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Effect of Repeated Reading on the Reading Ability of Children with Reading Difficulties

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Abstract

Utilising the quasi-experimental research design, the study investigated the effect of repeated reading on the reading ability of children with reading difficulties. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 22 Basic Three children for the study. The experimental group comprised 12 children while the control group had 10. Running record was used for the data collection. The study revealed that Repeated Reading (RR) is an effective and significant approach that can be used to improve children's reading abilities. There was a statistically significant difference in the scores of children in the experimental group and children in the control group. The study recommended that school heads, administrators and teachers should make a conscious effort to screen pupils in primary three to ascertain their reading abilities. Ministry of Education (MOE) in collaboration with school heads should provide in-service training for teachers to enable them acquire the requisite skills and strategies to teach pupils who face reading challenges.

Key words: repeated reading, reading ability, reading difficulties.

Introduction

Difficulty with reading is the most common characteristic of children with learning disabilities (Heward, 2009). It is estimated that 90% of all children identified as learning disabled are referred for special education services because of reading problems (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Even, some children with high cognitive abilities in

general education have reading difficulties; they comprise 10% of school children (Lyon, 1995; Shaywitz, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Grifftin, 1998). These children with reading difficulties with or without additional learning difficulties have problems with poor phonological processing (Snowling, 2000). Additionally, they have difficulty decoding alphabets and relating visual symbols to basic speech sounds (Snowling, 2000).

Children's academic achievement is dependent on their ability to read. Therefore, if they have problems in reading, they will face challenges in their academic achievement (Hitchock, Prater & Doworick, 2004; Osborn, et al., 2007). This presupposes that academic success is dependent on the individual's ability to read. Thus, if children do not learn to read and understand it will create serious conditions that may lead to academic challenges in life (Lyon, 2003).

Literature Review

Repeated Reading (RR) involves having children re-read a short passage until a suitable reading fluency level is met (Begeny, Krouse, Ross, & Mitchell, 2009). RR strategy can be traced to Samuels (1979). Samuels' research has greatly impacted the field of reading strategies that focus on guided practice and repetition. RR has been used with regular and children with special education needs (Morisoli, 2010). Ruskey (2011) reported that researchers have demonstrated the positive results of this method. Morisoli (2010) investigated the effects of RR on the fluency of diverse secondary English language learners (ELLs) with a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading. A multiple baseline reversal design across subjects was used to explore the effects of RR on two dependent variables: fluency (words read correctly per minute; wpm) and number of errors per minute (epm). Data were collected and analysed during baseline, intervention, and maintenance probes. In his intervention period, reading was followed by three oral RRs of a passage in duration of three weeks. Morisoli concluded that RR had a positive effect on the reading abilities of ELLs with a SLD in reading. Participants read more wpm and made fewer epm. Also, her study demonstrated that RR improved the reading abilities of ELLs with a SLD in reading.

Additionally, Bouguebs (2007) conducted an experimental research on the effects of RR on reading fluency. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the components of reading fluency (reading

speed and word accuracy) on learners' reading fluency using RR. The study was carried out at the Teacher Training School of Constantine with 16 second year students. Participants were selected from the English Department, and were randomly assigned to two groups (experimental group and control group). Her participants were, first, pre-tested through Curriculum Based Measurement Test to know their reading fluency scores prior to the beginning of the experiment.

At the end of the experiment, post-test was conducted via the same test used in the pre-test. Results from the pre-test and post-test were given in mean scores. The findings suggested that the results of students in the experimental group were significantly better than those in the control group. It was therefore concluded that the students who were taught with the RR method improved their reading fluency as indicated by the increase of the total number of words read correctly per minute.

Lastly, Ruskey (2011) conducted a study using a small group of students who met with the researcher for 30 minutes each day for four weeks receiving fluency instruction and reading poetry aloud. The findings of the study indicated that fluency instruction and practice using RR is a successful strategy and should be included in elementary school classrooms. The findings indicate the benefits of RR in various settings. This study was conducted to ascertain the effects of RR on the reading ability of children with reading difficulties.

