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The Impact of Repeated Reading on the Comprehension Level of Eight Eighth Grade Students at the Middle School Level

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The Impact of Repeated Reading on the Comprehension Level of Eight Eighth Grade
Students at the Middle School Level

By

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to those who make everything in my life possible. First, I want to thank my parents who have loved and supported me in every way possible over the years. You always have been an inspiration, a role model, and a loving presence in my life. I would also like to thank my husband for always telling me I could be successful, for believing in me, and for allowing me quiet time and space to complete my work. In addition, I wish to thank my students who have inspired me to continue learning every day. Finally, I want to offer thanks to God who has opened doors, guided me, and been faithful in His love in all aspects of my life.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of repeated reading on the comprehension level of eight 8th grade students. Incorporating an action research design, data was collected through utilizing a pretest and posttest, timed repeated readings, a reading semi-open ended questionnaire, a Likert-scale questionnaire, observation and the taking of field notes, and weekly assessments. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for a total of eight weeks for a period of 20 minutes two times per week, each Tuesday and Wednesday morning. Participants were a combination of eighth-grade regular education and special education students, with the majority comprised of those who struggle with classroom reading tasks, as evident by grades, attitude toward reading tasks, and standardized test score results. The setting was a public middle school in a rural county in the South. The teacher-researcher analyzed the collected data and found that repeated reading improved the comprehension level of the study group.

Keywords: reading comprehension, struggling readers, repeated reading, fluency, prosody, adolescent students

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CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The main goal for reading instruction is for the learner to comprehend. Reading is foundational for a student to achieve success in school as well as impacting his or her future life choices. Therefore, particularly beginning at the toddler age, parents and caregivers should introduce literacy activities to their young ones, guiding them in their path to be school ready. For educators, the teaching of reading can be simultaneously a rewarding endeavor and one that can be extremely challenging. When designing targeted strategies for reading instruction, it is critical teachers are aware of the various components that encompass the reading process. Reading can be a fulfilling and interesting activity, and with targeted instruction, those who struggle with comprehension can improve and become more effective readers.

To address the reading acquisition question, the National Reading Panel was convened in 1999 by the United States Congress and tasked with evaluating more than 100,000 research studies to determine the most effective way children learn to read. The Panel's report was submitted in 2000, and while the group will not be reconvened, the National Reading Panel offered important information for educators (National Institute of Child Health and Development, n.d.). Per the National Reading Panel, there are five key components in the reading process: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Development, n.d.).

As to comprehension, Beers (2003) maintained that it is "hard work that can be examined, modeled, practiced, and learned" (p. 60). Reading strategies can be implemented with the goal of improving comprehension for all students, but especially for those who struggle with reading tasks. Van Den Broek and Kremer (2000) posited that "the product of reading comprehension [is]: a memory representation resembling a network of relations between elements with the text" (p. 6). This complex cognitive process involves the reader continually decoding words, understanding vocabulary in context, and adjusting to the information presented explicitly in the text. Reading is an active, engaging, and complex cognitive activity. Shanahan (2006) recommended "students be taught to achieve a deep understanding of text on their own" (p. 29). This likely will lead to independent readers who can navigate the words successfully and comprehend the texts they are reading both in school and as part of their nonacademic life.

In the researcher's classroom, modeling of comprehension strategies is utilized often. The goal was for students to expand their strategy knowledge and possible uses with a variety of texts. Atwell (1998) also modeled comprehension demonstrations in her classroom as a way for "students to learn strategies for engaging with texts…I read aloud a poem, short story, or article to my kids and weave in descriptions of what I think, do, and wonder about" (p. 211). By hearing demonstrations of strategies while reading out loud, the students in the researcher's classroom became more actively engaged in the reading process. In Atwell's classroom, she demonstrated "using metacognition—by thinking about their thinking as they read—kids read more actively and analytically" (p. 211). Encouraging students to become active readers and to be aware of when to utilize

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various comprehension strategies seemed to be an effective approach with the researcher's students. Through teacher read-aloud opportunities while modeling metacognition, students in the researcher's classroom could observe the effectiveness of pausing, rereading, scanning, questioning, and reflecting. This deeper way of reading while utilizing various comprehension strategies demonstrated how to connect in a more effective way with the text and move beyond simply looking at the words on the page.

Moreover, with the move to middle school, students normally progress from the early stages of reading to the middle and upper stages of reading (Chall & Jacobs, 2003, Ehri, 1985). This shift in reading knowledge indicates that they can comprehend more complex text and navigate successfully content reading. Upper level students are tasked with reading text that is challenging both linguistically as well as cognitively; in addition, they are expected to tackle vocabulary that is beyond their everyday vocabulary knowledge (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). To maintain appropriate levels of comprehension, students must be successful not only in reading the words in these demanding texts, but also in understanding the specialized vocabulary contained in the content material. Approaching more difficult texts means students must become critical readers who can analyze concepts and expand their knowledge of the material. Chall and Jacobs (2003) maintained that if a student does not progress from the early stages of "learning to read" to the upper stages of "reading to learn" by the time he or she reaches 4th or 5th grade, then that student's reading success will be critically impacted. Chall (1983/1996) referred to this stage of reading as "learning the new"; it is during this stage that students are able to devote necessary cognitive effort to comprehending text. Once the decoding of words occurs more easily and automatically, comprehending and gaining new

information becomes the focus. In addition, students continue to acquire an assortment of reading strategies as they gain exposure and experience to a variety of topics and genres (McKenna, 2002).

Comprehending text indicates that the reader has acquired knowledge through encountering "a range of material from traditional books to the computer screen" (Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002, p. 4) as well as articles, workplace information, and social media. Comprehension, the main goal in reading, can be enhanced through a variety of instructional strategies. As part of classroom instruction, teachers can focus on aspects of reading that will strengthen comprehension. These include automatic word knowledge, vocabulary words, background knowledge, focused attention through specific purposes of reading, tasks that assist in processing information encountered in the text, modeling comprehension strategies, integrating reading with writing, and including inferential and critical thinking questions (McKenna, 2002). Each of these components will strengthen the opportunity to build a deeper understanding of the reading material and will add to students' repertoire of strategies from which to choose when they are reading independently.

As they comprehend text, readers are "interacting with information" (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). Furthermore, Lapp and Fisher posited that readers must rely on a combination of information presented in the text, personal background knowledge, purpose for reading, and motivation to comprehend successfully. A goal of comprehension instruction in the reading classroom is to teach students several strategies from which they can draw to reach a greater understanding of various texts. With a range of strategies from which to choose, students can navigate specialized vocabulary,

complex text structure, and a wide variety of topics that they will encounter in their school career, professional life, and as a productive citizen. Once comprehension strategies become more automatic, students likely will have success with "interpreting and evaluating what they read, drawing conclusions based on evidence, and so forth" (Raphael & Au, 2005, p. 206).

Being a critical reader and one who can understand text at a deeper level is not a skill generally taught in many classrooms, yet this understanding that moves beyond a simple examination is critical (Walmsley, 2009).   According to Walmsley, "Understanding big ideas is critical to full participation in work, life, and democracy" (p. 48).   Big ideas, or main ideas of the text, are not always obvious to students in the classroom, especially those at the upper level where content courses often involve text that is loaded with specialized vocabulary, advanced sentence style, a variety of text structure, and multiple concepts presented in a single text. Opportunities for critical thinking can lead to a deeper understanding of the big idea and the text itself, yet students cannot begin to focus on these important aspects of comprehension if they are hindered by the inability to read the text with success.   Expository texts are particularly difficult for many readers to comprehend (Merkley & Jefferies, 2009), which strengthens the efficacy for students to maintain a variety of strategies that will assist them when reading difficult content area texts.

The speed that words are recognized and decoded automatically impacts how successfully a student can comprehend. As McKenna (2002) claimed, "Time is of the essence, and so is memory" (p. 25). If too much mental attention and effort are used to simply decipher what the words are on the page, then there will be little comprehending

as the reading occurs. Automatic word recognition as well as fluent reading impact the success of comprehending. There is a distinction between simply discriminating speech sounds and phonemic awareness (Gunning, 2010), with speech discrimination categorized as "the ability to discriminate the sounds of language" (Gunning, 2010, p. 158) while phonemic awareness "is the consciousness of individual sounds in words [or] it is the realization that a spoken word is composed of a sequence of speech sounds" (p. 158). Phonemic awareness is the understanding of individual sounds within a word and a key component of reading; students will neither be able to recognize words in print nor be able to sound them out without this knowledge. As students gain knowledge about individual sounds and letter relationships, they begin to acquire words they know and recognize easily as they are reading. Lacking this ability, an early reader may simply learn a few words based on rote memorization rather than the ability to sound out words (Gunning, 2010). With comprehension as the main goal of reading, readers should be able to apply phonetic word knowledge quickly and easily as they advance their reading skill set.

Concerning phonics, phonics instruction has been a point of disagreement among reading researchers and reading teachers. This argument, often called "The Great Debate", centers on whether phonics instruction should be taught systematically and directly or whether it should be taught as part of a larger reading instructional model. As Cunningham and Cunningham (2002) posited, "Everyone seems to agree that we need to teach phonics, and almost everyone has an opinion about how it should (and should not) be taught" (p. 87, parenthesis in original). It is clear there needs to be an efficient, systematic approach to this critical reading skill to instruct readers in the letter-sound

rules. Beers (2003) defined the term phonics as referring "to the rules or, more accurately, the *generalizations* that help readers understand under what conditions certain letters or letter combinations will make certain sounds" (p. 223, italics in original). A meta-analysis by McArthur et al. (2012) provided evidence that phonics instruction showed a strong correlation for non-word reading accuracy along with a moderate correlation for word reading accuracy. An explicit instructional strategy for decoding words is generally associated with most models of phonics instruction (Veenendaal, Groen, & Verhoeven, 2015). Just as with comprehension, explicit instruction in sound and word knowledge can be effective in the reading classroom.

Adding to the necessary components of the reading process is the concept of fluency, particularly for instructional level readers and independent readers. Often, a beginning reader may struggle through the reading of words on the page and still maintain a certain level of comprehension. This basic understanding may be due to predictable text, picture clues, understanding of story structure, and encountering known words. Beginning readers, however, likely will read at a slow pace with little to no expression. On the other hand, older readers who are attempting longer passages with complex vocabulary may struggle to pronounce the multi-syllabic words, which means they are expending a great deal of cognitive effort. Therefore, these students will be attending to saying the words to such an intense degree that little cognitive processing remains to focus on comprehending the text. "One theory is that decoding requires so much mental energy that there is none left to devote to reading with expression" (Gunning, 2010, p. 239). Fluency is, as defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), "freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension in silent reading or

the expression of ideas in oral reading" (p. 85). Fluent reading must be both automatic as well as accurate. In other words, students must be able to recognize correctly the words while also reading with sufficient speed. While there are several strategies to improve fluent reading, repeated reading has been found positively to impact students' reading fluency (McKenna, 2002). Successive reading of the same passage can lead to faster reading times, enhanced sight words and decoding abilities, and improved phrasing through the successive reads; each of these improvements also can lead to an improvement in student self-esteem and confidence levels (McKenna, 2002).

In addition, vocabulary is an essential component of reading because students must understand the words contained within the text so that they will comprehend the overall meaning. This word knowledge skill is critical to not only decode words, but also to comprehend words within text. For example, vocabulary deficits seem to affect the struggling readers in the present researcher's classroom of 8th grade students. There was a demonstrated disconnect between many students' everyday vocabulary knowledge and that of more specialized vocabulary encountered in class lessons. Often, students with a limited vocabulary would stumble over or simply skip the unknown words, and this negatively impacted their understanding of what they were reading. The difficulty with comprehension was observed when students read material followed by an unsuccessful attempt to demonstrate basic comprehension of the text.

Likewise, Cambourne (2002) advised that the effective reading teacher approach these reading strategies under a constructivist theory classroom paradigm. Within a constructivist classroom, teachers create an environment that promotes deep engagement, instructs explicitly with contextualization, challenges students continually, creates

metacognitive awareness, and designs authentic tasks for effective reading behavior (Cambourne, 2002). By contextualizing learning, reading teachers help to ensure that students approach reading in a manner that makes sense to them. Authentic learning opportunities can include both fiction and nonfiction for a literature based approach to reading instruction, thereby incorporating opportunities to firm up phonics knowledge, advance vocabulary acquisition, progress with fluent reading, and improve comprehension. Reading instruction that is active, authentic, and provides ample opportunity to engage in literature will lead ideally to successful reading.

For a cognitive approach to reading, reading instruction will be student centered and is based on the premise that students "are active participants in their learning rather than passive recipients" (Gunning, 2010, p. 5). Educators should offer hands-on activities (Gunning, 2010), such as a repeated reading activity or other types of active performing strategies. In addition, teachers might consider that students learn at different rates and different times; therefore, instruction should be individualized when possible (Gunning, 2010). Targeted instruction, such as for comprehension, fluency, or vocabulary, is most effective when individual needs and levels are taken into consideration.

In today's modern, high-stakes classroom, teaching reading with success can be challenging. Often students are underprepared to read and to comprehend the material they encounter in their content courses. Approaching a textbook, article, or an advanced trade novel may be quite difficult. Also, students may be reluctant readers who have avoided reading in the classroom as well as during leisure time. This becomes particularly acute and even more problematic when working with middle school students

who already should know how to read with success. Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) cited the statistics reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress that have "consistently recorded that many middle school students have persistent difficulties in comprehending print-based texts" (p. 3). Although funding has been provided to schools and districts along with focused research into literacy intervention, Paratore and McCormack (2011) noted "substantial numbers of students continued to experience reading difficulty in the intermediate grades and beyond" (p. xiii).

With the rigors and fast pace of high school less than a year away, some members of a current group of eighth grade students in a rural middle school in the Southeast were not demonstrating strong reading skills or reading strategies from which to draw when faced with challenging grade level material. The result was many of these students were not successfully comprehending the text they read. During comprehension tests based on short stories or trade books read in class, a high percentage were performing below the expected level of success. This discrepancy of comprehension success was consistent and was reflected on both explicit and implicit types of questions. In addition, many of these students who struggled with comprehension tasks demonstrated reluctance when reading for pleasure and often expressed their dislike of books and reading in general.

As children progress through school, their reading must move beyond simply decoding the words to a comprehensive understanding of written material. This understanding includes elements of the prose, such as the syntax, as well as the reader's personal background knowledge. Purpose of reading also impacts comprehension success and can vary from reading a difficult textbook to reading an interesting short story in class to recreational reading. For a person to understand upper level texts, he or

she needs to be a fluent reader who can conquer the vocabulary contained within the passage. In the Reading Framework for the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress, fluency is defined as the "ability to read text quickly and accurately and comprehend what is read", (Appendix A, 2013, Glossary of Terms). Without prosodic, smooth reading, an upper level reader will have difficulty accomplishing the main goal when one is reading: to understand what is read. With a focus on learning objectives and the curriculum goals of course material at the middle school level, the pace of classroom instruction allows little time for remediation of weak reading skills. Consequently, this can impact success with comprehension. For quite some time, this researcher has been interested in the concept of repeated reading as a means of improving comprehension skills for middle school students.

Problem of Practice Statement

The rural public middle school, comprised of grades five through eight, where the research was conducted serves a high population of students from the lower levels of socioeconomic status. That is, the free and reduced lunch status was near the 60% mark for the 2016/2017 school year. Many of the students were living in single parent homes or were living with extended family members, most often grandparents, or were part of the foster care system. While there may be an interest, reading and books are generally not a high priority when income is either limited or money is in short supply. This was the situation at the site of the research, with low levels of recreational reading and high levels of struggling readers, as defined by reading two or more grade levels below the current grade status. Atwell (1998) maintained that some students have "experiences of literature that are so limited they don't yet know what they like to read" (p. 214) which

impacts their classroom success as well as willingness to read, as experienced in the 8th grade English classroom and study group. Furthermore, Atwell felt that "for some [students], inexperience with books will mean a delay in fluency; their reading will be awkward and slow" (p. 214). Comprehension success will be impacted negatively since students will be utilizing a great deal of cognitive focus to pronounce the words on the page. The performance of the school's special education students on last year's state standardized reading tests were lower than what was hoped, and many of these special needs students are also students from high poverty homes. It was likely reading levels were directly impacted by the economic situation the county was facing as well as the lack of direct instruction at the middle school level for improving reading skills to enhance comprehension. Therefore, a study examining reading comprehension was very timely and appropriate for the middle school and the researcher.

The unfortunate reality in the researcher's classroom was that many middle school students have difficulty understanding grade level material. Oftentimes, students were struggling so much just to say the words that they were expending mental capacities for this task and therefore leaving too little brain power to attend to the important element of understanding. When asked even simple questions about what they just read, some struggling middle school students often could not answer or relate what the passage was about, either main idea, character traits, or plot elements. This result ensued from individualized reading, scaffolded silent reading, and class instructional reading.

Research Question

What impact will repeated readings have on the comprehension level of eight eighth grade students at a middle school in the Southeast?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of repeated readings on the comprehension level of eight eighth grade students at a middle school in the Southeast.

Action Research Design

The method of research for this study was that of a mixed methods action research approach conducted by a practitioner in the classroom. This strategy for collection and analysis of information utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the researcher to form a complete profile, whereas numerical data alone would provide only a portion of the reader profile of each participant. There are behavior, attitude, personal feelings, voice, and body language aspects of a reader that could not be gleaned by simply examining a number on a comprehension test. However, numerical data points were an important part of the overall picture of the participants in that each needed fluency rating scores, comprehension scores, accuracy scores, and a rating score for researcher created surveys.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Many of the research studies pertaining to repeated reading's impact on comprehension involve younger students at the primary level, a common trend that was noted in the National Institute for Literacy's 2007 report for content-area teachers. The report supported the need for additional research, to include investigating the connection between comprehension, fluency, and accuracy in word recognition for struggling adolescent readers. As to the lower grades, repeated reading of a short text, with a goal of improved fluency, is often a built-in component of reading instruction for elementary students.

Furthermore, although speed and accuracy of reading impact comprehension abilities, style of reading is not normally included in middle school reading instruction. At this level, the focus shifts to reading more for content knowledge instead of reading strategies to improve students' word attack skills and reading comprehension abilities. This is illustrated by research conducted by Allington (1983) and Rasinski and Zutell (1996), who found that fluency instruction is often neglected in many classrooms. This notion is further supported by information found in the 2000 Report of the National Reading Panel's "Teaching Children to Read" prepared for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,

> Despite its importance as a component of skilled reading, fluency is often
>
> neglected in the classroom. This is unfortunate. If text is read in a
>
> laborious and inefficient manner, it will be difficult for the child to
>
> remember what has been read and to relate the ideas expressed in the text
>
> to his or her background knowledge. (para. 2)

This lack of intentional strategy instruction for improved reading and others that targeted increasing comprehension was certainly true in the researcher's middle school for the study. Heitin (2015) seemed to agree with the lack of fluency focus in the classroom as well as misunderstanding the impact that style of reading can have on comprehension success. The lack of focus on style of reading and its effect on comprehension as an instructional component for middle school students were issues investigated as part of this study. To address the problem of weak comprehension skills and its impact on student success with reading, the researcher utilized repeated readings and analyzed the impact this strategy had on comprehension for eighth grade middle school students.

