EFFECTS OF INSTRUCTION THROUGH POETRY VS. PROSE TEXT ON THE
MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF STRUGGLING ELEMENTARY-AGE READERS

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Abstract

Students must receive literacy instruction through texts that support their learning needs while appealing to their interests. Due to its genre-specific characteristics, poetry works well with young readers. This quasi-experimental, mixed methods study seeks to determine whether the use of rhyming poetry as an instructional text with struggling elementary-age readers results in larger student gains in reading motivation and reading fluency achievement than traditional prose texts. The study population consists of a sampling of 14 students in grades two through five. Students attend a small, rural elementary school located in the southeastern United States. Each student participant is labeled as a Tier 2 or Tier 3 struggling reader through the school’s Response to Intervention program. During the study, each participant receives reading instruction using poetry texts for two weeks and reading instruction using prose texts for two weeks. For the purpose of data collection, students are split into two treatment groups. A counter-balance method is used so that one group begins treatment with poetry while the other group begins with prose texts. At the end of the two-week time period, the treatments switch. Pre-treatment data is collected through one-minute timed reading fluency probes. Additional reading fluency probes are repeated after each treatment period. Quantitative data is also collected through Likert scale-based Motivation to Read Profile Surveys. Qualitative data support is provided through personal interviews with students and teachers. These interviews occur before treatment and after each two-week period. Results of this study indicate that no statistically significant difference exists between students’ motivation to read or reading fluency achievement when taught using poetry or prose texts. The study does reveal that interesting data trends exist. Students’ data indicate higher reading motivation following instruction using poetry. The study also indicates that students’ reading fluency achievement gains are slightly higher when instructed through prose texts. Study findings affirm the necessity of utilizing a variety of texts with early readers.

Keywords: poetry, prose, reading motivation, reading fluency achievement, text type
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Dedication

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CHAPTER 1

Background, Context, and Rationale

In the United States, many children struggle with their development as proficient readers. Reading difficulties exist for a number of reasons, none of which rests solely in the characteristics of the student (Walker, 2002). These difficulties are overcome as literacy practices are vetted for effectiveness.

Research indicates that reading difficulties stem from a faulty interaction between the reader and the literacy environment (Walker, 2002). Thus, the blame does not reside in the inadequacies of the reader. It is pertinent that studies look closely at student motivation in order to improve students’ interactions with literacy. Interactions between the student, the teacher, and the curricula are the motivational factors that promote student engagement (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015).

Background of the Study

The amount of reading in which students participate directly affects their reading abilities (Allington, 2009). Those who read more become better readers. However, struggling readers often see reading as a laborious task and go to great lengths to avoid it. Thus, these individuals do not progress in their development of essential reading skills.

Instructional practices perpetuate this problem. Successful readers not only read more on their own; they are also assigned more reading tasks by their teachers (Allington, 2009; Walker, 2002). Struggling readers lack accuracy when reading grade-appropriate texts. They frequently miscall words. This leads to a breakdown in comprehension which perpetuates the gap between the information struggling readers know and the information these students need to know in order to be successful students (Walker, 2002).
Struggling readers need to read authentic, familiar texts so that they may successfully practice their literacy skills at an appropriate instructional level (Walker, 2002). Authentic texts are texts without controlled vocabularies and include the range of fiction and nonfiction texts that are found on library shelves.

Reading fluency is the process of decoding words in a text with accuracy and automaticity so that comprehension is enabled and prosodic reading occurs (Rasinski, 2011). Reading texts that are too difficult causes struggling readers to rely too heavily on their strongest skill sets to the detriment of developing more sophisticated reading strategies (Walker, 2002). In order for fluency to develop, readers must be provided with the opportunity to engage with texts that they can read with a high degree of automaticity and accuracy (Allington, 2009). A constant diet of books at a too difficult reading level may perpetuate word-by-word reading, causing students to read in a word-by-word manner even when texts are not beyond the scope of their reading abilities. Teachers must make instructional adjustments so that an individual student is encouraged to make meaning from texts in a manner that builds upon the child’s strengths while refining areas of weakness (Walker, 2002).

**Research Problem**

According to Allington (2009), classroom instructional practices induce and prolong most reading fluency problems. It is essential that reading instruction provide access to repeated, successful readings of texts in order for students to develop as fluent readers. Instruction in decoding is not sufficient for remediating struggling readers. The volume of reading struggling readers do must increase in order to improve their reading abilities.

Oral reading assists in the development of reading fluency (Rasinski, 2010). Reading fluency is a student’s ability to read a text with automaticity and appropriate expression in order
to support comprehension. Oral repeated readings allow students to focus on phrasing and prosody. The National Reading Panel’s (1995) national study of reading fluency and comprehension finds a strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, as cited in Allington, 2009). The underlying cause of comprehension difficulties often stems from insufficient reading fluency (Rasinski, 2010).

Students’ reading fluency development progresses through choral reading exercises (Rasinski, 2010). Short texts with distinct rhythm and specific parts are good choices for choral reading. Poems, songs, and short stories are examples of such texts. Adding a performance aspect to repeated reading provides motivation for students. Poems are made for reading aloud and performance opportunities. The rhyme, rhythm, and predictability of poetry make it a simple, fun way of using repeated reading to enhance reading fluency.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to determine the extent to which differences may exist in students’ reading achievement when instruction is provided through varying text types. Specifically, this study seeks to understand whether instruction using rhyming poetry is more motivating for struggling readers than prose text. The study also seeks to determine if any reading fluency achievement differences exist when students receive instruction through rhyming poetry and prose text.

Coddington and Guthrie (2009) indicate that girls consider themselves to be more motivated readers than do boys. More positive reading attitudes may exist in female students because of a high degree of reading ability in these students. Many male students are not proficient readers, and a great many of these students do not find reading to be an inviting activity in which to engage (Scieszka, 2007). Girls read more than boys and have more
developed reading abilities (Logan & Johnston, 2009). However, if boys are introduced to reading materials that interest them, they will read (Scieszka, 2007). Many boys are not motivated to read because the books they are asked to read are not intriguing to them. Males tend to prefer short texts or those written in short sections because these texts give them more immediate senses of accomplishment (Wilhelm, 2001). Boys like to read facts, but they prefer that those facts be told in a story format. They enjoy interesting texts with a lot of graphic support. If attention is paid to the types and features of texts that are more appealing to the tastes of each gender, students become more motivated to engage in literacy activities.

**Research Questions**

1. Do changes in motivation to read occur when struggling elementary-age readers receive literacy instruction through rhyming poetry as opposed to prose text?

2. Do changes in reading fluency achievement occur when struggling elementary-age readers receive literacy instruction through rhyming poetry as opposed to prose text?

**Rationale for the Study**

Many students in the United States are not proficient readers. Only 36% of fourth graders score at or above proficiency according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015), or NAEP. Thirty-three percent of male students score proficient or above while 39% of female students score at or above proficiency (NAEP, 2015). The overall percentage of proficient fourth-grade readers is low, and a six-point score gap exists between the reading proficiency performance of male and female students. While neither gender scores exceptionally well, preconceived notions about boys and literacy seem to perpetuate the reading gap between male and female students (Wilhelm, 2001).
Boys find motivation in text types and text features that often differ from the interests of their female counterparts. Tradition dictates text types boys enjoy, and educators relay this message to boys through their suggestions to boys concerning text types (Wilhelm, 2001). It is important that educators look more closely at the interests of individual students in order to provide and encourage literacy activities that get both boys and girls excited about reading.

**Definition of Terms**

*Intervention.* An intervention is a program that, by design, hinders or alters the action of reading failure by preventing it from occurring or stopping it if it has already started (Cooper, McWilliams, Boschken, & Pistrochini, 1998).

*Reading Fluency.* Reading fluency describes the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (Rasinski, 2011).

*Rhyming Poetry.* Rhyming poetry has the repetition of similar sounding words occurring within or at the end of lines in poems or songs (Rhyme, 2016).

*Struggling Readers.* Students whose reading abilities are well below grade-level expectancies are struggling readers. These students have difficulty mastering spoken and written language (Carlisle, 2004).

*Tier 2, Tier 3 Interventions.* Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions represent extensive levels of intervention services. Students at these levels receive 30-45 minutes of intervention time five days per week from a qualified instructor (Ervin, 2016).

**Summary**

Schools struggle to remediate faltering reading progress among students in the early grades (Morris, 2015). A number of studies exist detailing reading problems with American students as well as the literacy gap between male and female students. Studies delving into the
particulars of text types that may be engaging for elementary-age students will contribute to improved instruction for these students.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

One of the most common struggles among educators is the issue of motivating students to participate in class activities. Curwin (2010) defines motivation as a student’s desire to learn. This desire is self-directed and occurs without pressure or coercion. Sagor (2003) states that motivation is not connected as much with personality as with students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the school environment. According to Dean, Hubell, Pitler, and Stone (2012), many factors affect motivation; these factors include: students’ beliefs about their abilities, students’ levels of interest, the perceived value of the task at hand, intrinsic motivations, and students’ beliefs about the level of control they assert over their learning.

Student Motivation: A Theoretical Perspective

Maslow’s Theory of Motivation is based upon a hierarchy with basic needs represented in the lowest levels of the pyramid (Aanstoos, 2014). These needs have to be met before more complex needs are considered. At the lowest level of Maslow’s hierarchy are physiological needs. Physiological needs represent such necessities as food and water. Next in the progression are safety needs. Security and order belong to this category. Security needs are followed by the desire for love and intimacy. Self-esteem needs have to be met next. The preceding needs are known as deficiency needs because individuals are motivated to meet them through feelings of some type of deprivation. The highest level in Maslow’s hierarchy is self-actualization. Self-actualization is known as a being need because this need is met through the motivation to better oneself. Maslow believes that one's needs are present at birth, and, through the guidance of an appropriate environment, an individual grows in an appropriate direction.
This study assumes that students’ basic needs are being met in the elementary school reading classroom. This scholarship strives to determine the extent to which students are encouraged to work toward the attainment of the more progressive needs of the hierarchy. Self-actualization requires students to become self-motivated by a desire from within. This study attempts to unveil methods through which this type of motivational development is encouraged by the reading teacher.

