest as compared to pretest. Results of the dependent sample *t* test are presented in

Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Dependent Sample t-Test on Record of Oral Language by Time (Pretest vs. Posttest)

	Pretest		Posttest				
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	d
Record of Oral Language	11.86	6.96	16.54	7.55	-10.60	.001	.32

Hypothesis 2

To investigate Hypothesis 2, and to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level (TRL), among Iranian children learning English completing Reading Recovery Intervention by time (pretest vs. posttest), a dependent samples *t* test was conducted. The dependent sample *t* test was statistically significant, t (55) = - 26.43, p = .001, d = 2.33. The mean difference was -12.73 with a confidence interval of -13.70 and -11.77 points. The mean TRL posttest score (M = 13.80, SD = 4.05) was statistically significantly greater than the mean TRL pretest score (M = 1.07, SD = 1.41). Using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size of 2.33 indicates the difference between the two scores is large. The null hypothesis was rejected; for the entire sample, there was a statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by TRL before and after the Reading Recovery intervention. Students received higher scores at posttest as compared to pretest. Results of the dependent sample *t* test are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Dependent Sample t-Test on Text Reading Level by Time (Pretest vs. Posttest)

	Pretest		Posttest				
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	d
Text Reading Level	1.07	1.41	13.80	4.04	-26.43	.001	2.33

Table 4.5

Linear Regressions with Oral Language Proficiency Predicting Student Achievement at Posttest

Student achievement variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Text Reading Level	0.32	0.06	.57	5.06	.001
Hearing and Recording of Sounds in Words	0.15	0.04	.46	3.73	.001

This study examined the relationship between oral language proficiency and student achievement in Reading Recovery using a sample of 57 Iranian children learning English. Students were evaluated prior to Reading Recovery intervention and after intervention. Hypothesis 1 examined whether or not a significant difference was found in oral language proficiency by time, before and after Reading Recovery intervention. The results of the dependent sample *t* test were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time; students received higher mean scores following participation in Reading Recovery intervention.

Hypothesis 2 examined whether or not a significant difference was found in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level by time, before and after Reading Recovery Intervention. The results of the dependent sample *t*-test were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in student achievement by time; students received higher mean scores on TRL following participation in Reading Recovery intervention. Hypothesis 3 examined whether or not a significant difference was found in student achievement, as measured by Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, by time, before and after Reading Recovery intervention. The results of the dependent sample *t*test were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in student achievement by time; students received higher mean scores on HRSIW following participation in Reading Recovery intervention. Hypothesis 4 examined whether or not level of oral language

proficiency predicted student achievement, as measured by HRSIW and TRL, after Reading Recovery intervention. The results of the linear regressions were statistically significant, and the null hypothesis was rejected. Oral language proficiency at posttest predicted student achievement at posttest. In each of the four analyses, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion, Conclusion, Implications, and Suggestions

This study examined the relationship between oral language proficiency and student achievement in Reading Recovery using a sample of 57 Iranian children learning English. Students were evaluated prior to Reading Recovery intervention and after intervention. Hypothesis 1 examined whether or not a significant difference was found in oral language proficiency by time, before and after Reading Recovery intervention. The results of the dependent sample *t* test were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in oral language proficiency by time; students received higher mean scores following participation in Reading Recovery intervention.

Hypothesis 2 examined whether or not a significant difference was found in student achievement, as measured by Text Reading Level by time, before and after Reading Recovery Intervention. The results of the dependent sample *t*-test were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in student achievement by time; students received higher mean scores on TRL following participation in Reading Recovery intervention.

Discussion of the Findings

This study examined the relationship between oral language proficiency and student achievement in RR using a sample of 57 Iranian children learning English. Students were evaluated prior to RR intervention and after intervention. In each of the four analyses, the null hypothesis was rejected. Reading Recovery intervention impacted Iranian children oral language proficiency skills, resulting in higher posttest scores. It is vital for educators to have a clear understanding of how language develops and how English structures are acquired by children who are learning to read and write (Clay, 1991). To measure oral language acquisition, ROL was administered to Iranian children learning English prior to

RR intervention and after RR intervention. The findings indicated higher scores at posttest as compared to pretest. Text Reading Level (TRL) assesses the student's reading behaviors. It informs the teacher about how the learner searches for information in printed texts and how the learner works with that information (Clay, 1993). The findings indicated there was a statistically significant difference in student achievement before and after RR intervention. Students received higher scores at posttest as compared to pretest. Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (HRSIW) measures the ability to hear sounds in words and write the letters associated with the sounds. Clay (1991) stated, "The sounds of speech are a very complex code and a written alphabet is a simple substitution cipher" (p. 82). The findings in this study indicated there was a statistically significant difference in student achievement, as measured by HRSIW before and after RR intervention.

Oral language proficiency at posttest predicted TRL and performance on HRSIW among Iranian children learning English participating in RR intervention. Proficiency in oral language is important for self-expression and communicating ideas (Clay, 1991). The results of the linear regressions were statistically significant indicating oral language proficiency at posttest predicted student achievement at posttest. The findings of this study suggest the importance of oral language acquisition of students. Healy (as cited by Gentile, 2003) stated, "Language shapes language shapes thinking, and language shapes brains" (p. vii). Understanding of oral language acquisition occurs in constructivist classrooms where students construct their own knowledge of literacy skills. Clay (1991) stated, "As children search for meaning in print they are able to notice new things about words or print or messages, constructively linking these to other things they know" (p. 319). In constructivist classrooms, the best teaching and learning occurs within the child's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the place where a child can perform a task with the guidance from an appropriate adult. Clay (1991) refers to the ZPD as the 'cutting edge of learning' concept. Teachers need to create more opportunities for students to work within their ZPD by creating stimulating activities and opportunities for growth. The teacher works with the student to allow him to do what he can accomplish alone but shares the activity when the student reaches some limit. Oral language must be modeled by

teachers continually for ELLs to understand language structures. Language should be engaging and in a meaningful context.

Implications of the Study

This study focused on improving reading skills and reading achievement of Iranian children learning English. As advocates of learning, teachers need to construct an environment to address the needs of all students and provide assessments that lead to a better understanding of all learners. Cunningham and Allington (1999) stated, "What the classroom teacher does day in and day out, minute-by-minute, has the greatest effect on what children learn" (p. 256). As our school populations continue to change, our teaching practices have to continue to change to prepare our students for the world of tomorrow.

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