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Effects of Phonemic Awareness and Oral Reading Fluency

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Effects of Phonemic Awareness and Oral Reading Fluency

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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ABSTRACT

Teaching students to read is a task that teachers are assigned to every school year. Many theories and theorists have given their take on the best way to teach students to read. Phonemic awareness has been in the forefront of reading instruction and currently is becoming a staple in many classrooms. This research study took a look at the correlation between phonemic awareness growth and oral reading fluency growth in a first-grade classroom working with mid-level students in a small group setting. The researcher used Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS) phonemic intervention and curriculum-based measurement (CBM) for oral reading fluency. The PRESS progress monitoring and the CBM gave the researcher qualitative information about student growth in phonemic awareness and their oral reading fluency growth. The researcher's data showed that with four weeks of small group intervention, the students' average growth of words per minute in oral reading fluency grew nineteen words per minute. The researcher was delighted in seeing that the growth from phonemic awareness helped students with their oral reading fluency.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Many educators are faced with the challenge of helping all children who enter their classrooms while ensuring all succeed regardless of the wide range of abilities. It is important to know that "approximately 15-30 percent of any class will require small-group support, even if the regular classroom program is efficacious and well taught" (Moats & Tolman, 2009, p. 88). Teaching children to read is not a one-size fits all situation. Learning to read is a process that students will learn when their brain has developed in the areas in which they are able to learn it.

Having a firm understanding of the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness is a basis that all students need to have before they can be successfully fluent and comprehend text. To do this, educators may need to slow the pace when teaching some students and provide them with more instruction based on their instructional level. Teaching phonemes directly allows students to understand sound correctly to begin building the foundation for their reading skills (Moats, 2009).

Brief Literature Review

"Studies have found that phonemic awareness was more predictive of reading development than students' IQ" (O'Connor, 2013, p. 28). The phonological awareness skills children may be working on are rhyming, alliteration and syllable segmentation. When children are in preschool, they may receive indirect training with these topics by reading stories and poems (Kilpatrick, 2013). The majority of phonological learning will take place in the primary classroom, but educators need to be aware that students coming into the classroom will be at different stages of learning phonological awareness. When educators are able to focus on the area

of phonological awareness that the student(s) are struggling with and build up from there to phonemic awareness, both the teacher(s) and student(s) will begin to see success in reading fluency.

Phonemic awareness skills are important for students to develop, because students will use these skills when they are decoding new words. The skills of phonemic awareness help a student learn to read, spell, manipulate phonemes, and much more (Stotsky, 2006). Phonemic awareness instruction in the classroom with direct instruction in both large and small groups is beneficial to all learners and a variety of language abilities. It is important to remember that students who are successful with phonemic awareness have a strong foundation to be successful, fluent readers because, "learning to decode an alphabetic writing system with phones requires phonemic awareness" (Moats, 2009, p. 81).

Statement of the Problem

The research problem was to measure the effectiveness of small group phonemic awareness instruction in correlation to oral reading fluency scores. The reading curriculum that the district has purchased moves at a pace that is too quick for many of the students. The curriculum does offer many opportunities for small group differentiation, but many students find difficulty in completing simple activities independently because of their language proficiency or phonological awareness skills. The district has purchased the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Curriculum to use with students in a large group. This works great for average to above average students, but lower achieving students need more time to think and add visuals before they are able to answer correctly. Providing students with the opportunity to learn and respond in a small group setting helps them become more engaged in their learning because it is attainable.

Purpose of the Study

Prior to the implementation of small group phonemic awareness, the researcher was implementing Heggerty Phonemic Awareness in a large group setting. The Heggerty Curriculum was successful in including hand gestures to students who needed the visual cue, but lacked an opportunity for all students to respond. Students who were fluent in phonemes were able to answer questions more quickly and more loudly than students who were still acquiring language or that were not fluent in all phonemes.

The researcher was concerned with students who needed small group phonemic awareness instruction because of their lack of knowledge of the alphabetic principle and their ability to read fluently. The majority of students that were entering first grade were coming in below average academically and have been struggling with being able to reach and maintain grade level achievement in oral reading fluency.

This year the researchers's school began using Fastbridge Assessments for early reading and early math benchmark assessments and progress monitoring. Seventy-five percent of students in the researcher's class fell below the twentieth percentile for national norms in early literacy. Nine students were labeled as high risk, five students were labeled as some risk and two students were labeled as low risk. The class average for accuracy on letter sounds was sixty-five percent. The class averaged four nonsense words per minute with ten students reading three words or below in a minute. This data shows the researcher that students would benefit from instruction on phonological awareness to increase their awareness of the English language sounds and begin to understand basic literacy skills to improve fluency in their reading.

Research Question

How does small group phonemic awareness instruction affect a student's oral reading fluency growth?

Definition of Variables

The following are the variables of the study:

Variable A: The progress students are making during the phonemic awareness intervention will be my dependent variable. Phonological skills that are acquired in any language will help in the development of phonological awareness.

Many students in our area come from low socioeconomic families that do not have access to many books and quality daycare. The phonological development of students in the researcher's classroom can vary depending on if that child attended preschool or went to a high quality daycare. Along with small group intervention, there are many variables that are out of the researcher's control.

Variable B: Teacher guided, small group phonemic awareness instruction will be the independent variable. Phonological awareness is the ability to manipulate sounds in spoken word (Reading Rockets, 2020). Small group instruction for phonemic awareness will be used to provide students with extra opportunities to practice sound manipulation. These students are slower to answer when working in large groups, but are intensely thinking of the new word. Giving them the opportunity to receive small group instruction on phonemic awareness will allow them more time to think of an answer before someone who is more fluent with the task gives an answer.

