THE EFFECT OF READER'S THEATER ON FLUENCY, COMPREHENSION, AND ATTITUDE AMONG STUDENTS WITH VARYING READING ABILITIES

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Abstract

A multitude of research has proven that repeated reading is an effective strategy to improve fluency in struggling readers. Students who struggle to read will inevitably fall behind in fluency and comprehension. As they have more and more negative experiences with reading, their reading attitude will decline. Building on previous research, this study investigated the effectiveness of repeated reading, through Reader’s Theater, among readers with varying reading abilities. Reader’s Theater is an avenue to improve fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude. It is a method of repeated readings in which students read a short passage multiple times and then perform for an audience. The theoretical foundation of this study is the Theory of Automaticity. This theory states that if all cognitive processes are utilized for decoding a word, there will be none left for comprehension. This quasi-experimental study investigated the impact of Reader’s Theater on fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude. There were 13 first grade participants in both the control group and treatment group. Pre and post-test were given to both groups. The means of differences between the treatment and control group were analyzed using an independent t-test and Mann-Whitney U. The results showed no significant difference in the individual components of fluency (expression/volume, phrasing, smoothness, and rate). However, when the first three components of fluency, which measured prosody, were grouped together and analyzed there was a significant difference between the treatment and control groups. The difference in the means of comprehension and reading attitude were not significant between the treatment and control group.
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Dedication

Above all, I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior. I know without a doubt he made all this possible and gave me the strength to keep going. To my husband, Jason, thanks for your support and not giving up on me. To my children, Bailey, Callie, and Eli. I look forward to not having to say, “I can’t do that right now, I’m working on my paper.”

To my mom and dad, I love you both! Thanks for your continuous prayers and ongoing support. You guys made me the person I am today.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sometime throughout their career, most teachers have fastidiously listened to the sudden start and stop of a student reading. This type of reading is characterized as being disfluent because the reader reads slowly, in an uneven manner, and without expression (Allington, 1990). Another characteristic of disfluent readers is that they often extricate themselves from reading instruction because of frustration (Rasinski, 2003b).

To prevent this sudden start and stop type of reading, which only leads to frustration, fluency should be implemented into the reading curriculum (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Although, there are numerous contributing variables that influence a student’s reading progress, reading fluency is a rudimentary component to being a good reader (Rasinski, 2003b). Poor readers often lack fluency. Fluency levels not only distinguish good readers from poor readers but, are also an undeviating indicator of comprehension (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Therefore, students cannot achieve comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading, when their reading is excessively slow (Rasinski, 2000). Students who do not accurately decode have little understanding of the author’s purpose, which will likely lead to the readers’ misconception of the text (Kulich, 2009). Reviews of fluency instruction have deducted that fluency instruction advantageously impacts fluency achievement, as well as general reading performance (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).

The most compelling rationale to teach fluency is because of the relationship between fluency and comprehension (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Kulich (2009) delineated this partnership as one “nourishing” the other. The relationship between fluency and comprehension has also been described as advantageous (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Strecker, Roser, & Martinez
(1998) noted that fluency is integral to comprehension and a vital element to a productive reading program. Research in relation to assessment has noted the relationship between measures of fluency as being highly associated with measures of comprehension (Rasinski, 2004a). Teachers must make instructional efforts to help students become more fluent (Allington, 1983; Torgesen, 1998). The National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) recommended that efficacious fluency components be reinforced in the classroom when disfluent reading is evident.

**Statement of Problem**

Fluency must be explicitly taught and modeled (Rasinski, 2004a). However, this has not always been the case. “Fluency is often taught as a separate area of the reading curriculum, distinct and apart from authentic reading students do during guided reading or reading workshop” (Rasinski, 2012, p. 517). Similarly, Ming and Dukes (2008) noted that fluency is not integrated into reading curriculum. It is not regarded as vital to veritable reading (Rasinski, 2012).

For two consecutive years (2009, 2010) a survey of reading experts deduced that fluency should not be considered a noteworthy subject (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2010; Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Shettel, 2011). Prior to this survey, Allington (1983) ascertained that fluency was a forgotten component of the reading curriculum. Similarly, in 1991, (Rasinski & Zutell) reported that teachers and reading experts gave minimum attention to directly or even indirectly teaching fluency as a component of their reading curriculum. Fluency has also been described as the “forgotten stepchild” of reading instruction (Rasinski, Homan, & Biggs, 2009).
In fact, the essentialness of fluency instruction has only surfaced a little more than a decade ago (Rasinski, 2003a; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). This is quite astonishing because fluency is one of the five pillars of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is a vital component of a strong reading program. Further complicating matters, is the notion that fluency has often been taught in the classroom as speed reading (Stayter & Allington, 1991; Rasinski, 2012). Teachers rely on one-minute timed passages to determine if a child is fluent. With this being the case in so many classrooms, students are not reading for meaning and, therefore, students are becoming speed readers with no regard to comprehension (Rasinski, 2012). Deeney (2010) cautioned that using one-minute timed passages as the sole measurement of fluency could lead to a misinterpreting of a student’s fluency. Other research by Dowhower (1987) suggested that focusing only on rate and accuracy gives students the impression that reading is only about saying the words correctly and quickly.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the present study is to determine the level of effectiveness that Reader’s Theater has on first grade students with varying levels of reading abilities. The present study also sought to examine how the attitudes of first grade students with varying levels of reading abilities were affected by Reader’s Theater.

**Significance of Study**

The significance of this study is that it sought to determine how Reader’s Theater would affect the reading abilities of students at all levels of reading. Past studies have proven its effectiveness with struggling readers. For example, Ming and Dukes (2008) noted that students who had trouble reading can capitalize from a well-rounded, researched-based reading program.
that explicitly teaches fluency. Rasinski (2014) described fluency instruction as having an outstanding benefit for students, especially those who struggle. Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) stated that fluency is an essential part of a thriving reading program and is especially beneficial to students who struggle. Fluency can be a vital ingredient for struggling readers (Rasinski, Homan, & Biggs 2008).

Although numerous studies have proven the effectiveness of Reader’s Theater with struggling students, minimal research has investigated how effective Reader’s Theater is with students at varying reading levels. A study that synthesized 24 research studies regarding fluency interventions suggested the need for more research regarding repeated readings with learners of all reading levels (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). Rasinski and Hoffman (2003) described repeated readings as beneficial to all learners, but the levels of learning were not categorized to see how effective repeated reading was at each level. This sentiment is echoed in various other research studies concerning repeated reading through Reader’s Theater (Martinez, Roser, and Strecker, 1999; Rasinski, 2006; Rasinski, 2012). A plethora of studies have concluded that repeated readings, which can be integrated through Reader's Theater, are beneficial to students, but few have categorized the participants into reading levels and investigated just how effective repeated reading is at each reading level (above average, average, below average). Therefore, this study sought to investigate how repeated readings, through the use of Reader’s Theater, affected students with varying reading levels.
Theoretical Background

Theory of Automaticity

This study was based on the Theory of Automaticity developed by LaBerge and Samuels (1974). The Theory of Automaticity has been utilized for more than 30 years to help explain the intricate endeavor of reading (Schrauben, 2010). It has dominated over the years because of its ability to account for the development of fluency. Specifically, The Theory of Automaticity stated that repeated reading fosters fluency development. Samuels (1979) used the analogy of comparing a reader to an athlete. He stated that a reader can improve his or her reading by repeated readings just like a basketball player can improve his or her basketball ability by practicing basketball drills. Reiterating this fact with a different analogy, Samuels, Ediger, & Patridge (2005) described the vocalizations of a new driver as they talk themselves through the process of driving, and compared them to a reader sounding out words. Eventually, there is no need to sound out the words because the word recognition phase has become automatic for the reader just as the process of driving has become automatic to the driver. When the driver internalizes the process, he or she can then do more than just driving, such as talk to another person in the car. Just as when word recognition becomes automatic for the reader, he or she can then comprehend the text.

This change from non-automatic to automatic word recognition, through repeated readings, is what allows readers to have enough mental capacity left for comprehension (Schraubem, 2010). LaBerge and Samuels (1974) argued that people could not focus on more than one thing at a time. A reader cannot focus all of his or her attention on decoding and comprehension simultaneously. In this case, the process of reading would be grueling because the reader would not have enough mental capacity to give the needed attention to both decoding
and comprehension at the same time. In fact, this is the very foundation of the Theory of Automaticity. If all mental capacity is used to decode words, no mental capacities will remain to ensure the text is being understood (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974).

There are three varied stages that coincide with fluency. The first stage is called non-accurate stage. At this stage, recognizing words is a hindrance to the reader. The next stage is called the inaccurate stage. In this stage, readers decode slowly and carefully with minuscule attention to prosody and usually no attention to comprehension. The last stage is the automatic stage. In this stage, readers read with appropriate accuracy, prosody, and rate (Samuels, 1997). This allows comprehension to be attained. The accuracy level of performance necessitates attention to processing; at the automatic level there is no need for attention to be required for processing (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). "Throughout these stages information travels from visual, phonological, and episodic memory until it finally reaches semantic memory" (Schrauben, 2010, p. 84).

Moreover, LaBerge and Samuel’s Theory of Automaticity explains how readers attain automatic word recognition through repeated readings of the same text (Schrauben, 2010). As readers are exposed to the same text repeatedly, they will likely be able to recognize the words with progressively more accuracy and automaticity. This progressive building of accuracy and automaticity is what enables the reader to focus attention on comprehension instead of decoding; resulting in gaining meaning from the text (Samuels, 1974).