The concept of repeated reading a short passage has been a long-accepted practice in the classroom, dating back in the United States to the Colonial Period (Rasinski, 2006). During this time, many Colonial settlers enhanced reading instruction for children by having them read Bible verses several times, with the goals of improved reading ability as well as prosodic reading. Samuels (1979), a pioneer for the idea of repeated readings, said that "the method consists of rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. Then the procedure is repeated with a new passage" (p. 403). As observed in the researcher's school, repeated reading and word decoding are not strategies typically practiced by middle school level teachers. The assumption is that students have moved beyond the "learning to read" stage to the "reading to learn" stage; in addition, students are thought to be proficient, independent readers who can understand the specialized content vocabulary and concepts. Students also are expected to be familiar with the various styles of nonfiction text structure encountered in their classes. Very often this is not the case, and then teachers at all levels realize they have students who are struggling readers and cannot navigate successfully the material encountered in their classes. The question becomes what to do to help those who struggle.

As a middle school teacher, the present researcher has observed that at this level and age, students who have difficulty with reading have been struggling for a few years and often suffer from self-esteem issues as well as low academic confidence levels. Similar findings were reported by Rennie (2016); struggling adolescent readers asserted that they made "the choice not to read and said they lacked confidence in their ability to do so" (p. 43). Perhaps this reluctance to read for some adolescent readers is related to

the "fourth-grade slump" (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Hirsch, 2003; Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). This observed concept pertains to the move toward informational text and novels, as opposed to picture books and predictable pattern texts, as well as the pedagogical concept of "reading to learn" for students in middle and high school. The "fourth-grade slump" is a particular concern for low-income students (Chall, & Jacobs, 2003; Hirsch, 2003), who face potential vocabulary deficits as well as a possible lack of reading materials in the home.

Many of the struggling readers who have been observed over the years by the researcher have said they "can't do it", "are stupid", "hate school", and "don't need to worry about dumb words anyway", failing to realize that reading is a life skill and essential to success in the world beyond school. As a reading teacher, this researcher felt an obligation to do all that is possible to assist students and to help them move along the continuum of reading acquisition. Practical, classroom-focused research involving repeated reading for comprehension improvement will go far in helping older struggling readers. This type of approachable and accessible action research gave the researcher ideas for strategic reading options to help struggling readers not only improve their reading abilities, but also improve their self-esteem and belief in themselves as capable students and readers.   Only by viewing reading as an interesting, useful activity that they can do successfully will students begin to see themselves as proficient readers in school and later life-long readers as they move beyond the academic setting to the working environment.

Brief Overview of Methodology

Action Research Philosophy and Research Question

The overarching point of action research, according to Mertler (2014), is that this type of research is done by teachers who are interested in their specific classrooms, their students, and how they learn most effectively. The fact that action research is concerned with a better understanding of a specific group of students and the issues impacting their learning makes this unique style of research very practical for practitioners currently in the field. As a full-time teacher, an action research model fit the parameters for the researcher of how to address the reading comprehension difficulties of eighth grade students. This process of inquiry allowed the researcher to discover repeated reading's impact on reading comprehension and general reading abilities, and this new knowledge was used to create a plan to address these issues with the goal of improved comprehension of material that is read. The research question was: What impact will repeated readings have on the comprehension level of eight eighth grade students at a middle school in the Southeast?

Participant Selection

The participants for this action research study pertaining to repeated reading and its effect on comprehension were comprised of eighth grade middle school students who attend public school in a rural area of a southern state. Letters were sent to all classroom

students and their families and were returned on a voluntary basis, based on their desire to participate in the research study.

Furthermore, the rural middle school was just over 500 total students in grades five through eight, with a total free and reduced price lunch rate that approached 60%. The ethnic distribution was predominately white, with 15% combined other races. In addition, some of the participants were part of the special education system and had an Individualized Education Program with specific notations pertaining to reading, such as a read-aloud accommodation.

Site of Research Study

The physical site for this study was a middle school located in a rural area of a southern state. Since this was an action research study, it was important that the site and participants be of close proximity as well as relatable to the problem of practice, which was that of students struggling with comprehension, within the researcher's actual classroom.

Sources of Data Collection

This study was a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data and qualitative data were collected from the student participants as well as the researcher for the study on repeated reading. Multiple types of data helped create a full, complete picture of the participants' reading profiles. During the study period, two times per week for eight weeks' students read a short text two times. Both errors and time were tracked for each reading. Then, the researcher compared gains in comprehension by incorporating repeated reading for both individual participants as well as observed trends in gains of the

group. Or, the converse could have been true and the researcher did not observe gains in comprehension after incorporating repeated reading as a targeted strategy.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data. Quantitative data was collected in the following manner. A baseline fluency score for comparison purposes for the study was needed. This initial fluency read was scored utilizing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) oral reading fluency scale developed as part of the 2002 Oral Reading Study (Table One, Appendix E). This four-point scale allowed each student to be scored on the qualities of phrasal reading, syntax of the text, and expressive voice qualities, (U.S. Department of Education, NAEP, 2002), and this scale was utilized throughout the study to assign fluency ratings. Results of the initial score along with changes or flat qualities of the fluency ratings were graphed for a visual display of the data in the form of a bar graph to chart changes over time. Additionally, the researcher administered a reading comprehension pretest along with a posttest for each participant. This allowed the researcher to see if there were gains in comprehension scores for students after incorporating repeated reading or if scores did not change or possibly decrease after the strategy was introduced. A Likert scale was also administered that involved students responding to seven questions pertaining to themselves as readers. Attitude and self-perception are key components of a reader's profile, making this an important piece of information to gather from each participant. Choices encompassed agree to disagree on a continuum for each of the seven questions, which were worded simply. Additionally, a reading interest survey was administered to determine further the participants' attitudes toward reading as well as the types of material they most enjoy reading. The interest

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survey was short with just five questions and was presented in a semi-open ended question format; it was used predominately to aid in the selection of text to utilize for the repeated reading sessions.

Qualitative Data. Qualitative data was collected throughout the study. This data came from field note information and a researcher maintained journal where student behaviors and comments were noted each day the repeated reading activity was conducted. These field notes were an important piece of information for creating a full profile of each reader, to go beyond a numerical score such as that for comprehension or a rating score for fluency. Color coding or symbols were used consistently to categorize and to organize the qualitative data.

Summary of the Findings

The overall results of the repeat reading study indicated an impact on comprehension. More specifically, the pretest/posttest showed a positive change in the score for many of the participants. Similarly, half of the participants increased their mean score for the second set of weekly comprehension scores along with a noted improvement in participants' results for the second reading session of each passage. For most of the passages read for the second time, accuracy, fluency, and time spent reading all improved. The study's positive findings support the incorporation of the strategy of repeat reading a short passage to improve comprehension success. Additionally, an action plan was created as a result of the study findings that involved three aspects: incorporating the repeat reading strategy into the researcher's classroom, sharing data results with the school and highlighting the success of the strategy, and sharing the study

features and data results with the county school board with the goal of more schools and levels of classrooms incorporating the strategy of repeated reading.

Dissertation Overview

In the following four chapters, a comprehensive literature review is presented, a description of the methodology for the study is included, findings are analyzed, and researcher conclusions are presented. Also, a definition of terms comes at the end of Chapter One. One table is included at the end of this document (Appendix E). This table provides a description of the four-point fluency scale utilized throughout this action research study.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: (part of fluency) Reading words in text with no errors (Glossary of Reading Terms, Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR), n.d.).

Automaticity: A reader's ability to process fluently information which requires little attention or effort (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Readers recognize words as whole units, and they recognize the words quickly and accurately (Beers, 2003). Word recognition and decoding are "automatic, [so] that little or no cognitive attention is needed or used" (Reutzel, 2006, p. 67).

Baseline fluency score: "A baseline, or starting point, measurement" (Jenkins, Hudson, & Lee, n.d.). A student's original fluency score before intervention occurs.

Buddy reading: A researched-based fluency strategy that pairs students at similar reading levels for a short time (Rasinski, 2003).

Comprehension: "The construction of the meaning of a written or spoken communication" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 39).

Decoding: The ability to recognize words printed on a page of text (Samuels, 2006), or the process of identifying the sounds of letters and then blending them into pronunciations of words (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Also, the ability to translate a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of sound symbol correspondences; in addition, the act of deciphering a new word by sounding it out (Glossary of Reading Terms, FCRR, n.d.).

Disfluency: "Speech that exhibits deviations in continuity, fluidity, ease of rate and effort, with hesitations or repetition of sounds, words, or phrases" (Segen's Medical Dictionary, 2012). This may include a reader's lack of appropriate phrasing, pacing, intonation, and accuracy.

Five Components of Reading: Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, n.d.).

Fluency: The ability to read text quickly and accurately and comprehend what is read (U. S. Department of Education, NAEP, Reading Framework, 2013). The ability to read smoothly and easily at a good pace with phrasing and expression (Beers, 2003). Fluency provides freedom from word-identification issues which may impact comprehension (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Individualized reading: Students select their own material to read, read at their own pace, and receive specific instruction individually, whole class, and small groups (Gunning, 2010). Reading that occurs individually, rather than in a group or with a partner, that can be done silently or out loud.

Prosody: "The prosodic features of language, such as stress and intonation patterns" (Walker, Mokhtari, & Sargent, 2006, p. 88). Prosody is reading with expression, proper intonation, and phrasing.

Radio reading: A read-aloud strategy that involves both reader and audience. Readers practice a short passage then read it to the class who responds with answers to student/reader prepared questions. This strategy is fast paced and improves comprehension. (Radio Reading, Reading Educator, n.d.). The main concept "for radio readings is to perform a text well enough that the listener can picture the events" (Reutzel, 2006, pp.77-78).

Reader's theatre: A strategy targeting fluency improvement through the practice and reading of a short play or any other piece adapted from literature with expression (Walker, Mokhtari, & Sargent, 2006). It is performance based instruction.

Reading interest survey: "A reading interest survey asks questions about a student's interests, habits, and attitudes around reading, and can help you learn what students like to read, as well as their attitudes about reading" (Serravallo, 2015, Reading interest surveys sect.). Also, a teacher prepared short survey given to students to determine their interests in reading and their beliefs about themselves as readers.

Reading rate/reading speed: "Reading at a pace permitting understanding of what is read" (Walker, Mokhtari, & Sargent, 2006, p. 88). The pacing or speed at which a reader reads text, both orally and silently.

Repeated reading: A technique where students read and reread a text a few times to improve reading fluency on indicators such as word recognition accuracy, reading speed, and oral reading expression (Samuels, in A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels, Eds., 2002).

Scaffolded silent reading: Scaffolded Silent Reading is intended to provide students with necessary support, guidance, structure, appropriate text difficulty, accountability, and monitoring that will assist them in transferring their oral reading skills to successful and effective silent reading practice (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008).

Students with Disabilities: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (PL 108-446) categorizes and defines a specific learning disability as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations" (PL 108-446, section 30 A&B). Students with a disability generally are impacted in their global classroom function and have an Individualized Education Program in place to facilitate classroom instruction and interventions appropriate for their executive functioning abilities and present levels of performance.

Struggling Readers: Students who exhibit "persistent difficulties in comprehending texts and learning academic subject matter" (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011, p. 1). A reader of any age who displays difficulty with written text and is one year or more below grade level reading. Reading difficulties may involve issues with fluency, comprehension, decoding, phonemic awareness, accuracy, prior knowledge, purpose of text, or a combination of any these.

Syntax: Arrangement of words and order of grammatical elements in a sentence (U.S. Department of Education, NAEP, Reading Framework, 2013).

Whole class choral reading: WCCR is a classroom strategy in which all students read aloud together (Gunning, 2010) from the same text with the teacher, who models accurate

pronunciation, appropriate reading rate, fluency, and prosody (Gunning, 2010; Paige,

2011).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that when students read a short, instructional level passage a few times, this will enable the likelihood they will comprehend more successfully (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011; Pikulski & Chard, 2003; Rasinski, 1989; Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2006; Samuels, 1979; Therrien, 2004). The result of this targeted reading strategy, which eliminates the burden of struggling to pronounce words, often will be better comprehension of material read. Therefore, it can be predicted that students' comprehension will improve along with their accuracy of reading. Comprehending the material is the main goal of reading, yet comprehension is but one piece of the reading puzzle. Within this literature review, comprehension was examined as a critical component of the reading process along with the other elements that comprise the reading process. In addition, instructional strategies that target an improvement in comprehension can lead to gains in understanding text, and one such strategy---repeated reading---was assessed as a possible means of such gains.

The main goal of reading is to comprehend the written words. In support of this goal, Marchand-Martella and Martella (2013b) stated "learning to read with understanding is the most important skill students can acquire in school. Reading is tied to all other academic areas" (p. 3). Yet, explicit reading instruction is not often taught beyond the primary grades (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). With the move to more

informational texts in middle and high school, adolescent students may need additional instructional strategies to comprehend these more structurally and syntactically complex materials. Heller and Greenleaf (2007) reported that adolescent students can generally decode and read more simple texts, yet they often struggle with content textbooks and other class resources. Expository material may present a unique challenge to adolescent students in that they are written with the purpose of providing content information, contain specialized vocabulary, and often vary in text structure layout. Further, "If students are not familiar with the various types of texts used in middle and high school, they may encounter challenges in comprehending what they read" (National Institute for Literacy, 2007, p. 20). Unlike narrative texts, which generally follow a similar story structure and linear event arrangement (Vaughn & Bos, 2012), informational text varies in how the material is presented. Additionally, students may have much less experiences encountering, reading, and interpreting expository texts (Lenski, Wham, Johns, & Caskey, 2007). Given the circumstances of encountering cause and effect, problem and solution, process, enumeration, compare/contrast, chronological order, and other text structures, students may struggle to maintain an appropriate level of comprehension.

Furthermore, an added benefit to reading improvement often is greater self-esteem for the student (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011; McGill-Franzen & Lubke, 2011). An important goal is to impart a sense of accomplishment and an attitude of "I can" to students who too often are defeated and feel they are incapable of being successful readers. Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) posited that in many situations, struggling readers will deliberately limit their participation in class due to the continuing cycle of

failures and difficulties they have encountered in school. Likewise, researchers have found that struggling adolescent readers chose not to participate in reading activities and that they lacked confidence in themselves as readers (Chen & Lee, 2010; Rennie, 2016). The effect of students' internal belief system having a negative impact on their academic success has been noted by researchers (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011; Kuhn, Groff, & Morrow, 2011; McGill-Franzen & Lubke, 2011; Rennie, 2016). For instance, the link between engaged reading and achievement was found by McGill-Franzen and Lubke (2011) who posited "Achievement and engagement are reciprocal; reading a lot increases achievement, and increased competence and expertise sustains motivation to read" (pp. 229-230). In addition, Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) suggested that reading teachers can help "struggling readers to participate in their own development and to find both success and satisfaction in school learning" (p. 10). Motivation, enhanced self-esteem, engaged reading, and active participation in reading activities can help overcome affective deficits in struggling readers, which could lead to an increase in positive literacy experiences.

As a result, with more robust participation in reading activities in school along with out-of-school literacy activities, students may be able to overcome the "Matthew effects". Stanovich (1986) hypothesized that students who avoid reading due to difficulties and discomfort will then read less and therefore have fewer experiences and practices with reading that would help improve their reading ability. "Matthew effects" as a reading term was coined by Stanovich "after the Biblical phrase about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer" (Spear-Swerling, 2013, p. 427). The "Matthew effects" essentially serve to make the gap even wider for the those who are

successful with reading and those who struggle with reading. Or, as Kuhn, Groff, and Morrow (2011) reiterated, students who struggle with reading and therefore participate in the act of reading less often "leads to an ever-expanding gap between those who have experienced success with their reading and those who have not" (p. 4).   These researchers even go on to posit that teachers' instructional strategies for these struggling readers may in fact be adding to the gap of achievement in reading. Without the process of actively engaging in reading, which struggling readers often are reluctant to do (Stanovich, 1986), "many forms of instruction encountered by struggling readers contribute to the very disparity that these forms were meant to eliminate" (Kuhn, Groff, & Morrow, 2011, p. 5).

Furthermore, the "Matthew effects" (Stanovich, 1986) extends into vocabulary knowledge, which impacts further a struggling reader's potential success with reading (Wood, Harmon, Kissel, & Hedrick, 2011). Vocabulary knowledge gaps can hinder students' comprehension abilities and successful understanding of not only content area material, but also text encountered in language arts class; thus, the reading achievement between successful readers and struggling readers may continue to expand. A limited vocabulary has the potential to impact students' success in out-of-school literacy activities, and may be further exacerbated by a lack of technology resources. In fact, "This gap becomes compounded when students lack access to technology in which multiple exposures to words can provide students with opportunities to learn unfamiliar words" (Wood, Harmon, Kissel, & Hedrick, 2011, p. 80). The disparity gap is a further concern with regards to high poverty areas. Not only are high poverty students often faced with family and economic challenges, but also these students may be faced with

disparities in school due to a lack of available technology. This "technological Matthew effect" (Stanovich, 1986) likely includes the school setting as well as the home setting, and this disparity in available technology has the potential to expand further the achievement gap between more affluent school districts and less affluent school districts.

Reading to comprehend is not an isolated event, but is a dynamic process that is impacted by vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge, experience, and motivation. Any of these factors could negatively affect a student's success rate with comprehending text. For example, as they move into the middle grades, students are expected not only to read grade level material in the content area, but also to understand the specialized content vocabulary. "Struggling readers have more difficulties with vocabulary knowledge with each successive grade level, as more technical vocabulary is introduced, and more sophisticated words . . . are encountered" (Wood, Harmon, Kissel, & Hedrick, 2011, p. 66). As they begin middle school, students are immersed in the study of academic subjects with specialized vocabulary, complex texts they must analyze, and complex writing (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011). Unfortunately, this on-grade reading presents a challenge that is too difficult to overcome for some students. They struggle with reading tasks and likely have done so for many years, which can impact both school success and self-esteem. McGill-Franzen and Lubke (2011) classified these readers by stating "Fewer reading-to-learn experiences translate into less competence, not only in skilled reading but also in knowledge of subject areas" (p. 230). Without successful reading experiences, academic knowledge and success likely will continue to decrease with each successive school year for these struggling students.

Moreover, Paratore and McCormack (2011) reported that "despite significant emphasis on and funding support for early intervention in literacy, substantial numbers of students continued to experience reading difficulty in the intermediate years and beyond" (p. xiii). Marchand-Martella and Martella (2013a) reported similar results and stated "Large percentages of students in our country are failing to read at high levels. This skill deficit affects these students for the rest of their lives" (p. 15). Further, these struggling readers may be the majority of the students in a classroom, since "in some schools, it is common to have significant numbers of classes in which 75-80 percent of students cannot successfully read textbooks" (Carnine & Carnine, 2004, p. 204). Pertaining to these reading difficulties, there is much research to address reading acquisition for younger students as well as strategies for those who may struggle with early reading concepts. However, there is a limited amount of research pertaining to older students who struggle with reading and how best to address their issues. In contrast, one of the studies that centered on older students found that there was little evidence of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies, such as the teacher thinking aloud while reading, in one middle school and two high schools (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). It is likely, however, that adolescent struggling students often can advance their reading skills and strategy knowledge through a targeted focus on improving comprehension.

Through research that led to instructional strategies, and then with appropriate targeted instruction, struggling readers may demonstrate "accelerated growth in reading and writing and increased motivation and engagement to read in and out of school" (Paratorre & McCormack, 2011, p. xvii). Goals such as these are a means to improve academic reading for those who struggle with this important skill; in addition, the

potential exists to create life-long readers. An "affective knowledge of reading, or the love of reading, relates to positive attitudes, emotions, and feelings, and motivation or desire to read" (Au, 2002, p. 70), which can lead to an increase with both in school and out of school literacy experiences.