The conceptual framework for this study is Bandura's Social Cognitive and Self-Efficacy Theory (Pajares, 2002). This theory is based upon the reciprocal interactions of behavior, environmental factors, and personal factors on an individual's functioning. In respect to this theoretical framework, this study seeks to identify methods of simultaneously improving students’ academic performance (behavior), intrinsic motivation (personal factors), and the climate of the reading classroom (environmental factors).

**Magnitude of the Reading Problem**

Educators struggle to produce large numbers of proficient readers in the early elementary grades (Morris, 2015). Early reading failure is a persistent problem. According to 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, only 36% of fourth-grade students are proficient readers. According to NAEP standards, this statistic is not significantly different from 2013 NAEP data. Finding instructional practices to address the needs of struggling readers is a dilemma that deserves attention. Learning to read fluently is essential not only to academic success but to one’s quality of life as well (Butera & Martinez, 2014).

Three common reading problems exist among struggling readers: difficulties with word reading, difficulties with comprehension, and difficulties with both word reading and comprehension (Spear-Swerling, 2015). Students with word reading difficulties benefit most
from phonics-based instructional strategies while those with comprehension problems receive the greatest benefit from instruction in comprehension strategies in conjunction with teacher modeling. Differentiating reading instruction to meet the areas of students’ specific reading needs allows for the greatest gains in reading achievement. Connor, Alberton, Compton, and O’Connor (2014) cite that most reading comprehension difficulties in the elementary school years result from poor decoding skills. These researchers propose that fluency instruction may most effectively remediate both word reading and comprehension problems.

It is evident that more research is needed to determine the best methods of remediation for struggling readers (Connor et al., 2014). It is necessary that the progress of struggling readers be monitored in an on-going fashion so that instructional changes may be made in order to best meet the needs of these students (Butera & Martinez, 2014). Successful reading instruction requires that education professionals work collaboratively to ensure that the needs of struggling readers are being met.

**Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers**

Struggling readers need exposure to a variety of texts (Akrofi, Swafford, & Janisch, 2010). This helps to build both confidence and interest in reading. These readers need to experience some successes with texts so they do not associate reading with insurmountable struggle. Explicit phonics instruction coupled with decodable texts is essential for early readers (Beverly, Giles, & Buck, 2009). However, as children progress, they benefit from challenging, more meaningful texts.

Studies indicate that struggling readers are provided less time for reading but are assigned more worksheets (Allington, 2009, 2013; Walker, 2002). Less-than-average readers are assigned
more practice with skills in isolation while more capable readers spend considerably more time reading.

Failure to learn to read results in both retentions and referrals to special education (Stein, Johnson, & Gutlohn, 1999). The literacy gap between good readers and poor readers continues to widen throughout students’ educational careers because students that struggle with reading in the early grades tend to avoid reading activities when possible in years to come. They miss out on reading opportunities, fail to get practice, and fall further behind.

According to Waxman (2015), the three main factors that affect reading achievement scores are the availability of reading materials in the home, students’ desire to read, and one-on-one tutoring for struggling readers. Applegate and Applegate (2010) note that students’ motivation to read is one of the most researched predictors of overall achievement in elementary school. Motivation is linked to the extent to which an individual expects to be successful with a task and the perceived value placed on the task. Engaged readers exhibit both of these characteristics.

**Motivating Struggling Readers**

Educators have to look beyond achievement scores to quantify motivational factors in readers (Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2014). Reading is not thought of as a tool but as a personal endeavor that must be meaningful to the student. Creating a classroom environment where students enjoy reading and are motivated to read is a challenge. A clear definition of motivation helps teachers foster motivational environments in their classrooms. Conradi et al. (2014) determine that assessing student motivation is just as important as assessing cognitive achievement.
Motivation creates lifelong readers and bolsters reading achievement (Jang, Conradi, McKenna, & Jones, 2015). A student’s individual beliefs about reading ability comprise self-efficacy, and the student’s goals or intentions for reading make it a worthwhile activity. In addition, students’ interests in particular topics and the values students place on reading also affect motivation. Thus, motivational factors occur gradually as a result of a multitude of experiences.

Many factors influence reading motivation (Jang et al., 2015). These factors include the student’s self-concept, attitude, and values. The student’s motivation causes the student to either engage in or avoid reading. The key to motivating students is understanding the factors that comprise this incentive and knowing how to foster these motivational factors in the classroom. According to Allington (2013), struggling readers read less than their peers because they are less motivated to read. The more time students spend reading, the better readers they become (Jang et al., 2015).

Motivation includes the initial engagement with a reading task and the persistence to stick with it (Jang et al., 2015). It is necessary that classroom instruction address students’ motivations to read. One method of doing so is through seeking to understand students’ interests. The knowledge of individual student’s interests allows reluctant readers to be motivated by the availability of texts that match those interests.

The value students place on reading is determined by the importance or usefulness students perceive in the reading task (Jang et al., 2015). Teachers promote motivation by discussing the value of reading in their classrooms. Discussions promote both reading comprehension and reading motivation. The social interaction in a discussion promotes positive reading self-concepts.
A student’s reading self-concept is composed of attitude, interests, and the student’s awareness of his proficiency (Jang et al., 2015). Challenging texts and reading activities that promote student collaboration toward a learning or mastery reading goal tend to be motivational for students. Students’ goals for themselves as readers provide motivation. As educators encourage students to set goals for their progress, students become driven to increase achievement. Mastery goals serve to be motivational for students as they read to learn, satisfy curiosity, and obtain enjoyment. Instructional practices either promote or hinder motivation through providing opportunities that encourage students to set personal reading goals.

Applegate and Applegate (2010) conclude that challenging texts and critical thinking opportunities are the keys to engaging students in literacy. Nelson and Damico (2006) note that, when participating in meaning-based shared reading activities, the struggling reader’s attitude toward reading improves. When the same student participates in reading activities that are less meaningful, this positive attitude is diminished. A positive attitude is a key factor in increased student motivation.

**Reading Achievement in Relation to Gender**

Research indicates that the reading achievement of male students is significantly lower than that of females. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that girls score an average of six points higher than boys on the fourth-grade reading test, and this trend continues throughout grade levels (cited in Waxman, 2015; cited in Watson, Kehler, & Martino, 2010). The reading achievement of male students lags behind that of females regardless of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Sadowski, 2010). Watson et al. (2010) suggest looking at the groups of boys and girls that are not performing adequately to determine the causation of the reading achievement gap.
Racial and economic characteristics combined with gender are most relevant to the performance gap in literacy (Watson et al., 2010). Black and Hispanic boys from families of low socio-economic status are very susceptible to inadequate literacy achievement. These researchers reference the idea that boys’ behavior and societal perceptions of what masculinity should look like affect their performance in the literacy classroom. Reading and writing are sometimes seen as pursuits of little interest to males. Culture and society influence this belief.

When adolescent girls are given the opportunity and encouragement to choose books that they find relevant, they are more motivated to engage with text (Graff, 2009). Struggling female readers see the reading practices presented through their school curricula and tested through standardized measures as a punitive practice. When exposed to literacy activities that are relevant, female readers are much more engaged in the activities. Meaningful dialogue based around texts draws students to read for meaning. In contrast, skills-based reading practices serve to make struggling readers apathetic toward books.

Studies indicate that girls read more often than boys (McGoewan, 2015). Boys, however, read different types of texts than girls. Boys tend to be drawn to science fiction, comedy, sports, and war-related materials. Girls tend to read more books related to relationships, adventure, ghost/horror stories, and stories related to animals. Many of the gender-related preferences exist because of norms induced by society.

Differences exist in the manners in which male and female students approach texts. Girls use reading comprehension strategies more often than boys (Bouchamma, Poulin, & Ruell, 2014). These strategies include making connections to prior knowledge and life experiences, reading with reflection, rereading, and adjusting reading rate to text type and difficulty. These skills are instrumental for increasing reading achievement.
Girls perceive themselves to be more motivated readers than do boys (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009). Many male students have poor attitudes toward reading. In this sense, they are unmotivated to read and have poor literacy skills due to lack of practice. Girls read more than boys, have a higher reading ability, and have more positive attitudes toward reading (Logan & Johnston, 2009). More positive reading attitudes may exist in female students because of a high degree of reading ability in these students.

Some gender attitudes imply that reading is for girls (Farris, Werderich, Nelson, & Fuhler, 2009; Senn, 2012). Some researchers attribute this to the theory that many elementary school teachers are female, and female teachers do not necessarily relate well to male readers (Serafini, 2013). In addition, boys are more physically active and less likely to sit still to read for long periods of time. Gender bias contributes to students’ mindsets about perceived performance levels (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015).

Students’ achievement is directly related to their expectations of success (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Children’s past experiences, the attitudes of those around them, and cultural expectations render their perceived notions of success. In general, boys are less confident in their reading abilities. This translates to lower achievement in literacy and a lower likelihood of boys choosing activities related to reading. As a result, many male students read less; and, therefore, do not develop adequate reading skills (Senn, 2012). Often, male students are less motivated readers than their female counterparts (Farris, Werderich, Nelson, & Fuhler, 2009).

Boys may be apathetic toward reading because of the types of texts to which they are exposed. Research suggests that texts boys like to read are often discouraged in schools (Serafini, 2013). Boys prefer texts such as comics and magazines (Farris et al, 2009; Sadowski, 2010). During the study by Farris et al., boys choose texts that are graphically appealing, have generous
amounts of white space, and have interesting text features or fonts. Overwhelmingly, the texts of choice for male students are those pertaining to informational subjects. Boys like texts with strong plots (Serafini, 2013). These texts must also be visually appealing. Graphic novels and magazine articles provide such appeal. In addition, boys like texts that provide information they find purposeful. They like characters to whom they can relate and texts that deal with contemporary issues. Humorous texts are especially attractive to male students. Shorter texts seem less intimidating and tend to be preferred by young male students. Fisher and Frey (2012) report that adolescent boys are motivated to read when they have a purpose for reading, are provided with a time and place for independent reading, and are given a diversity of texts from which to choose. The lack of male motivation toward reading is not biological. It is initiated by classroom practices that do not promote engagement for male students.

Thus, the types of texts teachers choose for instructional activities greatly influence readers’ attitudes. Given the indication that current practices in education often fail to support the needs of struggling readers, educators seek information concerning methods through which all students are encouraged to develop as readers.