This research study was conducted using Readers’ Theater, a modified repeated reading technique in which students repeatedly read and practiced a single text with the purpose of
increasing fluency and comprehension. The impact of this technique on word recognition and comprehension over time were noted. Samuels’ Theory (1979) provided a framework for this study. Samuel theorized that attention to decoding took time away from comprehension. According to automaticity theory, readers are involved in two important jobs at once. Those tasks are decoding the words and understanding the text. Due to the modest measure of attention accessible to any reader, attention that is given to the decoding of words cannot also be used for comprehending the text. Readers who need a vast amount of cognitive effort for decoding may disregard meaning because of their insufficiency of focusing on understanding the text (Mraz et al., 2013).

**Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory**

The second theory that supported this study was Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in cognitive development; especially the learning that takes places through interaction with a more knowledgeable person. He theorized that social learning came before cognitive development. Children internalize information from social interactions and learn from those interactions. These interactions from a more knowledgeable other will impact what they know. In most cases the more knowledgeable other is an adult, but it does not necessarily have to be.

Along with the principle of the more knowledgeable other, Vygotsky (1978) coined the phrase "zone of proximal development." The zone of proximal development is described as the gap between what a child can successfully achieve alone versus what he or she can achieve with support (Young, Moore, & Rasinski, 2015). Vygotsky ascertained that the zone of proximal development is a better predictor of intellectual development than the present level of development (Guseva & Solomonvich, 2017). Teachers should instruct students within their
zone of proximal development for optimal development. This type of teaching will allow children to develop mental processes that would otherwise not be developed.

Closely linked to the zone of proximal development is the concept of scaffolding (Fernández, Wegerif, Mercer, & Drummond, 2015). Scaffolding was described as short term intellectual support that moves the learner toward a superior rank of learning (Wass & Golding, 2014). Scaffolding allows the students, over time, to complete the task by themselves, but educators need to be careful not to give students too much help. Instead, educators should only give enough support so that students can manage the task but not so much that no learning takes place. If rote learning is the focus of the classroom, then the students will not be challenged because they will not be working in their Zone of Proximal Development. Conversely, tasks that are too challenging will not allow the students to eventually complete them on their own, even with scaffolding.

Research Questions

This research investigated the following questions to determine the effectiveness of Readers Theater in targeting and improving the reading skills and attitudes of the participants in the study:

1. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading fluency among students at varying reading levels?

2. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading comprehension among students at varying reading levels?

3. What is the impact of Reader’s Theater on the attitudes toward reading among students at
varying reading levels?

**Null Hypotheses**

1. Reader’s Theater will not have a significant effect on students’ fluency among students at varying reading levels.

2. Reader’s Theater will not have a significant effect on students’ comprehension among students at varying reading levels.

3. Reader’s Theater will not have a significant effect on students’ attitudes toward reading among students at varying reading levels.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

The limitations of this study included the following. The first limitation was convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is simply choosing people for the study because of easy access (Dudovskiy, 2017). The participants were two out of three first grade classes. One of the classes received the treatment of Reader’s Theater, while the control group continued with the regular reading program. The control group was selected because they had similar reading abilities to the treatment group. The text chosen for Reader’s Theater were nursery rhymes due to students' reading levels at the beginning of first grade.

This study took place in an elementary school in southeast Tennessee with 30 first grade participants (15 in the control group and 15 in the treatment group), which may limit the generalizability of the results. Validity concerns of the population warranted the findings to be limited to first grade students in Elementary School Z. Random assignment was not used because of the possible disruptions it may have caused to the educational environment. Matching of
students’ academic levels was utilized to academically align the control group with the treatment group. Normally, in a school setting, quasi-experimental designs are seen as efficacious options to experimental designs due to the make-up of the educational environment and possible jeopardy to students by using experimental research (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2009).

Using rating scales that have established reliability and validity helped to strengthen the study because reliability and validity have been established and the rating scales have been used successfully over the years concerning the same subject that this study investigated. Aligning academic levels of the treatment and control groups strengthened the study. Another strength of this study was that the evaluation of reading attitudes.

**Assumptions**

One assumption is that the Theory of Automaticity explains how information that is taken in visually is processed through a sequence of phases and eventually leads the reader to comprehend the text. Another assumption is that the participants will honestly rate themselves on the Reading Attitude Survey. Still yet, another assumption is that participants have a sincere interest in participating in the study and are not doing it for reciprocity reasons. Another assumption is that the students will perform to the best of their ability on all pre and post-tests. Related to the prior assumption, it was assumed that the improvement in oral reading during the repeated reading intervention transferred to the silent reading used during the reading comprehension posttest.

**Definitions of Key Terms**
Reader’s Theater- Reader's Theater is a “performance activity in which group of students perform a script... no costumes, props, movement, scenery, or memorization of lines” (Padak & Rasinski, 2004, p. 125).

Fluency - the ability to read text quickly, smoothly, effortlessly, with prosody, and automatically with little attention to sub skill tasks such as decoding (Rasinski, 2003).

Accuracy-refers to the ability to recognize or decode words correctly (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005).

Automaticity – fast, accurate, oral reading of text which read at a rate similar to the rate of speaking with effortless identification of words (Samuels, 1979).

Curriculum-based Measurement (CBM) - techniques educators use to find out how pupils are developing in fundamental academic areas such as math, reading, writing, and spelling (McLane, n. d.).

Repeated reading – reading a meaningful passage of connected text several times until identified level of fluency is attained (Samuels, 1979).

Reading comprehension-the ability to understand what is being read (Cooper, 2000).

Prosody- ability to read with expression (Dowhower, 1991).

Reading attitude- how students feel toward recreational and academic reading as measured by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990).
Title I: Title I is a federal assistance program that allocates funds to school districts with high percentages of students who are economically disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 13).

Title I schools: Schools that have a high population of students determined to be economically disadvantaged and that receive funding based on this status. (USDOE, 2002, p. 13).

Organized Document

The study is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 contains a review of the relevant literature pertaining to reading achievement. First, the history of reading is discussed followed by the current state of reading instruction. Next, a review of reading in Title I schools is discussed followed by a look at student attitudes toward reading. Each of the five pillars of reading are presented with a more in-depth look at comprehension and fluency. Then, relationship between comprehension and fluency is examined. Chapter 2 ends with an in-depth discussion of repeated reading and Reader's Theater followed by a summary.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

History of Reading

Reading instruction, like most things in the world of education, has changed over the years. Instructional strategies have been adjusted frequently (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teachers need to be acquainted with prior reading practices and the validity of each of them. While some practices are still valid, others are not. By familiarizing themselves with what reading practices have been used in the past, educators are able to avoid those that do not provide competent instruction to students (McCormick & Zutell, 2015).

In the 1700s education moved from homes into schools (Rehyner, 2008). In the 1800s, phonics became known as the best practice in reading (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). In the 1920s, strategies evolved from phonics and moved to the whole word approach. The whole word approach is described as a top to bottom approach. Teachers immerse their students in a print-rich environment, exposing them to books with many of the same words. Repeated exposure to the words allows readers to learn them. Conversely, phonics is a bottom to top approach. It is based on being able to break apart words into sounds and then blend those sounds together to make a word (Rehyner, 2008).

In the decade of the 1930s, the language experience approach was introduced. This approach involves combining all four aspects of literacy; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A language experience approach lesson is generated around an experience that the class has completed together. This is call a shared experience. Examples of shared experiences can be a field trip or other experience that the class has accomplished. The shared experience is then used to create a text. The students give details about the experience as the teacher records
them. The text is read and edited by the class with support from the teacher. The story is then read in a variety of ways including echo reading, choral reading, or partner reading. An extension activity is usually the final part of the language experience approach. An extension activity can include drawing illustrations to add to the story, answering comprehension questions related to the story, or reading other books related to the topic of the shared experience (Brace, n.d.).

In the 1940s, the Language Experience Approach (LEA) was replaced with an emphasis on both silent reading and reading aloud (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). By the end of the 1940s LEA returned. Phonics was the main instructional reading strategy of the 1950s. The reading instructional strategy of the 1960's focused on teaching to all modalities. These modalities are visual, kinesthetic, and auditory. During the 1970s, LEA became prominent again. The importance of improving comprehension emerged during the 1980s. Whole language returned in the latter part of the 1980s and the early 1990s (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010). “Balanced literacy instruction” became prominent in the latter part of the 1990s (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). One such program that showcases a balanced literacy program is called Four Blocks. The components of Four Blocks consist of a self-selected reading block, working with words block, guided reading block, and a writing block (Campbell, 1999). At the turn of the 21st century, emphasis was placed on reading programs that are researched-based along with an emphasis on early intervention. From 2010 to the present, more emphasis has been placed on early intervention through Response to Intervention programs (RTI) (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). In contrast, a more recent survey of reading instructional practices, by Cassidy, Garcia, and Ortlieb, (2015) noted that early intervention, intervention in grades K-3, is no longer of interest. This same survey reported that close reading, text complexity, high stakes assessment,
and Common Core Standards were topics of interest in 2015-2016. The topics of high interest in 2015-2016 were driven by the implementation of Common Core Standards (Cassidy, Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2015).

The Common Core State Standards require students to read more challenging books and passages (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). They also require the students to gain a deeper understanding from what they have read (The Foundation for Excellence in Education, 2010-2017). This means that students are required to be better analytical and critical thinkers. The text complexity standard in Common Core was developed to ensure that every student is prepared for college and career by the time they graduate high school (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). According to the article by The Foundation for Excellence in Education (2010-2017) a passage that was read by second and third graders is now being read by kindergarten and first graders. The story being referred to is *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel. Before Common Core, students were simply required to retell the main events of the story and identify the characters and setting of the story. However, with Common Core the students are now required to know and understand the similarities and differences of the adventures of Frog and Toad and take part in cooperative discussions about the story.