As to improvement in reading abilities through targeted strategy use, an instructional reading strategy that has been shown to lead to gains in comprehension ability is that of repeated reading. Samuels (1979) was one of the first researchers to identify the usefulness of this strategy, including to improve comprehension. His findings encouraged others to investigate repeated reading's effect on comprehension and fluency. These researchers, including Pikulski and Chard (2003), Rasinski (1989), and Therrien (2004), found results like those of Samuels. For example, success was found for improved comprehension and fluency after having students read a short, instructional level passage a few times, thereby confirming that students could attend to the meaning of text more easily.

One of the components of reading that impacts comprehension is that of fluency. Fluency can affect a reader's success with comprehension to such an extent that it is considered a key piece of the reading puzzle. Furthermore, leading reading researchers, like Cunningham and Allington, updated their 2010 landmark teacher resource book, *Classrooms that Work*, to include a chapter on fluency. In this chapter, the authors highlighted fluency's importance to reading comprehension and its ties to accurate decoding skills and vocabulary acquisition (Cunningham & Allington, 2010).   In addition, Paratore and McCormack (2011) underscored the importance of vocabulary study, fluency, and comprehension strategies in the book they edited pertaining to

struggling readers in grades three and beyond. Likewise, Hall, Burns, and Edwards

(2011) created their version of *Empowering Struggling Readers: Practices for the Middle*

Grades and devoted chapters to curriculum concepts, engagement of the reader,

comprehension strategies, vocabulary acquisition, and discussions about text that is read.

Clearly, a struggling reader is one who is multi-faceted with unique needs. These

students are the ones "who often have persistent difficulties in comprehending texts and

learning academic subject matter" (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011, p. 1). Yet, fluency

improvement through practiced oral reading must include the important aspects of

automatic word recognition in combination with prosodic reading; these skills will lead to

the reader's improved ability to construct meaning from the text (Kuhn, Groff, &

Morrow, 2011).

The notion of comprehending text implies an understanding of the written words,

but this can present a challenge in content areas due to the specialized vocabulary.

Compounding the various reading challenges exhibited by struggling readers within the

classroom is the fact that the student population is becoming increasingly unique (Roller,

2002), and many students may be coming to school without being reading ready.

Consequently, this creates a challenge for teachers who must address the various ability

levels, background and experiential knowledge, personal interests, economic challenges,

minority group status, vocabulary acquisition levels, and other unique differences.

Theoretical Base and Historical Perspective

The traditional concept of what it means to comprehend stems most often from

the way many students previously were taught in school: "teachers 'taught'

comprehension mainly through posing questions about text content and asking us to retell

or summarize the text in some way" (Keene, 2010, p. 11). This "antiquated" view of comprehension is unfortunately the main method of comprehension instruction in today's modern classrooms (Keene, 2010). Considering the literal level of questioning many teachers employ in the classroom, the classification of this style of comprehension instruction would be simply assessing basic comprehension. Rather, teachers could consider offering instruction to students about how to be more effective with comprehension strategies. Moving beyond simple recall, short-term memory details of text to a broader, deeper understanding of the material requires focusing on skills and strategies that enable a student to activate the many cognitive processes involved in the reading process.

To move beyond low-level questions and answers, comprehension instruction should include explicit instruction in a variety of strategies. Levels of comprehension can be enhanced through a focus on inferential questioning along with word work, which includes examination of affixes and root words along with vocabulary study. Vocabulary and background knowledge both are key to comprehension success (Fisher & Frey, 2009) and in combination "do not sit simply dormant until needed; they mediate the extent to which other reading comprehension behaviors are utilized" (Fisher, 2013, p. 3). Finding strategies that will activate word knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to gain a deeper understanding of text likely will enhance a student's comprehension abilities.

As to a specific instructional reading strategy, Samuels (1979) asserted repeated reading as a comprehension strategy was successful, which affirms his earlier work regarding automatic word recognition's role in smooth, fluid reading. As a pioneer for

the idea of repeated readings, Samuels said the notion of repeated reading involves a student "rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. Then the procedure is repeated with a new passage" (Samuels, 1979, p. 376). Word attack strategies or oral reading techniques for improvement are not strategies typically practiced by middle school level teachers (Allington, 1983; Kuhn, Groff, & Morrow, 2011; Rasinski & Zutell, 1996), yet with the potential for enhancing reading success, teachers of adolescent students could consider such strategies for inclusion in their instructional repertoire.

In support of the evidence that this gap in upper level instruction exists, Kuhn, Groff, and Morrow (2011) stated some may be surprised to find a chapter on fluency contained in a source targeting older students. Thereby, the authors categorized fluency as "a component of literacy development and instruction that is typically considered a focus for the primary grades" (Kuhn, Groff, & Morrow, 2011, p. 3). As for the connection between effective reading and vocabulary, the National Institute of Literacy reiterated that "both decoding and vocabulary affect fluency; as a reader gains mastery over new content vocabulary, fluency is likely improved for that content area" (What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy, 2007, What challenges do adolescent readers face with fluency? sect.). The assumption by many teachers is that students are instructional and independent readers, and able to read grade-level material, but this is often an incorrect conclusion and can lead to struggles with reading that continue throughout a student's middle and high school years. This is problematic in that "schools create a culture that supports the categorization of some youth as successful and others as failing" (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011, p. 8), often leading to the label of

struggling or marginalized reader that remains with a student throughout his or her school career.

Because of a lack of targeted instruction to improve oral reading and reading abilities, many middle and high school reading teachers, and certainly content area teachers, may be puzzled as to how they might assist those students who are struggling with the advanced levels of reading material. The majority simply assume the students know how to read with accuracy and appropriate speed, but just need to master the curriculum or text concepts as well as the specialized content vocabulary. As to the reading process for these upper level students, background knowledge, interest in the subject matter, inferential skills, and reasoning skills all impact readers' success with the text (Van Den Broek & Kremer, 2000).

In contrast, students who struggle with advanced academic reading in middle and high school may in fact possess reading skills and knowledge, but this knowledge might not be recognized in classrooms. In fact, students are reading outside of school through gaming, personal writing, and social media. These means of reading and communicating may be strengths for marginalized students, yet these "struggling readers actually possess a great deal of knowledge about reading that is not always recognized, valued, or fully utilized in schools" (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011, p. 4.). It seems likely that most struggling students fit the description prescribed by Hall, Burns, and Edwards (2011) as "readers [who] earnestly want to change their social status in classrooms and be involved with the curriculum. They want to work alongside their peers as full and capable participants who have something meaningful to say" (p. 11). By working to close the achievement gap of marginalized readers who may be struggling in most or all academic

classes, teachers, schools, and districts will be moving toward a more responsive stance. In this manner, all levels of readers will be able to succeed as instruction is targeted to the individual needs of diverse learners comprised of a unique group of students.

Comprehension

The goal for any reading activity, rather it be for pleasure, instructional purposes, or a work-related concept, is to understand the words (Anderson, Hiebert, Wilkinson, & Scott, 1985). This meaning making process is known as comprehension, which Harris and Hodges (1995) defined as "the reconstruction of the intended meaning of a communication; accurately understanding what is written or said" (pp. 38-39). Word knowledge impacts one's reading ability, and the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (2002) found that the highest comprehension scores for fourth grade students were also from the most fluent readers while the reverse situation was true that less fluent readers had lower comprehension scores (National Center for Education Statistics, Oral Reading Study, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002).

In a classroom setting, there may be readers with weak individual reading skills and low comprehension results, yet these same readers can more easily comprehend material read to them by the teacher or another student. The stronger listening comprehension results from eliminating the burden of deciphering the written words; therefore, it is a component of some special needs students who have processing issues, as written into their Individualized Education Program for a read-aloud accommodation. However, research has shown that stronger listening comprehension abilities, as compared to reading comprehension, shrink as students advance in grade levels

(Diakidoy, Stylianou, Karefillidou, & Papageorgiou, 2005; Sticht & James, 1984). In contrast, fluency and decoding of words may remain an issue for some struggling readers so that their listening comprehension may be higher than that of silent reading, even past the seventh grade (Biemiller, 1999).

Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro (2015) summed up the concept of reading comprehension by stating "Reading with comprehension depends on rapid and accurate literal and inferential interpretation of written language, integration of ideas in the text with one's existing background knowledge, and being alert to whether or not the meanings are adding up" (as cited in Moates, n.d., Text Comprehension sect.). Reading is a complex mental process that involves several cognitive activities that occur in tandem, such as word knowledge and background knowledge, as the reader interacts with the text. In fact, Van Der Broek and Kremer (2000) categorized reading as an exclusively human complex mental process. The ability to recognize sounds, symbols, and words automatically while reading will impact a student's ability to comprehend words and material that is read; therefore, improving automaticity in word recognition should improve comprehension as well. An improvement in comprehension will support the main goal in academic reading: for students to learn concepts from the text and thereby gain new knowledge or enhance their existing knowledge.

Moje (2010) reiterated that comprehension in primary school is quite different than that for middle and high schools. At the upper level, students must rely on "at least four types of knowledge and/or skill [sets that] are necessary to comprehend advanced texts of the secondary school subject areas" (p. 52).   These types of knowledge include semantic (word knowledge), discipline-specific (content area), discursive (how texts are

constructed), and pragmatic (purpose of the reading), and Moje posited that more than one of these skills will be needed as the difficulty level of the text increases. In the Carnegie Report *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006), struggling adolescent readers were noted to have a particularly difficult time comprehending content area reading. To be academically successful, it seems upper level students will need to be proficient in a variety of text organization structures, vocabulary, and content concepts encountered in their academic reading.

Repeated Readings

How, then, do educators target enhanced reading abilities to improve comprehension for students in upper grades? Incorporating the strategy of repeated reading may address the issue of comprehension weakness for older struggling readers. By reading a short passage out loud two to three times, students can focus less on pronouncing the words and attend more to the overall meaning. Beers (2003) recommended that teachers discuss any word miscues with the student for the first of the repeated readings, and then there should be a decrease of miscues in the next one or two readings of the same passage. This oral reading improvement is due to the situation that "as students reread, they are focusing on correcting the miscues they made previously and improving their phrasing and rate" (Beers, 2003, p. 217). With improvement in word reading, more focus will be available for understanding the meaning of the text.

An improvement in oral reading and its impact on reading comprehension continues to be an important point of study in research, since a decrease in missed words likely will lead to fewer word recognition issues for the student. Furthermore, word decoding and recognition may help solidify decoding strategies and word knowledge for

students who are marginalized, struggling readers. The diminishing effort needed to recall and to recognize a word seems to allow struggling readers to attend more to what they are reading, as opposed to just simply calling or saying the words until they reach the end. Beers (2003) supported this concept by stating that "fluent readers know the words automatically, spending their cognitive energy on constructing meaning" (p. 205), which is the main goal for any material that is read. Armes (2011) reiterated this idea when he suggested the need for improved comprehension and added "a great way to encourage this is through repeated oral practice of the same reading selection, which helps students with word recognition, fluency and prosody as well as general reading and comprehension" (Para. 4).

More attention to expressive reading often occurs with the introduction of the repeated reading strategy, and this important element of fluent reading was noted by the National Reading Panel in 2000, (as cited in Farstrup & Samuels, 2002), who

came out strongly in favor of repeated reading and similar techniques for

promoting reading fluency, concluding that repeated reading procedures

had a clear and positive effect on fluency at a variety of grade

levels…[and] on variables such as word recognition, reading speed, and

comprehension. (p. 175)

This leads to essential reading goals for all students, but especially for struggling readers: improved fluency, better word recognition, improved reading speed, more advanced word knowledge, increased range of vocabulary, and better comprehension of words that are read.

In the thirty-seven years since the publication of Samuels's classic article on repeated readings, there have been numerous studies and references pertaining to using repeated readings with the goal of improving fluency and comprehension (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Pikulski & Chard, 2003; Rasinski, 1989, 2003; Rasinski, Blackhowicz, & Lems, 2006; Samuels, 1979; Therrien, 2004). For example, Rasinski (1989) found that repeated readings and listening while reading were effective in improving the reading fluency for a group of third grade students. While Rasinki's study was comprised of high, average, and low ability readers, a focus on students of average and low reading abilities is efficacious as well for research studies.

The 2007 report prepared by the National Institute for Literacy for content area teachers of adolescent students suggested oral repeated reading of a text, but stressed sensitivity be maintained so as not to embarrass or call unwanted attention to students who are struggling with fluent reading. An excerpt from Schumm's (1999) *Adapting Reading and Math Materials for the Inclusive Classroom* described the procedure for repeated reading in several ways, to include group, pair, and individual reading. Paige (2011) presented the idea of whole class choral reading for fluency while Topping (1987) suggested pair and buddy reading to enhance fluency; paired or partner reading also was described on Reading Rockets (Paired Reading, n.d.) for younger readers or those who struggle with reading. Regardless of the exact format of the repeated reading procedure, the benefits are clear for readers at all instructional levels. With improved word recognition and fluency, reading will become more prosodic and smooth. Thereby, readers can increase their ability to focus cognitive attention to details in the text, leading to better comprehension abilities (National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Pikulski & Chard,

2003; Rasinski, 1989, 2003; Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2006; Samuels, 1979; Therrien, 2004).

Furthermore, Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, and Smith (2008) offered the concept of scaffolded silent reading to improve fluency and comprehension in that this guided type of silent reading can include goals and strategies, such as repeat reading of the passage. Rasinski (2003), a leading literacy expert, also suggested reader's theatre and radio reading as additional choices for strategies to improve fluency as well as more accurate word decoding. Schumm (1999) discussed fluency's impact on reading by saying

> Non-fluent readers typically read in a piece-by-piece, word-by-word
> manner and are slower and less accurate than fluent readers in decoding.
> With such inadequate reading patterns, non-fluent readers typically fall
> behind their peers and do not find enjoyment in reading. Moreover,
> because their reading is laborious, understanding of text is hampered.
> (What is the adaption? section)

Some older struggling readers read in just such a manner as Schumm described, and it is often a difficult situation for the student reading, the class, and the teacher. This concept was noted by Paige (2006) who said "by the time they get to middle school, they know who they are. When they are called to read, other students become agitated after just a minute or so" (p. 168). This sad reality for an older struggling reader simply reinforces his or her difficulty with reading, and it is likely that this laborious reading hinders comprehension for the struggling reader. It also may take away the aspect of simply enjoying reading for these students, which in turn may limit their life-long reading opportunities. The affective reading aspect, or a love of reading, is an important concept

that possibly could be improved upon with the appropriate strategies, approaches, modeling, and increased interest in reading.

In addition, automatic recognition of words affects comprehension and fluency. Samuels's research work in the 1970s built upon the theory of automatic information processing (LaBarge & Samuels, 1974). Samuels (1979) said "according to automaticity theory, a fluent reader decodes text automatically—that is, without attention—thus leaving attention free to be used for comprehension" (p. 379). Samuels's concept of repeated reading was based on this theory of automaticity, and it includes three levels of development for word recognition skills: nonaccurate stage, accuracy stage, and automatic stage (p. 379). As with many reading skills, advancing through the stages of word recognition is a continuum of learning and is applicable to all ages of general education students as well as those with special learning needs.

Moreover, Samuels (1979) traced the concept of rereading a short passage to early American educational practices. The books used in our American schools in the 17th century "for reading instruction frequently contained familiar material" (Samuels, 1979, p. 380) that students could read over and over while hornbooks "introduced reading through the use of prayers and verses already familiar to the children" (Meyer, 1957, as cited in Samuels, 1979, p. 380). The strategy of repeated reading has been a part of educational practice for more than 400 hundred years, highlighting its efficacy and usefulness in the reading classroom.

Examining our historical educational reading strategies demonstrates that educators in the Colonial period often utilized reading familiar text and repeatedly reading lines from a text as a common form of practice (Samuels, 1979). Specifically,

the process of repeated reading was an instructional strategy used by the Puritans and other settlers of early America that was adopted from educational principles in their native lands of Europe (Samuels, 1979).   Repeated reading is a successful and useful strategy that has been practiced by educators for centuries in both European and American education. "In fact, some [early American] schools were called 'blab schools' because students were required to read orally, reread, and memorize their lessons" (Rasinski, 2003, p. 10).

The element of familiarity of written words and an enhanced automatic process of word recognition enables a reader to attend to the meaning of the text in a more precise manner. The activity of reading involves intricate cognitive processes and is one of the most complex of all cognitive activities (Van Den Broek & Kremer, 2000). Consequently, freeing attention from decoding and word recognition issues will allow cognitive functioning to focus on the important aspect of understanding the words written on the page. Comprehending words is the main goal of reading any type of text.

As to concrete instructional strategies, when his article was republished in 1997 by *The Reading Teacher*, Samuels provided four main ideas for repeated reading in his Author's Notes section. These concepts were based on his review of nearly 200 studies on the concept of repeated reading, and two of these related the idea that "there is transfer of fluency to other portions of the text . . . [and] repeated reading is the most universally used remedial reading technique to help poor readers achieve reading skill" (Samuels, 1979, p. 381).

In support of the notion of repeated reading, a website for intervention strategies for struggling students and those educators who participate in Response to Intervention,

known as Intervention Central, offers a five-step process list to incorporate repeated reading for those who struggle, indicating that this does not have to be a complicated process within the classroom (Repeated Reading, n.d.). The steps for implementation also include a "hint" section that suggests students pick out books or articles that are of interest to them (Repeated Reading, n.d.), which was also suggested in the INQUIRE summary on repeated reading (Repeated Reading, n.d.). The element of interest is a valid point that applies particularly to older readers who likely will be more interested in reading if the text matches a personal interest or curiosity. It is important that students have some choice in their learning and in the material read in class, and this concept applies to intervention work as well. Students have varied interests; therefore, capitalizing on these interests when possible will help the strategy of repeated reading seem more applicable to the students in any class setting but particularly for older students.

Other websites also include information on repeated reading. Many of these sites, including Reading Rockets (n.d.), supported the strategy and reported it is "an instructional practice for monitoring students' fluency development" (Timed Repeated Readings sect.). The strategy explanation cited the research of well-known literacy researchers, including Rasinski (2003) and Samuels (1979, 2002), among others, including Kuhn and Stahl (2003) and Vacca and Vacca (1999). Therefore, incorporating repeated reading to improve comprehension and fluency is indicated as likely leading to more successful reading and comprehension for students of various ability levels, interests, and educational settings.

Furthermore, Paige (2006) found repeated reading to be effective within his study framework of fluency levels for struggling sixth grade students. Paige categorized this by saying "repeated reading can provide disfluent readers with increased confidence about their reading skills as they watch their reading rate increase" (p. 168). Although Paige's study involved students who all had learning disabilities and were in a self-contained special education language arts classroom, it is likely the use of repeated reading for any group of struggling readers will enable them to demonstrate gains in reading rate and fluency. This should have a positive impact on their comprehension of material read, as fluency impacts readers' abilities to understand the decoding of words as well as word recognition skills. As a result, fluency can affect a reader's success in understanding the material he or she is reading.

In an Evidenced Based Intervention Network Brief, Balensiefer (2010) said repeated reading "is a reading intervention that has been highly researched. Repeated reading primarily focuses on increasing reading fluency; however, studies have indicated additional benefits" (Intro. para.). Balensiefer also offered theoretical support based on LaBarge and Samuels's (1974) model of attention within the process of reading. As previously noted, this theory describes the concept that when extra attention is needed to decode words, then readers will not have the cognitive capacity to understand what they just read. By developing automaticity and fluency, readers will then have the space and means to devote cognitive attention to comprehension, which is the general purpose and goal of reading. The result will be better, more proficient readers who have a deeper understanding of the materials they have read.