Significance of the Study

Educators today are facing more and more challenges in the classroom. After a year of distance learning, in some cases, students may be lacking the basic skills necessary to become successful fluent readers. Studies have shown that children who are fluent in phonological awareness are better apt to become successful readers (Moats, 2009). As students progress through their schooling, the researcher would like to give students the basic knowledge to become confident in the sounds of the English language to be able to make connections to the print and become fluent readers that can read to learn. This study will provide information on how to help students achieve success in phonemic awareness to become fluent readers that will be able to not only learn to read, but read to learn.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval

In order to conduct this study, I received approval from MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study was sought from the school district where the research took place, at a rural school in Central Minnesota.

Informed Consent

Protection of human subjects participating in research were assured. Participant minors were informed of the purpose of the study via the Informed Consent Letter. I also read the method of assent to the participants before beginning the study. Participants were made aware that this study was conducted as part of the researcher's master degree program and that it was intended to benefit the researcher's teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent

was sought, and the parents understood and agreed, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined in both verbally and in writing.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the sample size. Due to so many students requiring different needs during the day, the researcher focused the research on students who do not legally require extra support services (e.g. special education), and are not up to their academic standards. Many of the students in the classroom are pulled out because they are English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED) students that require extra support services during small group What I Need (WIN) time. The focus of the researcher's group were students receiving tier 2 interventions. Tier 2 interventions provide extra focus and support that some students may need in certain areas. This allowed the researcher to select students who had acquired basic phonological awareness skills but were lacking in phonemic awareness skills.

Conclusions

Phonological awareness is key to a student's ability to successfully learn to read and achieve success in school. By conducting research on improving students' phonemic awareness to help a student read more fluently, the researcher hopes to learn how to better assist the students in the classroom to become more proficient readers who are showing growth in all areas of reading. In chapter 2, the researcher will explain what the research has shown about the importance of children receiving phonological and phonemic awareness instruction.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Teaching children to read has always been an important part of education. There have been many different techniques and tools that educators have used in the past that have helped many children learn to read. Learning more about brain development and taking into consideration the age at which students are expected to achieve certain reading skills, it is important to remember that learning to read is sequential and needs to be developmentally appropriate for the learner.

Phonemic awareness has become a forefront in literacy instruction. Educators have been made aware of the importance of sound awareness and language proficiency and how that may affect reading development. Once students have an understanding of phonemic awareness, their decoding and oral reading fluency will increase so that students are able to reach the ultimate goal of reading, which is to comprehend and read to learn.

It is important to know that "68% of schoolchildren do not possess the skills necessary to reach minimal levels of reading proficiency" (Berg & Stegelman, 2003, p. 48). As Berg and Stegelman (2003) later mention, it is important to assess phonological awareness skills to determine students that may have difficulties so that they do not become failures. This researcher focused on making changes in small group reading instruction to better instruct students at all levels of reading using phonemic awareness interventions so that they will become more successful, fluent readers.

Phonemic Awareness

There have been many discoveries about cognitive development and what linguistic skills children need to become successful readers. Phonological awareness has been around for many years, but connecting research to colleges and schools has been slow (Kilpatrick, 2013). In the mid to late 1900's phonological awareness was popular in some programs. Despite that fact, many educators were not taught about phonological awareness in college and are learning the importance of it while teaching (Kilpatrick, 2013). When teachers are effectively teaching students phonological awareness they are then reaching all levels of reading abilities and helping them learn (Hatcher et al., 2004). The term phonemic awareness has currently become a buzzword and many educators are beginning to understand the importance of providing developmentally appropriate instruction to teach children so they are able to build upon prior knowledge to become fluent readers.

The different levels of phonological awareness levels are syllable, onset-rime, and phoneme. These skills begin to be acquired and mastered in preschool and are typically achieved by late first grade to early third grade (Kilpatrick, 2013). It is important that children are taught phonemic awareness skills in the proper order for them to be successful in phonics and identifying words (Stotsky, 2006). Children will first learn the difference between words and sentences, learn to rhyme, be aware of syllables, manipulate onset and rime, and then begin to be aware of different phonemes (sounds) to begin manipulating sounds (Moats, 2009; Zeece, 2006). Phonemic awareness is one part of phonological awareness, but all are critical to a child's reading development (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Phonemic awareness "refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken word" (Reading Rockets, 2020, p. 1). Being able to isolate

phonemes is the first task a student will become fluent with in phonemic awareness. The student will be able to identify the beginning, middle, and end sounds of a word. Next, a student will begin to segment phonemes in single syllable words into their individual sounds. Once a student is able to segment sounds, they will begin to blend the phonemes together to produce a word. The most difficult part of phonemic awareness is being able to manipulate the sounds of a word. To do this, the student will replace, take away, or add sounds to a word to produce a new word (Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2016). A student who is able to manipulate and isolate phonemes in a word is showing the highest level of phonological awareness and is preparing to become a fluent reader (Kilpatrick, 2013).

Phonemic awareness instruction is vital for all students to learn, because it may be difficult to identify the students who are struggling readers until they have fallen behind (Kilpatrick, 2013). O'Connor (2014) made an interesting discovery when studies showed that "phonemic awareness was more predictive of reading development than students' IQ or socioeconomic level" (p. 28). By providing phonological awareness instruction as early as preschool using play based methods such as nursery rhymes, it has been effective in developing phonemic awareness to help students understand the basic phonemes in the language (Kilpatrick, 2013). The goal of a student's mastery of phonemic awareness is that they will be able to successfully decode words and become fluent readers.