**Current State of Reading**

Strickland, Boon, and Spencer (2013) stated that “reading is one of the most important early academic skills for students to acquire in school, yet learning to read continues to be a challenge for many elementary aged students in our nation’s schools” (p. 1). Likewise, Barth, Catts, and Anthony (2009) noted that many middle and high school students have not become proficient with simple reading tasks because they lack fundamental reading skills. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015) showed that at a national level, only 35% of fourth
grade students were proficient or above proficient in reading. This percentage dropped by the eighth grade. According to NAEP, at a national level, only 33% of eighth graders were proficient or above proficient in reading. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in reading achievement of 31 states in fourth and eighth grade when compared to the results of 2013. Tennessee was one of the states with no significant difference in reading achievement from 2013-2015 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015).

Title 1 Schools

Increasing reading achievement in all students is at the forefront of education (Stichter, Stormont, & Lewis, 2009). Specifically, improving reading achievement for Title I students has been a focus on the national level. Title 1 programs were implemented in schools to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). To be classified as a Title 1 school, 40% of the student population must be enrolled in free and reduced lunch (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). The higher percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, the higher the funds that are received (U. S. Department of Education, 2015).

Moreover, after 50 years, Title 1 has failed to close the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and advantaged students (Grant & Arnold, 2015). Likewise, Borman and D'Agostino (1996) argued that the effectiveness of the program remains debatable. The reading achievement gap between children from disadvantaged and advantaged families is significant and ongoing (Allington et al., 2010). The National Assessment for Title 1 reported that there is still a great disparity between the highest and lowest poverty schools (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004). Children from a low socioeconomic status, who were not reading on grade level by the time they were in third grade, were more likely to not finish high
school in comparison to those who are not from a low socioeconomic status (Hernandez, 2011). Perie, Grigg, and Donahue (2005) found that 77% of fourth grade students who were not socioeconomically disadvantaged attained proficiency while only 46% of disadvantaged students (eligible for free or reduced-priced meals) attained proficiency.

**Attitude Toward Reading**

Walberg and Tsai (1995) linked reading attitude to reading achievement. Over 20 years later, research still supports that children’s attitudes toward reading are indicative of their performance (Fives, 2016). To support this statement, the researcher conducted a representative study of nine year old students that explored the relationship of self-beliefs about reading and reading achievement. The researcher found that there was a “positive linear association” between reading attitude and reading achievement in the whole sample. Furthermore, this study and another (Kelley & Decker, 2009) have shown that girls have a more positive reading attitude than boys, even though the girls did not score significantly higher in reading achievement than boys.

Other researchers (McKenna, Kear, & Ellesworth, 1995) have identified some noteworthy findings about reading attitude. These researchers noted that a poor reading attitude may lead to a fluent reader choosing not to read when other options are available. Strengthening this argument is that successful readers might not have advantageous attitudes toward reading if they presume that they will be more satisfied with the results of doing something else. If even a capable reader expects the results of a doing another activity to be more satisfying than reading, he or she is likely to choose that activity instead.
A prominent model of reading attitude is called the McKenna Model (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). It states, “it is natural to predict that poorer readers, who have reason to expect frustrating outcomes, will tend to harbor more negative attitudes than better readers” (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995, p. 945). As children experience more success with reading, their attitude toward reading becomes more positive and gains are made in reading achievement.

Furthermore, the McKenna Model theorizes that an individual's reading attitude develops over time, but there is information that supports the idea that advantageous new experiences in reading may have only minor effects on attitude if the reader has already established negative beliefs about reading. For example, when a student who has a negative attitude toward reading reads a book they find interesting, there is only a minimal impact on attitude as he or she is reading, and the student’s overall belief system about reading is only minimally altered (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995).

**Five Pillars of Reading**

The National Reading Panel (2000) and other research (Cassidy, Valadez, & Garrett, 2010) has validated the five pillars of reading as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Phonemic awareness is simply manipulating sounds without matching the sound to the letter (National Reading Panel, 2000). Reading achievement is enhanced by phonemic awareness (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). Phonemic awareness is also good predictor of reading success. Students who struggle with phonemic awareness are likely to struggle with reading while students who master phonemic awareness are likely to have the strong foundation they need to be successful readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). Studies have failed to show that
phonemic awareness is the direct cause of some students being able to read better than others. For example, learning to read may have increased phonemic awareness, instead of phonemic awareness promoting reading. It is noteworthy to mention that students will be at varying levels of phonemic awareness. Upon entering kindergarten, students are likely to not be reading at all. In first grade there is more of a variety of differences in phonemic awareness between students. Teachers would be well advised to assess their students' phonic awareness abilities. This would indicate what level of instruction of phonemic awareness would benefit each student the most (McCormick & Zutell, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2000). Fortunately, research by Schatschneider, Francis, Foorman, Fletcher, and Mehta (1999) has leveled phonemic awareness tasks from simple to more complex. These tasks are matching pictures that have the same beginning sound, blending the onset and rime of the word, blending the sounds into words, taking out a sound and saying the remaining word, breaking apart words into sounds, and blending sounds of nonsense words. While phonemic awareness is a vital part of a successful reading program, it is only one component.

Another component is phonics. Phonics is often confused with phonemic awareness. The distinction between the two is that phonemic awareness does not include matching sounds to letters as phonics does (National Research Panel, 2000). A similar definition of phonics is the relationship between sounds and letters (Rasinski & Pakak, 2013). Possessing strategies to decode new words is essential in becoming a good reader (McCormick & Zutell, 2015) and students need to be exposed to phonics instruction early in their school career (Beck, 2006). If a student has a repertoire of strategies for word identification, he or she needs less exposure to new words to learn them (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). The concentration of phonics is decoding which is simply giving sounds to letters. First, phonics instruction begins with matching
individual letters to their specific sound. Then students begin to learn the sounds of letter combinations. Once this is accomplished, students begin to learn common rules to spelling words such as the letter e on the end of the word making the vowel long (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). However, Clymer (1996) cautioned against teaching rules for reading words because so many of the words do not follow the rule. One of the most common rules taught to young readers is "when two vowels go walking the first one does the talking." This means that when two vowels are beside each other, the first vowel makes the long sound, and the second vowel doesn't say anything. In his research, Clymer (1996) concluded that there are more than half of the words that do not follow this rule. He also noted that there are numerous words that do not follow the general rules that are often taught in classrooms.

Teaching rules may not be the best way to teach phonics. Rasinski and Padak (2013) examined phonics instruction with beginning letter sound relationships. The beginning letter sounds are called the onset. They can be taught with confidence because of their letter sound relationship consistency. This means that the letters they represent make a certain sound in most words. Phonics which taught using onsets would benefit from teaching with books that have the targeted sounds repeated in words throughout the book.

Once onsets have been taught, students need to be taught how to decode and read the rest of the word (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). The vowel and consonants following the vowel is called the rime. This is usually done through teaching words with short vowel sounds and then teaching words with long vowel sounds. Some research has indicated that vowel sounds should be taught in combination with the consonants that follow them (Gaskins, Ehri, Creso, O'Hara, Donnelly, 1996/1997). Other research has shown that children naturally divide words into onsets and rimes before they even learn how to read (Moustafa, 1995). This approach to teaching phonics is
beneficial in many ways. First, since the rime contains more than one letter, it allows the reader to scrutinize several letters at a time instead of one letter at a time, making decoding more efficacious. The second reason that teaching rimes is beneficial is because rimes consistently make the same sound when they appear in a word. The third way rimes are beneficial is that they are present in all words (Rasinski & Pakak, 2013). In conclusion, studies have demonstrated that teaching onset and rimes are beneficial to beginning learners.

The third component is vocabulary (National Research Panel, 2000). Vocabulary plays an essential role in learning to read. It is often overlooked in many classrooms (Rasinski, Padak, Newton, 2017). When it is incorporated, most of the time it is taught by locating words in the dictionary and writing the definition or through meaningless word lists and quizzes. These methods do not support vocabulary growth. For understanding, the reader must transfer the relatively unknown word from written word to spoken word. If the unknown word is not in the reader's vocabulary, it will not be understood by the reader. Rasinski, Padak, and Newton (2017) echoed those same sentiments about vocabulary. They noted that while content area vocabulary is important for understanding, it is often difficult for students to master because it includes internalizing unknown words for unknown ideas. This restricted understanding of content vocabulary can lead to gaps in student understanding of the text and further hinder future learning.

Similar to this idea, is the notion that students come to school with varying levels of vocabulary (Graves, 1986). If not rectified, the lack of vocabulary will lead to gaps in knowledge. Scholars recommend explicit vocabulary instruction (Lubliner & Smetana, 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000). To prevent these gaps in learning, attention needs to be given to vocabulary as a pre-reading activity (National Reading Panel, 2000). If this is done, there will be
less unknown words that will be encountered during reading. Vocabulary pre-reading activities also help by ensuring that the vocabulary word in print becomes part of the readers’ oral language. Students need to be able to use the new vocabulary in reading, writing, and speaking (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) which can be accomplished by repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Comprehension is another component of a successful reading program. Reading comprehension is a foundational reading skill for the internalization and construction of lexicon (Tarchi, 2017). Students need to be able to gain meaning from the text and recall that information when needed. The reader must have background experiences with the topic, be familiar with the language of the text, and be motivated to read the text so that he or she can gain meaning from what was read (Fisher & Lapp, 2009). Comprehension involves the ability make references from all these areas to build meaning. Furthermore, “comprehension requires the reader to be fluid in putting into action multiple processes, including decoding words and then fluently recognizing their meaning first in sentences and then in increasingly longer text passages” (p. 2).