**Engaging Young Readers**

Reading success affects reading motivation (Allington, 2002). Therefore, educators face the task of selecting texts that motivate young readers. Students are motivated to engage in activities when these activities are thought-provoking and allow for some degree of managed student choice.

Poetry is a text that meets students’ motivational needs (Allington, 2002). Poetry is written about many content-area topics, and these texts provide a creative bridge between the beauty of a poem and the content-rich information written in various other forms (Allington,
Rasinski, Rupley, Pagie, and Nichols (2016) and Perfect (1999) assert that poetry is an especially useful text for reading instruction. Poems often address topics that are of interest to students and are visually stimulating for young readers. The amount of white space on the page and the graphics that accompany poetry make this type of text appealing. These texts also encourage performance activities which provide unmotivated readers with a purpose for repeated readings (Rasinski et al., 2016). Neumann, Ross, and Slaboch, (2008) indicate that choral poetry reading motivates students and causes them to put forth their best efforts.

Fluent readers read with correct intonation, prosody, and automaticity (Young & Nageldinger, 2014). It is difficult to convince struggling readers to read a passage more than one time. However, reading with appropriate prosody is directly correlated to reading comprehension. Reading performance activities promote practice and prosody, both of which are essential elements in fluent reading. Poetry provides practice and performance, as do reader’s theater, speeches, monologues, and presentations. These activities build readers’ confidence (Rasinski, 2014).

**Texts for Repeated Readings**

Reading education takes the look of a swinging pendulum over the last fifty or so years (Morris, 2015). A phonics-based decodable text approach in the 1980s is followed by whole language instruction, which de-emphasizes phonics instruction, in the 1990s. The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 mandates that schools receiving Title I funds implement concentrated phonics instruction in kindergarten and first grade. The belief is that, with intensive phonics instruction, students will develop the skills necessary to later read authentic texts. The more recent Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016 calls for comprehensive literacy instruction which, by definition, includes comprehensive, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness,
phonics, vocabulary, language structure, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Advocacy Toolkit, 2016).

It is important for struggling readers to reread texts (Dowhower, 1987; Walker & Rivers, 2003). Since texts are familiar in a reread, students are able to focus on text elements and structures. The relatively short length of poems makes them ideal for repeated reading to increase fluency (Faver, 2008; Rasinski, 2014). In a reread, students are better able to apply reading strategies because they have time to focus on cognition (Walker & Rivers, 2003). Authentic rereading provides purpose. Poetry provides such an opportunity because it encourages performance (Faver, 2008). The rhythm and rhyme of poems make them easy to read and commit to memory (Rasinski, 2014). Students feel a sense of accomplishment from being able to read these quick texts to their friends and family members. These texts may be shared with adults at home, performed for classmates, and performed for other classes (Faver, 2008). Poetry as an instrument of reading instruction results in increased reading fluency, comprehension, and confidence as a result of repeated reading and performance. In addition, gains in intonation and prosody through repeated reading transfer to other passages (Dowhower, 1987). Repeated reading assists students in improving fluency, accuracy, prosody, and comprehension (Brown, 1999-2000).

In order to develop as successful readers, students need to be provided with the opportunity to read a multitude of texts that are on their independent reading levels (Allington, 2002). These texts allow for students to read with a high level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. The familiarity and repeated patterning of poetry provides the structure needed for such reading.
Repeated reading positively affects automatic word recognition and reading rate (Dowhower, 1987). Fluent reading involves chunking words into longer sections of text and requires correct intonation. Intonation is developed through repeated readings of a familiar, short passage. Non-fluent readers spend an inappropriate amount of time decoding text (Faver, 2008). Repeated reading is beneficial for teaching reading fluency in readers who struggle with automaticity. Both average and struggling readers grow in fluency through repeated reading.

Reading aloud assists readers in developing automaticity and prosody (Rasinski, 2014). Poems and songs are well-suited for choral readings, a highly supported student read-aloud practice. In choral reading, students read the same text aloud in chorus with their peers. Thus, struggling readers are supported by more fluent readers as they work to develop their skills.

**Instruction in Phonics and Word Recognition**

The strong foundation necessary for proficient reading requires skill in the areas of phonemic awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency (Rasinski, 2014). Poems are well-equipped for use in developing such skills in students. Decoding instruction is important as a part of every reading lesson in the kindergarten and first grade classroom (Allington, 2013). This instruction does not necessarily occur through systematic phonics programs because these programs are not necessarily practices that are best supported by research. Children do need systematic phonics instruction, but there is no one best program that works well for all readers. Early grades teachers must have knowledge about several methods of decoding instruction in order to meet the needs of various learners.

Much phonetic instruction is supplemented through the use of decodable leveled readers. The purpose of leveled readers is to make texts accessible to emerging readers (Morris, 2015). Using decodable texts for reading instruction provides students with the skills necessary to
decode more difficult words. Texts largely containing high frequency words do not provide this benefit (Akrofi, Swafford, & Janisch, 2010). Few studies examine the specific benefits of decodable texts on students’ reading abilities (Beverly et al., 2009; Cheatham & Allor, 2012). However, studies do indicate that beginning readers benefit from decodable words and repeated text. Yet decodable texts make no claims as to the quality of the literature (Kenny, 2014). The purpose of these texts is to promote the skills necessary to develop automatic word recognition skills. These texts allow young readers to develop their abilities to read independently.

The needs of readers change as their abilities develop (Brown, 1999-2000). Therefore, one must adjust the types of texts used with readers. No one text type is appropriate for all readers at all stages of reading development. Progressive readers must find extension through the texts they read.

The use of decodable texts may impede the reading growth of average readers (Beverly et al., 2009). Decodable texts lack predictability and engaging aspects. This obstructs both comprehension and motivation. The simple language and sentence structure of decodable texts may hinder fluency and comprehension in young readers (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). Both Texas and California mandate the use of decodable texts with students in the early grades. These states are large and very influential toward textbook producers. As a result, such textbooks are used in classrooms across the United States. Considering the rational for such practices is important given the widespread usage of decodable texts. Are decodable readers the best avenue for the application of decoding skills in young readers?

Good readers recognize words with automaticity while attending to the phonological make-up of the word (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). It is necessary to read with automaticity in order to read with fluency and comprehension. Meaningful texts promote fluency. Reading
merely by sight does not allow the reader to independently decode new words. Decoding causes the reader to take notice of all the letters in a word; the reader uses knowledge of letter sounds and letter patterns to analyze the word in order to read. Decodable texts support word recognition through readers’ opportunities to practice the skills they need in order to eventually have the ability to unitize words or read by sight. Decodable texts, by definition, contain a high degree of phonetically regular words that are taught through prior instruction. In order to benefit from decodable texts, readers must have adequate knowledge of decoding skills.

According to Allington (2013), decodable texts are not necessarily useful for early reading instruction. Decodable readers present text in a decontextualized manner in an effort to make the process of reading more simple (Cheek & Ortlieb, 2013). In so doing, the texts very often become meaningless strings of words that leave students with the misconception that reading does not have to make sense. Scaffolds, on the other hand, allow readers to engage with more complex texts without having to decontextualize and simplify the texts. If students are given the opportunity to experience reading skills in authentic situations, the attainment of such skills becomes purposeful. The decomposition and de-contextualization that occur within the reading of authentic text do not inhibit meaningfulness for students.

A study by Beverly et al. (2009) measures the effect on second semester first graders of phonics instruction plus decodable text in comparison to a treatment group receiving only phonics instruction and a treatment group receiving instruction through a teacher read-aloud of authentic literature. The study proposes that students receiving phonics instruction along with decodable readers will make greater gains than the other two groups. However, the study reveals that students receiving instruction through literature make almost identical gains to the group receiving phonics instruction with decodable texts. The literature group makes significantly
larger gains in comprehension than the other two groups. Instruction in the literature group consists of a teacher read-aloud of authentic, non-decodable texts accompanied by predicting questions. Authentic literature contains rich language and is not limited by word choice or sentence structure.

In order to teach and engage early readers, texts must have words with focused phonetic patterns, repetitive sentence structures, and contain interesting syntax supported by graphics (Morris, 2015). In order for reading fluency to improve, students must have a bank of known sight words and have the skills necessary for phonetically decoding new words. Morris cites two basic methods of phonics instruction, analytic and synthetic. In analytic phonics, students look at whole words and use sorting to compare the sounds in those words. In synthetic phonics instruction, students are taught to attend to each individual letter in a word and blend those sounds in order to decode the word. Both methods are systematic in nature, requiring certain vowel and consonant patterns to be taught before others. In order to encourage reading development in young students, schools must provide appropriate reading materials, supply effective phonics instruction, and train teachers in the implementation of a successful reading program.

Struggling readers often develop strategies for compensating for their lack of knowledge in difficult learning situations by applying ineffective strategies (Walker & Rivers, 2003). They sometimes make wild guesses about a word’s phonology instead of looking closely at the text in order to decode the word with accuracy. Some struggling readers read the text as strings of words instead of making connections to textual clues and their background knowledge. They read without checking meaning. Struggling readers often have deficits in sight word knowledge or sound blending and fail to use sources of information they find difficult. For instance, those
struggling with blending use picture clues instead of decoding skills to figure out unknown words. As these students are seen by teachers as less capable readers, the quality and quantity of their instruction is reduced, and the cycle continues.

Effective reading programs consist of explicit phonics instruction with texts to match the instruction (Stein, Johnson, & Gutlohn, 1999). Research suggests that explicit phonics instruction results in greater student gains than implicit phonics instruction. Explicit phonics instruction involves teaching students individual letter sounds and the process of blending these sounds in order to read new words. Implicit instruction relies most heavily on using beginning sounds and context clues to identify unknown words. The use of decodable texts to reinforce explicit phonics instruction causes students to apply phonological skills when reading. This assists students in developing word-identification skills and makes phonics instruction meaningful to students. However, many basal reading programs contain a low percentage of decodable texts. The texts presented in basal readers often have little to no correlation to the phonetics instruction presented in the program’s teacher’s edition.