Oral Reading Fluency

Research has proven that there is a direct correlation between a student's cognitive development of phonemic awareness and their ability to read fluently. A fluent reader will be able to read words with automaticity, accuracy, expression, phrasing, and passing (Moats, 2009). When a student is able to identify and read a word with ease, and are able to read more fluently,

they will be able to direct their attention to higher level thinking skill sets such as comprehension (Kim & Wagner, 2015).

Fluency is not only in regard to reading words, but a student also needs to be fluent in all areas of reading including letter names, sounds, and words (Moats, 2009). Being able to read fluently has a connection between recognizing words and being able to comprehend (Begeny & Martens, 2006). Mastery of the decoding process is a large task that good readers have accomplished, giving them the knowledge to decode text accurately to be efficient readers (Park et al., 2015). These correlations provide evidence that a student with a strong phonemic awareness background will be more successful in their oral reading fluency.

To help a student achieve a higher oral reading fluency, educators may also use some of the same resources with students when they were working on phonemic awareness. Repeated readings have been shown to help increase a student's oral reading fluency. Using nursery rhymes as text for students to read provides them with familiar vocabulary and text (Moats, 2009). Having higher achieving peers in the classroom assist students who are struggling with their fluency has also been proven to be an effective strategy for improving a student's oral reading fluency (Hofstadter-Duk & Daly, 2011).

ELL Students

ELL students are a growing population in many schools. "Foundational early reading skills will develop similarly for ELL students learning to read in English as they do with native English speakers" (Oh et al., p. 107). Providing students with basic knowledge of their new language with support in phonological awareness will provide them with a base in which to learn a new language. The basic phonological awareness skills will help students understand the new sounds in the language and be able to break sounds apart to better understand the language.

As these students are gaining alphabetic knowledge and developing phonological awareness, they may fall behind in their early years (Haager et al., 2009), but as years pass, they are able to become successful readers (Melesse & Enyew, 2020). Phonological awareness is very important for student success to begin reading instruction for ELL students and not wait for their proficiency of language (Hatcher et al., 2004; Dussling, 2018). However, a student who has had sufficient reading instruction in their native language will need to acquire language and vocabulary to be able to show fluency and proficiency in the English language (De Ramirez & Shapiro, 2007). Giving ELL students time and providing them with the same phonological and phonemic awareness instruction will help these students achieve oral reading fluency within time.

Theoretical Framework

Brain development is a crucial part of learning to read. There are four different areas in the brain that develop at different times to support different areas in reading. It is important as a teacher to factor this into reasons why some students struggle early on in school with reading and phonemic awareness.

A researcher on the development of reading stages, Jeanne Chall, describes a learner from preschool to college with her reading stages from pre reading to construction and reconstruction (Moats & Tolman, 2009). The stages were based on what typical children master as they learn to read (Moats & Tolman, 2009). The phases are very linear and do not show that a student may go back to relearn. Chall's stages represent that what a student learns is built upon what they have previously mastered.

Another researcher in reading development is Linnea Ehri. This theorist focused on word-reading development from pre-alphabetic to consolidated alphabetic (Moats & Tolman

(2009). Ehri's "theory helps us understand the phases children move through on their way to proficient reading" (Lane, 2020, p. 1). The phases take a reader from pre alphabetic to the consolidated alphabetic. Ehri's phases show the connection of students being able to recognize words for oral reading fluency and being able to master phonemic awareness skills earlier in life. As students are learning to read, educators need to acknowledge that "alphabetic learning is acquired through progressive differentiation of both the sounds in words and the letter sequences in print. Phoneme awareness is the foundation upon which letter-sound association can be constructed" (Moats & Tolman, 2009, p. 45).

Scarborough's "rope" model may offer educators the most comprehensive theory of reading development with a visual to show how language comprehension and word recognition combine together for a skilled reader to develop (Moats & Tolman, 2009). The belief is that there are many subskills that are needed to achieve mastery in decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Word recognition is part of the rope that includes phonemic awareness as a thread. Without that thread, a student may never reach a skilled reading level where they are fluent and able to comprehend (Moats & Tolman, 2009).

Research Question

How does small group phonemic awareness instruction affect a student's oral reading fluency growth?

Conclusions

It is imperative to a child's education that they learn to read fluently, and it's also important to realize that the foundation to read is "laid when the child begins to learn language and understand speech" (Wassik, 2001, p. 133). To help a student achieve success in oral reading

fluency, there is a process and an order in which they need to learn the basic properties of language, both oral and written.

Curriculums are meant to teach the students who are at grade level and have mastered skills that have been traditionally thought to be mastered by that age. Educators need to be aware of factors that may be inhibiting their students' ability to reach their oral reading fluency goal and reteach phonemic awareness skills. Making sure to teach students at their development level will ensure that they become proficient readers. Using the information from my research will help me determine the effectiveness of small group phonemic awareness instruction and a student's oral reading fluency.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

This study was conducted to examine the impacts of providing students with small group phonemic awareness instruction upon their oral reading fluency scores. Studies have shown that "phonemic awareness plays an essential role in the storage of written words and is very critical and has not been an important part of teaching reading" (Kilpatrick, 2013, p. 6). Phonemic awareness is one part of phonological awareness that helps a child develop sound awareness. An important part of this research was meeting the students where they are developmentally in a small group to help their comprehension of sounds. Providing students with the opportunity to learn phonemic awareness skills has been found to be a "building block for decoding and word recognition" and overall reading achievement (Baker, 2007). The researcher was curious to see if small group phonemic awareness instruction correlated with growth for a student(s) oral reading fluency.