Participants who were involved in RR in other geographical context showed significant improvement in their fluency (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davisand & Kouzekanani, 2003). In Ghana, it appears that there had not been any reported study to support the finding that RR has significant influence on reading fluency. Also, Ghana has unique cultural settings and English is the second medium of instruction from primary one to three. Could such gains be established among pupils in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis in the Western Region of Ghana? Would there be a difference in the reading ability between pupils with reading difficulties who are taught using the RR method and those who are not? Therefore, this study was conducted to ascertain the effects of RR on the reading ability of pupils with reading difficulties.

Hypothesis

There will be significant difference in the mean scores of reading ability between children with reading difficulties who are taught using the RR method (experimental group) and those who are not taught with the RR method (control group).

Methodology

Research Design

Quasi-experimental designs are similar to true experiments, but they lack random assignment to experimental and control groups. Quasi experiments give the experimental purists a queasy feeling as they require a pretest and posttest for a treated and comparison group that is similar to a control group except assignment to the comparison group is not determined by random assignment. The non-equivalent comparison group design was adopted for the study. The design looks a lot like the classic experimental design, except it does not use random assignment. In many cases, these groups may already exist (Trochim, 2020; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). In this study, the experimental and control groups comprised children with reading difficulty. One of the groups received the intervention and the other did not. No one was assigned to treatment or comparison groups. Those groupings existed prior to the study. While this method is more convenient for real-world research, it is less likely that the groups are comparable than if they had been determined by random assignment. Perhaps the treatment group has a characteristic that is unique–for example, higher income or different diagnoses–that make the treatment more effective.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population comprised 63 grade 3 pupils selected from two public schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis in the Western Region of Ghana. Purposive sampling was used to select 22 participants for the study while simple random sampling was used to select the two schools. The purposive sampling technique was used as it enabled the researchers to select participants who read at the same reading level, were in the same class and were within the same age range and therefore had similar characteristics, as suggested by Bryman (2012). The participants from the two schools were randomly assigned to either the control or the experimental groups. The experimental group

had 12 pupils and the control group had 10 pupils with reading difficulties in primary three, hence the variation in the sample size as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Group of Participants

Participants	Frequency	Percentages
Experimental Group	12	55.5
Control Group	10	45.5
Total	22	100.0

Research Instrument

Running Record was adapted as the sole instrument used to test the children's reading ability. Running Record is an informal reading assessment tool developed by Marie Clay in 2002. It is a tool for decoding, scoring and analysing children's precise reading behaviours (Fountas & Pinnell, 2005). According to Spinelli (2012), Running Record involves the teacher 'keeping a "running record" of students' oral reading by closely monitoring and recording their errors while they read (p. 212). Spinelli (2012) describes the procedures for constructing and administering the running record as follows:

Substitution (S): The teacher writes the error on top of the line while the correct word from the text is written below (each incorrect response is counted as one error)

Multiple attempts, or repetitions (R): When the child attempts to read a word several times, each attempt is recorded (errors are recorded as many times as the child makes the error, for instance, if the child attempts to mention the word and makes 10 errors in the attempts, all the errors will be counted).

Self-correction (SC): If a child reads a word wrongly and corrects the word himself/herself, the teacher marks it SC (not counted as an error).

No response or omission: If the child gives no response or omits a word, the teacher records with a dash (counted as one error).

Insertion: When child inserts a word on his or her own, the teacher records with a dash (counted as one error).

Word told (T): The child stops because he or she finds out that a word is being pronounced wrongly or does not know the word; the teacher provides the word and records it as T (counted as one error).

Appeal for help (A): When the child asks for help, the evaluator marks with an A and tells the student to try it (counted as one error). Only the second attempt is scored. If the student gets the word correct the second time, there is no error.