Likewise, Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) noted that successful readers use a variety of strategies as needed to comprehend a text. One of these strategies is to preview the text and set a purpose for reading. This purpose keeps them focused. Successful readers also make predictions and then validate them as they read. They use context clues to discern vocabulary along with making mental pictures in their minds as they are reading. They ask questions about the text to connect prior information with new information. A successful reader rereads information if understanding is not attained during the first reading. Good readers focus on combining big chunks of information to enhance remembering. Chunking together pieces of information to
better remember the text is similar to a fluent reader chunking the words together while reading instead of reading word by word (Vaughn et al., 2000). This enhances the reader’s ability to read at an appropriate rate. Unfortunately, so many readers find themselves assigned to read a passage from which they cannot that they cannot gain meaning. At this point, the teacher needs to determine which strategies(s) are needed and how best to implement those strategies (Fisher & Lapp, 2009).

A majority of the applicable professional literature concerning comprehension pertains to the upper grades, however, there is some research which includes grades K-2 (Stahl, 2004). Research directed toward younger grades emphasizes background knowledge. A word of caution about background knowledge is that educators need to be aware that students could be relying on inaccurate or irrelevant background information. Educators are responsible for teaching students with limited background knowledge how to make connections with the texts. One effective strategy to help improve background knowledge is through interactive read-alouds. Interactive read-alouds limit the discussion of background knowledge to that which pertains only to the text. This alleviates the irrelevant background knowledge that students may have (Stahl, 2004).

Another comprehension technique that has been proven effective for younger readers is Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) (Stahl, 2004). This procedure consists of making a prediction, reading a section of the text to verify the prediction and making new predictions. This procedure is then repeated throughout the text. The National Reading Panel (2000) has determined that DRTA increases reading achievement because it requires justification and verification of predictions that were made. This continuous interaction with the text allows for
clarification, ongoing participation, and connections between existing knowledge and new information (Gaskins, Anderson, Pressley, Cunicelli, & Satlow, 1993).

A different comprehension strategy is called literature webbing (Stahl, 2004). This comprehension strategy is a prediction technique that consists of putting picture cards of the story in order before the story has been read. After the cards are put in order, the teacher reads the book to the students and then the picture cards are revisited to verify or correct predictions. The students are then given a chance to read the text with the teacher and extension activities are completed. These activities can include making text-to-text connections and writing activities. This method has been proven successful with first graders using narrative texts. A study by Reutzel and Fawson (1991) found that first grade students who used literature webbing read texts more accurately and answered more questions correctly about the passage than the control group. Furthermore, Reutzel and Hollingsworth (1991) noted that students who participated in literature webbing could give more details during a retelling of the text.

Another comprehension strategy which appropriate for younger students is visual imagery (Stahl, 2004). This is making a picture of what is read in one's mind. Visual imagery was utilized in a study of second grade students with low comprehension scores (Center, Freeman, Robertson, & Outhred, 1999). The study began with the students practicing making mental pictures of an object in the room. For the next six days, the teacher discussed how to make mental pictures of a sentence. Over the next five days, students began using what they had learned about visual imagery and generalized it to passages to which they listened. In-depth discussions of the mental images always occurred during the lesson to ensure that students’ mental images were explicitly related to the text. Students who participated in visual imagery
training outperformed the control group on several reading measures including retelling of the story, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension.

Fluency is the final component of the Five Pillars of Reading. Fluent readers do not spend all their cognitive energy on decoding. Accurate decoding itself does not characterize a reader as fluent. Instead, the reader must read accurately and automatically. This still does not define a reader as fluent. The final component to fluency is chunking the text into phrases which can be read with appropriate expression. Reading with appropriate phrasing is an indicator that the reader is gaining meaning from the text (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). Fluency has been described by Young and Rasinski (2009) as the ability to read orally with accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. Accuracy refers to the reader's ability to read text without errors in pronunciation. Automaticity is defined as the reader's ability to read text effortlessly and without errors. When a reader can read with automaticity, he or she can focus on comprehension because all cognitive abilities are not being used to decode words. When students can read with automaticity and accuracy, prosody is soon to follow. Prosody is better known as reading with expression, proper phrasing, and intonation (Farrell, 2015).

Another definition of fluency is "efficient, effective word-recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text” (Pikulski & Chard, 2005, p. 510). Recognizing the words while reading is a necessary premise for one to achieve fluency (Kaskaya, 2016). Fluency has also been described as vital to comprehension and a key component of productive reading (Strecker, Roser, & Martinez, 1998).

This numerous amount of definitions has some commonalities. The foundation of each of these definitions is that fluent readers must be capable of reading quickly or automatically and accurately recognize words. Readers should be capable of reading a text with appropriate
expression and phrasing (prosody) and interpret the text for meaning (comprehension) (Ming & Dukes, 2008). The reading experience is more likely to be relished by a student if fluency is attained (Kaskaya, 2016).

Fluency instruction requires 15-20 minutes daily. In addition to this fluency instruction, students need to have other opportunities each day to practice fluent reading (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). Research has investigated numerous methods of how to help readers become more fluent (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

Fluency can be improved through various activities. Rasinski and Padak (2013) suggested modeling fluency. Most students do not think about what fluent readers do to help the audience understand what they are reading. These students require opportunities to hear fluent reading along with discussing the details of fluent reading. Both of these objectives can be completed through a read-aloud. Even though the student is not reading, it provides a model of what fluent reading sounds like. Other benefits of modeled reading are that it expands students' vocabularies which makes them better at comprehending. Eighty percent of comprehension comes from vocabulary knowledge (Ruetzel & Cooter, 2015). The modeled reader provides an example of how to read with prosody. The students can then model the teacher’s expression and phrasing in their own reading (Rasinski, 2014). At the end of the modeled read aloud, the teacher should briefly discuss how the reader's voice changed to show the emotion of the character (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). The model reader can also read a short passage fluently and then again word by word and discuss which one was most effective in conveying the message of the text. This can also help students become self-aware of whether they are reading fluently.

Researchers have suggested assisted reading (Rasinski & Padak, 2013; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000). This can take on various forms. One form of assisted reading involves a reader reading a
text while simultaneously listening to a fluent model of the text. This can be accomplished by reading a text aloud and having students follow along and read silently. Another form of assisted reading is choral reading which is reading the text together. During choral reading, the text can be read in creative voices to keep students more engaged (Rasinski & Padak, 2013).

Partner reading, also called paired reading, is another form of assisted reading (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). Partner reading is most effective when a struggling reader is paired with a non-struggling reader (Eldridge, 1990). The stronger reader will provide support to the struggling reader along with offering words of encouragement. As one child reads, the other listens and follows along and then the roles are switched. A variation of partner reading consists of the readers reading at the same time.

Another form of assisted reading is listening to a compact disc while reading silently (Rasinski, 2001). This can be integrated into a listening center and easily incorporated into the reading curriculum (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). To add to the enjoyment, students can practice reading a book several times and then record themselves reading a book for which they and others may listen to while at the listening center. Dowhower's (1987) study, which measured the effectiveness of repeated reading and listening while reading silently, found that there were very little differences in reading rate and word recognition between the treatment groups, but listening while reading contributed to greater improvement in phrasing words while reading.

Chomsky (1976) conducted a study with five third grade students. They were the five lowest readers in the class, and their teacher was frustrated with their lack of improvement. Chomsky began by having the students repeatedly listen to a tape while following along. She commented that at first it took a month for most of the students to become fluent with the book they had chosen. Chomsky described how the students would lose their places many times and
start over. As time went on, the students became successful readers of the books in about a week. Along with the students listening to the tape and following along, Chomsky and her graduate assistant worked with the students for about 30 minutes each day. The purpose of these support activities was to transition the students from memorization of the text to concentrating on the phonological aspects of the words within the text. During this time the students would read only the part of the book for which they demonstrated fluency. This session also included word study activities such as breaking unknown words into syllables and writing activities. The benefits of listening while reading along were seen at school and at home. The parents mentioned that their children who had previously disliked reading were now reading more than they ever had. The teachers were also astonished by the student's progress.

Another form of assisted reading is called the Neural Impress Method (NIM) (Heckelman, 1969). In this method, the teacher sits on the student's dominant side. The teacher and child begin reading the text together, but the teacher stays a little ahead of the child while reading with appropriate expression. If the child falls behind, the teacher continues to read fluently, and the child models that fluency as he or she finished the text. Heckelman concluded that the NIM etched the fluent reading from the teacher into the minds of the students. Heckelman reported a mean increase of 1.9 in students' reading levels with the NIM.

A study by Flood, Lapp, and Fisher (2005) corroborated the Neural Impress Method. This study included a comprehension measurement to the Neural Impress Method which the authors called NIM+. NIM was conducted the same except comprehension was assessed at the end of the NIM session. This study included 20 students who were in 3rd-6th grade. The participants were in NIM sessions four days a week for 10 minutes. The authors concluded that NIM was an effective strategy for increased fluency achievement.
Repeated reading is another form of assisted reading. Repeated reading is simply reading the same text repeatedly until a desired level of achievement is reached (Rasinski, 2017). Both of the latter components have proven successful to show gains in reading achievement (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2002).

**Relationship Between Comprehension and Fluency**

Fluent reading is a strong indicator of reading comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). It has been shown that oral reading fluency is a better predictor of comprehension than having success with comprehension strategies such as retelling the story and cloze reading procedures (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001). “Fluency and its relationship with comprehension is the key to proficiency in reading” (Kulich, 2009, p. 26). Fluency is more than just reading fast or with expression (Kuhn, Rasinski, and Zimmerman, 2014). Rather, it is reading with a focus on understanding. Farrell (2015) described the relationship between fluency and comprehension as one fostering the other. Similarly, the relationship between fluency and comprehension has been described as being clearly related (Therrien & Kubina, 2006; Therrien, 2004). Guerin and Murphy (2015) argued that although rate, accuracy, and prosody are important to fluent reading, a successful reading program must give attention to the relationship between fluency and comprehension. Moreover, fluency is the bridge between decoding and comprehension as described by Pikulski and Chard (2005). Thus, to gain comprehension, one must be a fluent reader. Mraz et al. (2013) noted that fluency is a key component that supports reading comprehension, and reading comprehension is the goal of reading.