Meaning-based shared reading positively affects the achievement of the reluctant, struggling reader (Nelson & Damico, 2006). Such reading activities improve the student’s attitude toward reading as well as the student’s general attitude toward expectations at both school and home. Declines in student motivation are noted when students are required by their teachers to read from leveled readers and books meant for phonics instruction.

One of the most efficient methods of phonics instruction is through training students to recognize rimes (Rasinski, 2014). Rimes are the remainders of words from the first vowel and including the consonants that proceed that vowel. Many leveled texts are developed to teach students to decode using rimes. These texts are not authentic and have little context to them.
Poems present rimes in an authentic manner. Through experience with text, students notice these regular word patterns and apply their knowledge to more easily decode unfamiliar words (Walker & Rivers, 2003). As students experience these patterns multiple times, they begin to apply the knowledge more readily to other reading. This is the manner in which decoding skills are developed.

Phonetic instruction is only meaningful to students when they use it in reading and writing (Allington, 2013). The word play of poetry assists readers in developing phonemic awareness while the familiarity and repetition of poems promotes sight word memorization (Rasinski, 2014). Both phonics and fluency are taught through rhyming poetry (Rasinski, Zimmerman, & Bagert, 2015). Deficits in phonological skills attribute to the majority of reading difficulties (Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Baker, Dobbler, & Apichatabutra, 2009). Such deficits lead to limited amounts of reading and, thus, limited exposure to vocabulary and experiences with contextual understanding. Early interventions in phonemic awareness, decoding, word recognition, and fluency are beneficial forms of remediation.

Phonemic awareness, an essential early reading skill that entails the manipulation of sounds in words, is easily taught through the rhyme and resonance of poetry (Rasinski et al., 2015). Using onsets (the initial sounds in words) and rimes (word endings) are effective methods of phonics instruction. Often such phonetics are taught through leveled readers with very unnatural text. Such texts are frequently meaningless. Successful readers are not developed through bland texts (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). Comprehension must develop alongside of word recognition and decoding skills. Poetry promotes the development of decoding skills while assisting in the acquisition of comprehension skills because, through poetry, text is presented in a repetitive, decodable, and meaningful manner (Rasinski et al., 2015).
Literacy Instruction through Meaningful Text

Struggling readers make greater reading improvements when reading lessons are meaning-based rather than skills-based (Allington, 2013). Familiar, authentic texts support students’ use of sense-making skills because they are able to accurately read such texts (Walker & Rivers, 2003).

Learning occurs through interactions with others (Walker, 2003). Exemplary teachers encourage and provide opportunities for their students to engage in curricular discussions with their peers (Allington, 2002). Successful teachers focus on meaning-making activities and take individual differences into consideration.

A strong foundation in phonemic awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency is necessary for reading comprehension (Rasinski, 2014). Most reading comprehension difficulties surface from underdeveloped foundational skills in literacy development. These skill deficits result in problems with reading comprehension that persist throughout the upper grades. All readers, even strugglers, work to make sense of their reading (Walker & Rivers, 2003). The ability to read and comprehend depends upon many factors. The reader’s knowledge of strategies, background knowledge about the text, their purpose for reading, the format of the text, and the reading situation all influence the reader’s ability to make sense of the text.

Comprehension is the act of thinking while reading. Vocabulary knowledge strongly correlates with reading comprehension skills (Quinn, Wagner, Petscher, & Lopes, 2015). In fact, vocabulary knowledge predicts reading comprehension achievement. Struggling readers must be exposed to a variety of texts in order to increase their vocabularies (Allington, 2009). Vocabulary knowledge and the ability to decode texts are required in the development of fluent readers.
Poems often present readers with sophisticated vocabulary words (Rasinski, 2014). Poems require comprehension skills such as inferencing because poets are slated with the task of creating meaning in the context of a few short lines. Poetic analysis requires a great many comprehension skills. In order to be able to adequately perform a poem with expression, readers must closely read the poem for meaning in order to apply correct prosody. The nature of poetry encourages students to make connections to the text through the power of the language used by the author (Perfect, 1999). The rich language of poetry exposes children to vocabulary that they might not otherwise encounter. Poems may be selected to meet the ability levels and interests of a variety of students. Poetry is a useful text in providing for vocabulary instruction and the promotion of critical thinking skills.

**Conclusion**

Effective teachers require students to engage in authentic reading and writing tasks for the major part of the school day (Allington, 2002). These exemplary teachers require that students spend at least 50% of the school day reading and writing. In many typical classrooms, students spend only 10% of the school day participating in authentic reading and writing activities. In effective classrooms, a large portion of class time is spent in guided reading, independent reading, and reading in science and social studies.

While it is apparent that students’ reading achievement is an area in which more study is needed, motivation appears to be a prime factor in the lagging progress of elementary-age students. Research indicates that these students are often engaged by alternative texts. Poetry, because of its structure and language, may provide both motivational material and instructional content for struggling readers. The rhyme of poetry allows for instruction in phonetic principals while the rich language promotes vocabulary instruction. While poetry may be a successful
method of both fluency and comprehension instruction for young readers, many reading programs allocate very little time and attention to poetry (Rasinski, 2014).
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This study seeks to determine whether the use of rhyming poetry as an instructional text with struggling elementary-age readers results in larger student gains in reading motivation and reading fluency achievement than traditional prose texts.

Research Design

This quasi-experimental, mixed-methods study uses quantitative methods and includes support from qualitative data. Quantitative studies utilize statistical, numerical, and mathematical data analysis methods to analyze data gathered through questionnaires, surveys, and other calculable methods. Qualitative studies take a totalistic research approach (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014). Thorough understanding of a phenomenon is sought through looking at the entity as a whole rather than breaking it apart into individual variables. This research utilizes a case study to closely examine the reading interests, motivation, and achievement of a sampling of elementary-age struggling readers. The study seeks to determine the effects of reading fluency instruction through the mediums of rhyming poetry and prose text upon the fluency progress and literacy motivation of elementary-age students.

Students are divided by grade-level into two participant groups. Group A contains second-grade and fourth-grade students while Group B contains third-grade and fifth-grade students. These are not physical groupings but are groupings used by the researcher for the purpose of data collection. Students are grouped as such in order to reduce the potential that developmental factors may influence treatment outcomes. This study requires the usage of two separate treatment groups so that a counterbalance approach may be used. The counterbalance treatment approach allows for each participant group to receive each treatment, but each group
will receive a different treatment as the first treatment. This will assist in ensuring that the effect of learning to learn does not interfere with study results. The learning to learn effect results from the tendency of one treatment method to have a carryover effect on the results collected during the proceeding treatment. By mixing grade-level groups and allowing each text type to assume the position as the first treatment for one of the two treatment groups, this effect will not interfere with study results.

Each participant group participates in a two-week cycle of treatment. In order to remove bias, a coin toss is used to determine which participant group receives a particular treatment in the first two-week cycle. If the coin toss lands on heads, Group A receives reading intervention instruction through rhyming poetry for the first two-week cycle, while Group B receives reading intervention instruction through prose text. If the coin lands on tails, the reverse is true.

**Study Setting and Participants**

The setting for this mixed-methods study is a rural elementary school with an enrollment of approximately 260 students. The researcher is a faculty member at the participating school. The participants in this study include two male students and two female students currently enrolled in second grade, four male students and one female student currently enrolled in third grade, one female student currently enrolled in fourth grade, and three male students and one female student currently enrolled in fifth grade. Participants range in age from eight years of age to eleven years of age. In the context of this study, participants are separated into two treatment groups. Group A consists of the aforementioned second and fourth grade students. Treatment Group B consists of the aforementioned third and fifth grade students.

The participants are identified as struggling readers through data gathered from universal screener results as well as classroom data reported by their general education teachers. Study
participants’ reading achievement data indicates that their reading achievement is at or below the 25th percentile on the nationally normed easyCBM screener (easyCBM, n.d.). Study participants receive 45 minutes of small group reading intervention daily. These interventions are provided by trained school personnel.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In order to assess the manner in which rhyming poetry instruction and prose instruction affect students’ motivation to read, a student “Motivation to Read Profile” is completed by each research subject (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, Mazzoni, 1996). These surveys use a Likert four-point response scale with students indicating their attitudes toward statements about reading. A survey is given to each subject prior to treatment. Each treatment group is surveyed again after each two-week treatment cycle.

The reading fluency progress of students is measured using easyCBM fluency probes. A fluency probe is given to each experimental group before treatments begin. To ensure the validity of the initial fluency score, two additional equivalent probes are given so that the researcher has three sources of information from which to glean the measure of central tendency on this pre-test. After two weeks of treatment, the fluency probing process is repeated with each subject. Again, three equivalent probes are given so that each subject’s measure of central tendency may be found. This post-testing process is repeated after the second two-week treatment period.

Data is also collected through interviews with study participants and the interventionists working with those participants. These interviews are conducted as a pre-assessment before treatments begin. The interviews are repeated after each two-week treatment cycle so that changes in students’ attitudes and motivation may be assessed.
Data Analysis Procedures

Following the study, the mean achievement for each experimental group is calculated for Treatment 1 and Treatment 2. This achievement data comes from the easyCBM fluency probes that are used to assess student achievement before and after each research treatment. A paired samples t-test is used to determine if the mean of Treatment 1 differs significantly from the mean of Treatment 2. Data is disaggregated into grade level groups and male/female groups, and multiple t-tests are used to determine the effectiveness of the two treatments for these subgroups.

Survey data is analyzed to determine students’ attitudes and motivation toward reading before the treatments are conducted. This information is compared to the surveys completed after each treatment to determine if any differences in students’ attitudes and motivation exist proceeding reading interventions utilizing rhyming poetry and prose texts. Survey data is converted to percentages in order to assess the number of participants responding in a certain way and to allow for comparisons among responses. Percentages are based on the total number of male respondents and the total number of female respondents. Disaggregating data in this way will allow for comparisons between genders. A t-test of dependent samples is used to analyze the pre- and post-survey data of the study participants. This analysis process allows the researcher to determine statistical differences in students’ attitudes and motivation following each treatment method.

Interview data is collected for the purpose of garnering individual perspectives that help explain and support the statistical results.