Moreover, Stahl (2000) offered the notion of practice as an essential means of improving fluency and suggested repeated reading as one of the four means of incorporating this much-needed skill practice. Stahl stated that repeated reading is a "classical approach" and readings should be timed, miscues counted, and the results graphed for each component. For an element targeting older students, the readers might graph the results themselves. By graphing the times and errors themselves, older readers would be actively involved in the process and may take more of a personal interest in their outcomes. Also in consideration of older readers, Fuchs and Fuchs (2000) recounted repeated reading as "a more complex activity" (p. 98) that they recommended incorporating into a comprehension building strategy for older readers who may struggle.

For more recommendations on this instructional strategy, Joseph (2008) addressed the concept of repeated reading for those who struggle with reading and suggested students practice this reading strategy to improve reading skills. She maintained that repeated reading of passages would lead to "improvement in reading accurately, quickly, and with expression" (p. 1171). Joseph reiterated that students would benefit the most from being timed, reading orally, and having their errors corrected, which concurs with Stahl's (2000) suggestions. In addition, it is best to provide reading passages that are on the students' instructional level (Joseph, 2008). Instructional reading level text indicates a student can read the material with teacher support and that the text is not too frustrating or challenging (Harris & Hodges, 1995). When possible, personal interests of the students should be considered as instruction is planned and passages are chosen, particularly for older students.

As to the efficacy of the strategy, Rasinski (2003) stated that

Repeated reading is a powerful tool. However, in many

classrooms repeated reading is rarely done. Teachers and

students tend to read a selection once, talk about it a bit, and

then move onto the next selection. But there is much to be

gained from reading a text more than once. When repeated

reading is employed on a regular basis and in engaging ways,

students' word recognition, reading fluency, and comprehension

improve significantly. (p. 100)

Rasinski included the word "engaging" to describe the recommended repeated reading

strategy, which would be of particular importance to older struggling readers. These

students may be reluctant to participate in reading activities, and the elements of

relevance and interest may help to combat resistance often found in middle and high

school readers who are struggling. In addition, the social element of working with a

partner also may appeal to older readers. Furthermore, Rasinski elaborated on repeated

reading's efficacy by purporting that this oral reading strategy "provide[s] additional

sensory reinforcement for the reader, allowing him or her to focus on the prosodic (i.e.,

intonational) elements of reading that are essential to phrasing . . . and [thereby] ensure

that the student is reading, not skimming or scanning, the text" (p. 31, parenthesis in

original). With practice, a reader can become efficient in decoding skills to such a degree

that the automatic, fluent nature of word recognition allows for focused attention on the

main task for reading, that of constructing meaning from the words (Rasinski, 2003).

In the same manner, other researchers have offered support for similar reading

strategies, such as shared reading, word level work, and Reciprocal Questioning

(ReQuest). Fisher, Fry, and Lapp (2009) reported that shared reading activities are an excellent way for teachers to demonstrate how to interpret and how to interact with text. This modeling technique includes versions of repeated reading, including echo reading and choral reading. Similarly, Lapp and Gainer (2010) described strategies using popular songs and writing to closely examine words. They were concerned about the "disconnect [that] seems to exist between word-level processing and comprehension skills of many students" (Lapp & Gainer, 2010, p. 195). Several of Lapp and Gainer's suggestions involved rereading material for a closer look at the words. Finally, Grant (2010) reviewed the instructional strategy of Reciprocal Questioning (ReQuest), which was created by Manzo in 1969, and that directs students to critically think during the process of reading. Students then reread the material before formulating questions to ask their teacher. Each of these strategies incorporates an element of the instructional strategy of repeated reading, highlighting its importance to the concept of comprehension.

As a review of various research pertaining to the strategy of repeated reading, Dowhower (1989) reported that there is "evidence to show it is a viable instructional tool not only for disabled or remedial readers in special classes but also for developmental readers in regular classrooms, and for not only very young children but also mature adults" (p. 502). Research has indicated that repeated reading is beneficial for not only low achieving students, but also for high achieving students; furthermore, this reading strategy supports more efficient word processing so that more cognitive attention can be devoted to comprehension (Dowhower, 1989). The notion that repeated reading as a strategy can benefit readers of all levels is evidence that this easy to incorporate strategy should be included in instructional plans for all reading teachers. With "research

evidence to show that repeated reading procedures produce gains in speed and accuracy, result in better phrasing and expression, and enhance recall and understanding for both good and poor readers" (Dowhower, 1989, p. 506), enhanced comprehension should be the result of incorporating this strategy. Furthermore, content area teachers also could utilize the repeated reading strategy for their middle and high school students. This would help them reach a deeper understanding of both the contextual vocabulary as well as the concepts and specific information found in the text resources. The goal for content reading, like all reading, is for the students to grasp the meaning of the words (Rasinski, 2003).

To conclude from the various research articles and the authors' suggestions, the standard format for repeated reading is that students read a short (100-200 word) passage at their individual instructional reading level. This oral reading should be in a timed format while errors, time, and accuracy are tracked; the targeted goal is at least 100 words read correctly per minute. Graphing the results is optional in that this is not always a recommended element of the strategy, but it is suggested to include this actively created visual source for older students who are participating in the repeated reading strategy.

Fluency

Fluency is a key reading skill; a weakness in this proficiency can impede readers from the critical element of comprehending written words. As defined by Harris and Hodges (1995), fluency is "freedom from word-identification problems that might hinder comprehension in silent reading or the expression of ideas in oral reading; automaticity" (p. 85). Likewise, Rasinski (2003) categorized fluency as "the ability of readers to read

quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good meaningful expression" (p. 26). Rasinski cautioned, however, that fluency is more than simply reading accurately and reiterated that fluency weaknesses can result in poor comprehension of written material. A successful reader is one who can read at an appropriate pace, with expressive qualities and appropriate phrasing, and who can grasp the meaning of the written words. Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) expressed the importance of the relationship between reading fluency and comprehension by stating

> Slow, capacity-draining word recognition processes require
> cognition resources that should be allocated to comprehension.
> Thus, reading for meaning is hindered; unrewarding reading
> experiences multiply; and practice is avoided or merely tolerated
> without real cognitive involvement. (p. 8)

Additionally, Stahl (2000) included fluent, prosodic reading as an essential component for a reader who can interact with text to gain information while using "context to monitor reading". This would lead to comprehending the material that is read. Samuels (2002) described the importance of fluent reading with the concept that "the most important property of fluent reading is the ability to perform two difficult tasks simultaneously, as, for example, the ability to identify words and comprehend a text at the same time" (p. 167). This theory of fluency as reading without word identification issues is based on the automatic information processing in reading, from the 1974 LaBarge and Samuels research findings (Samuels, 2002). More recently, the important concept of comprehension has been added to most discussions involving fluency and its

impact on successful reading, which highlights the key influence of automaticity when reading.

As to fluency enhancement during a repeated reading activity, Schumm (1999) suggested the teacher lead a brainstorming session and model the passage prior to beginning, as this brainstorming would help set a purpose for the activity. The extent of the modeling would depend on the fluency level and decoding proficiency of the student, as he or she may need modeling of the passage prior to the first reading to help with difficult words. Wolf (n.d.) purported that focus on reading fluency has gained in popularity due to "a growing realization of its importance in reading comprehension" (Introductory para.). In addition, fitting with the concept that there are several components which help create a successful reader, fluency is "not so much of an outcome, [but]…a developmental process that is shaped and influenced by all the linguistic systems that give us knowledge about words", (Wolf, n.d., para. 8). Peggy McCardle, who served in the capacity as former head of the child development and behavior branch at the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development, said "viewing comprehension as a sequential skill rather than a continuously evolving one 'also implies they don't need ongoing instruction after 3rd grade, and we clearly know they do'" (as cited in Sparks, "New Literacy Research Infuses Common Core", 2015, Response to Findings sect., para. 7).

For fluent readers, there seems to be a certain ease of oral reading, and listening to a fluent reader is often an interesting and satisfying experience for a teacher. The expressive reading sounds like natural conversation, with intonation, phrasing, and inflection a noted part of the oral reading. The opposite, however, is certainly true as

well. It is tedious to listen to a disfluent reader read out loud with little or no expression nor intonation. The word by word reading style is often slow and labor intensive for the reader as well as the listeners. A report prepared by the National Institute for Literacy focusing on older readers that included strategies for content area teachers found similar reading styles for older students in that "struggling readers lack fluency, read slowly, and often stop to sound out words" (National Institute for Literary, 2007, What Challenges do Adolescent Readers Face with Fluency? sect.). In the same manner, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) found improved expression is an important aspect of fluent reading, along with intonation and phrasing. Each component of fluent reading leads to prosodic reading, a goal for oral readers once they have a certain element of automaticity in their decoding and reading abilities. With smooth, appropriately paced reading and automatic word recognition, readers can focus on the important task of comprehension.

Blau (n.d.), writing for Scholastic.com, provided five ways to develop and to improve fluency which would help readers' confidence, accuracy, and understanding. In addition, Blau suggested modeling fluent reading and repeated reading as the top two strategies for fluency improvement, which then could lead to improved comprehension and more enjoyment in the act of reading. Likewise, Joseph (2008) included fluency instruction as part of her "best practices" for addressing reading problems. She suggested targeting reading rate and speed as a means of improving fluency, which would lead to improved reading comprehension success.

If the goal for reading is to comprehend, then a targeted focus on each of the involved elements should be included in reading curriculum at all levels of instruction. Fluency instruction should be integrated when it is noted as a deficiency in students'

reading. Rasinksi, Blachowicz, and Lems (2006) reiterated that "until recently, reading fluency had not been a priority in reading instruction in the United States" (p. 1). The authors also reminded educators that they could not have a singular focused definition of fluency, such as "reading fast or with good oral expression" (Rasinski, Blachowicz, & Lems, 2006, p. 1). This caution should be extended to the students as well.

Incidentally, speed also should improve with repeated readings, and since the National Assessment of Educational Progress included speed in their definition of fluency for the Reading Framework (2013), it is an important enough piece of the reading puzzle that the rate of reading does impact a student's overall reading ability. Too slow a pace of reading leads to disfluent, word by word reading, and often a student will have little idea what he or she just finished reading. Too fast a pace of reading, on the other hand, may lead simply to focusing on speed and ignoring accuracy as well as comprehension of the passage. Chard, Pikulski, and McDonagh (2006) corroborated this concept when they maintained "The ability to read words as orthographic chunks or units increases word recognition. This speed in word recognition enables readers to focus on constructing meaning from text" (p. 46). A slow pace of reading impacts the ability to devote the necessary cognitive functioning to comprehend the words the student just read. Therefore, the main goal of reading, which is to gain understanding, is compromised.

Research has demonstrated that fluency is an important component of a successful reader's skills. Fluent readers are those who can read without the effort of struggling to recognize words, can use appropriate phrasing, and can attend to syntactical clues as well as sentence structure. Automatic word recognition and a prosodic, expressive quality are

two components of fluent reading, and struggling with one or both elements leads to the type of reading often heard from a disfluent, struggling reader. This potential struggle with fluency and its ensuing impact on successful reading and comprehension are strong reasons to consider incorporating fluency instruction into reading curriculum. Reading success may be impacted by what Allington (1983) called a forgotten goal of reading instruction—fluency. When warranted, a clear focus on fluency is beneficial to building successful reading experiences.

Furthermore, Moats (n.d.) reiterated the importance of "sound-symbol decoding and automatic recognition of words" (Reading Fluency and Word Recognition sect.) as critical skills necessary for fluent reading and suggested additional practice may be needed prior to word recognition becoming "automatic". The strategy of repeated reading may have a positive impact on automaticity and fluency. Samuels (1979) maintained that comprehension improves with each successive reading and that "as less attention is required for decoding, more attention becomes available for comprehension" (p. 378). This supports the concept that repeated reading will enhance both fluency and comprehension for older readers, particularly those who are struggling with the reading process. A clearer understanding of what is read likely will be the result. Consequently, this may enhance struggling readers' self-esteem and conceptual viewpoints of themselves as successful readers inside and outside the classroom. As Samuels (2006) summed up in his discussion of fluency, "The routes to fluency development seem reasonably clear. One route is to have students get extensive practice reading books . . . The other route for building fluency is through the use of the many varieties of repeated reading" (p. 18).

Students with Learning Disabilities

It would be remiss not to discuss the teaching of literacy strategies for special needs students. In fact, there are several studies pertaining to utilizing the strategy of repeated readings with students who had learning disabilities. From the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report Students with Disabilities Repeated Reading (2014), two studies comprised of students who had learning disabilities in grades five through twelve were found to show an improvement in comprehension but not in fluency or alphabetics when using repeated reading as a strategy. Although this intervention report found no improvement in fluency with the inclusion of repeated reading as a strategy, the aspect of fluency improvement with struggling readers is a noted outcome in other studies. These research studies were comprised of participants from both regular education and special education settings.

Sindelar, Monda, and O'Shea (1990) found that students with disabilities had a similar improvement in rate of reading and detail recall as compared to students without disabilities. As part of the study, both groups of students read a short passage either once or three times, and reading rates improved for both instructional and independent level readers. Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, and Baker (2001) posited that there is an overall indication that a strong correlation exists between reading fluency and comprehension. However, they also indicated

"A major problem identified in descriptive research studies is that, when compared with students without learning disabilities, students with learning disabilities have limited background knowledge for reading most texts" (p. 286). These gaps of background

knowledge and experience often found in students with disabilities have a negative

impact on comprehension success (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001).

Furthermore, The Students with Learning Disabilities Repeated Reading

intervention report (2014) stated that repeated reading "is based on the theory of

automaticity, developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The theory is that fluent readers decode

reading text automatically, enabling the reader to focus on comprehension" ("Program

Information", Background section). Paige (2006) found that repeated readings with

special education students improved reading rate as well as led to a decrease in word

reading miscues, and concluded that "these two factors may improve overall reading

efficiency" (Abstract sect.). In further support of repeated reading, fluency focus, and

comprehension improvement for special needs students, Martel (2012) also confirmed the

usefulness of a focus on fluency for students with disabilities and suggested utilizing the

strategy of tracking growth and improvement on fluency as a motivating factor (Reading

Strategies sect.). Seeing a visual, concrete improvement on a graph of fluency

performance can be utilized with success (Martel, 2012). The fact that repeated reading

as an instructional strategy involves encountering and saying material more than once

seems to be beneficial to special needs students and may help with motivation as well as

successful reading outcomes.

With similar findings, the importance of decoding words was addressed by Gough

and Tunmer (1986), and the authors maintained that decoding words correctly is directly

related to reading. In fact, they provided an equation to support this concept: Reading =

Decoding x Comprehension, where comprehension is linguistic rather than reading

related. This linguistic interpretation implies an understanding of the words and their

component parts as opposed to knowledge about the individual word's meaning. Perhaps this explains the perplexing occurrence when students, both general education and special education, are skilled decoders and oral readers yet cannot comprehend accurately what they read.

In addition, other studies found that incorporating the repeated reading strategy led to gains in reading skills for students with learning and behavior issues, to include comprehension, word recognition, and fluency (Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, & Martin, 2007; Lingo, 2014; Staudt, 2009). These are vital skills that impact all students' success with reading, and building on these skills could enhance achievement with reading in an academic setting. By improving fluent reading and word knowledge skills, there likely will be a noted improvement in the students' comprehension success. However, an admirable goal is to create life-long readers who can master successfully the various reading tasks put to them throughout their lifetime. Improved reading skills for special education and general education students would impact reading in all its forms, which would include academic and nonacademic reading. Out of school literacy, such as reading for enjoyment and entertainment, work related reading, how-to pieces, and social media, can contribute to a student's successful life as a productive citizen throughout his or her lifetime. Helping to inspire literate, critical thinking citizens is a worthy goal for educators at all levels.

Conclusion

Several seminal studies have reported on the reading strategy of repeated reading and its impact on comprehension and fluency. Yet, many of these studies have been conducted with younger elementary students as opposed to older students at the middle

school level (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Samuels, 2006). To determine the impact on older students, this research has been designed to investigate the instructional reading strategy of repeated reading for adolescent readers. There is a gap in the present research field pertaining to older students who struggle with comprehension, and this research has been devised to address this important missing piece in reading research for adolescent students.

Furthermore, the goal of this project was to determine how effective the strategy of repeated reading could be in addressing comprehension weaknesses. An equally important goal was to design and to implement targeted strategies that would help fill the research gap for struggling older readers. By helping to determine appropriate instructional strategies, the aim for this project was to create more proficient adolescent readers who can navigate successfully the world of literacy in school as well as set the stage for proficient, life-long readers. Research can help solve the puzzle of addressing the needs of adolescent readers who struggle with comprehension and create productive citizens who can read and analyze a variety of text throughout their lives. In the next chapter, methodology information is presented along with setting, participant, and instrumentation information.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLODY

INTRODUCTION

Middle school students who struggle with reading comprehension was a concern

for the present researcher as was a lack of targeted instruction to improve reading

comprehension through various strategies. At the researcher's rural middle school,

struggling readers were not consistently being instructed with a targeted goal for reading

skills, such as improvement in reading comprehension success or improvement in word

knowledge. The middle school in the study has several struggling readers, as evidenced

by grades, standardized test scores, and computer program reading levels below the

current grade level. Therefore, these students tend to struggle in nearly all academic

classes due to difficulties with reading and comprehension of text.

Every academic course involves reading in some capacity, and the ability to

navigate successfully various text formats and specialized vocabulary greatly impacts

success within the classroom. This is especially true at the middle and high school level,

where students must confront content area text full of specialized vocabulary. At the

researcher's middle school, the building principal stated that reading scores on the end-

of-the-year standardized tests were a targeted focus for improvement. On the

standardized tests, comprehension scores for both fictional stories and nonfiction text

were below the expected level for success within the classroom. The researcher has

noted a weakness in the ability to comprehend successfully material that is read in the

classroom, on computerized tests, and on the standardized tests given at the end of each academic year. Weakness in comprehension was consistently observed for a group of eighth grade students; this included both general education students and special education students. As a result, students' persistent issues with understanding material read was a top concern for the researcher to address and then to offer concrete strategies for struggling students as a means of improving their reading abilities.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this action research study was to incorporate the strategy of repeated reading and to determine the impact on eighth grade students' comprehension level of material read in a rural southern middle school. This study focused on the strategy of repeatedly reading two to three times a short text while the researcher evaluated the oral reading. Weekly comprehension knowledge of grade level text was evaluated as well, utilizing both explicit and implicit question formats post reading. In addition, evaluation of comprehension was further investigated through written responses to questions created by the researcher in the form of a pretest and posttest. Finally, reading behaviors were noted by the researcher and were combined with student responses to two surveys in the form of questionnaires.

Statement of Problem of Practice and Research Question

The researcher sought to address the following problem: Eighth grade middle school students who struggle with reading often have weak comprehension skills. This struggle impacts negatively students' success in academic classrooms, success with standardized tests, and self-esteem as effective students and readers.

The goal of teaching is to help students reach their potential as learners and as citizens of our global world. According to the mission statement adopted in 2006 on the National Education Association's (NEA) webpage, a prominent goal of teaching is that of "equal opportunity. We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character", (NEA's Vision, 2006, Mission and Values, Equal Opportunity sect.). Struggles with basic reading skills hinder students from reaching their potential and independence as a learner and productive citizen. This led to the formulation and the focus of the research study with a target of helping older struggling readers. The researcher's goal was to investigate the following question: What impact will the strategy of repeated reading have on the comprehension level of eight eighth grade students at a rural public middle school in the Southeast?