Pikulski and Chard (2005) argued that if students cannot automatically recognize a word while reading, the cognitive processes will be used for trying to decode the word, and no cognitive processes will be left for comprehension. Fluency is encumbered by lack of word
recognition (Mraz et al, 2013). Readers who spend a small amount of cognitive effort on decoding or word recognition will have more cognitive energy to spend on comprehension (Rasinski & Padak, 2013). Children need to be able to read with automaticity so that there is enough cognitive processes for comprehension. Students cannot spend time decoding every word they encounter while reading and still comprehend what they read. To gain comprehension, one must be a fluent reader (Mraz, 2013). Comprehension is the reason that fluency and decoding are taught (Rasinski & Padak, 2013).

Some researchers (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974; Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005) argued that fluency precedes comprehension. These researchers argued that readers must develop automaticity in word recognition to prevent all cognitive capacities from being spent on decoding. When automaticity in word recognition is achieved, cognitive processes can focus on comprehension. Conversely, others (Dowhower, 1991; Rasinski, 1984; Strecker, Roser, & Martinez, 1998) argued that fluency and comprehension are interwoven. Griffith and Rasinski (2004) suggested that the development of fluency necessitated occasions where students are involved in discerning and engaging discussions of text.

Repeated Reading

Repeated reading is a reading strategy that offers hope for the improvement of reading fluency (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). It is becoming more popular as a way to help students improve fluency (Therrein & Kubina, 2006). According to Therrien (2004) “repeated reading is an evidence based strategy designed to increase fluency and comprehension” (p. 252). Samuels (1979) and others (Therrein & Kubina, 2016) described repeated reading as reading a text over and over until a desired level of achievement was gained. Samuels noted that it helped students develop word identification skills which in turn fostered fluency. The first reading requires most
of the focus to be centered around word recognition. During the second reading, the brain does not have to be focused as much on word recognition and is able to chunk words into meaningful phrases. During the third reading, the reader can read with proper phrasing and expression. (Cunningham & Arlington, 2007). The key to repeated reading is the transfer of learning to a previously unread text (Samuels, 1979). When readers read a text more than once, it is expected that they will show improvement with each additional reading (Rasinski, 2012). Repeated practice improves the reading of the actual text that was practiced. However, the true importance of repeated reading is demonstrated when students read a new text. The learning from the repeated reading of one text partially carries over to the to the new text. Similarly, Therrien (2004) saw a transfer effect as a result of repeated readings in his study of nondisabled students and students with learning disabilities. He saw the greatest transfer effect when the passages were read aloud to an adult rather than to a peer because the adults provided corrective feedback. This generalization from the practiced passage to a new passage is the hope of educators who use repeated readings as part of their reading curriculum (Lo, Cooke, Starling, 2011). This transfer of learning will enhance student reading of unfamiliar text.

Research regarding fluency has demonstrated that various components of fluency are improved with repeated readings. These components are accuracy in word recognition, automaticity, comprehension, and attitude toward reading (Dowhower, 1994; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). The National Reading Panel (2000) conducted an extensive review of the professional literature and submitted the findings to Congress. In these findings, the literature indicated that repeated readings lead to significant improvements in reading for struggling and non-struggling readers. Therrien and Kubina (2006) stated that repeated reading works best with students whose reading capabilities are between a first and third grade instructional level and students who read
above the third grade level but at a laborious pace. Repeated reading is not suggested for kindergarten students because they lack the necessary foundational skills to be successful (Therrien & Kubina, 2016).

Therrien (2004) analyzed five factors that he concluded advantageously impacted the success of repeated reading. The first factor is error correction. Error correction includes a more fluent reader correcting a student when a word is missed. The student is then instructed to reread the sentence saying the missed word correctly. The missed word must be read correctly before reading the rest of the passage (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). Rereading of the text also contributes to developing the reader's prosody (Therrien, 2004).

The second factor is modeling. This includes a fluent reader reading the text while the nonfluent reader listens to the text being read (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). Fluent reading can also include reading together with a more fluent reader. Ardoin, McCall, and Klubnik (2007) conducted a study involving repeated reading with third-graders. The students listened to a model reading from a fluent reader. Then the students did a repeated reading of the same passage, while receiving error correction after reading the passage. The model reading along with error correction fostered improvement in reading fluency on new unread passage.

The third factor is cueing and performance feedback. This consists of reminding the students to read fluently and providing feedback on their performance. In this process students graph how long it took them to read a passage. On each successive reading, the students graph their progress and are encouraged to do better. This notion is supported by Gross et al. (2010) who noted that improvements in academic performance may be a result of setting attainable goals and prompt feedback. Chard, Vaughn, and Tyler (2002) noted the importance of giving feedback on words missed especially for students with a learning disability. These authors also
concluded that repeated reading, along with corrective feedback, was successful in increasing fluency. Therrien and Kubina (2016) also boasted of the value of corrective feedback. They noted that if students omit a word or cannot recognize a word, feedback should be given immediately. In other circumstances, such as mispronouncing a word, feedback should be given when the student has completed the passage but before the student reads it again. In this case, the feedback is telling the student the word and having him or her repeat the word.

The fourth factor that influenced the success of repeated readings is the previewing and practicing of isolated words (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). Selecting words that will be troublesome for students to practice before a repeated reading enhances the likelihood that the student will have an increased reading rate. Several studies have shown the effectiveness of practicing isolated words. For example, one study found that three out of four fourth graders responded more favorably to the treatment which contained modeling, practicing isolated words, and repeated readings than treatments that did not contain practicing of isolated words (Begeny & Silbur, 2006). A similar study by Begeny and Martins (2006) corroborated the advantages of practicing isolated words before repeated readings. The authors concluded that practicing isolated words with adult modeling and corrective feedback was beneficial to increasing fluency through repeated readings.

The fifth factor that influenced the success of repeated readings was the repeated reading material that was chosen (Therrien, 2004). Research in this area seems to be unclear. For example, Clay (1993) demonstrated that using simple texts that were easy for the student to decode was most effective. Other research suggested that the text chosen for the students to practice during repeated reading should be at their instructional or independent level (Meyer & Felton, 1999; Samuels, Ediger, & Patridge, 2005). An instructional level text is a text that a
student can read with 90%-95% word recognition accuracy. The independent text is a text that the child can read at 95% accuracy or higher. Having texts at these levels will advantageously impact students' reading fluency because they do not have to spend all their cognitive processes on decoding. Instead, they can focus on reading with meaning and for meaning (Lo, Cooke, & Starling, 2011). Additional research suggested that the text chosen for repeated reading should be at the child's frustrational level (Young, Rasinski, & Moore, 2015). The authors noted that at this level the child would need strong scaffolding to be successful. Using text at the frustrational level supports Vygotsky's Theory of Zone of Proximal Development. This theory contends that students can be successful with more difficult text when they are given strong support at first and then the student gradually takes on more of the reading with less and less support (Vygotsky, 1978). This allows the student to read texts at the outermost point of their reading capabilities (Young, Rasinski, & Moore, 2015).

**Reader's Theater**

Students are more likely to practice a text over and over if they know they get to perform the reading in front of an audience. Worthy and Prater (2002) concluded that the foundation of Reader's Theatre is repeated reading. Repeated reading is a research-based method used within Reader's Theatre and has been shown to increase fluency (Mraz et al., 2013). Whithear (2011) concluded that “by repeating a reading passage orally, a poor reader not only became faster, more accurate and read with more expression, but began to transfer this reading fluency to previously unread passages more easily than without repeated reading” (p. 22). Samuels (1979) noted that the effects of repeated readings were transferring to new and even more difficult text.

Worthy and Prater (2002) noted that Reader’s Theatre gives students an authentic reason to engage in repeated reading of text. It is important to note that the goal of rehearsal is not
speed reading. It is to convey meaning to the audience through reading with meaningful expression (Rasinski, 2007). Young and Rasinski (2009) recommended integrating Reader's Theatre as part of classroom reading instruction. Likewise, Mraz et al. (2013) concluded that teachers should give Reader's Theatre the utmost consideration because it incorporates numerous methods of fluency that have been proven beneficial. “These include modeling, echo reading, buddy reading, choral reading, and repeated reading” (p. 175). Another teacher who incorporated Reader's Theater expressed his enthusiasm for Reader's Theater by stating that Reader's Theater is a hidden jewel of which all teachers should be aware (Rasinski & Padak, 2013).

Another benefit of Reader’s’ Theatre is that it requires no acting, props, costumes, or scenery. Consequently, readers must use their voice to carry the meaning. The goal of fluency instruction is aimed at improving prosody and meaning (Young & Rasinski, 2009). Young and Rasinski stated, “Reader's Theatre can create an academic avenue that leads to increased reading fluency, regardless of whether students are striving or thriving” (p. 1). Reader's Theatre is beneficial to both struggling and non-struggling readers. Worthy and Prater (2002) stated that even students who are resistant to read, eagerly practice for a Reader's Theatre performance, reading the scripts multiple times.