Data analysis seeks to determine whether the treatments applied in this study affect students’ reading achievement. Analysis also seeks to conclude whether one treatment method is more motivating for struggling readers than the other.
Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation in the study is the small population size. The use of a paired sample t-test allows for valuable data analysis with a small study sample. The application of the study to students of varying grade levels also leads to the generalizability. In addition, qualitative data adds credibility to the study results.

This study is also limited by the effect of learning to learn. It is likely that one treatment may have a carryover effect on the treatment that is applied second. To improve validity in this respect, the counterbalance method is used so that each treatment is used first for one group of subjects.

Additionally, since this study is conducted with subjects classified as Tier 2 or 3 struggling readers, the results may not be generalizable to the larger student population. In order to test the generalizability, additional research may be conducted so that this study is replicated with students of average and above-average reading ability.

Delimitations to the study include the population sample. The participants in this study represent struggling readers from grades two through grade five. This particular population is chosen because they represent students struggling with reading proficiency at the participating school. The research in this study focuses on struggling readers because the researcher is specifically interested in the effects of the treatments on this population.

Summary

Reading difficulties not only make school challenging for children, students struggling with reading also have difficulty transitioning to productive adult lives (Butera & Martinez, 2014; Walker, 2002). Reading ability affects practically every aspect of a child’s education. Elementary schools attempt to provide interventions for struggling readers in an effort to close
the gap between these students and their same-age peers (Connor et al., 2014). It is essential that educators have knowledge concerning specific text types and text characteristics that are motivational for young readers. This information provides educators with an important first step in the attempt to engage struggling readers in the act of purposeful reading. As students see reading as a positive, rewarding activity, their engagement with literacy provides the practice necessary for meeting proficiency goals.
CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

While it is expected that elementary-age students be exposed to a variety of texts types, the overwhelming text of choice is narrative (Strachan, 2014). In order to adequately expose students to a variety of literature, classrooms must expose students to a variety of high quality literary and informational texts. It is expected that students receive instruction through poetry, drama, various story types, and a plethora of informational texts. An exposure to differing text types supports students’ reading and writing development. Because divergent text types differ in structure, features, and vocabulary, the use of a variety of text types is necessary in supporting the reading development of young students. In this study a population of struggling readers is observed to determine the answers to the following research questions:

1. Do changes in motivation to read occur when struggling elementary-age readers receive literacy instruction through rhyming poetry as opposed to prose text?
2. Do changes in reading fluency achievement occur when struggling elementary-age readers receive literacy instruction through rhyming poetry as opposed to prose text?

Data analysis seeks to determine whether the treatments applied in this study affect students’ motivation to read. Analysis is also used to conclude whether one treatment method appears to be more motivating for struggling readers than the other.

Results

Students’ Motivation to Read

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 represent students’ self-reported reading self-concept and value of reading respectively. These concepts are represented as percentages measured by the Motivation to Read Profile Survey.
Table 4.1

*Motivation to Read Profile Survey Self-Reported Reading Self-Concept Expressed as Mean Percentage Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

*Motivation to Read Profile Survey Self-Reported Value of Reading Expressed as Mean Percentage Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-treatment.** Initial survey data, the data that is gathered before any treatment is administered, denotes that male students in the treatment population have a reading self-concept of 63% while female students in the treatment population have a reading self-concept of 65%.
The extent to which students value reading is represented in Table 4.2. Prior to treatment, initial survey data indicates that male students in the treatment population have a 73\% value of reading will females in the same population sample have an 87\% value of reading score.

**Post-poetry treatment.** Following two weeks of treatment involving poetry as the text type used for instruction in reading intervention groups, students’ reading self-concepts and the degree to which students value reading are measured again using the Motivation to Read Profile Survey. Survey results indicate that male students have a reading self-concept of 73\%. This is a 10 percentage point increase from the pre-treatment measure. Male students’ value of reading score following poetry treatment is 73\%. This score is identical to the pre-treatment score. The female post-poetry reading self-concept score is 69\%. This indicates a 4\% increase from pre-treatment data. Female students’ value of reading score is 74\%. This is a decrease of 13\% from the pre-treatment score.

**Post-prose treatment.** Succeeding two weeks of prose as the text type used for instruction in reading intervention groups, students’ reading self-concepts and the degree to which students value reading are measured once more using the Motivation to Read Profile Survey. Male students report a reading self-concept score of 71\%. This is an increase of 8\% over the pre-treatment reading self-concept survey score. The value of reading score for male students is also 71\%. This score denotes a decrease of 2\% from pre-treatment survey data. Female students’ reading self-concept score following prose treatment is 66\%. This is a gain of 1\% from pre-treatment survey data. Female students’ value of reading scores following prose treatment is 75\%. This is a decrease of 12\% from data collected pre-treatment.
**Reading Fluency Achievement**

**Pre-treatment.** Table 4.3 represents students’ pre-treatment reading fluency words correct per minute scores as assessed by easyCBM reading fluency probes. Pre-treatment data indicates that second grade male participants begin the study out-performing their female counterparts. Male second-grade study participants are reading 59 mean words correct per minute before the study begins, while female second-grade study participants have a mean words correct per minute score of 40. It shall be noted that, due to willingness to participate, second grade study participants are evenly represented by two males and two females.

Pre-treatment data gathered from third grade participants denotes that the female participant begins the study with a reading fluency score of 111 words correct per minute while her male peers have a pre-treatment words correct per minute mean score of 61. Genders are not equally represented in this grade-level because, due to willingness to participate in the study, four male students serve as study participants while only one female student is represented in the study.

This inequality holds true at the fourth-grade level as well because no male participants exist at this grade-level. The female fourth-grade participant begins the study with a words correct per minute score of 94.

Fifth grade male participants begin the study with higher reading fluency achievement scores than their female counterpart. Fifth grade male participants have a mean words correct per minute score of 132 while the female fifth grade participant has a mean words correct per minute score of 106. Fifth grade participants are not equally representative of both genders. Fifth grade participants include three males and only one female student.
Table 4.3

*Pre-Treatment easyCBM Reading Fluency Probes Reported as Mean Words Correct per Minute Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-poetry treatment.** Table 4.4 details easyCBM fluency probe data gathered following two-weeks of reading interventions provided through poetry text.

**Second grade.** At the conclusion of the two-week poetry treatment cycle, male second grade students have a mean words correct per minute fluency score of 59. This fluency score shows no change from pre-treatment words correct per minute scores in male second grade students. Following the two-week poetry treatment cycle, female second grade students have a words correct per minute score of 34. This score denotes a decrease of six words per minute in the female study participants.

**Third grade.** Following poetry treatment, third grade male students have a mean words per minute easyCBM fluency score of 64 words correct per minute. This is a gain of three words correct per minute from the pre-treatment score. The female second grade student obtains a words correct per minute score of 100 following poetry treatment. This denotes a decrease of 11 words per minute from the pre-treatment score.
**Fourth grade.** At the conclusion of the two-week poetry treatment cycle, the female fourth grade student obtains an easyCBM words correct per minute score of 83. This probe denotes a decrease of 11 words per minute.

**Fifth grade.** Following two weeks of poetry treatment, fifth grade male students obtain an easyCBM fluency score of 131 words correct per minute. This indicates a decrease of one word correct per minute from pre-treatment data. The female fifth grade student has a post-poetry treatment score of 100 words correct per minute. This is a decrease of six words correct per minute from the pre-treatment score.

Table 4.4

*Post-Poetry Treatment easyCBM Reading Fluency Probes Reported as Mean Words Correct per Minute Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-prose treatment.** Table 4.5 details easyCBM fluency probe data gathered following two-weeks of reading interventions provided through prose text.

**Second grade.** Following two weeks of treatment using prose texts, second grade male students obtain a mean words correct per minute score of 61. This is a gain of two words correct per minute from pre-treatment data. Female second grade students have a post-prose treatment score of 42 words correct per minute. This is also an increase of two words correct per minute.
**Third grade.** At the conclusion of the two-week prose treatment cycle, third grade male students have a mean words correct per minute score of 63. These study participants show an increase of two words per minute. At the close of the two-week prose treatment cycle, the third grade female study participant obtains an easyCBM words correct per minute score of 102. This denotes a decrease of nine words per minute for this participant.

**Fourth grade.** The fourth grade post-prose treatment for the female participant is 88 words correct per minute. This is a decrease of six words correct per minute from pre-treatment data.

**Fifth grade.** At the close of the two-week prose treatment cycle, fifth grade male students obtain a mean words correct per minute score of 134. This indicates an increase of two words per minute from pre-treatment data. The fifth grade female student, at the end of the prose treatment cycle, has an easyCBM words correct per minute fluency score of 100. This denotes a decrease of six words correct per minute when compared to the pre-treatment score received on reading fluency probes.

Table 4.5

*Post-Prose Treatment easyCBM Reading Fluency Probes Reported as Mean Words Correct per Minute Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paired Sample T-Test

A paired sample t-test is used to compare the means of study participants under two different treatment conditions (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014). This test is used in this particular study to examine both students’ motivation to read and reading fluency achievement. First of all, data collected using the Motivation to Read Profile Survey is analyzed to determine if differences exist in students’ attitudes toward reading when receiving instruction through rhyming poetry as opposed to prose texts. Secondly, a paired sample t-test is used to determine if the mean reading fluency achievement scores of study participants vary significantly from one another when participants receive reading instruction through poetry as opposed to prose texts.

Motivation to Read Profile Survey.

Hypotheses.

$H_0$: Students’ motivation to read is equal when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry ($\mu_1$) and prose ($\mu_2$).

$H_1$: Students’ motivation to read is greater when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry ($\mu_1$) than prose ($\mu_2$).

$H_2$: Students’ motivation to read is less when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry ($\mu_1$) than prose ($\mu_2$).

Data analysis. Prior to treatment, students complete a Motivation to Read Profile Survey. Data collected from this survey is represented as a percentage so that comparisons may be made among both treatment methods and genders. A two-tailed test of statistical significance is used when interpreting this data. An alpha level of 0.05 is used for all statistical tests. As shown in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.1, results indicate that no statistically significant difference exists in students’ motivation to read when receiving instruction through poetry ($M=72.43$, $SD=10.13$)
when compared to pre-treatment data (M=70.93, SD=8.80); t= -0.42, p=0.68. These results suggest that no difference exists in the reading motivation of the overall sample population after receiving instruction through rhyming poetry.