Repeated errors: The child makes an error and continues to substitute the word again and again (counts as one error each time). Exception: When a proper name is substituted, it is counted as an error only the first time it is substituted.

Words or phrases repeated: When the child accurately reads a word or phrase more than one time, no errors are counted.

Pilot testing of research instrument

The instrument was pilot-tested in one public school in the Cape Coast Metropolis and a reliability coefficient of .79 was obtained. To establish the content validity of the instrument, it was critically analysed by three subject matter experts in the field of special education, as suggested by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) in order to meet the expert judgment requirement. The pilot test provided sufficient evidence that some pupils in the metropolis had reading difficulties. Based on the pilot testing, there was the need to refine the construction and administering of the Running Record to suit the study. Therefore, the following miscues and scoring procedures were used for the actual reading assessment:

Self-pronounced word – mark the top of the word pronounced correctly

Misread word – write the correct word with the error above it.

Omitted word – write the word and circle it.

Self-corrected word – write the word with SC above it.

Teacher tells the word – write the word with TT above it.

For the scoring, self-pronounced words attracted a mark (1 mark) each whereas all other miscues were scored zero (0 mark) with the exception of self-corrected words that also attracted a mark (1 mark). The children read individually and were scored based on the number of correct words.

Pre-Test Procedure

The pre-test was done in one day. The following procedures were used to administer the Running Records:

1. Selection of reading material: The researchers selected 110 words passage that the pupils had already read from the Government Basic Two reading book. This passage was used for all the pupils. The passage was selected because it encouraged and sustained readership, had moral lessons and it provided general information to facilitate daily living skills (Day & Bamford, 2004). The reason for choosing 110 words was that Fountas and Pinnell (2005) suggested that the passage to be used should be between 100 to 200 words. The researchers therefore decided to select words within that range. The rationale for selecting the government reading book was to ensure that the passage was standardised and appropriate for the pupils. Again, considering their reading abilities (reading difficulties), a passage below their level was appropriate in assessing their reading abilities.
2. Pre-reading stage (before assessing their reading ability): Before asking the pupils to Read Aloud individually, as the second step in administering the instrument, the researchers engaged each pupil in a brief conversation approximately one-minute chat to ensure they were relaxed and free from any fear or anxiety. The rationale for this activity was based on Krashen's (2007) language learning acquisition, thus the 'affective filter'. According to him, once the affective filter is low, language learning is high. He suggested that during language acquisition and learning, children should be in an "anxiety-free" environment to enhance learning.
3. Reading stage (assessment stage): the researchers gave the passages to the pupils to read aloud individually. Each child was given 9 minutes to read the passage.
4. Post reading stage (Scoring): This was based on the number of words that each pupil was able to pronounce correctly, using the following miscues;

    Self-pronounced word – mark the top of the word pronounced correctly

Misread word – write the correct word with the error above it.
Omitted word – write the word and circle it.
Self-corrected word – write the word with SC above it.
Teacher tells the word – write the word with TT above it.

In scoring each child's reading ability, self-pronounced word attracted a mark (1 mark) each while all other miscues were scored zero (0 mark) with the exception of self-corrected words that also attracted a mark (1 mark). As pupils read individually, the number of words they pronounced correctly was noted**.**

Data Collection Procedure

Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the Metropolitan Director of Education in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis in the Western Region and the heads of the primary schools. The rationale and ethical issues involved in the study were explained to the head teachers, class teachers and parents of the selected pupils and their informed consent was elicited. Informed consent of the pupils was also elicited. They were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Intervention phase

The intervention was provided to the whole group. This phase lasted six weeks. There was one session each day from Monday to Friday which lasted for 45-minutes. Monday to Thursday were used to teach the passages while Friday was used to teach decoding skills (word recognition) of difficult words in the passages (Table 2). Flash cards and word games were used to facilitate the intervention.