In their study of second graders’ use of Reader's Theatre, Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1999) found that students doing repeated readings with Reader's Theatre doubled achievement in reading rate when compared to the control group, even though the concentration of the repeated reading was on reading with verbal expression and reading for meaning, not on speed. The treatment group who used Reader’s Theatre also made considerably greater achievement than the control group on an informal reading inventory. The informal reading inventory
measured reading comprehension and fluency. Students in the treatment group, participating in Reader's Theatre, liked to practice their text because they would get to perform it in front of others. A second grade student supported that statement when she wrote, “I never thought I could be a star, but I was the best reader today” (p. 333).

Young and Rasinski (2009) described Reader's Theater as performing a written script that utilizes assisted and repeated reading. The repeated reading and assisted reading promotes word recognition accuracy and automaticity. Through rehearsal, using repeated and assisted reading, the focus was on presenting the script with meaning. Readers must use their voices to convey the meaning of the text to the audience. Prosody and meaning are the goal of fluency instruction using Reader's Theater (Young & Rasinski, 2009).

**Summary**

Reading is a cognitive operation in which readers endeavor to comprehend and react to concepts that are expressed in written text (Mraz et al., 2013). Unfortunately, this is not easy to attain by many students. Teaching students to read continues to be a leading objective of education, yet numerous students have difficulty learning even rudimentary reading skills (Theirren, 2004). Students are expected to progress to the point where they can read easily and instantaneously. When word recognition becomes automatic, there is enough mental capacities to allow for a focus on understanding/comprehending the text. Conversely, when word recognition does not become automatic, it significantly hinders the reader’s ability to comprehend the text (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

When successful readers read aloud, it mirrors their speech. They read with appropriate expression, speed, and chunking of words. The opposite is true of struggling readers. Their
reading is indicative of a slow pace, inadequate word phrasing, and substandard intonation patterns (Dowhower, 1989). With these struggling students in mind, teachers provide systematic phonics instruction, which allows these students to become well-versed in decoding, but they often fail to reach the point of becoming fluent enough to be successful readers (Allington, 1983). Since fluency is defined as the means to comprehension, teachers must employ strategies which take the reader from decoding to fluency (Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnson, 2009).

Reader’s Theater is a strategy that employs repeated reading. Repeated readings have been found to increase fluency and comprehension (Dowhower, 1989; Samuels, 1997). It is often described as a pleasant way to genuinely engross readers in repeated readings (Mraz et al. 2013). Teachers should implement Reader's Theater as part of a balanced reading program because fluency scholars have found Reader's Theater to be an appropriate way of increasing fluency and comprehension achievement (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998; Yound & Rasinski, 2009).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used to determine if the instructional approach of Reader’s Theater had a statistically significant effect on students’ fluency, comprehension, and attitude toward reading. A quantitative inquiry was used as the methodology for this study. The characteristics of quantitative research include the gathering of data for testing a hypothesis and interpreting outcomes (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The research questions are reviewed. Then a description of the population, sample, instruments, research procedure and time period of study, along with a description of how data were analyzed, is described.

Research Questions

1. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading fluency among students with varying reading levels?

2. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading comprehension among students with varying reading levels?

3. What is the impact of Reader’s Theater on the attitudes toward reading among students with varying reading level?

Population/Sample

This research was conducted in a small, rural elementary school in southeast Tennessee. The school contained approximately 300 students in grades K-5. The participants were selected
by convenience sampling. They were from two of the three first grade classes. The treatment group received Readers’ Theater while the control group received regular reading instruction. The selection of the control group was determined by matching the students’ reading levels. The control group consisted of 13 first grade students. The treatment group consisted of 13 students, a teacher, and an instructional assistant.

The instructional assistant in the treatment group remained in the classroom the length of the school day to assist with Reader’s Theater. The assistant in the control group remained in the classroom from the beginning of class until lunch. The assistant in the treatment group remained at school to help students practice their parts for Reader’s Theater. This gave the students in the treatment group extra support. The students in the control group did not have that extra support. This extra support helped scaffold student learning.

**Description of the Instruments**

“The ability to measure students’ level of achievement in fluency and monitor their progress is key to successful fluency teaching” (Rasinski, 2004, p. 4). Educators need to be able to measure the efficacy of their instruction in fluency. To effectively accomplish this, they need avenues to evaluate student fluency (Rasinski, 2004). These avenues are discussed below.

The Multidimensional Fluency Scale was used because it is public domain and is widely used by educators. It assesses varying measures of fluency. These measures are “dimensions of expression and volume, phrasing, and smoothness” (Rasinski, 2004b, p. 19). The assessment of multiple dimensions allows teachers to focus on each dimension individually and obtain a clearer picture of fluency proficiency (Rasinski, 2004b). The passages to be assessed by the Multidimensional Fluency Scale were on first grade level.
Research Procedures

Permission was obtained from the school district to proceed with the study. Parental consent was given for the participants. Initial data was collected. Then, the experimental group received treatment for the following four weeks, while the control group continued with the normal reading curriculum. The reading curriculum used was *Reading Street* which was developed by Scott Foresman. It was mainly used for guided reading to teach comprehension and vocabulary. *Reading Street* was supplemented with the *Wilson Fundations Program*, developed by Wilson Reading Program, which teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, high frequency words, handwriting, and spelling.

The scripts were chosen to coincide with the comprehension strategy from the basal readers, *Reading Street*, adopted by the school system. The weekly schedule for the treatment group follows. On day one, the objective was to acquaint the students with the Reader’s Theater script and the comprehension strategy for the week. The teacher model read the entire script taking on the persona of each character as the students followed along. Then, the comprehension strategy was discussed. On day two, the teacher assigned roles based on the students’ reading levels and interest. The students then practiced their part several times as the teacher and instructional assistant moved throughout the room listening and providing guidance when needed. The objective for day three was to help students who had word recognition problems. To rectify this problem, the teacher read the script with appropriate prosody while the student read along with the teacher who served the role as the more expert reader. The teacher kept a fluent pace even if the student fell behind. This was done until the student could read the script without help. This method is called the Neural Impress Method (NIM) (Heckelman, 1969; Hollingsworth, 1978). While these students were given assistance, the other students were
practicing their role with a partner. On day four, the students practiced performing on stage with microphones. Day five was the day to perform for other classes in the school (Chase & Young, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

The aim of the study was to assess the impact of Reader’s Theater on the fluency, comprehension, and attitudes among first grade students. Fluency was grouped into four components. The reading rate component of fluency was analyzed by the independent t-test. Comprehension scores were also analyzed using an independent t-test. The independent t-test was used to determine whether the differences that occurred, if any, were due to random chance or if the mean achievement scores were statistically significant despite the small sample size of participants in the control and treatment group.

The Mann-Whitney U was used to analyze the remaining scores (expression and volume, smoothness, and phrasing) on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Rasinski, 2010) and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). The Mann-Whitney U test was chosen because both sets of data were ordinal, and the samples were independent. The independent samples in this study were the participants in the treatment groups and the participants in the control group. The same participants were not in both groups.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Reader’s Theater on comprehension, fluency, and reading attitude among students with varying levels of reading abilities. Previous research has shown that Reader’s Theater is beneficial to struggling readers (Ming and Dukes, 2008; Rasinski, 2014; Rasinski, Homan, & Biggs, 2008). This study focused on the effect of Reader’s Theater among a classroom of students with varying reading abilities.

The independent variable in this study was Reader’s Theater. The dependent variables were fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude. The participants of this study were 26 first grade students in a rural elementary school in Tennessee. The treatment group consisted of 13 first graders. The control group consisted of 13 students. The treatment group received four weeks of an intervention called Reader’s Theater. The control group did not receive Reader’s Theater. Instead, they received reading instruction through basal readers. The basal readers were called Reading Street and were developed by Scott Foresman.

Reader’s Theater, which was the intervention in this study, is not a play. There is no acting. Participants of Reader’s Theater must use their voice to give meaning to the text (Rasinski, 2010). It was hypothesized that Reader’s Theater would improve reading fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude in all students, not just struggling students. The following research questions guided this study.

1. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading fluency among
students at varying reading levels?

*Null Hypothesis* 1, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in fluency as measured by The Multidimensional Fluency Scale.

2. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading comprehension among students at varying reading levels?

*Null hypothesis* 2, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in comprehension as measured by STAR.

3. What is the impact of Reader’s Theater on the attitudes toward reading among students at varying reading levels?

*Null Hypothesis* 3, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in reading attitude as measured by Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

Four types of data were analyzed for the control and treatment groups. The first type of data were from fluency scores. Fluency was grouped into four parts and each was analyzed separately and then an overall fluency score was given. The first component of fluency was reading rate. To assess reading rate, students were timed for one minute while reading three AIMSWEB passages on a first-grade reading level. The median score was analyzed using an independent t-test. The purpose for using the independent t-test was to determine if there was a meaningful difference in reading rate gains made between the treatment group and control group.

An independent t-test analyzed the difference in gains in reading rate between the treatment group and control group. The treatment group (*N* = 13) was associated with a mean score of *M* = 13.69 (*SD* = 7.158). By comparison, the control group (*N* = 13) was associated
with a numerically smaller mean score of $M = 10.92$ ($SD = 7.69$). To test the hypothesis that the treatment group would have higher gains than the control group, an independent samples t-test was performed. Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s $F$ test, $F(24) = .160, p = .693$. The independent samples t-test was not associated with a statistically significantly larger mean between the treatment group and control group for reading rate, $t(24) = 0.950, p = .352$, alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The results are listed in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1

*Mean Gains Between Treatment Group and Control Group Reading Rate Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>13.69</td>
<td>10.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second data that were analyzed were the remaining components of fluency which are expression and volume, phrasing, and smoothness. These components were measured by the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Rasinski, 2010) and analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U Test. Histograms showed that the population distribution was not similar between the treatment and control group. See Figure 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U test was run using rank means to determine if there were differences in the mean gains made between the two groups in expression and volume. The expression and volume scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 15.58) and control group (mean rank = 11.42) was not statistically significantly
different; U = 57.5, z = -1.882, p = .06, alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was not a statistically significant difference in expression and volume while reading between the treatment and control group. Thus, participants in the reading group did not read with more expression and volume than participants in the control group. These results are provided in table 4.2.