Table 4.6

Post-Poetry Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>70.93</td>
<td>72.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1. Overall Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Poetry Treatment

Figure 4.1. Paired sample t-test results when comparing pre-treatment reading motivation of all study participants to post-poetry treatment reading motivation. Reading motivation is measured by the Motivation to Read Profile Survey.

Table 4.7 and Figure 4.2 display results of the paired sample t-test comparing students’ pre-treatment reading motivation (M=70.93, SD=8.80) to post-prose treatment reading motivation (M=70.50, SD=10.14); t=0.11, p=0.91. This result indicates no significant difference in students’ motivation to read following reading instruction through prose texts.

Table 4.7

Post-Prose Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>70.93</td>
<td>70.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>10.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
t | 0.11
---|---
p (two-tail) | 0.91

**Figure 4.2.** Overall Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Prose Treatment

Table 4.8 and Figure 4.3 display male Motivation to Read Profile Survey data following poetry treatment. Pre-treatment reading motivation (M=69.33, SD=9.80) is not significantly different from post-poetry treatment data (M=73.00, SD=7.58); t=-0.77, p=0.46. Results indicate that no significant differences exist in the reading motivation of male participants following poetry treatment.
Table 4.8

*Male Post-Poetry Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>69.33</td>
<td>73.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.3. Male Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Poetry Treatment

Table 4.9 and Figure 4.4 display female motivation to read data following poetry treatment. Female pre-treatment reading motivation data ($M=73.80$, $SD=6.61$), when compared to post-poetry treatment data ($M=71.40$, $SD=14.71$), indicates no statistical difference ($t=0.45$, $p=0.68$). Results signify that no difference exists in female motivation to reading following treatment with rhyming poetry.

Table 4.9

Female Post-Poetry Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>73.80</td>
<td>71.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.4. Female Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Poetry Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4. Paired sample t-test results when comparing pre-treatment reading motivation of female participants to post-poetry treatment reading motivation. Reading motivation is measured by the Motivation to Read Profile Survey.

Male post-prose treatment reading motivation data is shown in Table 4.10 and Figure 4.5.

When compared to pre-treatment data (M=69.33, SD=9.80), post-prose treatment data (M=70.56, SD=10.81) implies no significant difference in reading motivation; t=-0.22, p=0.84.

Male study participants indicate no considerable difference in motivation to read following reading instruction through prose texts.
Table 4.10

**Male Post-Prose Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>69.33</td>
<td>70.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>10.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.5. Male Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Prose Treatment

Figure 4.5. Paired sample t-test results when comparing pre-treatment reading motivation of male participants to post-prose treatment reading motivation. Reading motivation is measured by the Motivation to Read Profile Survey.

As indicated in Table 4.11 and Figure 4.6, female motivation to read pre-treatment data (M=73.80, SD=6.61) is not significantly different than post-prose treatment data (M=70.40, SD=10.04); t=1.01, p=0.37. This signifies that prose treatment does not affect the reading motivation of female study participants.

Table 4.11

Female Post-Prose Treatment Motivation to Read Profile Survey Percentages Compared to Pre-Treatment Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-T</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>73.80</td>
<td>70.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.6. Female Motivation to Read: Pre-Treatment vs. Post-Prose Treatment

Figure 4.6. Paired sample t-test results when comparing pre-treatment reading motivation of female participants to post-prose treatment reading motivation. Reading motivation is measured by the Motivation to Read Profile Survey.

**Reading fluency achievement.**

**Hypotheses.**

H$_0$: Students’ reading fluency achievement is equal when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry ($\mu_1$) and prose ($\mu_2$).

H$_1$: Students’ reading fluency achievement is greater when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry ($\mu_1$) than prose ($\mu_2$).
H₂: Students’ reading fluency achievement is less when receiving treatment through rhyming poetry (μ₁) than prose (μ₂).

**Data analysis.** Prior to treatment, students’ reading fluency scores are measured using easyCBM passage reading fluency probes. This probe measures students’ reading fluency using words read correctly per minute. Additional probes are given to students proceeding poetry treatment and following prose treatment. A two-tailed test of statistical significance is used when analyzing this data. An alpha level of 0.05 is used for all statistical tests.

Table 4.12 and Figure 4.7 display a comparison of post-poetry treatment (M=79.64, SD=38.19) and post-prose treatment (M=81.64, SD=38.18) reading fluency achievement data for all participants. Results indicate that neither poetry nor prose texts produce a significant difference in the reading fluency achievement of study participants as a whole; t= -1.06, p=2.16.

**Table 4.12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 and Figure 4.8 denote a comparison of male post-poetry treatment (M=85.00, SD=39.81) and male post-prose treatment (M=85.44, SD=41.96). Results indicate that neither poetry nor prose produces a significant difference in the reading fluency achievement of male participants; t= -0.16, p=0.87.

Table 4.13

Male Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>85.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>39.81</td>
<td>41.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.14 and Figure 4.9 show a comparison of female post-poetry treatment (M=70.00, SD=37.28) and female post-prose treatment (M=74.8, SD=33.54). Results indicate that a statistically significant difference in the reading fluency achievement of female participants does not exist, but the results are very close to statistical significance; t= -2.71, p=0.05. The relationship indicates that female students show greater reading fluency gains when instructed through prose texts.

Table 4.14

Female Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mdn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.15 and Figure 4.10 display a comparison of second grade post-poetry treatment data (M=46.00, SD=31.38) and post-prose treatment data (M=51.25, SD=30.37). Results indicate that neither poetry nor prose texts produce a significant difference in the reading fluency
achievement of second grade participants; \( t = -2.46, p=0.09 \). However, results are close to indicating that prose texts produce greater reading fluency gains in second grade students.

Table 4.15

*Second Grade Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>46.00</td>
<td>51.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>31.38</td>
<td>30.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( t )</td>
<td>-2.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p ) (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( t ) Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.10. Mean fluency probe data for second grade participants. The median wcpm score following prose treatment (47.0) is slightly higher than the wcpm score following poetry treatment (43.5).

As shown in Table 4.16 and Figure 4.11, third grade post-poetry treatment data (M=70.80, SD=21.14) and post-prose treatment data (M=70.40, SD=25.34) are not significantly different; t=0.12, p=0.91. Therefore, third grade study participants demonstrate no differences in reading fluency achievement when a comparison is made between reading fluency probes following poetry instruction and reading fluency probes following prose instruction.

Table 4.16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>70.80</td>
<td>70.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>21.14</td>
<td>25.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.11. Third Grade Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose

Figure 4.11. Mean fluency probe data for third grade participants. The median wcpm fluency score is slightly higher for prose treatment (Mdn=69) in comparison to poetry treatment (Mdn=61).

Fourth grade fluency scores are not included in the disaggregated data because only one fourth grade student is participating in the study. The data of this student is included in “All Participants” and “Female” but cannot be disaggregated by grade level.

Table 4.17 and Figure 4.12 display fifth grade post-poetry treatment data (M=123.50, SD=23.07) and post-prose treatment data (M=124.50, SD=25.16). The results of the paired sample t-test are not significantly different; t= -0.20, p= 0.85. No difference exists in the reading fluency achievement of fifth grade students when instructed through either poetry or prose texts.
Table 4.17

*Fifth Grade Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>123.50</td>
<td>124.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>25.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p (two-tail)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical (two-tail)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.12. Fifth Grade Fluency Achievement: Poetry vs. Prose

![Graph showing mean fluency probe data for fifth grade participants. The median wcpm score is minutely higher following prose (Mdn=124) instruction when compared to poetry (Mdn=122) instruction.]

**Figure 4.12.** Mean fluency probe data for fifth grade participants. The median wcpm score is minutely higher following prose (Mdn=124) instruction when compared to poetry (Mdn=122) instruction.

**Interviews**

This mixed-methods study combines quantitative data with qualitative support. Basic qualitative studies provide a descriptive account in an effort to understand the point of view of research participants (Ary et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher uses interviews to determine participants’ perspectives concerning the usage of poetry and prose texts during reading instruction. The researcher is attentive to recurring themes or patterns in participants’ responses. This qualitative data is used in support of the quantitative data used in this study. Students and interventionists are interviewed at three separate times during the study: pre-treatment, post-poetry treatment, and post-prose treatment.


**Student interviews.**

*Pre-treatment.* Prior to the study, students are interviewed to determine their attitudes and motivations toward reading. The interviews are also used to gauge students’ reading preferences.

*Second grade and third grade.* When questioned about what attracts them to texts they enjoy, male students respond that they like the illustrations or photographs. One female respondent states that she prefers texts with characters around her own age. Both genders indicate that they like “good stories.” Students in grades two and three mention that they prefer stories that are easy to read. A portion of students from both genders respond that they either are unsure what texts they enjoy reading or that they do not like to read any texts.

*Fourth and fifth grade.* Students of both genders indicate that they either do not enjoy reading or enjoy reading only sometimes. Students indicate that they will read some texts but are unable or unwilling to elaborate on the text types they typically read. When questioned about texts they enjoy reading most, male students indicate that they are drawn to joke books and texts about animals. Female students also indicate that they enjoy books about animals.

*Post-poetry treatment.*

*Second grade.* Following the two-week poetry treatment cycle, students are interviewed to determine their attitudes and motivations toward reading. One female participant indicates that she likes “poems because they can sometimes be funny.” Another female participant mentions that she likes poems because they are simple, making it easier to read and sound-out new words. A male student says that he likes poems because “They’re fun to read. Figuring out new words you don’t know makes it fun.” When questioned about text type preferences, second grade students indicate an overwhelming preference for poetry over prose. These students denote that
the reading activities they participate in when reading poems are more engaging than the activities that accompany the prose texts they read. A female student states that poems are more helpful when practicing reading skills because they contain words that are easier to “sound out.”

Third grade. Third grade students are divided as to which text type they prefer. When questioned about whether prose or poetry texts seem to help them more with reading, 50% of male participants indicate that they prefer poetry while 50% prefer prose. The sole female participant prefers poetry when choosing a text type. Male students that indicate they prefer poetry as a text type make comments such as, “I like poems because they have a lot of rhyming words. The rhyming words are easy for me to read, so I don’t struggle and can read it better.” Another poetry characteristic male students indicate they prefer is the prominence of humor.