Action Research Design

As a practitioner currently teaching in a public middle school, action research was an excellent fit for this research. Action research addresses a specific problem within an individual classroom, and it enabled the researcher to gather and to analyze data pertaining to a reading comprehension concern (Butin, 2010; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014; Mertler, 2014). The researcher specifically designed the parameters of the study to fit the needs of the students who may struggle with reading comprehension. Action research that incorporated the gathering of data in tandem was the most appropriate in that it allowed the researcher to gather both quantitative and qualitative data throughout the time-frame of the study. Quantitative data was collected utilizing a comprehension pretest and posttest, weekly comprehension quizzes, a fluency rating scale, accuracy

when reading, a short survey, and a questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale. Qualitative data was collected in the form of field note forms and a researcher journal.

The research design was chosen so that a full and accurate profile for each of the participants as a reader could be created; additionally, this allowed for a more thorough examination for potential growth. A mixed methods design allowed the researcher to investigate various types of data and to evaluate the complete picture of participants as readers (Mertler, 2014). Using numerical data or narrative data exclusively would have provided only a portion of the reader profile of each participant. There were behavior, attitude, personal feelings, voice, and body language aspects of a reader that could not be gleaned by simply examining a number on a comprehension test or an end-of-the-year standardized test. However, statistical data points were important to the overall picture of the participants in that each student needed a comprehension score, a speed, accuracy, and fluency score, and a rating score for two surveys created by the researcher.

By combining both types of data collection and analysis, the researcher could examine more thoroughly the research question pertaining to the strategy of repeated reading and its impact on comprehension.   As the procedural operation was that of a concurrent procedure, the researcher collected information and data simultaneously (Mertler, 2014). At the end of the study period, the researcher converged both qualitative and quantitative data. A triangulation mixed-methods design was appropriate for this research since each type of data was pertinent for this study.

Setting and Time of the Study

The setting of the action research study was a rural public middle school that serves students in grades five through eight. The researcher's two English 8 classes were

used as participants for the study, to include four students from each class. The public middle school is in a southern state, in a mountainous and isolated area of the Appalachian Mountains. To protect the identity of the participants as well as that of the setting, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

The time-frame for the study was during the spring semester in the English 8 classroom. Over a period of eight weeks, the researcher gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. The data gathering process occurred within the framework of the regular 90-minute block period. Each session occurred in the morning, with one class working on the strategy of repeated reading from 9:45 until 10:05 each Tuesday and Wednesday, and the second class working on the strategy of repeated reading from 11:15 until 11:35 each Tuesday and Wednesday. Data collection occurred concurrently, with weekly comprehension evidence combined with the results of the repeated reading strategy in conjunction with the researcher maintained journal created from the field note information.

Data was collected on Tuesday and Wednesday over an eight-week period; each session lasted approximately 20 minutes in the morning near the end of the block for both classes. A different short passage or poem was utilized for each session. The schedule of data collection and strategy implementation was as follows.

Week One:

Tuesday, two surveys were distributed and filled in and then were collected. The strategy purpose, research goals, and the procedures plus a research time-line were reviewed orally. The pretest was administered individually in written form; it occurred post silent reading of a historic presidential speech, except for the two special education

students who have a read-aloud accommodation in their Individualized Education Program. See Appendix C for speech and pretest.

Wednesday, the strategy was introduced with a brief explanation, modeled by the researcher including how to mark time and errors of partners, and then the class participated in the repeated reading activity for 15 minutes. Data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Two:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Three:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher.   See Appendix C for passage.

Week Four:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Five:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Six:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Seven:

 Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Week Eight:

Tuesday, the repeated reading strategy was practiced for approximately 20 minutes and data was noted by the pairs of students as well as by the researcher. See Appendix C for passage.

Wednesday, the posttest was administered individually, following a silent read of the historic speech, except for the two special education students who have a read-aloud accommodation in their Individualized Education Program. See Appendix C for speech and posttest.

Participants

The volunteer participants for the study were from a rural middle school in a southern Appalachian region state and were from the researcher's English 8 classroom, comprised of general education and special education students.   According to the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test results at the eighth-grade level, "34 percent of low SES students, . . . 60% of students with disabilities, and 26 percent of all male students score at the lowest levels on the test and cannot read well enough to navigate in a typical classroom" (as cited in Moats, n.d., Facing the Problem

sect.). These findings mirror to a certain extent the population of the study's volunteer participants.

Difficulties with reading are often compounded by the social aspects of middle school and the many physiological and social concerns related to adolescence. Daily struggles in the classroom and a feeling of inferiority may be the situations faced by struggling readers, compounded exponentially if these students are already placed within a marginalized group due to poverty, race, or special education status. As Moats (n.d) stated, "A struggling reader is equally, if not more, in need of school experiences that promote self-respect, competence, self-reliance, social integration, and peer collaboration" (The Adolescent Struggling Reader sect.) than are students who do not struggle with reading.

Furthermore, the researcher has noted most struggling students avoid reading unless it is part of a structured class activity. This included opportunities to read utilizing technology, so even if electronic devices are an option, they may be most often used for social media or gaming as opposed to reading books or magazines. Generalizations about this rural area and its communities are unfair to apply unilaterally, however. There are exceptions to the common pattern of struggles with literacy for students who are at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale or who have been classified as special education students. Billings, Norman, and Ledford (1999) cautioned against this type of generalizing and they maintained that "the Appalachian region . . . [and its] stereotypical perceptions ignore the reality of the diverse communities and cultures within" (as cited in Ronan Herzog, 2013, p. 208). Perceived difficulty with reading as well as pronouncing words may perpetuate the commonly held stereotypes about the Appalachian mountain

region. Ronan Herzog (2013) concluded that defeating the typical stereotypes of marginalized groups can be accomplished if our society were able "to develop a more informed and public understanding of the complex and diverse Appalachian region and its people" (p. 215). Breaking down these stereotypes and myths about both the cultures and people of the Appalachian region could be further facilitated by advancing the reading abilities, school performance, and self-confidence of those who struggle with words, fluent reading, and comprehension.

Moreover, stereotypes about poor, rural communities may have contributed to a lower self-efficacy for some of the struggling students in this research study. Tatum (2013) emphasized that "Stereotypes, omissions, and distortions all contribute to the development of prejudice" (p. 65.) The researcher has often been told by students that they are just "hillbillies" and "rednecks" so reading and school are not that important. Clearly, stereotypes and classifications were limiting these young students and impacting the belief system in which they find themselves trapped. Tatum further advanced the notion of racism by stating "that while all Whites benefit from racism, they do not all benefit equally. Other factors, such as socio-economic status, gender, age . . . [and] mental and physical ability, also play a role in our access to social influence" (p. 67). The students with whom this researcher worked fit many of these classifications.

Poverty and unemployment were prominent features in the study environment, which impacts school performance and perceptions about education in many important ways. Adams (2013) reported that the 2011 Census revealed 16.4 million children were living below the poverty line and deep poverty is on the rise while "one in four children [are] dependent on aid" (p. 141). Furthermore, Mantsios (2013) supported these figures

by stating "Approximately one out of every five children (4.4 million) in the United States under the age of six lives in poverty" (p. 151). The number of children qualifying for a free and reduced rate for meals at the researcher's school was approaching 60% while neighboring schools in the county were even higher, with one school at over 90% of students receiving free or reduced lunches. Undoubtedly, economic situations were impacting the public school system as well as the student population within the study environment.

Oftentimes, success in school seems to go hand in hand with economic status. Mantsios (2013) confirmed this notion when he stated, "School performance (grades and test scores) and education attainment (level of schooling completed) also correlate strongly with economic class" (p. 155, parentheses in original). For the researcher's students from low income families, the daily struggles for a decent lifestyle often seemed to outweigh the concerns pertaining to school performance. This situation is compounded if health issues or special education status are also part of the equation, which Wolanin (2013) found to be the case in that "students with disabilities generally have lower incomes than their peers without disabilities" (p. 180).

Consequently, class status indeed does impact education in a very profound manner and influences success within the school setting. hooks (2013) posited that "the white poor make up the majority of the poor in this society" (p. 200). The too often underprivileged students from poor backgrounds are impacted in many ways within a public school environment, and this was evidenced by the academic and reading struggles that they commonly experienced in the researcher's English 8 classroom. Along with these struggles often comes low self-esteem and lower expectations for future success, all

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of which are compounded if the student is also within the category of special education status or a racial minority.

To gain a sense of the unique personalities and situations of each of the eight participants, the following is a brief biographical statement for the participants. A pseudonym was used for each participant., five of whom were boys and three of whom were girls.

John is a regular education student who is approximately three grade levels below his present grade placement for reading comprehension. His grades range from B's to F's with math being the highest and English being the lowest, and comprehending material seems to be a weakness.

Sabrina is a talkative student who seems to have many friends and participates in group work in the classroom. She seems to struggle with comprehension and avoids reading unless part of a structured lesson. Sabrina is a regular education student and is two grade levels below her present placement for reading comprehension. Her grades are B's and C's for academic subjects.

Richard is one of the most successful readers in the class, with grades that reflect his intelligence. His grades are A's in all subjects, and he is one grade level above his current level for reading comprehension.; he is a regular education student.

Braxton is an autistic student who receives special education and speech services. He participates in group work but avoids speaking out in class, although his speech is adequately understood. Braxton makes C's and D's on his report card and is currently three grade levels below present grade level for comprehension.

Amy seems to be a shy student who avoids contact with other students. She reads very slowly and is three grade levels below her current placement for reading comprehension. Amy receives special education services and makes C's and D's on her report card.

Charlie is very quiet in class and social settings, and his family dynamics often change from week to week. He reads very softly and hesitantly; his comprehension level is two levels below his current placement. Charlie does not receive special education services and makes A's, B's, and C's on his report card. His seeming struggles with comprehension are especially concerning given the fact that he is not a special education student.

Ashley is a regular education student who is one level below her current placement for comprehension. Vocabulary seems to be an issue, as she uses simple words in her writing and speech. She participates in both class discussions as well as group work. Her grades range from C's to A's on her report card.

Cameron is a regular education student who appears to love to read aloud in class. He participates in any discussion and will often initiate conversation. Cameron loves sports and focuses his time and energy toward this endeavor, apparently leaving little time for academics. He makes B's and C's on his report card with the occasional D, and Cameron professes he does not care because all he wants is to earn passing grades so he can play sports.

Ethical Considerations

As with any quality research project, propriety and ethics were closely monitored. The researcher strove to ensure that not only were personal ethics and specific institutional ethical guidelines followed, but also those of federal guidelines, especially

considering the study included special needs students. Ensuring participant safety and anonymity was first and foremost. Even for sharing results within the school, the researcher needed to maintain participant anonymity, since some of the participants were special needs students. Also, the researcher worked to ensure students were not singled out or embarrassed in any way, which was an attainable goal as all students were participating in the repeated reading strategy at the same time as part of regular class instructional time.

The participant volunteers were informed of all study considerations and safety was monitored. Throughout the study, all guidelines of personal ethics, local school district, the University of South Carolina, and all federal ethical guidelines as they pertain to special needs students were followed consistently as well as accurately. Because all participants were middle school students, and therefore under the age of 18, parental or family consent and involvement was needed prior to the initiation of the study period. Participation in the research was conducted on a voluntary basis, yet no incentives or limitations were placed on any student because of his or her decision to participate in the research study. There also were no course grade enhancements or reductions due to participation. Letters were given to all students in the English 8 classes (see Appendix A) and were returned within a week's time.

Instruments

Throughout the acting stage of action research, data of various types were collected from both the student participants and from the researcher. For the study on the strategy of repeated reading and its impact on comprehension, the researcher collected

both quantitative and qualitative data. The various characteristics of reading data collected created a full, complete picture of students' reading profiles.

First Instrument, Pre/Post Comprehension Assessment: The researcher administered a reading comprehension pretest at the beginning of the study period, along with a posttest at the end of the study period, for each participant. This was done individually and in written form. The test was based on a historical speech presented by President Roosevelt to a Joint Session of Congress in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, with ten fill-in-the-blank or short answer questions created by the researcher.

Second Instrument, Likert Scale: A Likert scale was administered that involved students responding to seven questions pertaining to themselves as readers. Attitude and self-perception are important components of a reader's profile, so this was key information to gather from each participant. Choices encompassed agree to disagree on a continuum for each question, which were worded simply. Additionally, the researcher administered a reading interest survey to determine further the participants' attitudes toward reading as well as the types of material they most enjoy reading. The interest survey was a short question and answer format, with most of the five questions answered on a semi-open ended format. Data was used to guide the selection of passages utilized for the repeated reading sessions.

Third instrument, Observation Field Notes: Narrative data was collected throughout the action research study in the form of a researcher maintained journal. Student behaviors and comments were noted on the days the strategy sessions occurred. These field notes were an important piece of information for creating a full profile of each reader and for evaluating the impact of the repeated reading strategy.

Fourth instrument, Artifacts/Comprehension Checks: Weekly comprehension quizzes were scored as part of the classes' instruction and were also used as part of the study data. These quizzes were in response to material read in class during the week and were completed individually.

The observation by the researcher of comprehension difficulties exhibited by some students led to this study which assessed the strategy of repeated reading's impact on comprehension abilities. This concept fits with Mertler's (2014) notion that "action research is participative, since educators are integral members—not disinterested outsiders—of the research process . . . and action research is a planned, systematic approach to understanding the learning process" (p. 20). Action research seemed particularly appropriate for this study in that it allowed the researcher the opportunity to evaluate and to modify concepts about the field of reading and how it pertained to the students in the researcher's English 8 classroom. This systematic approach involved specificity of the problem with reading and exploration of ways to improve the issues with weak reading comprehension skills (Mertler, 2014). Action research with the researcher's own specified instructional practice and its possible impact on students enabled the researcher to create potential solutions. In turn, these potential solutions and strategies would lead to a possible improvement in instructional practice for a positive influence on student learning with improved reading comprehension outcomes.

Quantitative Data Collection

The researcher collected various types of quantitative data throughout the research period. Several were repeated during the research time frame, while the pretest, posttest, and surveys were administered only at the beginning of the study period.

Surveys. All participants were surveyed by responding to a short, researcher created questionnaire, comprised of five questions pertaining to reading strategies as well as personal interests in reading. Also, the researcher administered a rating scale in the form of a Likert scale. This was a five-point scale (strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree) with each choice assigned a numerical value for the students to choose as they answered each of the seven questions. The questions were simply stated and researcher created. Inferential statistics in the form of a chi-square test were used to compare and to analyze the frequency for each response of the group. Results are in Appendix F.

Fluency. For participant fluency ratings, the researcher utilized the National Assessment for Educational Progress four-point scale developed as part of a 2002 oral reading study. This four-point rating scale evaluates a student's oral reading on the criteria of syntactical cues, phrasal reading, and expressive reading. These individual fluency scores were charted over the study period, and the numbers were displayed visually in the form of a line graph contained in the Appendix F section. To help with the consistency of the scores, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a special education teacher within the school to score the participants to enhance inter-rater reliability while still maintaining ethical integrity. This was for comparison purposes, with the goal of both raters granting the same score for students' oral reading. Individual scores were graphed in the form of a bar graph, to show the scores from each data point collected throughout the study. This graphical display showed improvement for each participant and is presented in the Appendix F section.

Accuracy and time spent reading. For the repeated reading strategy, a short passage was presented to each participant during the 20- minute strategy session two times per week. Both sessions were conducted at consistent times on the mornings of Tuesday and Wednesday, during the regular class time and as part of class instructional activities which helped alleviate concerns that other students would know who was participating in the voluntary study. Pairs of students were presented with passages or poems and blank paper to note time and to track mistakes for each other. The researcher, however, tracked the results and gathered the data for the participants while collecting similar results for nonparticipants on a rotating basis. The method of collecting data from all students at various times was incorporated to help maintain anonymity of the participants. Results are graphed in the Appendix F section.

Pretest/Posttest. Each participant completed a pretest and a posttest at the beginning and then at the end of the data collection period. Both tests were the same and were based on a historical presidential speech from 1941. This nonfiction speech included ten questions written by the researcher that were given post-reading. There was no discussion of the answers for the questions, and there were several weeks of time between the two administrations of the test. Also, there were many other stories, articles, and poems read during the study, all of which helped maintain test/retest reliability.

Weekly comprehension checks. As part of the regular instructional strategy for both English 8 classes, weekly comprehension quizzes were utilized. This information provided another set of data with which to combine in conjunction with the other quantitative data. These weekly comprehension quizzes provided the researcher with a means of monitoring any improvement as noted within regular classroom activities.

Several of these comprehension quizzes involved a short story or article read as a class activity while two of them centered on poetry read in class.

Qualitative Data Collection

The researcher collected various types of qualitative data throughout the study, predominately in the form of field note information and a researcher journal for narrative data. This field note information provided insight into student behavior, observed attitude, and spoken words which were noted as they occurred. Each day, these notes were typed in the form of a narrative journal. This data provided valuable understanding as to researcher observed reading behaviors and vocalized student comments reflecting self-awareness of oneself as a reader. Many of the comments and behaviors noted in the researcher journal provided a snapshot view of the participants' thinking at the time of the repeated reading activity.

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Data Analysis

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The inductive analysis process of the qualitative data collected involved organizing, coding, and arranging by theme each piece of data. Once this process was completed, then the researcher began to describe the data in such a manner that similar features or categories were noted. After the organizational process was complete, it was necessary for the researcher to interpret the descriptions of the data. It was here that the researcher began to note similarities and patterns as well as contradictory or confounding data. Both were very valuable in determining an answer to the research question, as patterns and similarities in data point to an affirmation of the strategy leading to improvement, while opposing data points lead to the conclusion that the strategy was not effective. Statistical analysis was utilized for the quantitative data. With all data

analyzed carefully using appropriate descriptive, inferential, and inductive statistical analysis methods, both quantitative and qualitative data led the researcher to answer the research question. Through the action research study, the researcher determined how incorporating the strategy of repeated reading a short passage impacted participants' success with comprehension.

Conclusion

Many of the reading studies conducted since 1974 have led to the industry accepted concept that reading comprehension is impacted by many factors, including word knowledge and fluency. Fluency is closely related to reading success, and by improving fluency, a reader's comprehension generally will improve as well. As a result, repeated reading has been included in many studies as a targeted strategy to improve reading comprehension (Pikulski & Chard, 2003; Rasinski, 1989, 2003; Samuels, 1979; Therrien, 2004). The publication nearly forty years ago of Samuels's (1979) classic article on repeated readings has led to numerous studies and references pertaining to using repeated readings with the goal of improving comprehension, word knowledge, and fluency. Rasinski (1989) posited that repeated readings and listening while reading were effective in improving the reading fluency for a group of third grade students. Kuhn and Stahl (2003) found that appropriate phrasing while reading indicated the reader's level of comprehension of the material read. In addition, Therrien (2004) found in a meta-analysis that the research-based strategy of repeated reading could be used with regular education as well as special education students to improve comprehension and fluency. Similarly, Staudt (2009) investigated word study in combination with repeated reading

with two special education students and found the method to be effective in overall reading skills improvement.

There are several action research studies (Berg & Lyke, 2012; Klubnik, 2009; Ruskey, 2011) similar to this action research study; however, this study varies in some important ways. This action research study involved eighth grade middle school students, and this appears to be a somewhat neglected category for a study involving the strategy of repeated reading. Most often, middle school students are presumed to be proficient readers who can utilize various reading strategies. This will enable them, it is assumed, to be successful with the vast amounts of content specialized vocabulary and reading they will encounter while in middle school and later in high school. However, this is not the reality for many middle school students who struggle with reading and are below grade level for instructional reading and comprehension skills, as was the case in the researcher's classroom. A study centering on struggling middle school students was warranted as a means of building upon the previous studies that evaluated repeated reading and its impact on comprehension.