Figure 4.1

*Histogram for Treatment Group Volume/Expression*
Figure 4.2

Histogram for Treatment Group Volume/Expression

![Histogram](Image)

Table 4.2

Mean Rank Scores Between Treatment and Control Group in Expression/Volume

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>15.58</td>
<td>11.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-score</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail (Asymp.)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next part of fluency was phrasing. A histogram determined that the population distribution samples of the treatment group and control group were not similar. See figures 4.3 and 4.4, respectively. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test used mean ranks to determine if there were differences in phrasing of words while reading between the two groups. The phrasing scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 14.92) and the control group (mean rank = 12.08) were not statistically different; U = 66, z = -1.132, p = 0.257, and alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The treatment group did not read with better phrasing than the control group. These results were listed in table 4.3.
Figure 4.3

Histogram for Treatment Group Phrasing

Histogram

Mean = .46
Std. Dev. = .66
N = 13
Figure 4.4

*Histogram for Control Group Phrasing*

![Histogram](image)

Table 4.3

*Mean Rank Scores Between Treatment and Control Group in Phrasing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>14.91</td>
<td>12.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-score</td>
<td>-1.132</td>
<td>-1.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail (Asymp.)</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next part of fluency on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale was smoothness. A histogram of the treatment and control group determined that the population distribution samples were not similar. See figures 4.5 and 4.6, respectively. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test used mean ranks to determine if there were differences in reading smoothness between the two groups. The phrasing scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 14.42) and the control group (mean rank = 12.58) were not statistically different; U= 66, z = -1.132, p = 0.403, and alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The treatment group did not read smoother than the control group. These results were listed in table 4.4.
Figure 4.5

Histogram of Smoothness Treatment Group

Mean = .38
Std. Dev. = .65
N = 13
Figure 4.6

*Histogram of Smoothness Control Group*

![Histogram of Smoothness Control Group](image)

Table 4.4

*Mean Rank Scores Between Treatment and Control Group in Smoothness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>12.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-score</td>
<td>-0.836</td>
<td>-0.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail (Asymp.)</td>
<td>0.403</td>
<td>0.403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overall scores on the Multidimensional Scale for fluency were also analyzed to answer research question 1. A histogram of the treatment and control group determined that the population distribution samples were not similar. See figures 4.7 and 4.8, respectively. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test used mean ranks to determine if there were differences in overall fluency between the two groups. The overall scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 16.54) and the control group (mean rank = 10.46) were statistically different; \( U = 45, z = -2.112, p = 0.034, \) and alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The treatment group did read with better overall fluency than the control group. These results were listed in table 4.5.
Figure 4.7

*Histogram of Treatment Group Overall Fluency*

- **Mean**: 1.77
- **Std. Dev.**: 1.481
- **N**: 13
Figure 4.8

Histogram of Overall Fluency Control Group

Table 4.5

Mean Rank Scores Between Treatment and Control Group in Overall Fluency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>16.54</td>
<td>10.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-score</td>
<td>-2.112</td>
<td>-2.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail (Asymp.)</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third type of data were comprehension scores from STAR. This data was analyzed to answer research question number 2. An independent t-test analyzed the difference in gains in comprehension between the treatment group and control group. The treatment group ($N = 13$) was associated with a mean score of $M = 34.46$ ($SD = 38.36$). By comparison, the control group ($N = 13$) was associated with a numerically smaller mean score of $M = 32.54$ ($SD = 48.34$). To test the hypothesis that the treatment group would have higher gains than the control group, an independent samples t-test was performed. Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene’s $F$ test, $F(24) = .671, p = .421$. The independent samples t-test was not associated with a statistically significantly larger mean between the treatment group and control group for comprehension, $t(24) = 0.112, p = .911$, alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. These results were reported in table 4.6.

Table 4.6

*Mean Gains Between Treatment Group and Control Group Comprehension Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t-Test: Independent Two Sample for difference in Means</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>34.46</td>
<td>32.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>38.86</td>
<td>48.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>13.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth type of data were the results of the reading attitude survey. The data from the reading survey was analyzed to answer research question number 3. A histogram of the treatment and control group determined that the population distribution samples were not similar. See figures 4.9 and 4.10, respectively. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test used mean ranks to
determine if there were differences in reading attitude between the two groups. The reading attitude scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 15.81) and the control group (mean rank = 11.19) were not statistically different; U = 54.5, z = -1.540, p = 0.124, and alpha = .05. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The treatment group did not have a better attitude than the control group. These results were listed in table 4.6.

Figure 4.9

Histogram of Reading Attitude for Treatment Group
Figure 4.10

Histogram of Reading Attitude for Control Group
Table 4.6

Mean Rank Scores Between Treatment and Control Group in Reading Attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>15.81</td>
<td>11.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z-score</td>
<td>-1.540</td>
<td>-1.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P value</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical two-tail (Asymp.)</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Reader’s Theater on comprehension, fluency, and reading attitude among students with varying levels of reading abilities. Participants were assessed according to gains comparing the treatment group to the control group. A Mann-Whitney U was used to analyze reading attitude and three of four components of fluency (expression and volume, smoothness, and phrasing). The other component of fluency (reading rate) and comprehension scores were analyzed using an independent t-test.

Data were collected on each of the three dependent variables; comprehension, fluency, and reading attitude. Significance or non-significance was determined through the use of parametric (independent t-test) and non-parametric (Mann-Whitney) statistical analysis. The independent t-test was used to analyze the means of both the comprehension scores and the rate component of fluency because both of these measures were at the ratio level. The Mann-Whitney U was used to compare the means of the remaining three components of fluency
(expression and volume, phrasing, and smoothness) as well as reading attitude because they were both ordinal data.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows.

1. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading fluency among students at varying reading levels?

   *Null Hypothesis* 1, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in fluency as measured by The Multidimensional Fluency Scale.

2. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading comprehension among students at varying reading levels?

   *Null hypothesis* 2, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in comprehension as measured by STAR.

3. What is the impact of Reader’s Theater on the attitudes toward reading among students at varying reading levels?

   *Null Hypothesis* 3, Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in reading attitude as measured by Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

To answer question one, Mann-Whitney U were used to determine if there was a difference in the mean of the treatment and control group. The results determined that the null hypothesis should be rejected; meaning that there was enough evidence to conclude that Reader’s Theater had a significant impact on the participant’s fluency than regular reading instruction.
To answer question number two, independent t-test results were used to determine if there was a difference in the means from treatment group to control group. The results determined that there was not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis; meaning that there was not enough evidence to conclude that Reader’s Theater had a greater impact on participant’s comprehension than regular reading instruction.

To answer question number three, Mann-Whitney U results were used to determine if there was a difference in the mean of the treatment and control group. The results determined that there was not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis; meaning that there was not enough evidence to conclude that Reader’s Theater had a greater impact on reading attitude than regular reading instruction.
Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Educators and researchers have divulged the need for more explicit instruction in reading fluency. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that fluency is a profound struggle for many students. They noted that a numerous amount of studies supported the idea of repeated readings. They also noted that repeated readings advantageously effect students reading abilities up to the fifth grade and highly recommend that educators implement fluency practices into their curriculum.

Research has indicated that reading fluency is linked to reading comprehension. Although the link between the two is not completely understood, researchers agree that there is a definite relationship between them. Pikulski and Chard (2005) concluded that fluency is the bridge between decoding and comprehension. Fluency is more than just reading fast or with expression (Kuhn, Rasinski, and Zimmerman, 2014). Rather, it is reading with a focus on understanding. Farrell (2015) described the relationship between fluency and comprehension as one fostering the other. Similarly, the relationship between fluency and comprehension has been described as being clearly related (Therrien & Kubina, 2006; Therrien, 2004).

Fluency and comprehension are components of reading that can be influenced by reading attitude. Walberg and Tsai (1995) linked reading attitude to reading achievement. Over 20 years later, research still supports that children’s attitudes toward reading are indicative of their performance (Fives, 2016). McKenna, Kear, & Ellesworth (1995) demonstrated that readers with negative attitudes need a multitude of positive experiences while reading to have a profound
impact on their reading attitude. These researchers also concluded that students with positive reading attitudes are often more likely to choose another activity over reading.

This study focused on assessing the impact of Reader’s Theater on fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude among students with varying reading abilities. It examined the differences between the treatment and control group data. The level of significance, if any, was given for the following dependent variables: fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude. The research questions that guided this study were as follows.

1. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading fluency among students at varying reading levels?

*Null Hypothesis 1,* Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in fluency as measured by The Multidimensional Fluency Scale.

2. What effect does participation in Reader’s Theater have on reading comprehension among students at varying reading levels?

*Null Hypothesis 2,* Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in comprehension as measured by STAR.

3. What is the impact of Reader’s Theater on the attitudes toward reading among students at varying reading levels?

*Null Hypothesis 3,* Ho: Reader’s Theater will have no statistically significant difference in reading attitude as measured by Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.
Summary

This study was conducted in a small school in southeast Tennessee. The population of the school is approximately 300 students in grades k-5. The population sample for this study was 26 first graders. Thirteen were in the treatment group and 13 were in the control group. The treatment group received 4 weeks of Reader’s Theater. The control group received regular reading instruction through the county adopted basal series. Pre-test were given for each dependent variable (fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude) prior to the intervention of Reader’s Theater. The results were recorded. Post-test were given 4 weeks later, after the intervention of Reader’s Theater was implemented to the treatment group. During those 4 weeks, the control group continued with regular reading instruction. Statistical analysis was performed for each dependent variable to determine if there was a significant difference in the mean gains between the treatment group and control group. Matching students in the treatment group with students in the control group allowed groups to be similar in reading achievement.