Table 2: Weekly intervention schedule

Days	Lines in the passage	Number of words
Monday	3 lines	29
Tuesday	3lines	23
Wednesday	3 lines	32
Thursday	3 lines	26
Friday	Review of difficult words	19

During the intervention phase, the procedures outlined by Mercer, Mercer and Pullen (2011), were followed. These included continuous

engagement with the pupils, selecting a reading material that was suitable for their maturational level, given constant feedback and modelling.

Monday

Step One: (Introduction Phase)

The researchers introduced themselves to the pupils and asked the pupils to do same. The researchers explained the reason for our meeting to the children and motivated them to participate fully and avoid missing the sessions.

Step Two: (Teaching Phase)

The teaching phase involved the actual intervention sessions. Pupils were given the first three lines of the passage to be read. This had four sentences consisting 29 words. The following activities were done:

Activity One (Pre-Reading Stage)

Difficult words in the first three lines were learnt.

Activity Two: During Reading Stage - Teaching and Learning Activity

The researchers read each sentence and asked the pupils to read as a group six times. This was done for all the four sentences in the three lines. The researchers called the pupils individually to read sentences in the lines six times. The researchers guided them and corrected the words they found difficult.

Activity Three: Conclusion- Post-Reading Stage

The researchers asked the pupils to mention some of the words they heard in the passage. Pupils were called randomly to decode the words they mentioned by pointing to the words in the passage six times. The purpose of the post-reading activity was to ensure that pupils decode the words they mention and were not rote learning. This increased their word identification skills.

Activity Four: Evaluation

The researchers pointed to the words randomly and asked pupils to decode them six times.

Remarks: All the pupils were present for the session.

Tuesday

Step One: (Introduction Phase)

The researchers revised the previous lines read with the pupils. Pupils were asked to identify some of the words in the previous readings. This was done 3 times.

Step Two: (Teaching Phase)

The researchers indicated the lines to be read to the pupils. The researchers then, proceeded to the activities.

Activity One: Introduction

Pre-Reading Stage

The researchers guided the pupils to read the difficult words in the passage (in specific lines) six times. These were made up of 3 lines, 3 sentences and 23 words.

Activity Two: Teaching and Learning Activity.

During –Reading Stage

The researchers read each sentence and asked pupils to read as a group six times. This process was done for all the sentences in the three lines. Pupils were called individually to read sentences in the lines six times. The researchers guided and corrected the words they had difficulties in pronouncing.

Activity Three: Conclusion

Post-Reading Stage

The researchers mentioned some of the words in the passage randomly and asked the pupils to identify those words by pointing to the words and decoding the words six times. Pupils were called individually to perform the task. This was done six times.

Remarks: All children were present for the session.

Wednesday

Step One: **(Introduction Phase)**

The researchers asked the pupils to read in groups repeatedly the previous lines read. The researchers called the pupils individually to read each sentence 3 times till all the lines were completed. This procedure was to revise the previous lines and ensure continuity.

Step Two: **(Teaching Phase)**

Pupils were told the specific lines to be read. In all, there were three lines, made up of two sentences and a word count of 32.

Activity One: Introduction

Pre-Reading Stage

The researchers guided the pupils to decode the difficult words in the lines repeatedly (six times).

Activity Two: Teaching and Learning Activity

During-Reading Stage

The researchers read each sentence and asked the children to model repeatedly (six times). The same was done for the other sentences. Pupils were asked to read the sentences individually six times. The researchers guided and corrected the pupils as they read.

Activity Three: Conclusion

Post-Reading Stage

Pupils were asked to decode the words randomly repeatedly (six times). This task was done in groups and also individually.

Activity Four: Evaluation

The researchers pointed to words randomly and asked the pupils to decode them repeatedly. They also read in groups repeatedly (six times).

Remarks: All pupils were present for the session.