Reading improvement strategies that highlight comprehension and fluency have been a focus in the curriculum and instructional guidelines for primary aged students, but not as much of a goal for instruction or evaluation for middle school students. This action research study sought to address this gap and to discover the impact of incorporating the strategy of repeated reading and its effects on comprehension with eighth grade middle school students. The researcher believes a repeated reading strategy action research study as a means of improving comprehension success was appropriate for upper middle school struggling readers. Furthermore, the researcher hoped to see a

positive change in the readers' fluency levels, to include reading speed, prosody, and attention to syntactical clues. As this was indeed the positive effect finding, the researcher discussed the positive findings with the participants on an individual basis. In addition, in an informal setting, the researcher shared with the administrators and teachers within the building the results of the study and how to incorporate this reading strategy within the regular classroom setting, as the findings demonstrated a positive correlation. Protection of participant privacy was maintained throughout the informal sharing process, and a plan of future action was crafted and was shared with all interested parties. Negative or neutral findings were shared as well with the appropriate audience, to include participants and school personnel.

With the use of repeated readings, one would expect to see an improvement in comprehension success. Since they were attending less to decoding and word calling, the participants had increased cognitive energy and a better opportunity to focus on understanding the concepts and creating meaning. After all, understanding what is read is the goal of reading. Successful reading is a critical skill, with all other subjects in school related to reading in some capacity. Furthermore, reading is a life skill that impacts a person's ability to function as an informed citizen in today's global society. As a reading teacher, the researcher must make every effort and take each opportunity to employ action research strategies to assist all students, but especially those who struggle with reading. This notion of reading for understanding will impact students as they move beyond school to higher education or to the workforce. Today's global, instantaneous, communication focused society demands strong reading skills, and the researcher looks

forward to conducting future action research cyclical studies that will expand the

knowledge of how to assist those who struggle with the critical skill of reading.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the impact on the comprehension level in a middle school

class after incorporating the strategy of repeated reading. A small group of 8th grade

students (n = 8) participated in the voluntary study for a total of eight weeks in their

English 8 classroom with the teacher serving as the researcher. All activities and data

collection occurred in the context of the regular classroom during two morning blocks,

which created an authentic atmosphere for the study. As a problem of practice, the

researcher was concerned about the difficulties with comprehension several students

demonstrated, both for class activities as well as for standardized tests. A key feature of

action research is "the planned, systematic approach to understanding the learning

process" (Mertler, 2014, p. 20).   In this manner, research practitioners can address a

specific concern in their classrooms or school district, such as the issues with

comprehension success within the researcher's classroom.

A mixed methods approach was the most appropriate form of research for the study. An

individual's reading profile is more than just a simple grade level number or test score;

therefore, both qualitative and quantitative data were needed to provide a full and

complete picture of reading abilities and attitudes. The research study was comprised of

weekly comprehension checks, reading accuracy, rate and fluency, pretest/posttest scores, attitude surveys, researcher journal entries, and researcher observations. The study population was a group of eighth grade readers, several of whom struggled with reading at a rural public middle school located in a Southeastern state in the Appalachian Mountains. This chapter presents a summary of the findings.

Research Question

What impact will repeated reading have on the comprehension level of eight 8th grade students at a middle school in the Southeast?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of repeated reading as a strategy on participants' success with comprehension.

Findings of the Study and Interpretations of the Results

Two prevalent themes emerged after carefully examining the data. The first theme can be characterized as the affective aspect of the classroom environment and secondly there was a noted impact on the comprehension level of the participants. The researcher evaluated the sources of data, to include the researcher journal, field notes, observations, and the testing components, and after each data set was conflated, the overarching patterns began to emerge. Frequent commonly expressed thoughts, behaviors, and actions of the participants emerged along with commonalities in comprehension evaluation. As a result, the researcher could then link all data points to the tangible affective and comprehension improvement themes.

Impact on Affective Domain

During the time-frame of the study, the researcher began to note an affective aspect to the classroom environment. For example, as the study progressed for the eight weeks, several students began to comment about their enjoyment of the repeat reading activity. Specifically, three participants originally indicated on the Likert scale (Appendix B) that they preferred to read alone. Yet, the researcher recorded on the field note forms (Appendix D) that two of these students demonstrated through their body language and comments their engagement with the repeated reading strategy as an affective indicator. Their body language seemed to indicate that they enjoyed the partner reading aspect involved with the strategy implementation. Charlie, who seemed shy and quiet during class, told his partner, "Well, I guess we can do this reading" one day and on another day said, "I did better the second time, thank goodness!" In addition, Richard seemed quite competitive when participating in the repeated reading activity, stating comments such as "This will be easy" and "It was fun to try and beat yourself in reading" and "This reading thing is pretty cool!" To clarify the third student who indicated he preferred reading by himself, Braxton was an autistic special needs student who appeared not to enjoy interacting with his classmates.

Likewise, John, who struggled throughout the year with literacy activities, shifted from laughing and stumbling over words during the repeated reading sessions to indicating his enthusiasm for the repeated reading sessions when he said, "Hurry up!" to his partner as well as "I'm going to read first today, not you" and "I want to say the words right" along with "I want to read this a third time!" Along a similar track of improved behavior and comments, Sabrina shifted from "Hurry so we can finish first"

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and "Don't laugh at me" and "I've never been good at reading anyway" to "This isn't so bad" and "At least I improved the second time" and "This reading thing is not too bad" as well as the final comment of "Is this it? Are we going to do the reading thing again?" The researcher noted these seemingly enthusiastic and positive comments on a regular basis as the study progressed.

The other special needs student, Amy, spent the first four sessions over the first two weeks of the study worrying about being with her friend Katy (a pseudonym) as well as not wanting to read first and then gradually shifted to comments such as, "This isn't so bad" and "Let's flip to see who goes first" and telling the researcher "I like this." These words of seeming enthusiasm, an active, involved demeanor, and positive comments as the study progressed were marked signs of improvement for Amy in comparison to her regular classroom behavior. Along these trajectories of improved behavior and attitude, Ashley started the sessions by first worrying about who her partner would be and if she could use her phone when she finished reading. Then, as the study progressed, her comments shifted to things such as "Let's do that reading thing!" and "I'll go first today" to "I think I did okay with this reading thing today." Similarly, Cameron began the study by asking questions like "Is this stuff we have to read boring?" and "How long is this going to be today?" As the weeks progressed, he began to state comments such as "I think I'll do alright with this today" to "I'll do mine last so I can read to the class" and "Last time for this? Well, we can do it again later." Normally, Cameron is very busy with sports and friends and does not appear to devote a great deal of time to reading and academic pursuits.

As to a related concept, Richard indicated on the semi-open ended questionnaire (Appendix B) that he focuses on the vocabulary words and rereads difficult parts as two reading strategies that he uses. He also stated that he read as much as possible, maybe an hour, outside of class. Richard is one of the more successful students in the researcher's English 8 classes, and he did very well with all aspects of the study. The other student who indicated a longer time than the overwhelming answer of a few minutes/10 minutes of reading outside of class was Amy, a special education student with a read-aloud accommodation in her Individualized Education Program. She responded on the questionnaire that she reads for 30 minutes a day and will ask a friend along with go back and focus as her two reading strategies. Generally, Amy seemed to have processing issues when reading or listening to text, but the researcher noted in the journal that she appeared to be involved and active in the repeated reading activity. In fact, the researcher stated several times in the journal that Amy appeared to be giving full effort as well as focusing on the task at hand, a contrast to the normal class behavior.

Similarly, along the trend of a shift in attitude, one half of the participants indicated they enjoyed reading books or magazines while the other half disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Appendix F). Yet, it was noted throughout the study time-period that many students expressed enjoyment for reading, words, and the repeat reading sessions. Apart from Braxton, every student expressed a degree of interest and enjoyment as the study progressed. For example, several participants, including John, Sabrina, Richard, and Amy, stated they were pleased when they improved their accuracy and times. In addition, many of the participants stated they knew a specific

word, such as etymology or obscure, and that they could "beat" their personal errors and times or that of their partners, as recorded by the researcher.

In addition, it was noted in the journal that certain students, to include John, Sabrina, Amy, and Charlie, seemed hesitant to read orally and embarrassed by mistakes made when reading orally with their partners. Yet, as the study progressed, laughter or "My bad!" and "Oh, no!" shifted to high-fives with each other as well as rushing to get to the designated area for the partner repeated reading activity. The researcher also noted many smiles when the second read was an improvement as to accuracy and/or time from the first read, more animated and involved behavior, inquisitiveness about the topic for that session's reading, and focusing on the text to help improve the results of the reading. These recorded comments and behaviors are a shift from the regular classroom behavior.

The researcher noted on both the field note form and in the journal many similar exhibitions of behaviors and stated comments pertaining to a seeming enjoyment of and engagement with the reading activity. In addition, the researcher observed a positive shift in the classroom environment. This affective change included such aspects as enthusiasm for the repeated reading activity that occurred on the two designated days each week as well a more positive atmosphere in the classroom. As a result, the researcher integrated all the data which led to the discovery of the tangible affective classroom behavior improvement for both attitude and demeanor. With each participant, there was a general sense of positivity.

As a final aspect on the Likert questionnaire, it is note-worthy that no participant chose the option of neutral for any of the seven questions. Mertler (2014) maintained that there is no "right or wrong" choice when deciding to include this option, but he did

recommend including it in a five-point scale. Therefore, the researcher opted to include a choice of neutral as an additional option for the students. As upper middle school students, it seemed possible that the participants might not have an opinion one way or the other on each question, although that was not the case when the questionnaire was tallied and analyzed.   Data is displayed in the Appendix F section (Figure F.18).

In addition, regarding the semi-open ended questionnaire, responses were used as a resource to gain further information about thoughts on academics and reading; the main purpose, however, was to gather ideas as to types of passages to select for the strategy implementation sessions. The data were not formally evaluated or used as part of the data analysis for this study. Rather, the researcher sought additional facts and opinions from the study participants as a means of selecting interesting, pertinent text to use during the repeat reading sessions. Responses that assisted in the selection of passages included three participants who indicated they liked English or history as well several respondents who stated they liked true stories, anything in a series, and stories about friends and school.

As a conclusive point, the combination of field note forms and the researcher journal created a clear line to the affective theme of improved classroom environment. Students, both study participants and nonparticipants, distinctly indicated through actions and words that the environment was more positive and that they enjoyed the repeated reading activity on the two designated days each week. The researcher was asked almost daily when they were going to be able to do "that reading thing." By utilizing the centrally focused data gleaned from the field notes, questionnaires, and journal, the researcher discerned an emotional response to the study that had an impact on the

participants' impressions as to the efficacy of what they were doing with repeated reading.

Impact on Comprehension Success

Pretest and Posttest

As to the second tangible theme of a noted improvement in comprehension tasks, participants demonstrated gains of various levels for each of the data sets centering on comprehension. For example, five students improved their scores and one student decreased in accuracy by one question on the pretest/posttest; two students scored the same for both tests. Specifically, Amy improved the most from 20% to 70% while John improved significantly as well from 10% to 50%. These two students struggled consistently throughout the year with literacy and comprehension assignments. Cameron improved from 60% to 90% while Sabrina improved from 70% to 90%, and Ashley improved slightly from 80% to 90%.

Conversely, Charlie decreased slightly in his score for the pretest/posttest from 80% to 70%. In addition, two students' scores remained the same: Richard at 80% and Braxton at 30%. However, for the pretest, Braxton left five questions blank but on the posttest, he left zero questions blank. This seemed to be an improvement of a different category. The fact that Braxton answered all questions on the posttest seemed to demonstrate a more willing attitude to complete reading comprehension work, since Braxton often left answers blank with the comment "I can't do it" or "I'm frustrated." To confirm this notion, the researcher did not note Braxton expressing negative feelings and frustration during the posttest administration in contrast to the pretest administration when it was noted that he said, "I hate reading!"
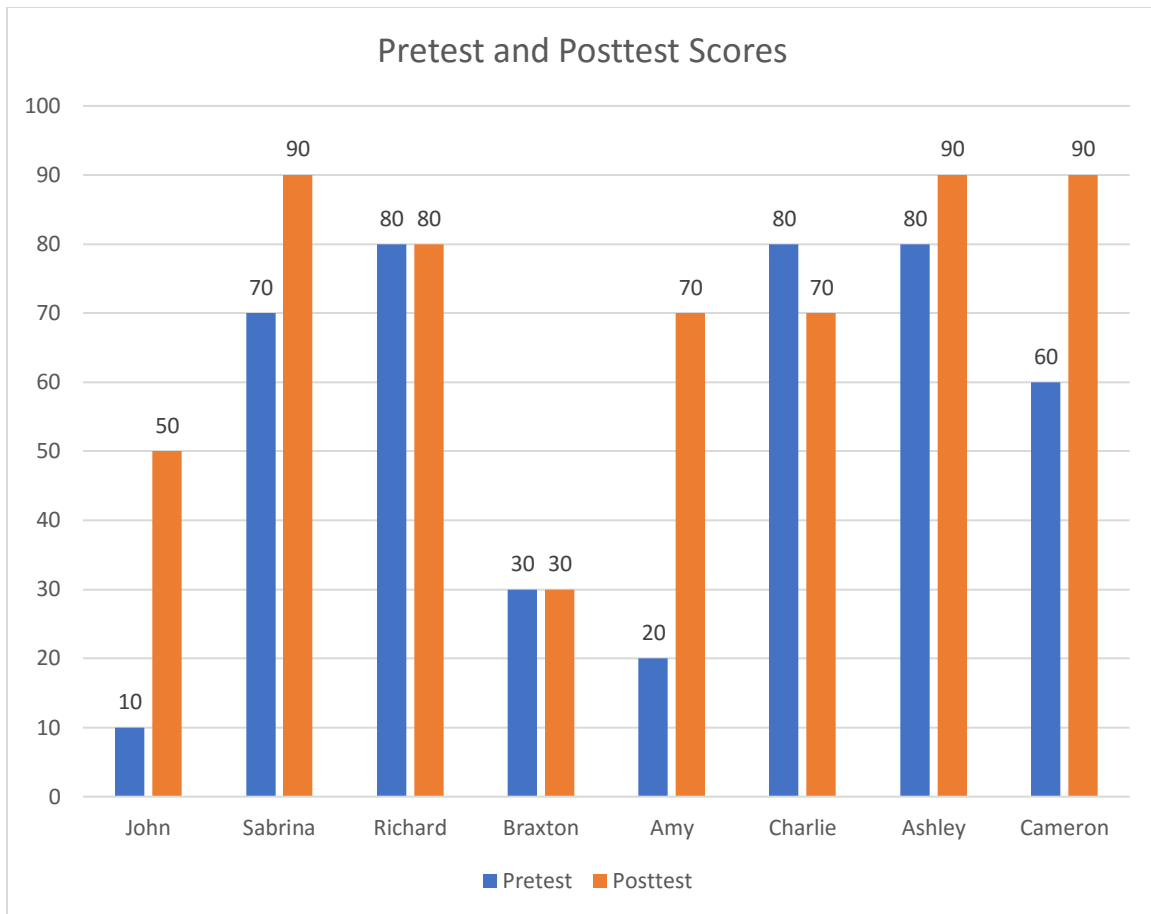
Figure 4.1 Student Pretest/Posttest Scores

Considering gains in the mean scores for the participants, the mean score for the pretest was 53.75%; the mean score for the posttest was 71.25%, with 17.5 points as the increased mean value from the pretest to the posttest. The range for the pretest was 70% while the range for the posttest was 60%, with a 10% total difference for the two test scores. To help with score continuity and validity, the researcher did not discuss with any participant or classroom student the historical speech of President Roosevelt nor any of the ten questions; furthermore, there were several weeks between the administration dates for the tests. Students also were reading other material as part of the regular classroom instructional plan.
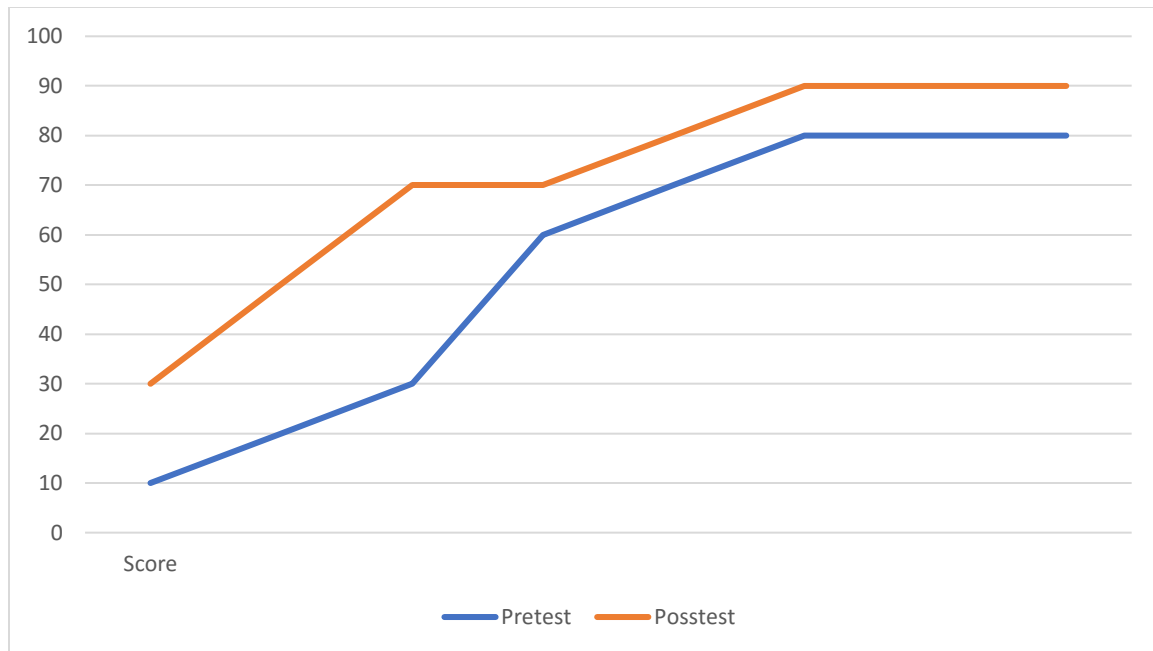
Pretest/Posttest Group Scores

Figure 4.2   Pretest/Posttest Group Scores

Weekly Comprehension Scores

Similarly, the researcher found further support for the overarching pattern of comprehension improvement in the weekly comprehension scores. These scores were collected as part of evidence regarding a potential impact in comprehension success; quizzes were part of the regular classroom assignments that were completed by all students. While the average scores for each individual quiz remained predominately steady throughout the study time-frame, the scores were reflective of the normal performance for students. However, there were group gains between the first four comprehension checks and the last four comprehension checks. Specifically, four of the eight participants gained in total averages while one participant had the same average for

both sets of comprehension quizzes. Three students decreased their mean scores for the
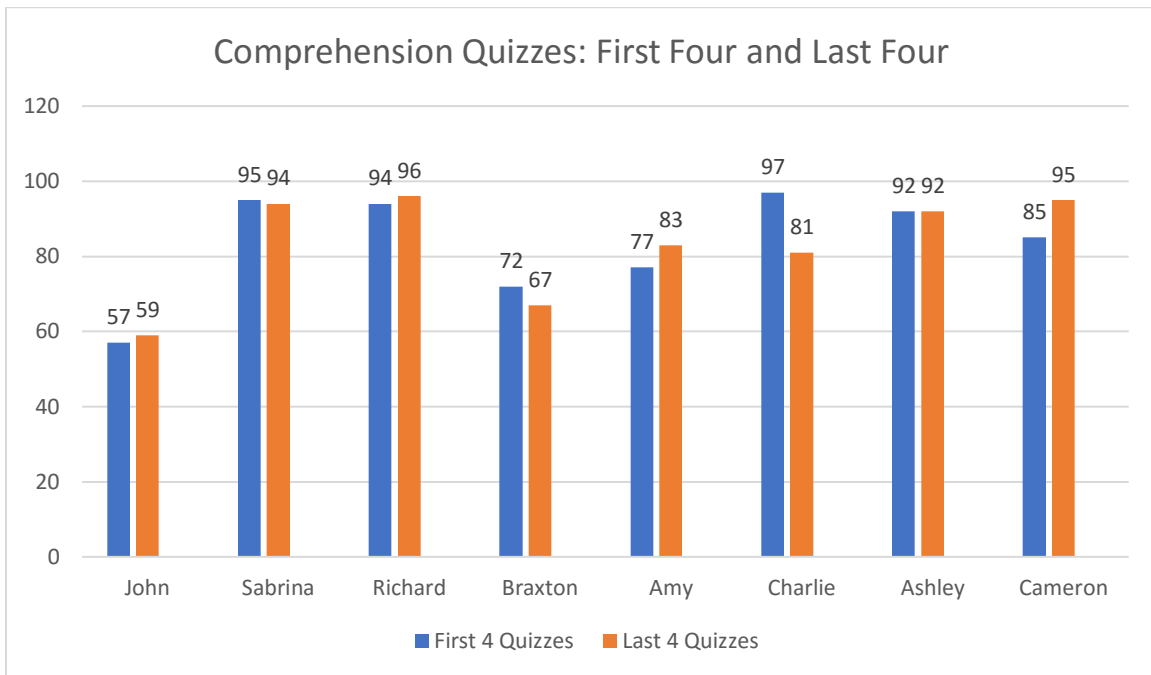
two sets of quizzes.