Fourth grade. The sole fourth grade participant in this study is a female. This student indicates that she does enjoy reading in her spare time and most enjoys texts about ghosts. She indicates that she first looks at a text’s title when determining her interest in reading a particular text, and she becomes disinterested if a text appears to be “boring.”

Fifth grade. Fifth grade male and female students indicate that they prefer poems because “They are more fun.” One male fifth grader states, “I like poems better. They are easier for me. They’re interesting tales and have a rhythm to them.” Both male and female students specifically mention that the rhyming nature of poetry contributes to their preferences for this text type. These students do not indicate that one text type helps them more with reading than the other. They merely indicate a preference for poetry over prose.

Post-prose treatment.

Second grade. In post-prose interviews, male and female students indicate that they enjoy reading books, particularly those that are humorous. One student mentions that he enjoys
repeated reading of both poetry and prose. A majority of second grade participants feel that both
text types help them proportionately the same with reading. When questioned about whether or
not they read during their spare time, 100% of female and 50% of male students answer in the
affirmative. These second grade students specify that they first look at the text title and the
pictures when they are searching for something to read. When questioned about text
characteristics that make these students unlikely to read a particular text, both male and female
students indicate that a text of great length and complex wording makes them less likely to read
the text.

*Third grade.* In response to a question concerning the texts they most like to read, third
grade male students mention a variety of series books ranging from picture books to chapter
books. Comic books are also a common text mentioned among these students. Those male
students preferring prose texts indicate that prose texts have more words and, thus, are more
helpful with reading. When asked whether or not they enjoy reading as a hobby, the tally is
divided with half of third grade male students in the participant group indicating that they do
enjoy reading in their spare time and the other half indicating that they do not. Resoundingly,
these students indicate that they become uninterested in a text if it is “too long” with complex
wording. Male second grade participants note that texts must not appear “boring” if they are to
read them, and the absence of pictures causes their interest to wane. When asked these same
interview questions, the third grade female participant mentions that she does enjoy reading in
her spare time. She lists several early chapter books, each a part of a larger series, that she
especially enjoys reading. This student indicates that she is especially drawn to chapter books
and first looks at the title and pictures to determine if a book will interest her. The female
participant indicates that stories help her more with reading than poetry.
Fourth grade. Following prose treatment, the singular fourth grade female participant indicates no preference for text type. She believes that both poetry and prose have the same effect on her ability to read.

Fifth grade. When questioned about texts they enjoy reading, male students indicate that they do not place a priority on reading because they have not found a text that interests them. These students will only read a text if it appears to “be fun.” The female fifth grade participant indicates that she enjoys reading historical passages most, but only “if it’s fun.”

Interventionist interviews.

Pre-treatment. When asked about texts enjoyed most by students in their intervention groups, teachers typically respond by giving an example of a text read recently in their small group setting. One teacher mentions a folktale enjoyed by fourth grade students while another mentions a chapter book from a series of texts enjoyed by fifth grade students. When questioned about differences in text preference according to gender, interventionists state that male students seem more drawn to informational texts while female students prefer stories with characters to whom they can relate. One interventionist mentions that both genders seem to enjoy texts about animals. When asked about texts that best hold the attention of their students, interventionists note that students seem to have a preference toward informational texts as well as those that contain humor. Interventionists believe that students find texts that have “good pictures or illustrations” to be appealing. All interventionists participating in these pre-treatment interviews cite illustrations as the text feature that students find most interesting.

Post-poetry treatment. Following treatment with poetry, one interventionist states, “Students have difficulty with poems because the natural wording is switched.” Another indicates, “When we read [a particular poem] my students naturally made connections to stories
they had read with the same theme.” One teacher generalizes that texts with high frequency words and word family patterns work best in intervention groups. A teacher working with fourth grade students feels that the students in her intervention group like poems better. She states, “Poems are shorter, and we could read them more times. This helped [the students] to understand poems better than the prose texts.” Another teacher indicates that, since poems are chunked into stanzas, fifth grade students benefit from stopping to think after each stanza, aiding in their comprehension.

**Post-prose treatment.** Following treatment with prose text, one interventionist specifies, “My students do better with non-fiction than fiction. The non-fiction texts make them want to know more, and that leads to research.” Prose texts are better for teaching reading comprehension and reading fluency. Another interventionist denotes that young students seem to enjoy stories more. An interventionist working with fifth grade students indicates that fifth graders seem to like prose texts better because they can understand them better. She goes on to say that reading the texts multiple times is very helpful. “I feel that my students become uninterested in a text if I don’t choose texts that are fun and relevant to their life,” states a fifth grade teacher. Teachers find that students do not want to read a text that is really long. Teacher’s responses in post-prose treatment interviews support that older-elementary male students seem to enjoy texts about animals and adventures. Their female classmates seem to enjoy personal life stories or stories about history.

**Outcomes**

While statistically significant values are not obtained through the quantitative data represented in this study, results do provide insight as to the effects of text types on students’ reading fluency achievement and motivation to read.
**Motivation to Read**

Quantitative study results indicate that participants show insignificant differences in motivation to read following treatment by poetry and treatment by prose. While results are far from being considered statistically significant, the median reading motivation score is slightly higher following poetry instruction (Mdn=72.5) when compared to pre-treatment data (Mdn=71.5). The median reading motivation score is lower following prose treatment (Mdn=69.5) when compared to pre-treatment data (Mdn=71.5). Student interview data indicates students’ preferences for the rhyme and rhythm of poetry along with an appreciation for the shorter text lengths of poems. Therefore, some support is provided as to the value of poetry as a motivational text for struggling readers.

**Reading Fluency Achievement**

Study results indicate that participants have greater fluency achievement gains when receiving reading instruction through prose text than poetry. Again, the results of the t-tests are not statistically significant, but all results, excluding those of third graders, have negative t-values. These negative t-values indicate that students’ have higher reading fluency scores following instruction with prose texts. This result is more prominent with female students than males. The female t-value of -2.71 is very close to statistical significance.

**Interview Data**

Since participant sample sizes are small, qualitative data is instrumental in understanding treatment outcomes. Interview data supports quantitative findings in relation to students’ motivation to read.

Students indicate a motivation to read poetry due to several characteristics of this genre. Students enjoy poems because they tend to be humorous. Both pre and post-treatment survey
data reveals students’ appreciation of humor in texts. Students also like poems because they feel they are fun to read. Study participants cite the rhyme and rhythm of poetry as elements that make this genre enjoyable and easy to read. Several students indicate that poems present words in a manner that makes them simple and easy to decode.

Students are deterred from certain texts because of text length. Interview data indicate that students’ initial responses to texts are a result of appearance. If a text appears to be too long or lackluster, students lack motivation to engage with the text.

Interventionists’ viewpoints are sometimes contradictory to those of students. Interventionists’ responses to interview questions indicate their belief that students have a preference for prose texts. Most interventionists in this study express that students prefer nonfiction prose texts to poetry, and this belief does not match study findings. However, interventionists’ articulations that students make greater reading progress when instructed through prose texts supports the quantitative findings of this study.

When asked about texts that seem more beneficial toward their progress as readers, most participants indicate that one text type is not more helpful than the other. Several interventionists indicate that prose texts are more beneficial in aiding students’ reading comprehension and fluency achievement.

**Summary**

Several findings are a product of this study. Even in the absence of statistical significance, study results indicate a tendency for one text type to be more motivational for elementary-age readers. Results also support a conclusion as to the text type that produces the largest fluency gains among students. Information regarding students’ text type preferences and teachers’ assumptions about students’ text type preferences is also provided through this study.
Data collected through surveys as well as personal interviews indicate that students find reading engaging when they receive instruction through poetry. The rhyme and rhythm of poems appeal to students. Study participants acknowledge that they find poetry to be entertaining to read. The fact that poems lend themselves to repeated readings for a variety of purposes contributes to the appeal of this genre.

However, study findings point to an assumption that prose texts promote greater reading fluency progress in students. While quantitative findings are not statistically significant, students of both genders and three of the four participating grade levels all have greater reading fluency gains following treatment with prose texts.

Study data gathered through personal interviews indicate that differences exist in the viewpoints of students and the viewpoints of their teachers. Teachers’ statements regarding students’ text preferences are somewhat contradictory to statements made by the students. This supports the relevance of this study in informing instructional practices.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This study seeks to determine the extent to which the effectiveness of reading instruction is influenced by text type. Specifically, the researcher seeks to determine if reading instruction through rhyming poetry and reading instruction through prose texts have differing effects upon students’ motivation to read and reading fluency achievement. While study results do not indicate statistical significance, several conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

Conclusions

The null hypotheses in this study states that both reading motivation and reading fluency achievement are equivalent when students are instructed using rhyming poetry and prose texts. In this case, study statistics do not indicate that one text is more motivational for struggling elementary-age readers. Neither do statistics indicate that one text type, poetry or prose, promotes greater reading fluency achievement gains.

Implications

Instructional ramifications may be gleaned from the results of this study. While not statistically significant, the findings do point to several instructional imperatives that are important as teachers make considerations for reading instruction.

Foremost, it is essential to note the necessity of using a variety of text types with developing readers. Current standards require that students be exposed to a variety of text types in the elementary classroom (Strachan, 2014). Survey results reiterate the necessity of this variety as differing text types obviously have varying effects on students’ motivation to read and reading achievement. Using a variety of text types in reading instruction assists students in finding the key factors that motivate them as readers. While commonalities exist, interview data
indicates that students have a variety of preferences when choosing texts. As students are introduced to texts that meet their motivational needs as readers, they become more interested in reading.

**Recommendations**

This study uses a small population sample of struggling elementary-age readers in an effort to determine if reading instruction through rhyming poetry has a greater effect upon students’ reading motivation and reading fluency achievement than instruction through prose texts. While this study did not produce statistically significant findings, trends in data are noted. It is recommended that this study be repeated with a larger sample size to determine if statistically significant results may be obtained.

In addition, all participants in this study are struggling elementary-age readers. The repetition of this study with students of average or above-average reading ability will contribute to the generalizability of the study. Conducting a facsimile of this study in a general education classroom, with the participation of students of a variety of ability levels under the instruction of the same teacher, is another possibility for further study that will lead to findings about the effectiveness of poetry as a genre for increasing reading motivation and reading fluency achievement with the general student population.