The researcher assessed students in both phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency at the beginning of research and continued to progress monitor students on a weekly basis throughout the research. Documenting any correlation between phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency can provide insight to methods in which to assist struggling readers achieve success.

Research Question

How does small group phonemic awareness instruction affect a student's oral reading fluency growth?

Research Design

The research design that best fits the action research study is qualitative design with purposeful sampling. This design can be used when the researcher is going to rely on procedures and collect numerical data (Mills, 2018). Students were given small group instruction based upon the phonemic awareness skill that they were working on to help them become more fluent readers. The researcher utilized the AB approach for data collection. The researcher gathered baseline data in phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency that provided the researcher with a point of reference in where to begin small group instruction. The oral reading fluency baseline helped the researcher track the growth of progress made from phonemic awareness instruction. Small group instruction was implemented for two, four-day school weeks before an oral reading fluency progress measurement was taken. Small group instruction data and assessments were gathered for four weeks. At the end of every week, the researcher gathered data on the progress of phonemic awareness to see if an adjustment in small group instruction needed to be made. Every two weeks, the researcher progress monitored students on their oral reading fluency progress.

Setting

The setting of this study was a rural school located in a central Minnesota town with a population of 3,300. This community also has many people living outside the city limits with a very diverse culture and low socioeconomic status. It is a community with a mix of agriculture and processing plants. School enrollment was 506 students in K-6th grade in one school, 62 of them in first grade. Of the students enrolled in the elementary school, 208 were Caucasian, 274 Hispanic or Latino, 1 was Black or African American, and 2 American Indian. Within the school, 171 students receive ESL (English as a Second Language) services, and 280 students qualify for

free or reduced breakfast and lunch. The elementary school also has 106 students in special education.

Participants

The participants of the researcher's action research were students from the first grade classroom from the 2021-2022 school year. There were sixteen students in the classroom with eleven boys and five girls. The students in the classroom five were Caucasian, ten identified as Hispanic or Latino, and one American Indian. Within the classroom, eight students receive ESL (English as a Second Language) services and three receive special education services.

Sampling

The sample for this action research was a convenient sample because the subjects were easily accessible to the researcher (Siegle, 2015). The sample for the action research study were students from the researcher's first grade classroom. These students had a foundation of letter sounds in the English Language.

Instrumentation

To collect data for this action research, the researcher used the Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS) Phonemic Awareness Inventory (see Appendix A) and a curriculum based measurement (CBM) for fluency using one minute timed fluency reads (see Appendix B). The PRESS inventory gave the researcher a point of reference in where to start interventions for small group instruction and how to group students into the small groups. Students were asked to isolate, segment, blend, and manipulate sounds. This task was completed orally with the student just listening to sounds and directions and giving an auditory response. The CBM has a selection of timed reads for first grade students. Students were given an appropriate level of the student copy of the passage while the researcher started and stopped a

timer for one minute and documented any errors that the student made. At the end of every four days, the researcher progress monitored student(s) on their progress on phonemic awareness (see Appendix C). While progress monitoring, the researcher asked the student(s) to manipulate sounds in a word and the student responded orally while the researcher documented answers on the recording sheet.

Data Collection

For the researcher to see the effectiveness of small group phonemic instruction in association with a student's oral reading fluency, baseline assessments were given using the PRESS Inventory and a CBM for oral reading fluency. The PRESS baseline inventory for phonemic awareness assessed students on isolated sounds, segmenting, blending, and sound manipulation. The researcher then gave a one-minute CBM on oral reading fluency baseline. Students received two weeks of phonemic awareness instruction in small groups before they were progress monitored on their oral reading fluency. Data was collected on the researcher's recording paper copy, then transferred to an excel form to create graphs on the data collected.

Data Analysis

To summarize the quantitative data collected, the researcher used excel spreadsheets using each student's baseline assessment score in both phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency. Quantitative data was used because the researcher had a "collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain" (Mills, 2018, p. 5). The researcher documented the student's progress being made with oral reading fluency and phonemic awareness. At the end of the research, the researcher had the student(s) re-take the phonemic awareness inventory and an oral reading fluency assessment. Once the student's growth was entered, the researcher calculated the

mean growth rate of the student(s) in both their phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency and looked for a correlation of growth between the two.

Research Question and System Alignment

Table 3.1 will provide information about the researcher's research question and the research. A small group of first graders will be participating in small group phonemic awareness instruction, the researcher is going to record progress made in phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency. To attain this information, PRESS interventions and assessments will be utilized through baseline assessments and weekly progress monitoring.

Table 3.1

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique	Source
How does small group phonemic awareness instruction affect a student's oral reading fluency growth?	Progress students are making during small group phonemic awareness instruction. Teacher guided small group phonemic awareness instruction	Small group instruction Action Research Quantitative Data	PRESS Intervention and Assessments used weekly CBM - Benchmark Advance For oral reading fluency will be used every 2 weeks.	The researcher will be gathering data on a weekly and bi weekly basis. The scripted assessments and interventions will allow the researcher to provide an equal learning opportunity.	Students will be given baseline assessments and then taught in small groups with ORF assessment every two weeks.	1st grade students Sample size is 5 students.

Procedures

The action research took place during WIN (What I Need) time from 2:15-2:45 Monday - Thursday. Once baseline assessments for phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency were given to students and the data was collected, the researcher assigned students to groups based on their need or level in phonemic awareness. During small group instruction, students who were working on phoneme isolation played a game where students drew a picture card and sorted the cards based upon the beginning, middle and ending sound. This was completed at first in a small group, then the students were given time to complete the task during independent practice. The group that was working on phoneme segmenting was provided with elkonin boxes and words for segmenting. As the students said each word, they focused on saying the sounds that are in each word while moving an object into a box. Once again, this was demonstrated in a small group and made available to the students for independent practice.