Figure 4.3   Mean Scores for Comprehension Quizzes, First Four Quizzes and Second Four Quizzes
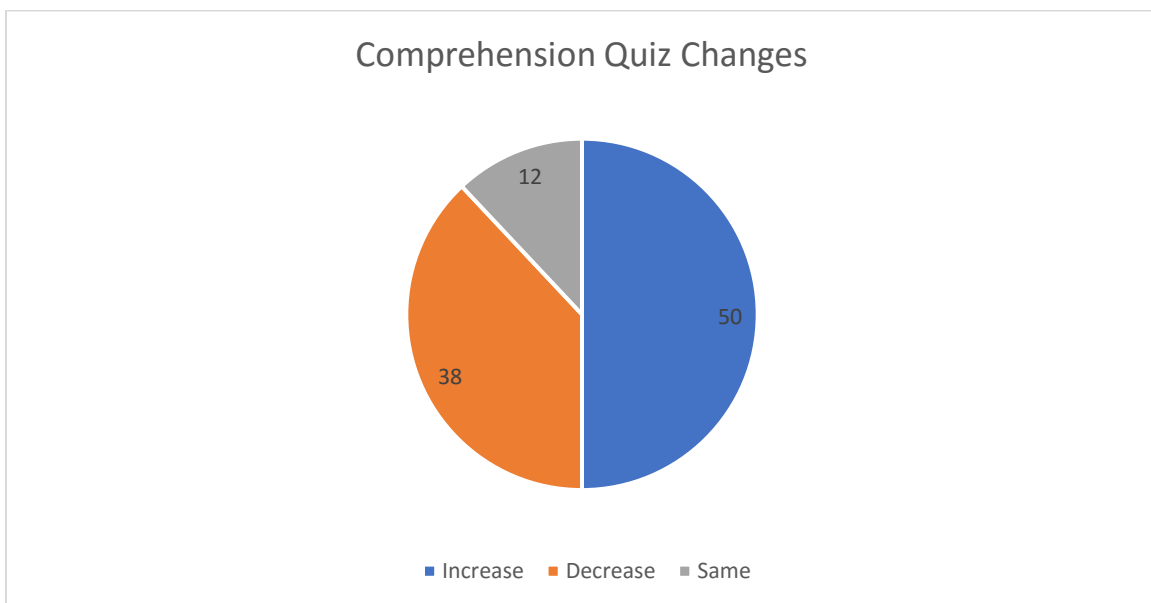

Figure 4.4   Mean Scores for Comprehension Quizzes, First Four Quizzes and Second Four Quizzes

To note, one student, Sabrina, decreased by just one point; Braxton, a special education student, decreased by four points, and Charlie decreased by 16 points. Charlie also was the only student who had a lower posttest score; it is important to highlight the fact that his family situation changed during the study. In the student participant section, Charlie was described as having family dynamic changes and this was the situation he faced during the study time-frame. Also, the three lowest test score means represented the normal performance of the two special needs students and the general education student who consistently struggled in all areas of literacy and had received a failing grade for English 8 the first three nine-week grading periods.

Specifically, each comprehension quiz was in response to a short story or poem read as part of the regular curriculum plan and were completed as individual activities. The exception was that both the special education students qualified for a read-aloud accommodation in their Individualized Education Program; therefore, the special education aide, the special education teacher, or the researcher read all short stories, poems, and quiz questions to these two students. Genre was as follows: Week 1, nonfiction passage with explicit/implicit questions in multiple choice and short answer format; Week 2, nonfiction passage with short answer question format; Week 3/narrative short story with story elements and plot structure chart to fill in with information; Week 4, poem with short answer question format; Week 5, fiction passage with explicit/implicit questions in multiple choice and short answer format; Week 6, poem with multiple choice answer format; Week 7, nonfiction passage with explicit/implicit questions in multiple choice and short answer format; Week 8, nonfiction passage with explicit/implicit

questions in multiple choice and short answer format. The weekly comprehension score information is presented in Figure F.3 in the Appendix F section.

Fluency Score Ratings

The researcher noted the theme of general improvement in another of the sets of data regarding the way participants read the passages. Each participant received a fluency score rating based on the 2002 National Assessment for Educational Progress four-point scale developed as part of an oral reading study. This four-point scale was utilized throughout the study to obtain one fluency score per each reading session during the eight-week study period, with the first score considered a baseline fluency score. As the pretest and posttest were administered on the first session and the last session dates, no repeated reading sessions occurred on those two days, indicating that each student has fourteen total repeated reading sessions with a separate fluency score for each reading. The mean fluency scores, on a scale of 1 to 4, ranged from 2.63 to 3.25; this resulted in a difference of 0.62 for the group.
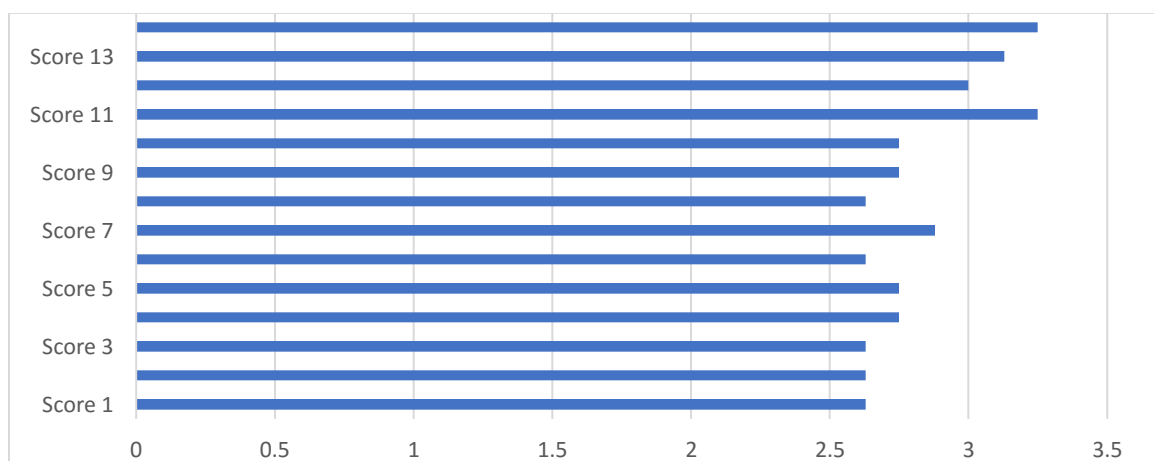
Fluency Mean Scores for All Passages

Figure 4.5   Fluency Mean Scores for All Passages

As to the scoring procedure, the researcher evaluated each study participant's oral reading based on prosody, expression, sentence structure, and phrasing. According to the 2002 National Assessment for Educational Progress fluency scale, a reader who scores a one or two would be classified a nonfluent reader while those who score a three or four would be classified a fluent reader. Of the study participants, four students received scores of three and four consistently throughout the repeated reading activities; these students are Sabrina, Richard, Ashley, and Cameron.

The other four students were scored with a two at some point during the oral fluency rating evaluation. These students were John, Braxton, Amy, and Charlie, two of whom are special education students. One of these special education students, Braxton, receives speech services as part of his Individualized Education Program, while the other special education student, Amy, is seemingly very shy and is generally hesitant when speaking orally. Of the two general education students, John seems to struggle in all areas of literacy, having received a grade of "F" on his report card for the first three nine weeks grading periods for English 8 in addition to never receiving a passing score on a reading standardized end-of-the-year test while in middle school. The other general education student, Charlie, is usually observed to be a quiet student who speaks in a low tone when he communicates orally and seems to hesitate when communicating his thoughts and opinions. Charlie has passed all his language arts classes as well as the end-of-the-year standardized tests while in middle school. However, each of these four participants improved his or her oral reading to warrant at least one score of a three during the study. Fluency scores for these four students are listed below.

To enhance inter-rater reliability, the researcher invited the 7th/8th grade language arts special education teacher to score participants on a random basis. This teacher randomly chose one study participant each week to evaluate with a fluency score; the scores for both raters were identical for each score. The conclusion can be that of a valid, accurate fluency rating, as the special education teacher scored eight total students with an identical score as that of the researcher.

Fluency Scores

Name	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14
John	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3
Braxton	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Amy	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
Charlie	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2

Figure 4.6   Fluency Scores

Accurate Reading

Along with the tangible improvement in comprehension as well as fluency while reading, the researcher noted improvements in accurate reading throughout the repeated reading activity. Accuracy when reading enables one to understand the sentence structure, vocabulary, and meaning of the passage. Therefore, accurate reading is a key component leading to comprehension, which is the main goal of reading ((Anderson, Hiebert, Wilkinson, & Scott, 1985). Accuracy when reading is reflected in the number of errors a student makes while reading orally and is said to be accurate when there are no errors in the reading (Glossary of Reading Terms, FCRR, n.d.).

As part of the twice-weekly activity sessions, each study participant's partner tracked and recorded errors as totals for all passages, with a separate total for each first read as well as second read. During the study period, every student could choose with whom he or she would work for that reading session. Students had two goals when actively participating in the repeated reading activity: decrease the total time and decrease the total errors from the first read of the passage to the second read of the passage. Each participant in the study decreased his or her errors much of the time for the second read for each of the fourteen passages read, with the group mean at 66% decrease in errors.

In contrast, there were several instances of a student having an increase in errors when reading a passage for the second time, with the group mean at 9% increase in errors. Two students, Richard and Cameron, had no second reading sessions with an increase in errors for 0% error increase. Finally, every participant had more than one second read attempt that was equal in errors to the first attempt. The range was 4 with a low of 2 and a high of 6. The mode was 3 instances of equal errors for the second read. Below are the group's mean error totals.
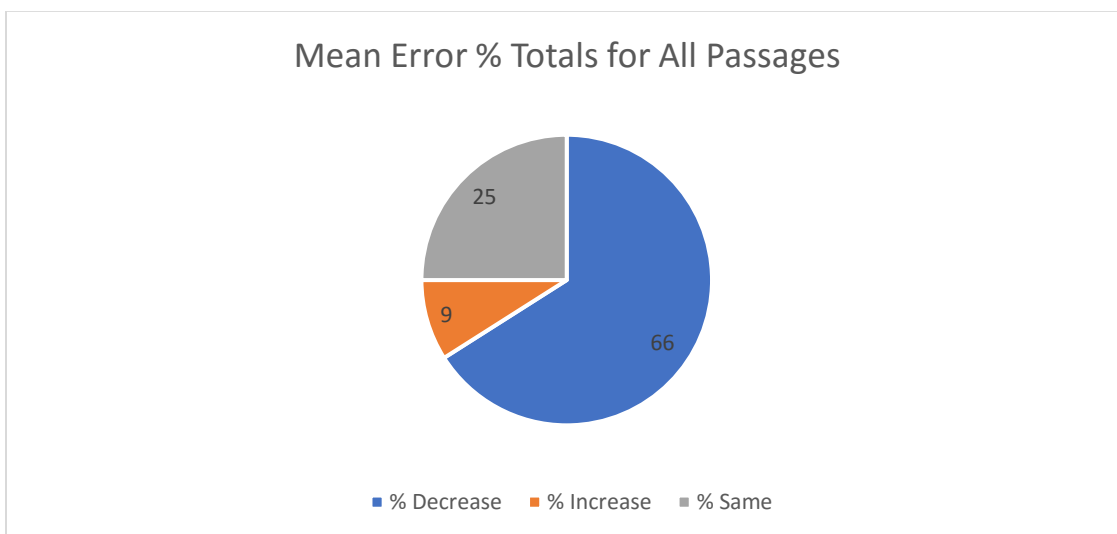

Mean Error % Totals for All Passages

- % Decrease — 66
- % Increase — 9
- % Same — 25

Figure 4.7   Total Group Error Percentages, First Read to Second Read for All Passages

Additionally, as to percentages and totals pertaining to the specific passages read, seven of the passages resulted in a 0% increase in errors for the second read, five of the passages had an increase of one error, and there was one incidence each for an increase in errors of two or three in a specific passage. Therefore, this equates to a mode of 0 for an increase in error totals for all fourteen passages. All data is presented in the Appendix F section, to include individual error scores as well as the group error scores (see Figures F.7 and F.8; see Figures F.10 through F.17 for individual results). Also, information pertaining to the seconds needed to read each passage is included in the same figures for the individual participants (Figures F.10 to F. 17).

Conclusion

There is a great deal of research that supports incorporating the strategy of repeat reading in the classroom, particularly at the primary level. With a seeming gap in the research and the knowledge pertaining to older students utilizing the strategy, this study sought to investigate the impact on comprehension after incorporating repeat reading in a middle school classroom. The sample size of the study was small (n = 8), but the population represented the overall composition of the researcher's English 8 classroom at the rural middle school. There were special education students as well as general education students; plus, the study group was comprised of those who were successful with reading and comprehending as well as those who were not successful with literacy activities. Racial demographics were as follows: seven Caucasian students and one African American student; to note, the study setting has a high predominance of Caucasian students and a small number of minority students.

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For the weekly comprehension checks as part of the regular classroom instructional activities, half of the study group increased their mean score for the second set of the weekly quizzes. In addition, one student remained at the same score for the quizzes while three students decreased their mean scores. As a further comment, one general education student decreased by a single point, one special education student decreased by four points, and one general education student who had home issues during the study period decreased by 16 points. In combination with these positive results, the pretest and posttest data analysis indicated a likely success with the incorporation of the repeated reading activity. Specifically, five of the eight study participants (63%) showed an improvement in the two score sets. In addition, of special interest and encouragement for the strategy was the fact that the two largest gains shown were for one special education student and the general education student who struggled with literacy activities throughout the year, resulting in a failing grade for the first three nine-weeks grading periods. Also, two students showed no improvement with a score that remained steady; however, one of these students was the second special needs student and his results show improvement of a different nature. Braxton is autistic and often expressed reluctance to participate in class or to complete assignments. His pretest had five blank answers, but Braxton's posttest contained no blank answers. While his score remained unchanged, the fact that Braxton answered all ten questions is a seeming improvement and indicative of the positive change in the affective environment of the classroom. In contrast, one student decreased his accuracy rate by one question.

Additionally, it seemed likely that enthusiasm levels and self-esteem levels improved since the researcher often noted positive comments and behavior as the study

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progressed.   This positive trend in the classroom environment was supported as students seemed more excited to participate in "that reading thing" and often rushed to get to a designated area so they could begin the activity. Belief in oneself as a successful student and reader can impact in a positive way a student's performance, as evident in this study by the decrease in errors as well as time spent reading for most of the repeated reading sessions. Furthermore, the researcher often noted smiles, high-fives, and positive interaction between the reading partners during the designated time for the activity, demonstrating that positive results were occurring, both as to score results as well as affective behavior and attitudes for many of the participants.

It can be concluded that a positive correlation is likely for the repeated reading activity and the overarching theme of affective improvement in the classroom environment pertaining to comprehension; many positive comments were noted throughout the study. Continuing with the second overarching theme, a tangible improvement in comprehension was evidenced by the posttest results, which showed gains for many of the study participants (63% improved). In fact, two participants improved their posttests significantly, and both students typically struggle with literacy activities. One is a special education student, Amy, and the other is John, a general education student. Furthermore, one half of the participants improved their weekly mean comprehension scores while one remained with the same score and three decreased their total mean average score for the second set of quizzes.

To further the conclusion that the repeated reading strategy was effective in the 8th grade English classroom is the resulting evidence of improvement in both time spent reading and error totals for passage reading. Resulting data showed an improvement with

a decrease in many students' accuracy as well as seconds needed to read a passage. As a final piece of evidence that the repeated reading activity was a success, the end-of-the-year state standardized test for reading showed encouraging results. Of the study participants, four (50%) failed the previous year's seventh-grade reading test and four (50%) passed the seventh-grade reading test. In contrast, six (75%) of the study participants passed the eighth-grade state reading test while two (25%) did not reach a sufficient score to pass the test. Of these two students who did not reach the necessary score, one was the autistic special needs student and the other was the general education student who consistently struggled with literacy and had never passed a state reading test while in middle school.

It is worthy to note two encouraging facts pertaining to the state test results. Two students who passed the eighth-grade reading test had never passed a state reading test up to that point, and both young ladies were elated, judging by the tears of joy that erupted when they were told of their success with the state test. Also, while the autistic student did not pass, his score improved by 130 points from the previous year, demonstrating a positive shift in his reading comprehension abilities and perhaps an improvement in his attitude toward reading and literacy activities. In the following chapter, a summary is provided of the study as well as suggestions for further research followed by an action plan for the researcher's classroom and possible implementation in other language arts classrooms.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Within the researcher-teacher's eighth grade classroom at the middle school, many students appeared to struggle with comprehension tasks, leading to the Problem of Practice for this study. These comprehension activities involved classroom instruction and discussion, weekly comprehension quizzes, and county as well as state standardized tests. This study was designed as a means of evaluating the impact on success with comprehension through the strategy of repeat reading a short passage. Data analysis showed an improvement in two distinct thematic frames. First, an affective improvement was noted as to classroom environment and the expressed attitudes of the participants. Second, the researcher recorded improvement in comprehension success on a variety of tasks, to include weekly comprehension quizzes and a study designed pretest/posttest. Reading beyond simply stating the words and moving toward an understanding of the words' meaning is a skill needed for success in the upper level classrooms. Yet, many middle school students struggle with the task of comprehending the material they are tasked with reading.

Chall (1983/1996) described reading acquisition as occurring in stages and maintained that students in upper levels are "learning the new", which accurately describes where students at the middle school should be in their reading skills. Students

in middle and high school are encountering content area specialized knowledge and topics, and they are expected to read successfully classroom material. Aspects of reading, such as comprehension, phonetic word knowledge, and vocabulary, all impact a reader's success. To ensure that students move beyond simple explicit questions and answers in their reading activities, instructional design for comprehension improvement should include specific instruction in a variety of strategies.