Thursday

Step One: (Introduction Phase)

The researchers revised the previous lines read with the pupils. Pupils were asked to identify some of the words in the previous reading. Each word identified was mentioned 3 times.

Step Two: (Teaching phase)

The researchers indicated the lines to be read to the children. We then proceeded to the reading activities.

Activity One: Introduction

Pre-Reading Stage

Pupils were guided to read the difficult words in the passage repeatedly (six times). The passage had 3 lines, 3 sentences and 26words.

Activity Two: Teaching and learning activity.

During-Reading Stage

The researchers read each sentence and asked the pupils to read as a group repeatedly six times. Each pupil was called to read sentences in the lines repeatedly 6 times. The researchers guided and corrected the words they had difficulty.

Activity Three: Conclusion

Post-Reading Stage

The researchers asked the pupils to decode the words randomly. This was done repeatedly six times. Pupils read in groups and individually.

Activity Four: Evaluation

Pupils were asked to point to words randomly and decode them repeatedly.

Remarks: One of the pupils was absent.

Friday

Through word drills, flash cards and word games, the researchers guided the pupils to decode all the difficult words in the passage repeatedly.

Step One: (**Introduction Phase)**

The researchers guided them to decode the difficult words repeatedly (six times).

Step Two: (Teaching Phase)

The researchers asked pupils to pick flash cards and decode the words on them. Each child identified the words and repeated them six times.

Step Three:

Pupils were paired to identify the words and pronounce them six times. Thereafter, each partner also pronounced the word three times. This exercise was done till all partners decoded the words repeatedly with our assistance.

Remarks: All pupils were present for the session.

Other weeks

The other weeks proceedings followed the exact procedures described in week one.

Post-Test Procedure

The post-test was done within a day for both experimental and control group. The post-test took the same procedure as the pre-test. However, they were timed 7 minutes for the post-test.

Data Analysis Procedure

The independent samples t-test was used to analyse the data. Independent samples t-test is used on two different groups of participants to determine the differences in mean values or scores (Pallant, 2010) in order to determine if there were any significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis: *There is no significant difference in the reading ability between pupils with reading difficulties who are taught using the RR approach (experimental group) and those who are not taught with the RR approach (control group).*

The main purpose of this hypothesis was to determine whether RR approach would be an effective intervention for helping pupils with reading difficulties. The hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance. The results of the pre-test comparison of the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test on Control and Experimental Groups (Pre-test)

Approach	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Repeated Reading	Experimental	12	7.00	5.26			
	Control	10	6.40	6.59	20	0.238	0.814

Significant at p=0.05 (2-tailed)

The independent samples t-test result revealed that there was no significant difference in scores for pupils in the experimental group (*M* = 7.00*; SD* = 5.26) and pupils in control group [*M* = 6.40*; SD = 6.5; t(*20) = 0.238, *p* = .814].

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test on Control and Experimental Groups (Post-test)

Approach	Group	N	Mean	SD.	df	t	p
Repeated Reading	Experimental	12	13.17	6.67	20	2.410	.026
	Control	10	6.40	6.42			

*Significant *p* = .05 (2-tailed)

Table 4 reveals the result of the post-test after the Repeated Reading approach was adopted as an intervention to help pupils with reading difficulties. It was observed that there was large improvement in the reading abilities of the pupils in the experimental group who had a mean score of (*M* =13.17*; SD*=6.67) while the pupils in the control group had a mean score of (*M* = 6.40*; SD* = 6.42). This clearly indicated that the RR Approach significantly helped to improve the reading

abilities of pupils. When the mean scores of the two groups were tested using the independent samples t-test at 5% significant level, two-tailed, the results revealed that there was significant difference between control and experimental groups t*(20df)* =- 2.410, $p<.026$.