Students who were working on phoneme blending were provided with elkonin boxes. When this group was given a word, they would identify the sounds in the word by putting an object into the boxes, then slide their finger from left to right saying the sounds in the word smoothly and together. Once students completed the task in a small group, the students then practiced the skill independently.

Students that were ready for phoneme isolation and manipulation, began by reviewing the sounds in the word by using elkonin boxes. They began by taking a picture card from the pile to review the sounds. The students then practiced changing the initial, final, or medial sound in the word to create a new word. Once small group instruction was over, students practiced together drawing cards and changing a sound to create a new word. The end of intervention time was

spent visualizing sound manipulation by providing elkonin boxes and markers for students to practice sound manipulation with their weekly phonics skill.

After two weeks of small group phonemic awareness instruction, students were progress monitored on their phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency. To progress monitor growth in phonemic awareness, students were asked to listen to words and change sounds orally. To progress monitor the student's oral reading fluency, students were given a student copy of a grade level appropriate passage, then asked to read for one minute while the researcher documented any errors the student made. The researcher was able to implement small groups and monitor progress for four weeks.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher sent an informed consent letter home to the families of the students in the classroom. With the participants being only six or seven years old, it was important that all families were given the information of what activities their child would be participating in and what data was going to be collected. Giving families this information provided them with the opportunity to make an informed decision on whether or not they would like their child to participate in the action research. This action research study was not in violation of ethical practice and the data was kept confidential. There was no greater harm to students than that of a normal school day for a first grade student.

Conclusions

The school in which this study was conducted is a diverse school with students from different backgrounds both culturally and economically. The researcher chose students from the classroom who had basic alphabetic knowledge of the English language and were ready to begin learning to read. During this action research, students were assigned small groups in which to

participate in a phonemic awareness skill that the researcher proved to be an area of need.

Students were progress monitored on a weekly basis to see if their phonemic awareness skills

were improving and then bi weekly to see if their oral reading fluency was increasing. Chapter 4

provides the results from the researchers study that was conducted.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Phonemic awareness is an important early literacy skill that helps readers develop a strong foundation for reading as their skills develop. As Scarbourough's Rope model suggests, the sub skills in phonemic awareness are critical for word recognition and comprehension (Moats & Tolman, 2009). With the many challenges in education from poverty, ESL students, Distance Learning, ect. students are needing educators to meet them where they are developmentally to provide them with phonemic awareness skills needed in learning to read. The gap in student achievement seems to be growing and phonemic awareness has been proven to be a building block in helping students grow in their reading development. With many curriculums moving along each week, some students are not able to master skills in that time.

The purpose of the researchers study was to identify the correlation between phonemic awareness growth and oral reading fluency growth. The researcher was concerned with the beginning of the school year data and the amount of students that fell below the 20th percentile in national norms in early literacy.   Providing students with small group phonemic awareness instruction at their level provided students content that challenged them and provided them with opportunities for success. This allowed students to work and grow at their pace without as many distractions and provided them with more opportunities to vocalize their responses.

Data Collection

To collect data, the researcher relied on baseline assessments and progress monitoring data from each individual student based upon small group interventions using the PRESS Phonemic Awareness Inventory, PRESS Skill Monitoring, and a curriculum based measurement for oral reading fluency. Collecting the baseline data allowed the researcher to know what

interventions would help support student growth. Progress monitoring phonemic awareness every week allowed the researcher to see if students were growing or if the concept was too easy.

Everyday, the researcher gathered her small phonemic awareness group that was working on sound manipulation. During this time, the students were shown cards with colored pictures and asked to identify the picture. The students would repeat the item on the card and were asked to identify the first, last, or medial sound using elkonin boxes. Once that sound was identified, the researcher would ask the students to change either the first, last, or medial sound. The first few of each day were always completed together as a group, then students were asked to give a thumbs up when they knew the new word and then the researcher would call on individual students. At the end of group time, students were given elkonin boxes and markers to practice sound manipulation with their weekly phonics skill. This allowed the students to further visualize what they were doing, and helped bring sound manipulation to print.

The researcher noticed that when students began working with sound manipulation using the beginning sound, all students relied on the elkonin sound boxes to identify and change sounds. As students progressed and became more proficient with the manipulation, students were not relying on the elkonin sound boxes, but rather completing the manipulation completely mentally. This growth shows their understanding in language.

Results

RQ 1: How does small group phonemic awareness instruction affect a student's oral reading fluency growth?

Small group phonemic awareness interventions to track growth in a student's oral reading fluency took place over four weeks in a first grade classroom. Students were asked to work with

their teacher at the end of each day four times a week, leaving one day for progress monitoring.

See Appendix B and C for progress monitoring tools that the researchers used. The PRESS

Phonemic Awareness Inventory for this group of students guided the researcher to begin

interventions in sound manipulation. Table 4.2 shows the weekly data collected by the researcher

on where the students began with interventions and the progress that was made during progress

monitoring.

The students' interventions progressed in sound manipulation from beginning sound, end

sound, and medial sound. When students were able to successfully answer eight out of ten

questions correctly, the researcher moved on to the next level of sound manipulation.

Table 4.2

Sound Manipulation Progress Monitoring

Students	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Student	Initial Sound	Final Sound	Final Sound	Medial Sound
B1	9	3	10	8
B2	9	5	10	8
G1	10	5	10	7
G2	9	4	8	7
Average	9.25	4.25	9.5	7.5

Note. All progress monitoring scores were based on a score out of ten. Students were moved to
the next area of sound manipulation when the average was nine or more. If there was a student
whose score was significantly lower than the rest of the group, the researcher would have moved
them into a new group.