Lastly, conducting this study using a participant sample from grades one and two will examine the implications of poetry versus prose as an instructional text with emerging and beginning readers. The standard deviations noted in the analysis of the data from this study indicate large variations in reading fluency data. This is to be expected considering this study spans grades two through five. The repetition of the study with a focus on students in grades one and two will eliminate large standard deviations and produce data indicative of the reading
fluency achievement of beginning readers in response to reading instruction through poetry and prose texts.

Summary

Literacy instruction is a science of many dimensions. As teachers search for instructional practices and materials that assist students in becoming successful readers, it is important to keep in mind the role of students’ reading motivation. While study findings are largely inconclusive, much information is gathered through students’ survey and interview responses that leads this researcher to the conclusion that poetry is a little-explored genre that will provide students with a purpose for reading, enjoyment for reading, and enough textual support to make the reading of an authentic text accessible for struggling readers.
References


Appendices
Appendix A
Parent Permission for Study Participation
English
Dear Parent,

I am conducting a study concerning teaching methods that might be most helpful for our students. I would like to have your child’s input in this study. This would include the completion of a survey which will be repeated three times over the course of one month. I would also like to get feedback from your child through interviews, which will occur three times over the course of one month. Your child’s responses will be kept completely confidential. No names will be attached to the responses.

Both the surveys and interviews will be conducted during your child’s CORE time, so he/she will not miss any class time or recess time in order to participate. The surveys and the interviews involve questions about how well your child likes reading and the types of texts that your child most likes to read. Your child’s participation is important so that we may make changes to our CORE time instruction that will be helpful to our students. If you are willing to allow your child to participate, please sign and return this form.

Thank you,

Melissa Barbee
Instructional Coach
Talbott Elementary School

Parent’s Signature: _________________________________ Date: ____________
Appendix B
Parent Permission for Study Participation
Spanish
Querido padre,

Estoy realizando un estudio sobre los métodos de enseñanza que podrían ser más útiles para nuestros estudiantes. Me gustaría tener la opinión de su hijo en este estudio. Esto incluiría la realización de una encuesta que se repetirá tres veces en el curso de un mes. También me gustaría recibir retroalimentación de su hijo a través de entrevistas, las cuales ocurrirán tres veces durante el transcurso de un mes. Las respuestas de su niño serán mantenidas completamente confidenciales. No se adjuntarán nombres a las respuestas.

Tanto las encuestas como las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo durante el tiempo CORE de su hijo, para que no pierda ningún tiempo de clase o tiempo de recreo para poder participar. Las encuestas y las entrevistas incluyen preguntas sobre cómo le gusta leer a su hijo y los tipos de textos que le gusta leer a su hijo. La participación de su hijo es importante para que podamos hacer cambios en nuestra instrucción de CORE que ayudará a nuestros estudiantes. Si está dispuesto a permitir que su hijo participe, por favor firme y devuelva este formulario.

Gracias,

Melissa Barbee
Entrenador de instrucción
Escuela Primaria Talbott

Firma de los padres: _________________________________ Fecha: ____________
Appendix C

Motivation to Read Profile Survey
Motivation to Read Profile

Reading Survey

Sample 1: I am in ________________.

☐ Second Grade
☐ Third Grade
☐ Fourth Grade
☐ Fifth Grade

Sample 2: I am a __________.

☐ Boy
☐ Girl

1. My friends think I am __________________________.

☐ a very good reader
☐ a good reader
☐ an OK reader
☐ a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

☐ Never
☐ Not very often
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often

3. I read __________________________.

☐ not as well as my friends
☐ about the same as my friends
☐ a little better than my friends
☐ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is ________________________.

☐ really fun
☐ fun
☐ OK to do
☐ no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don’t know, I can ___________________.

☐ almost always figure it out
☐ sometimes figure it out
☐ almost never figure it out
6. I tell my friends about good books I read.
   - I never do this.
   - I almost never do this.
   - I do this some of the time.
   - I do this a lot.

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand ____________________.
   - almost everything I read
   - some of what I read
   - almost none of what I read
   - none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are ________________.
   - very interesting
   - interesting
   - not very interesting
   - boring

9. I am ________________________.
   - a poor reader
   - an OK reader
   - a good reader
   - a very good reader

10. I think libraries are ____________________.
     - a great place to spend time
     - an interesting place to spend time
     - an OK place to spend time
     - a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading ____________________.
     - every day
     - almost every day
     - once in a while
     - never

12. Knowing how to read well is ____________________.
     - not very important
     - sort of important
13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I _________________.
   - can never think of an answer
   - have trouble thinking of an answer
   - sometimes think of an answer
   - always think of an answer

14. I think reading is _____________________________.
   - a boring way to spend time
   - an OK way to spend time
   - an interesting way to spend time
   - a great way to spend time

15. Reading is _________________________________.
   - very easy for me
   - kind of easy for me
   - kind of hard for me
   - very hard for me

16. When I grow up I will spend _________________.
   - none of my time reading
   - very little of my time reading
   - some of my time reading
   - a lot of my time reading

17. When I am in a group talking about stories, I _____________________.
   - almost never talk about my ideas
   - sometimes talk about my ideas
   - almost always talk about my ideas
   - always talk about my ideas

18. I would like for my teacher to read books out loud to the class ___________.
   - every day
   - almost every day
   - once in a while
   - never
19. When I read out loud I am a ________________________.

☐ poor reader
☐ OK reader
☐ good reader
☐ very good reader

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel ____________________.

☐ very happy
☐ sort of happy
☐ sort of unhappy
☐ unhappy

Appendix D
Motivation to Read Profile Survey Student Responses
## Motivation to Read Pre-Treatment Survey Responses

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## Motivation to Read Post-Poetry Treatment Survey Responses

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Appendix F

Post-Poetry Treatment Reading Fluency Scores
## Post Poetry Treatment Fluency Scores

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Appendix G

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Appendix H

Sample of Student Answers to Interview Questions

Pre-Treatment
Pre-Treatment Student Interview Response Sampling

1. Do you enjoy reading?
   “I’m too busy doing other stuff.”
   “I sometimes do.”
   “Not really.”
   “I like reading some things.”

2. Do you read books or stories other than those your teacher asks you to read?
   “I sometimes do.”
   “No.”
   “I read library books.”
   “Not much.”

3. What types of texts do you prefer to read?
   “I don’t know.”
   “I don’t really like to read.”
   “I like joke books.”
   “Animal books.”

4. What do you like most about the texts you prefer to read?
   “I like the characters to be my age.”
   “I like the pictures.”
   “I like good stories.”
   “It’s easy to read.”
Appendix I

Sample of Student Answers to Interview Questions

Post-Poetry Treatment
Post-Poetry Treatment Student Interview Response Sampling

1. What do you enjoy reading most?
   “a book”
   “every book”
   “Something funny”
   “I like poems because they can sometimes be funny.”
   “What I really know about words is from Frozen. I like poems because I can read something simple, easy to read, to sound out”
   “Ghost Hunters”
   “I like to read scary stuff and Dork Diaries”
   “I like both poems and stories”

2. Do you like to read during your spare time?
   “yes”
   “yes”
   “yes”
   “yes”

3. If you are choosing something to read, what do you look at first?
   “got pictures”
   “title”
   “the title”

4. What makes you not want to read a particular text? (What is it about some texts that make you not want to try to read them?)
   “It is too long.”
   “harder words”
“if it looks like it would be boring”
Appendix J
Sample of Student Answers to Interview Questions
Post-Prose Treatment
Post-Prose Treatment Student Interview Response Sampling

1. What do you enjoy reading most?

“The Cat in the Hat”

“The Phantom Tollbooth”

“comic books”

“big books”

“Bug Battles”

“any kind of books: chapter books, comics, superheroes”

“Pigeon Books – Pigeon Drives the Bus, Curious George, Diary of a Wimpy Kid”

2. Do you like to read during your spare time?

“No”

“NO!!!!!!!”

“Yes”

“Yes”

3. If you are choosing something to read, what do you look at first?

“title”

“If it’s a book I’ve read.”

“The title”

4. What makes you not want to read a particular text?

“When I have to because you don’t have much play time.”

“too long and boring”

too big words

“words are small”
“If it’s too long it makes me not want to read.”
Appendix K

Sample of Interventionists’ Answers to Interview Questions

Pre-Treatment
Sample of Interventionists’ Answers to Interview Questions
Pre-Treatment

1. What text types do your students seem to enjoy reading most?
   “They really like the ‘Nine Tales’ story we’ve been reading. They get into it.”
   “They like books that have real information.”
   “My fifth graders are enjoying Henry and Mudge.”

2. Are there differences in the types of texts preferred by male and female students? If so, what differences do you notice?
   “I hadn’t really thought about it. I guess the boys like books about boys and girls like characters that are girls.”
   “They both seem to like stories that have animals in them.”
   “Boys prefer informational texts.”

3. What text types seem to best hold the attention of your students?
   “They seem to like something they can relate to.”
   “They like stories about real things.”
   “If it’s interesting or funny they like it.”

4. What text characteristics do students seem to enjoy most? By characteristics, I mean the way the text looks.
   “They really like pictures.”
   “If it has good pictures or illustrations, they like it.”
   “I hadn’t really thought about that. They like for the text to have a lot of good pictures.”
Appendix L
Sample of Interventionists’ Answers to Interview Questions
Post-Treatment
Sample of Interventionists’ Answers to Interview Questions

Post-Treatment

Have you noticed any difference in your students’ reading performance or motivation to read while using either poetry or prose texts during the course of this study?

“[Prose] seems to work better with my students because poems have unnatural words and that’s seems to confuse them.”

“My students do better with non-fiction than fiction. When they read non-fiction they want to know more, and that leads to researching to learn.”

“We were able to teach cause and effect through one of the poems. The students also compared [the poem] to another story they had read because they had the same theme.”

“Stories are better for teaching reading comprehension and fluency.”

“My students seem to do about the same with poetry and prose as far as their reading ability. They seem to enjoy prose more.”

“My fourth graders like poems better. They are shorter and we could read them several times. This helped with them understand better.”

“With poems, we stopped to think after each stanza, and that helped them understand.”