The first goal of this quasi-experimental study was to assess the impact of repeated readings through the implementation of Reader’s Theater on fluency among first grade students by determining if there was a difference in the means between the treatment and control groups. Fluency was grouped into four components. An independent t-test was used to determine if the fluency component of rate was statistically significant. The other components of fluency (expression and volume, smoothness, and phrasing) were analyzed using Mann-Whitney U test. The results showed that there were no differences in the individual components of fluency, however, when expression/volume, smoothness, phrasing scores were combined, there was a statistically significant difference in the treatment group over the control group. Whereas, the rate component of fluency showed no difference from the control group.
The second goal of this quasi-experimental study was to assess the impact of repeated readings through the implementation of Reader’s Theater on comprehension among first grade students by determining if there was a difference in the means between the treatment and control groups. An independent t-test was used to analyze any differences between the two groups. The results showed that there was no difference in comprehension from the control group.

The third goal of this quasi-experimental study was to assess the impact of repeated readings through the implementation of Reader’s Theater on reading attitude among first grade students by determining if there was a difference in the median between the treatment and control groups. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze any differences between the two groups. The results showed that there was no difference between the treatment and control group in reading attitude.

Discussion and Implications of Results

In partial reference to research question 1, the independent t-test showed that the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no difference in reading rate, was accepted. The treatment group \( N = 13 \) was associated with a mean score of \( M = 13.69 \) \( (SD = 7.158) \). By comparison, the control group \( N = 13 \) was associated with a numerically smaller mean score of \( M = 10.92 \) \( (SD = 7.69) \).

Although the means were not statistically significant, these gains were made in a mere 4 weeks. According to Hasbrouck-Tindal Oral Reading Fluency Norms (2005) above average students in the first grade should be averaging a 1.9-2.2 increase in words per minute each week. The above average students in the treatment group in this study averaged an increase of 4.7 in
words per minute each week. The above average students in the control group averaged an increase of 4.1 words per minute each week.

The fluency norms expected for the average group was an increase of 1.9 words per minute in a week. The treatment group in this study was identical to the expected growth of 1.9. The control group growth rate was 1.8.

The fluency norms expected for the below average students was an increase of 0.6-1.0 words per minute each week. The below average group in treatment group averaged 2.05. The below average group in the control group averaged 1.8. That led to an overall increase of words per minute in a week for the treatment group of 3.42 and an overall increase in words per minute in a week for the control group of 2.73.

Increasing reading rate was not the main goal of Reader’s Theater, however the results of this study showed that reading rate did increase at a higher rate than the control group among students with varying reading abilities. This gives support to the idea that Reader’s Theater is beneficial for all readers with regard to increasing reading rate. This finding also implies that Reader’s Theater is an authentic and enjoyable way to make gains in reading rate without emphasizing speed reading. Conversely, the control group, which engaged in one-minute timed readings pursuant to increase reading rate, had less of an increase in gains overall than the treatment group. This certainly warrants educator’s attention to focus on more authentic ways to increase reading rate among their students.

In pursuance of answering the remaining portion of question 1, a Mann-Whitney U test showed that the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no difference in volume/expression, phrasing, and smoothness while reading, was rejected. The overall scores for the treatment
group (mean rank = 16.54) and the control group (mean rank = 10.46) were statistically different; U = 45, z = -2.112, p = 0.034, and alpha = .05. Like the reading rate, this difference was made in only 4 weeks.

These results warrant attention to educators who are looking for ways to increase prosodic reading in their students. During Reader’s Theater, students in the treatment group were encouraged to take on the role of their character. This meant that they would convey the meaning of the text with their voices. Students practiced prosodic elements during the week and conveyed the meaning of the text to the audience through their voices. Reader’s Theater, by definition, does not require any props or scenery in preparation for the performance. In furtherance of the audience understanding the meaning of the script, readers must read with the prosodic elements of fluency that they have practiced during the week. These elements include expression/volume, phrasing, and smoothness.

Research question 2 was analyzed by an independent t-test. The independent t-test showed that the null hypothesis, which stated there was no difference between the treatment and control group in comprehension, was accepted. The treatment group (N = 13) was associated with a mean score of $M = 34.46$ ($SD = 38.36$). By comparison, the control group (N = 13) was associated with a numerically smaller mean score of $M = 32.54$ ($SD = 48.34$).

The Theory of Automaticity helps explain these results. This theory (Samuels, Ediger, & Patridge, 2005) states that as a person practices reading a text, he or she will become automatic in his or her decoding abilities which allows cognitive processes to be directed toward giving meaning to the text. Although, students practiced throughout the week, below average students had difficulty with word recognition that could not be rectified in a 15-minute period over 5 days. The Neural Impress Method was utilized in an attempt to compensate for this group of
students’ deficiencies in word recognition. However, because some students were reading at a pre-primer level, the Neural Impress Method was not successful in rectification of word recognition problems. The Neural Impress Method is a form of assisted reading (Heckelman, 1969). In this method, the teacher sits on the student's dominant side. The teacher and child begin reading the text together, but the teacher stays a little ahead of the child while reading with appropriate expression. If the child falls behind, the teacher continues to read fluently, and the child models that fluency as he or she finishes the text. Given this lack of word recognition gains, students were not able to free up cognitive processes to focus on comprehension. Hence, all of their cognitive processes were focused on decoding the word.

Another theory that could explain why there was no significant difference in comprehension between the treatment and control group is Vygotsky’s (1978) “zone of proximal development.” This is described as the gap between what a child can successfully achieve alone versus what he or she can achieve with support (Young, Moore, & Rasinski, 2015). Teachers should instruct students within their zone of proximal development for optimal development.

Closely linked to the zone of proximal development is the concept of scaffolding (Fernández, Wegerif, Mercer, & Drummond, 2015). Scaffolding allows the students, over time, to complete the task by themselves. Educators need to be careful not to give students tasks that are too challenging. Students will not be able to complete them on their own, even with scaffolding, because they are being taught outside of their zone of proximal development. Thus, even though students were supported through the Neural Impress Method, they were expected to read at a level that was outside of their zone of proximal development. Therefore, optimal development was not attained.
Research question 3 was analyzed by Mann-Whitney U Test. Mann-Whitney U showed that the null hypotheses, which stated there was no difference in the reading attitude between the treatment and control group, was accepted. The reading attitude scores for the treatment group (mean rank = 15.81) and the control group (mean rank = 11.19) were not statistically different; U= 54.5, z = -1.540, p = 0.124, and alpha = .05.

The research of McKenna, Kear, Ellsworth (1995) stated that younger students generally have a positive attitude about reading; with the most positive reading attitudes in the beginning years of school. This positive attitude impacts the younger students’ ambition and motivation to read. Given that students in this study are in the first grade, they are experiencing the excitement and enjoyment of being able to open a book and read the words instead of only looking at the pictures. This excitement leads to a positive reading attitude. The treatment group and the control group were both experiencing this positive attitude in their classrooms. Students at this level often receive positive feedback about their reading abilities from teachers and parents. This positive feedback advantageously impacted the students’ reading attitudes in both groups.

The determining factor on reading attitude between participants in the treatment group and control group were the positive comments from the treatment group about Reader’s Theater. One student said, “This is fun. I’m a good reader.” Another student said, “Can we do it again.” Another student asked, “When do we get to do Reader’s Theater?” These positive comments from participants in the treatment group should not be ignored. Nor should the countless comments of the administration and other teachers at the school. Reader’s Theater should be given the utmost consideration from educators as a means of improving reading attitudes of students as they progress through school.
Recommendations

One goal of this study was to investigate if repeated reading through Reader’s Theater would improve a student’s reading attitude. Continuing research should also focus on how a student’s reading attitude impacts his or her reading achievement during repeated readings. For example, would a poor reading attitude lead to less reading success during Reader’s Theater? Conversely, would a positive reading attitude lead to more reading success during Reader’s Theater? McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth (1995) theorized that as children experience more success with reading, their attitude toward reading becomes more positive and more gains are made in reading achievement. However, they also noted that students who dislike reading will likely hold on to those feelings unless they have numerous successful experiences while reading. Therefore, other research should focus on the correlation of reading attitude and Reader’s Theater.

Other research in this area could extend to larger populations including not only rural, but suburban, and urban schools as well. This would increase the generalizability of this study; meaning that the results could then been generalized across all three of these types of school districts. Having a larger population would also allow the researcher to aggregate the data into reading levels and determine the benefits of repeated reading for each reading level.

Discernibly, there is an urgency for longitudinal research to investigate the impact of repeated readings at different points throughout the school year. During this longitudinal study data should be recorded during the treatment instead of only at the end. This would help researchers and educators better understand how the components of fluency are developed. Which would allow educators to discern the sequence of student development regarding the components of fluency.
Other research could focus on the role of academic feedback during repeated reading; concentrating on the degree and timing of the feedback. This would help determine the type of feedback educators should give their students when engaging in repeated reading. It would advantageously benefit educators in knowing when to give feedback and what type of feedback to give the students during repeated reading.

Conclusions

This study investigated the impact of repeated reading, via Reader’s Theater, on fluency, comprehension, and reading attitude. Fluency was grouped into four components; rate, expression/volume, smoothness, and phrasing. Although, the results demonstrated that the individual components of fluency were not statistically different from the control group, the overall fluency scores demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference in all components of fluency, except rate, when grouped together. Comprehension scores and reading attitude scores were not significantly different than the control group.
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