Every two weeks of phonemic awareness intervention, the researcher would ask the

students to read for monitoring in oral reading fluency. Monitoring oral reading fluency every

two weeks gave the students more time to understand what manipulation skill they were working on and time to read in class working on fluency in general. Students' growth every two weeks was substantial for most of the students. The researcher noticed that after two weeks of phonemic awareness intervention, the average student growth went from 20.25 words per minute to 28 words per minute. The fourth week of interventions, the students averaged 38.75 words per minute. The growth average overall was 19 words per minute as seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Oral Reading Fluency Growth

	Baseline	First	Second	Growth
B1	10	23	28	+18
B2	35	35	45	+10
G1	18	29	41	+23
G2	18	25	43	+25
Average	20.25	28	38.75	+19

Note. The scores for oral reading fluency were based upon words per minute. The growth was based on growth from the baseline fluency assessment to the second fluency monitoring.

Data Analysis

Overall, the researcher was able to see a growth in small group phonemic awareness instruction and a growth in oral reading fluency. Growth in areas was what was expected, but the researcher did not expect the amount of growth in oral reading fluency to be as significant as it was. The data collected aligns with Baker (2007) stating that phonemic awareness skills have been found to be a "building block for decoding and word recognition" and overall reading

achievement. It is also important to note that direct phonemic awareness instruction is new to the researcher's school, but that "phonemic awareness plays an essential role in the storage of written words and is very critical and has not been an important part of teaching reading" (Kilpatrick, 2013, p. 6). The data collected in this study shows how the growth in phonemic awareness skills can improve a students ability to read by recognizing and decoding unfamiliar words using an oral reading fluency assessment.

As students were working in small groups the researcher was intrigued by the amount of growth she saw with students throughout the week. Typically the first two days of the intervention were more of a struggle for the students needing to use elkonin boxes to sound out the sounds before manipulation and while manipulating the word. The last two days of intervention, the students typically became more confident with the skill and were not fully relying on elkonin boxes to assist them in sound manipulation. The exception would be when students were working on final sound manipulation, this skill took the students two weeks to be successful.

When the researcher was looking at the growth of oral reading fluency, she was pleasantly surprised by the amount of growth every two weeks. The curriculum based measurement provided a student with a copy of the story that had bigger print with a double space that allowed students to easily track their words without becoming confused on the line that they were reading. In the future, the researcher would also like to complete the comprehension questions, to assess the students' comprehension of the passage that they are reading. Overall, the phonemic awareness instruction in small groups was helpful to the reading development of the students used in the sample.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the future the researcher would like to implement the interventions for a longer period of time to collect more data from the students. Allowing other staff members who help in the classroom to assist with interventions and collect data would also be helpful as to not overwhelm the classroom teacher. The researcher also did not use students who scored low on phonemic awareness in this study because they were not working on oral reading fluency, but letter sound fluency. Being able to track the growth of sounds per minute for this group of students would have also been beneficial to show the development of these students. The researcher would have also liked to see if the rate of words per minute and sounds per minute would increase at the same rate.

Conclusion

Beginning this action research project, the researcher knew that phonemic awareness instruction would be beneficial to students. The amount of growth in the students in the short amount of time each day and in only four weeks was something that the researcher did not expect to see in both phonemic awareness and oral reading fluency. The researcher was also concerned about the students becoming disengaged with the process of segmenting the word from the picture and then manipulating the sound that they were asked to. Students however, were engaged and each day brought an attitude of joy to want to participate in a game with their friends. This attitude of positiveness and fun provided the students with a mental state of wanting to learn and engage in the topic bening learned so that they could learn without frustration.

Chapter 5

Implications for Practice

Many students have struggled with learning the past few years. There have been many distractions, worries, and life events that have disrupted learning across the globe. Early literacy skills are important in a student's development of learning to read. Wanting to help students to become successful readers, the researcher was looking for effective ways to improve oral reading fluency without taking up too much class time or requiring a lot of prep time to complete activities. The activities and progress monitoring tools used provided just that, easy implementation, minor prep time, and growth in students achievement.

Action Plan

Studying the effects of small group phonemic awareness instruction and the correlation it has on a student's oral reading fluency has made an impact on the researcher. The plan is to continue with the intervention with the sample group and add another group of students to work on an intervention at a different level as well, but tracking letter sound fluency inplace of oral reading fluency. This new group of students is lower than the current sample group, and is missing many early literacy, pre alphabetic skills. From the research provided and the data collected, providing the next group of students with a phonemic awareness intervention will only increase their ability to identify and decode words.

The impact on students was a positive learning experience that provided students with a positive, engaged learning environment that helped them grow in oral reading fluency and their guided reading level. The benefit of providing students with this type of learning opportunity is reaching students at their learning level and forming a concrete foundation in which the students are able to build more skills upon.

Plan for Sharing

The researcher plans on sharing the intervention that she used, research found, and data that was collected with the kindergarten and first grade team at my school, the instructional coach, WIN Team and administration. Both kindergarten and first grade teachers have been discussing interventions needed to help fill in the gaps in early literacy that students are coming to school missing. The instructional coach and administration are open to new ideas that are research based to show improvement in areas of need. Using this intervention will provide students with instruction that will allow them to grow in early literacy skills to become successful, fluent readers. The simplicity of the intervention will also not overwhelm teachers with time and prep to complete. The growth that the data shows from the sample students shows promise to begin closing the gap between the level that students are entering school and their grade level.