Table 5: Result of the Difference between Pre-test and Post-test

Approach	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Repeated	Experimental	12	6.17	3.88	12.158	5.364*	0.000
Reading	Control	10	0.00	0.82			

*Significant at $p = .05$ (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows the performance of the pupils after comparing the result of the pre-test and post-test. The result in the table shows that there is a significant improvement in the performance of the pupils after using RR Approach. The pupils in the experimental group had a mean score difference of ($M = 6.17$*; SD* = 3.88) while the pupils in the control group rather showed no significant difference in their mean scores (M =0.00*; SD*=0.82) in their reading abilities. Again, after comparing the mean scores of the two groups, the independent-sample t-test reported that there was significant difference in the scores or performance of pupils in the experimental group and pupils in the control group, $t(12.158) = 5.364$, $p = .001$. The result implies that RR approach is an effective approach and strategy to be adopted to help children with reading difficulties in order to improve upon their reading abilities.

The result is in congruence with the findings of Morisoli (2010) that RR had a positive effect on the reading abilities of English language learners with Specific learning disability in reading. Rasinski and Padak (2005) found that practice with RR leads to improvement in oral reading fluency on the practice passage, but also on passages that have never before been encountered. RR has been shown to be effective in increasing reading fluency and, to a lesser extent, reading comprehension for pupils with learning disabilities (Therrien, 2004). Therefore, pupils experience success through RR use and it builds their confidence and encourages them to invest more time and effort in achieving the skill of reading fluently (Nuttall, 1996). Ruskey's (2011) findings indicated that fluency instruction and practice using RR was a successful strategy and should be included in elementary classroom. RR is therefore beneficial in various settings.

Furthermore, the results of the current study is in congruence with the finding of Roundy and Roundy (2009) that on the average, the use of RR strategies increased students' fluency, words per minute (wpm) reading score, reading-oriented self-esteem, and confidence. Neumann, Ross and Slaboch (2008) concluded that as pupils reread text, new sight words were learned and pupils were able to apply these sight words to new text. There is an ample evidence to conclude that when used consistently, RR intervention could improve pupils' reading ability rates (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Therrien, 2004). Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davisand and Kouzekanani (2003) found that the gains in fluency when Repeated Readings was implemented was valuable to the participants, however, researchers had difficulty determining whether the RR alone accounted for the gains because of the multi-componential nature of the intervention.

Conclusions

Repeated Reading improves pupils' performance in reading fluency and word identification skills. Pupils have shown a gradual progress in fluency rate by increasing reading rate and decreasing word reading errors. This study demonstrates that this strategy can help create a positive reading experience for pupils. This experience may translate to the development of self-confidence in one's ability to read.

Recommendations

A conscious effort should be made by school heads, administrators and teachers to screen pupils in primary three to ascertain their reading abilities. If some of the pupils are identified as having reading difficulties, they can further be assessed by professionals to find out if they have dyslexia (serious reading difficulties). Pupils who are identified as having reading difficulties should be managed with effective reading strategies like RR in the regular education class to enhance their reading ability. However, pupils who are found to be dyslexic can be assisted with effective strategies in a resource centre.

In order for remediation to succeed, it is suggested that the Ministry of Education in collaboration with school heads should train teachers to acquire the requisite skills and strategies that will help pupils who face challenges in reading to do remedial teaching. To this end, it

is necessary for educational administrators and curriculum designers to strengthen courses in Special Education to aid in effective teacher training. Regular teachers may then be able to teach effectively to help the pupils with reading difficulties.

Lastly, it is suggested that teachers should encourage their pupils to practise RR in the classroom under their guidance and independently when they are alone. RR should be propagated to improve the reading ability of children with reading difficulties.

Limitations

Only pupils in class three of two selected basic schools in the Western Region of Ghana were used for the study. Hence, not all the pupils in the basic schools were covered. This undoubtedly affected the sample size making it impossible to generalise the findings.

Also, certain basic essentials were taken for granted. These include the economic background of the pupils, the presence or absence of quality teachers (that is well trained teachers) and availability or lack of teaching and learning materials in terms of reading materials or libraries.

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