

The Effects of Focused Fluency Practice on Reading Rate, Motivation, and Interest in Reading for Struggling Primary Students

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Abstract. This study examines the effects of focused fluency practice on reading fluency, motivation, and interest in reading using a variety of research based strategies designed to improve fluency in struggling students. The twelve- week study looks at six third grade students with low achievement in reading. Multiple assessments and an assortment of methods were used including: repeated reading strategies, Reader's Theatre, Quick Reads, humorous literature, and reading for a reason. Rationale for each strategy is given and individual student progress is profiled to show the effectiveness of using a variety of methods to improve reading fluency. Repeated readings of independent level text were shown to be highly successful for improving reading rates in students with slow reading acquisition and maintaining current motivation to read.

1. Introduction

Reading fluency demonstrates a reader's ability to create meaning from text, integrating everything previously learned about printed and spoken language. Automatic word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, and effective assimilation of perceptual skills combine to produce fluency while reading [1]. In recent years, fluency has been an assumed outcome of reading instruction [2], and for most students in the classroom, this is true. However, the issue of fluency for students who struggle requires special attention to the underlying problems that inhibit fluent reading, the necessary support to minimize or correct those problems, and focused fluency practice. Struggling readers often fall behind their peers in reading development from their earliest attempts due to a variety of causes. For these readers, specific activities designed to improve fluency are unachievable, allowing for the occurrence of bad reading habits, delays in acquiring fluency, and loss of motivation to read. In the classroom setting, these students do not receive the opportunity, attention, or practice required for mastering reading skills [3]. Finding ways to ensure struggling students develop reading skills that will help them become fluent readers is paramount to keeping students motivated to read. Using a range of methods and strategies that interest students and provide optimum reading experiences for promoting fluency is critical [4]. Many studies have found that automatic word recognition improves with the use of repeated reading strategies. Using a balanced approach that incorporates "modeled reading, paired readings, repeated readings, and dramatization" offers students a variety of strategies and substantially improves fluency [5]. Selecting reading material at the proper reading level that offers a recurrence of high frequency words along with repeated practice of these texts helps increase reading fluency for struggling students. Increasing the amount of time these students spend reading at their instructional level gives them appropriate practice for development of reading skills. Setting reasonable expectations for growth in reading fluency offers guidance for instruction and motivates students to achieve.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

To study the effects of using multiple fluency strategies to help improve overall fluency by increasing reading rate, thereby fostering more interest and motivation in reading, third grade Title I students took part in repeated reading strategies using a variety of texts including, story books, plays, poetry, humor, and expository texts for 12-weeks. The students were selected for the study using assessment data that showed slow acquisition of reading ability, specifically, oral reading fluency, over a two or more year period. Students were pre-assessed to find reading levels and reading rate, surveyed to find areas of interest, and offered research based instructional practices and texts for the purpose of improving fluency. During each thirty-minute session, students read selected texts up to four times using choral reading, paired reading, timed repeated reading, echo reading or shared reading. Appropriate modeling for reading and teacher feedback to support fluency development was provided. Each text was approximately 100 words in length providing optimum repeated practice. Topics used for reading material were chosen based on availability of resources and the reading survey. Texts about animals remained the favorite choice of students in both pre and post survey responses.

Students were motivated to read using humor, favorite stories, topics of interest chosen from the reading survey, performances with Reader's Theatre and reading for younger students.

After twelve weeks of repeated reading using a variety of texts, reading rates increased for all students. Interest in reading and motivation was unchanged or slightly improved. The students gained an average of 21 words per minute. Automatic word recognition, self-correction rates, and comprehension were also improved. Students with the lowest reading rates made the largest increase in reading rate during the beginning weeks of the study showing repeated reading of independent level texts to be highly effective in increasing fluency for struggling students. More secure readers made the most growth while reading at instructional level. Observation of all study participants showed improvement in fluency, increased interest in reading and positive attitudes toward the task of reading overall.

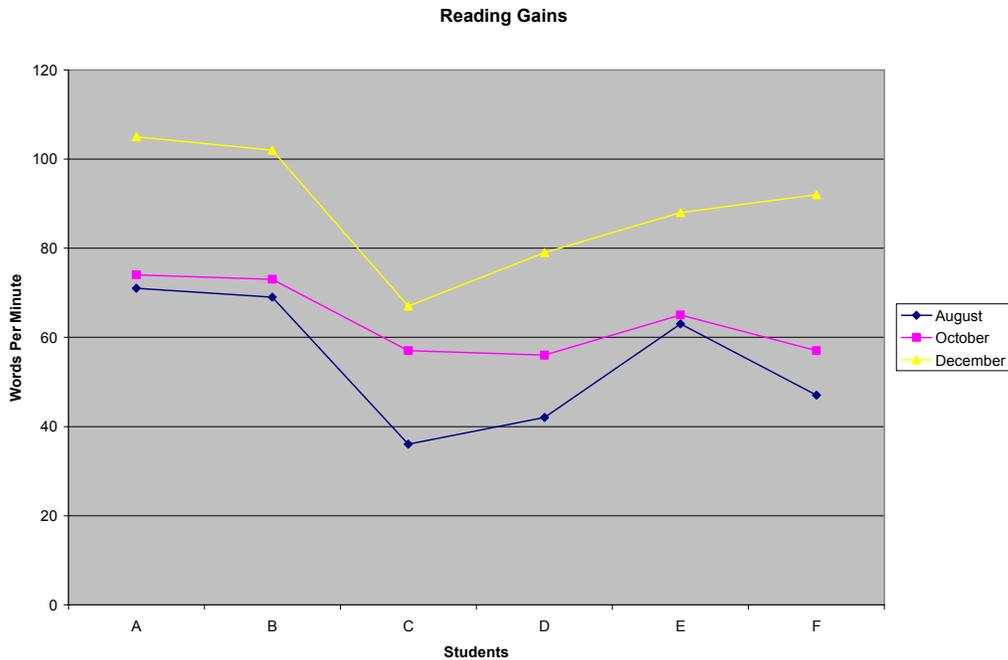


Fig.2. Reading Gains over Time Demonstrating Occurrence of Growth

3. Conclusion

Repeated reading and motivational techniques with appropriate text had a positive impact on student performance. These techniques helped to increase reading rates, boost comprehension, and reinforce positive attitudes toward reading. Implementation of reading instruction for struggling students that instills motivation, interest, and confidence, makes reading less laborious and more enjoyable for struggling students, supporting the necessary foundation for more complex demands in their literacy journey.

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