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Appendix A

Completion Date 26-May-2021
Expiration Date 25-May-2024
Record ID   42657482

This is to certify that:

Melissa Vetsch-Larson

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Minnesota State University Moorhead

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6a1db5d0-a922-4679-a5fd-35095a54be74-42657482

September 1, 2021

205 2nd St. S
Long Prairie, MN 56347

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a study to see if working more closely with the sounds of words will help to increase their reading fluency.

Your child was selected to participate because he/she is in my regular education classroom. If you do allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to complete the following activities that are typical in a first grade classroom and involve no risk to your child. If you choose to not have your child participate, it will not impact your child's involvement in any normal classroom activities.

1. Your child will be participating in a small group to work on sound recognition, sound blending, and sound manipulation. This will happen during WIN time four days a week.
2. Once a week your child will be given a post-test to see if they have grown in sound awareness.
3. Students will be asked to read for one minute every other week to see if their oral reading fluency has increased.

Mrs. Tammy Cebulla has given permission to conduct this study. The information gathered will help me complete my master's degree at Minnesota State University of Moorhead. With parental consent, I am able to use the information gathered from small groups to write my final paper. It is important to know that the tasks your child will be completing are part of normal first grade instruction. If you sign this form, you are giving me permission to use the information I gather from your child. All information will be kept confidential and no names will be used. Your child may also opt out of participation at any time with no consequences.

Please get in touch at any time with questions about this study. You may contact Melissa Vetsch-Larson at (320) 732-2194 mvetschlarson@lpge.org or Principal Investigator Dr. Tiffany Bockelmann at 218-780-0757, or by email at tiffany.bockelmann@mnstate.edu. Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by email at irb@mnstate.edu.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep. You are making a voluntary decision whether or not your child may participate. Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information above and are allowing your child to participate in the study. You may withdraw your child from the study at any time.

_____   _____
Signature of Parent or Guardian   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator (Teacher)   Date

Appendix B

Phonemic Awareness Inventory

PRESS

Student: _____ Date: _____ Administered by: _____

Isolated Sounds

Use bird as an example. Say to the student, "I'm going to say a word and then I will say the beginning sound, which is the first sound in a word. For example, in the word bird, the beginning sound is /b/. Now you try (using the same word, bird)." If the student answers incorrectly, then provide a second example using the word hat. If the student still cannot identify the beginning sound, then discontinue the assessment. If the student responds correctly, praise the student and continue by asking him or her to provide the beginning sound for the following words:

Word	cat	top	pet	sun	mop
response					
correct					

≤ 4 consider PA-1   > 4 move to Segmenting

Segmenting

Use pen as an example. Say to the student "I'm going to say a word. Please tell me the sounds you hear in the word. For example, if I say the word pen I hear the sounds /p/ /e/ /n/. Which sounds do you hear?" Then ask the student to segment a second word. If the student does not answer correctly, model the correct response and ask him or her to segment a third word. If the student still does not respond correctly, discontinue the assessment. If the student responds correctly, praise the student and continue segmenting the following words:

Word	fan	set	bin	dot	nut
segmented sounds					
correct					

≤ 4 consider PA-3   > 4 move to Blending

Phonemic Awareness Inventory Continued

Blending

Use dog as an example. Say to the student "I'm going to say some sounds then I'm going to say them fast to make a word. Listen, I'll say the sounds /d/ /o/ /g/ and when I say them fast, I hear the word dog. You try saying /d/ /o/ /g/ fast. What word do you hear?" If the student does not answer correctly, model a second word, and then ask the student to blend a third word. If the student still does not respond correctly, discontinue the assessment. If the student responds correctly, praise the student and continue by asking him or her to blend the following sounds. Read each sound, one at a time, and prompt the student to say them fast.

Sounds	/b/ /a/ /t/	/p/ /e/ /t/	/s/ /u/ /n/	/h/ /o/ /p/	/p/ /i/ /g/
response					
correct					

≤ 4 consider PA-4   > 4 move to Manipulation

Manipulation

Use cat as an example. "If I say the word cat and take away the /c/ sound and put /h/ in its place, I have the word hat. Now you try, what if I take away the /h/ sound in hat and put /s/ in its place, what word do you have?" If the student answers incorrectly, then provide a second example and ask the student to think of a different word. If the student still cannot provide a word, discontinue the assessment. If the student responds correctly, praise the student and continue by asking him or her to provide the new word for the following words:

Word	can take away /c/ put /f/ in its place	wet take away /w/ put /n/ in its place	pin take away /p/ put /t/ in its place	fog take away /f/ put /h/ in its place	run take away /r/ put /s/ in its place
response					
correct					

≤ 4 consider PA-5   > 4 move to Decoding Inventory

Appendix C

Quick Check #2		**Fluency**

Name _____ Date _____

My Dog

1   My dog is big. He likes to run.
He can jump, too!

2   My dog is black.
He has big paws.
He has a long tail.

3   My dog likes to eat. He eats fast!

4   My dog sleeps in a dog bed.
The bed is in my room.

5   He is a good dog. He is my friend.

Fluency

Grades K–1: 100L–230L | **Quick Check #2**

Name _____ Date _____

My Dog

Words per Line

1	My dog is big. He likes to run.	____8
	He can jump, too!	____12
2	My dog is black.	____16
	He has big paws.	____20
	He has a long tail.	____25
3	My dog likes to eat. He eats fast!	____33
4	My dog sleeps in a dog bed.	____40
	The bed is in my room.	____46
5	He is a good dog. He is my friend.	____55

Comprehension Questions

1. What is this story about?
   (a dog)

2. What color is the dog?
   (black)

3. Where does the dog sleep?
   (in a dog bed, OR in the boy's/girl's room)

Passage	Words: 55			
Oral Reading Accuracy				%
Reading Rate				wpm
Comprehension # Correct				/3
Fluency	1	2	3	4

Appendix D

Skill Monitoring: Initial Sound Manipulation - (ISM 1)

Name: _____   # of Correct Items: _____ Date: _____

Directions: I am going to say a word and I will ask you to say the word and then change the first sound in the word to make a new word. EXAMPLE: If I ask you to say the word "fan" and I ask you to change /f/ to /c/, you would say the new word "can." Now you try one. Say the word "pen." (Have student repeat "pen.") When you change /p/ to /h/, what is the new word?

Correct Response	Incorrect Response
Very good. The new word is "hen" when you change /p/ to /h/.	The first sound in "pen" is /p/, so when you change /p/ to /h/, the new word is "hen." Your turn. When you change /p/ to /h/ in "pen," what is the new word?

Okay. Now here is your first word.

Word	Initial Sound Manipulation When you change _ to _, what is the new word?	New Word	Student Response	Correct
1. cat	change /c/ to /h/	hat		
2. road	change /r/ to /t/	toad		
3. sack	change /s/ to /t/	tack		
4. big	change /b/ to /j/	jig		
5. hot	change /h/ to /r/	rot		
6. look	change /l/ to /t/	took		
7. tie	change /t/ to /b/	by		
8. fake	change /f/ to /b/	bake		
9. dog	change /d/ to /l/	log		
10. bee	change /b/ to /s/	see		

Skill Monitoring: Final Sound Manipulation - (FSM 1)

Name: _____   # of Correct Items: _____   Date: _____

Directions: **I am going to say a word and I will ask you to say the word and then change the last sound in the word to make a new word. EXAMPLE: If I say "cake" and I ask you to change /k/ to /n/, you would say the new word "cane." Now you try one. Say the word "five."** (Have student repeat "five.") **When you change /v/ to /l/, what is the new word?**

Correct Response	Incorrect Response
Very good. The new word is "file" when you change /v/ to /l/.	The last sound in "five" is /v/, so when you change /v/ to /l/, the new word is "file." Your turn. When you change /v/ to /l/ in "five," what is the new word?

Okay. Now here is your first word.

Word	Final Sound Manipulation When you change _ to _, what is the new word?	New Word	Student Response	Correct
1. cat	change /t/ to /b/	cab		
2. fame	change /m/ to /t/	fate		
3. like	change /k/ to /m/	lime		
4. rim	change /m/ to /p/	rip		
5. lip	change /p/ to /d/	lid		
6. cob	change /b/ to /t/	cot		
7. rat	change /t/ to /m/	ram		
8. bad	change /d/ to /t/	bat		
9. seem	change /m/ to /d/	seed		
10. cup	change /p/ to /t/	cut		

Skill Monitoring: Medial Sound Manipulation - (MSM 1)

Name: _____   # of Correct Items: _____ Date:_____

Directions: I am going to say a word and I will ask you to say the word and then change the middle sound in the word to make a new word. EXAMPLE: If I say "dog" and I ask you to change /o/ to /i/, you would say the new word "dig." Now you try one. Say the word "wig." (Have student repeat "wig.") When you change /i/ to /a/, what is the new word?

Correct Response	Incorrect Response
Very good. The new word is "wag" when you change /i/ to /a/.	The middle sound in "wig" is /i/, so when you change /i/ to /a/, the new word is "wag." Your turn. When you change /i/ to /a/ in "wag," what is the new word?

Okay. Now here is your first word.

Word	Medial Sound Manipulation When you change _ to _, what is the new word?	New Word	Student Response	Correct
1. tick	change /i/ to /o/	tock		
2. made	change /ā/ to /u/	mud		
3. lake	change /ā/ to /ī/	like		
4. dot	change /o/ to /ā/	date		
5. sat	change /a/ to /i/	sit		
6. mitt	change /i/ to /a/	mat		
7. math	change /a/ to /o/	moth		
8. beat	change /ē/ to /ō/	boat		
9. fin	change /i/ to /a/	fan		
10. bit	change /i/ to /e/	bet		

Skill Monitoring: Medial Sound Manipulation - (MSM 2)

Name: _____ # of Correct Items: _____ Date: _____

Directions: **I am going to say a word and I will ask you to say the word and then change the middle sound in the word to make a new word. EXAMPLE: If I say "dog" and I ask you to change /o/ to /i/, you would say the new word "dig." Now you try one. Say the word "wig."** (Have student repeat "wig.") **When you change /i/ to /a/, what is the new word?**

Correct Response	Incorrect Response
Very good. The new word is "wag" when you change /i/ to /a/.	The middle sound in "wig" is /i/, so when you change /i/ to /a/, the new word is "wag." Your turn. When you change /i/ to /a/ in "wag," what is the new word?

Okay. Now here is your first word.

Word	Medial Sound Manipulation When you change _ to _, what is the new word?	New Word	Student Response	Correct
1. big	change /i/ to /a/	bag		
2. rig	change /i/ to /u/	rug		
3. mate	change /ā/ to /ī/	might		
4. hope	change /ō/ to /o/	hop		
5. sad	change /a/ to /ē/	seed		
6. fix	change /i/ to /o/	fox		
7. pin	change /i/ to /a/	pan		
8. feel	change /ē/ to /i/	fill		
9. shop	change /o/ to /i/	ship		
10. hot	change /o/ to /a/	hat		