Targeted strategies can lead to an improvement in comprehending written material, which is the main goal of reading. Success with comprehension can be enhanced through a focus on strategies, but these strategies must include aspects related to the reading process. Furthermore, moving toward a deeper understanding of text as well as the ability to understand inferential questions are both impacted by vocabulary and background knowledge, which Fisher and Frey (2009) reported are key to comprehension success. Research has shown that these two important aspects of reading work in tandem with other reading comprehension components and impact the extent that each focus is needed for various reading tasks (Fisher, 2013).

For a specific instructional reading strategy, Samuels (1979) built upon his earlier work regarding automatic word recognition's role in smooth, fluid reading and asserted repeated reading as a comprehension strategy was successful. As one of the early proponents for the idea of repeated readings, Samuels said the notion of repeated reading involves a student "rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. Then the procedure is repeated with a new passage" (Samuels, 1979, p. 376). Although word attack strategies or oral reading techniques for improvement are not strategies typically implemented by middle school

level teachers (Allington, 1983; Kuhn, Groff, & Morrow, 2011; Rasinski & Zutell, 1996), teachers of adolescent students could consider such strategies for inclusion in their instructional curriculum to address weak comprehension skills.

In the researcher's English 8 classroom, students often appeared to have difficulty comprehending text. Many students struggled with grade level material and were not successful with comprehension quizzes or oral questioning in response to material read in class. Furthermore, the comprehension difficulties observed in the classroom were not limited to inferential questioning, but they also included explicit questions as well as vocabulary centered questions. In addition, comprehension difficulties were a school-wide concern as related to the standardized state tests administered at the end of the year, which led to a school administrator goal of comprehension improvement. With the on-going concern for struggles with comprehension, the researcher sought to address issues with comprehension through a targeted strategy. The question for the study was: What impact will repeated reading have on the comprehension level of eight eighth grade students at a middle school in the Southeast?

Focus and Overview of the Study

For the study pertaining to comprehension difficulties, the strategy of repeated reading a short passage was utilized with a mixed methods design. A reader's individual reading profile is comprised of more than a score for comprehension, as it includes behavioral and attitude aspects as well. Therefore, a variety of quantitative data and qualitative data was collected throughout the eight-week study period. Permission agreement letters pertaining to the study were sent to all members of the researcher's English 8 classroom, and they were returned on a voluntary basis. Of the eight letters

returned, six were general education students and two were special education students with a racial makeup that included seven white students and one black student. This demographic profile mirrors that of both English 8 classes, as each is comprised of general education and special education students most of whom are Caucasian.

Quantitative data was gathered from several sources, including a pretest/posttest, a Likert scale questionnaire, weekly comprehension checks, fluency scores for oral reading, and errors made while reading plus time needed to read each of the passages. Each piece of data was collected from all English 8 students so that anonymity of the study participants was protected. During the mornings of the repeated reading activity, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, self-chosen pairs of students timed each other and tracked the number of errors made during the reading of a short passage. There were fourteen total passages, with the pretest administration, modeling of the procedure, and Likert scale questionnaire completion occurring on the first day and the administration of the posttest occurring on the last day of the sixteen-day study. The passages read as part of the repeated reading activity were an average of 124 words, with a range of 67 to 198.

In addition, the pretest/posttest was identical and included ten researcher-created questions in response to the introductory portion of a speech given by President Roosevelt in 1941. To enhance the test/retest reliability, there were several weeks between the administration days of the pretest/posttest, and there were no discussions about either the speech or the ten questions. As to reliability for the fluency scores given during the strategy sessions, inter-rater reliability was enhanced through a second scorer who randomly chose one student participant per week to score for fluency; each score was identical to the researcher's score for all eight participants.

Likewise, the Likert scale questionnaire was administered to all students in the English 8 classroom and was comprised of seven short questions that sought to gauge readers' opinions about the process of reading and themselves as a reader. This questionnaire was supplemented by a semi-open ended reading interest questionnaire given to all students that served to provide additional information about participants and was not part of a formal data analysis procedure; rather, this set of data was used as a means of selecting interesting text to read during the strategy sessions. Each classroom student completed the weekly comprehension checks as well, and these were administered as part of the regular classroom instructional activities. For the repeated reading data pertaining to the individual passages, each student tracked his or her partner for accurate reading as well as time spent reading. Both partners read each passage two times, and they recorded errors made and seconds spent reading each time. All data is graphed and located in Appendix F.

Summary of the Study

The pretest/posttest results showed promising positive trends as did the second set of weekly comprehension quizzes, which indicated a theme of noted improvement in comprehension success. Most participants, six out of eight, had an increase in the total posttest score with two students showing a significant score gain. While no student scored a 100% on either the pretest or posttest, the positive increase for many of the participants and a steady score for one of the study participants indicates a likely success for the repeat reading activity. Likewise, there was in increase in the weekly comprehension scores for the second set of quizzes, with four out of eight participants increasing their mean score and one participant remaining steady with her score. It can

be surmised that focusing on the intent and overall message of the text, rather than struggling with the words themselves, impacted in a positive way the participants' comprehension abilities. With the necessary cognitive energy to devote to the task at hand, the participants were more likely to have focused their attention on the important aspect of comprehending what they were reading.

Continuing with this overall pattern, an improvement in both accuracy and fluency when reading was noted during the repeated reading study. Data analysis showed that each participant in the study decreased his or her errors for many of second readings for each of the fourteen passages read while also improving the fluency score when reading out loud. In contrast, there were a few instances of a participant having an increase in errors when reading a passage for the second time, with the group mean at 9% increase in errors; two students had zero second reading sessions with an increase in errors. Similarly, fluency scores improved for each participant for at least one of the repeated reading sessions while most improved for several readings. The conclusion can be made that the strategy of repeated reading a short passage leads to a decrease in errors for the second reading, a general decrease in the time spent reading, and an improvement in fluent oral reading.

To gain further knowledge about the participants' reading profile, there were two surveys administered at the beginning of the study: a Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-open ended questionnaire. The Likert scale questions were simply worded and made statements that pertained to reading enjoyment, classification as to readers' abilities, preference for mode and style of reading, and strategy use when reading. Moreover, the second questionnaire was for information gathering purposes to assist in

the selection of passages as well as gain further information about each participant's thoughts on reading. This data, along with field notes and a researcher journal, helped establish important information which led to a noted affective theme of an improved classroom environment as well as participants' views on the process of the repeated reading strategy.

Limitations of the Study

There were limitations inherent in the study pertaining to repeat reading of a short passage which could have impacted the results and conclusions. First, the sample size was relatively small with eight students, as this was a voluntary study. Each of the 42 English 8 students was aware there were neither penalties nor rewards involved in the study; rather, participation was simply to engage in the activity for evaluation. However, the demographic makeup of the actual study population was a close approximation of the population of both classes. The rural school is small with a high percentage of white students, relatively high populations of special needs students, and a large percentage of free and reduced lunch students indicating a lower socioeconomic status. Future research should include a larger study population as well as a more diverse student population.

Next, the time-period of the study was moderately brief at eight weeks. Given the brisk curriculum pace of the researcher's English 8 classroom and the fact that students were expected to be prepared to take two standardized state tests later in the semester, the researcher needed to keep the study within a reasonable frame of time. Deadlines put a limitation on the study period but did allow for a full eight weeks of consistent implementation of the strategy. In addition, the study included two days per week for strategy implementation. Future research might incorporate the repeated reading strategy

for a longer period as well as consider incorporating extra sessions during the week to gather more data.

Finally, the researcher served as both classroom teacher as well as study designer, implementer, and analyzer of all data. This implies there may have been a certain amount of unintentional bias. As the researcher originally hypothesized that the strategy of repeated reading would be effective in increasing comprehension abilities, she may have been biased when gathering evidence that may have supported the hypothesis. However, to avoid this issue when possible, the researcher implemented design elements to overcome any bias. These included:

1. a field note form that specifically listed student statements as well as noted behaviors

2. consistently utilizing the same criteria for fluency ratings based on the 2002 oral reading study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress

3. enlisting a special education language arts teacher to rate fluency on a random basis for each of the eight study participants

4. analyzing all qualitative data using descriptive statistics analysis methods

These efforts likely helped control potential researcher bias. Mertler (2014) addressed the notion of rigor and bias in that action research studies are evaluated based on the entire process, not simply on instrumentation and methodology. Therefore, the measures taken to control researcher bias helped strengthen the findings as well as the conclusions based on the data. Future research, however, could involve more than one teacher or a researcher who was not also the study participants' classroom teacher to strengthen further any conclusions reached as part of data analysis.

Methodological Limitations

Methodological limitations were present that may have impacted the data, analysis, and conclusions of the study. These include matters pertaining to both the instruments as well as the data collection process. To begin, the researcher designed the study in a manner that would involve active participation of the adolescent students. For example, each pair of students used an electronic device, such as an iPhone or Android, to time their partner while at the same time they tallied the errors made; data was recorded on a piece of paper. It is possible the students made mistakes in the time spent reading or the number of errors made. Since an electronic device was used, the accuracy of the total time reading was likely precise. However, errors in the tallies for accurate reading may not have been completely correct. The researcher was with the study participants to the extent possible for both readings, but as all groups were reading simultaneously, it was not possible to be present at all sessions. To strengthen the data validity, either the special education aide or the special education teacher was in the room for each of the repeated reading sessions. These two individuals helped monitor the non-participating pairs of students so that the researcher predominately could monitor the participating pairs of students, which helped to control the possibility of error.

In addition, each student chose a partner with whom to read. These self-chosen partners were often friends or at least acquaintances which may have impacted their objectivity when monitoring their reading partners. With the constant monitoring provided by the researcher, the special education aide, and the special education teacher, it seems unlikely there were many instances of partner bias occurring, but it was a

possibility. Perhaps future studies might involve an assigned partner; although in the researcher's classroom, the adolescent students tend to enjoy choosing their own partners.

Another possible limitation in the methodological design of the study might be the fact that students knew their goal was to decrease both time and errors for the second of the repeated readings. On the first day of the study, the researcher modeled through a demonstration the repeated reading process, to include how to time, track errors, and maintain a goal of decreasing both features. Perhaps this goal influenced some students when they were participating in the repeated reading sessions so that they rushed during the second reading, which may have impacted the resulting data. Future studies could omit the clearly stated goal, although it seemed an important aspect to the repeated reading strategy and therefore was an on-going goal for each participant.

Finally, the researcher recognized the possibility that regular classroom instruction may have impacted the positive results of the strategy implementation. As the teacher for all the study participants, classroom instruction was on-going throughout the study period. During the time of the study, class instruction centered predominately on grammar and writing instruction, as the state standardized test date was quickly approaching for the English/writing portion of the grade 8 tests. However, classroom instruction included reading work as well, so there is the possibility that comprehension instruction could have influenced the positive results shown with the pretest/posttest data along with the weekly comprehension quizzes. Future research studies may design instrumentation and methods that would control for any regular classroom instructional influence. However, the researcher ensured that no other repeated reading opportunities occurred during the study time-frame to help control any influence on the resulting data.

Implications of the Findings

The theoretical framework for this study included LaBarge and Samuel's (1974) Theory of Automaticity as well as Chall's (1983/1996) Theory of Reading Development and the implementation of repeated reading as an instructional strategy (Samuels, 1979) to determine whether the strategy impacted reading comprehension. Readers who expend a great deal of effort to decode words have little cognitive attention to devote to comprehending the text (LaBarge & Samuels, 1974), which is the main goal when reading. Chall (1983/1996) theorized that readers go through certain stages in reading development and by the time they are in middle school, students are "learning the new". This study attempted to answer the question pertaining to the strategy of repeated reading and its impact on the important task of comprehension. According to data analysis, the strategy of repeated reading was in fact successful as to improving readers' comprehension abilities.

In fact, there were several positive correlations resulting from this research study incorporating the strategy of repeated reading and its impact on comprehension. First, the study group showed gains in the pretest/posttest scores. Of the eight participants, five performed better as to comprehension on the posttest while two remained equal for their scores and one decreased in comprehension score for the posttest by one question. These results indicate a positive correlation between the repeated reading strategy and comprehension success, considering no discussion took place pertaining to the historical speech or related comprehension questions, and there were several weeks between the administration of the pretest and the posttest. Therefore, any gains in comprehension for the test can be surmised to result from the strategy implementation.

Furthermore, students participating in the research study showed an improvement in comprehension success on weekly quizzes. Specifically, four of the students increased their comprehension scores for the second set of weekly quizzes and one student maintained the same score for the first and second sets of quizzes. Three students, in contrast, did not perform as well on the second set of quizzes as they did for the first set of weekly comprehension quizzes. However, it is important to note that one general education student decreased her success rate by just one question and one special education autistic student decreased his score by four points. The remaining student decreased by several points, but this decrease possibly was due to family situations he faced during the study time-period which impacted his school attendance as well as his academic performance.

To further support the conclusion that the repeated reading strategy was indeed successful in improving comprehension abilities, participants improved their accuracy when reading orally. For each passage's second reading opportunity, five of the participants decreased their error totals while two of the participants remained at the same error total. To contrast, only 9% of participants showed a gain in errors when comparing the first reading of a passage to the second reading of the same passage. This data set validates the participants' study goal of decreasing errors for the second reading as well as an original stated goal of the repeated reading strategy (Samuels, 1979).

As to fluency when reading, there was a clear improvement made during the study. For the fluency ratings, each student showed improvement in their ability to read with prosody, pacing, and expression. Of the four students who scored a two at some point during the study, each improved to at least one score of three for a fluency rating

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for other reading opportunities during the study. The four students who received a three

on the initial fluency ratings also improved to a score of four for several of the later

repeated reading sessions. As a result, the data shows that the implementation of the

repeated reading strategy was successful in enhancing students' comprehension abilities

along with their oral reading abilities.

Since the 1974 findings centering on the theory of automaticity (LaBarge and

Samuels), there have been many reading studies leading to the concept that

comprehension is impacted by several factors, including background knowledge, word

knowledge, and fluency. Fluent reading impacts successful reading, and by improving

fluency, a reader's comprehension is likely to improve as well. As a result, repeated

reading has been included in many studies as a targeted strategy to improve reading

comprehension (Pikulski & Chard, 2003; Rasinski, 1989, 2003; Samuels, 1979; Therrien,

2004). Moreover, after nearly forty years since the publication of Samuels's (1979)

classic article on repeated readings, there have been numerous studies and references

pertaining to using repeated readings with the goal of improving comprehension, word

knowledge, and fluency. A meta-analysis conducted by Therrien (2004) found that the

research-based strategy of repeated reading could be used with both special education and

general education students to improve comprehension and fluency. Similarly, Staudt

(2009) investigated repeated reading along with word study for two special education

students and found the method to be effective. It seems there is an apparent link between

repeated reading and comprehension improvement, and this study also showed a positive

correlation between repeated reading usage with adolescent readers and an increase in

comprehension success along with affective improvement in the classroom environment.

There seemed to be a gap in the research for utilizing repeated reading as a strategy with upper level readers, and a study centering on middle school students who may struggle with comprehension was needed. This research study sought to build upon the previous studies that evaluated repeated reading and its impact on comprehension. With the use of repeated reading as a targeted strategy, it is expected to see an improvement in comprehension success. This was in fact the result of the study, as the statistical analysis showed consistent improvement in comprehension success for the study group in three different areas, to include a comprehension pretest/posttest, accurate reading, and weekly comprehension quizzes. Therefore, the research question was answered: there is a positive impact on comprehension after incorporating the strategy of repeated reading.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since the participants of this study were older than the typical population for repeated reading studies, along with the inherent limitations of this study, future research is warranted. As Kirylo (2015) asserted, "Teachers who teach from the inside out are those who engagingly approach their craft with demonstrative purpose, seeking to make meaningful connections with students" (p. xiv). This concept applies to the teacher-researcher, who hopes to continue building connections with students as well as the action research process. Through more actively engaging students in the reading process, guided instruction can be tailored to meet the needs of individual students and can be informed by future research studies. Mertler (2014) maintained that as a researcher "you can always make revisions to your action research plans for the purpose of improving implementations of your research in subsequent cycles" (p. 215).

With this engaging approach (Kirylo, 2015) in mind that potentially will enhance further students' knowledge about comprehension strategies, future studies may address a different set of student populations. The students may attend an urban school or one that is more diverse in student demographics than the setting for this study. A varying set of students might yield interesting results, perhaps similar or confounding to this research. In addition to a different demographic population, future studies may choose to work with various grades in middle school as well as high school. The ensuing data would be an interesting comparison for the present data set. Also, a longer study time-period as well as more sessions per week might be included in future study plans; this study time-period was relatively short at eight weeks with the repeat reading sessions occurring twice per week during the morning.

In addition, future researchers may want to consider utilizing a researcher who is not the study participants' classroom teacher as this may cause an unintended aspect of participant bias or researcher bias. By working with the present study data and positive results, future researchers may be able to definitively support the notion that repeat reading of a short passage can lead to gains in comprehension for all types of students of various ages. This study supported the conclusion that the strategy of repeated reading positively impacts a student's comprehension success.

Action Plan

Reading teachers, reading specialists, school administrators, college education instructors, and curriculum planners would likely be interested in the present research findings that show evidence of improved comprehension success with the incorporation of the repeated reading strategy. To build upon the success of the study, the researcher

has a three-point action plan. First, the researcher plans to focus on the middle school

and her classroom students. Since the repeated reading activity showed gains in

comprehension abilities as well as oral reading abilities, the researcher anticipates

incorporating the strategy on a regular basis. This will be built into the regular classroom

instructional plan and will be utilized for both general education and special education

students.

In addition, the researcher hopes to include other grade levels in the school. It

would be ideal if all grade levels at the public middle school chose to incorporate this

strategy, to include not only multiple grade levels, but also a variety of student ability

levels. The researcher has been asked to present the study's findings and

recommendations at the opening faculty meeting in the fall. Perhaps the inclusion of the

repeated reading activity on a regular basis will lead to stronger, more confident readers

at the middle school level. With improved comprehension abilities, students likely will

be more successful readers and perform better on classwork as well as on standardized

tests. An improvement in comprehension abilities was an administrator goal and a

school-wide focus, so it seems the repeated reading strategy could help address issues

with comprehending grade level text in language arts classes as well as content area text

that is full of specialized vocabulary.

Finally, the researcher hopes to present the data findings and conclusions at a fall

school board meeting. This will allow her to share the positive findings pertaining to the

repeated reading strategy and its impact on success with comprehension. With a personal

goal of improved comprehension success for the county's students, the researcher plans

to present the concept of repeated reading as a tangible strategy that can be incorporated

into classrooms. In addition, the strategy will be highlighted as useful for all ability levels of students, as there were students who were successful with comprehension and those who struggled with comprehension as part of the study population. The variety of students' reading knowledge and levels of ability is common in today's classrooms, which includes any language limitation, special education status, or difficulty with reading acquisition. In addition, other teachers in the county may wish to participate in action research at their individual schools or grade level, which could further the knowledge pertaining to success with comprehension.

Conclusion

With a goal of comprehending when reading, students and teachers can target strategies that will improve success with comprehension. Words and books are powerful tools which can open doors to new places. This cognitive knowledge that can be gained through reading and learning is essential for an isolated rural area such as the region where the middle school is located. The student population is generally homogenous with little diversity; therefore, it is of great importance to expose students to other people, regions, and ideals. Reading can be both informative as well as enjoyable.

As Jane Austen expressed in *Pride and Prejudice* through the character Caroline Bingley, "I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading". The simple act of reading and then rereading a passage, a poem, or a book can strengthen the concepts presented and further one's understanding of the words. The power of reading has been expressed by many authors, but perhaps Oscar Wilde articulated the concept of repeated reading best when he stated, "If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use reading it at all" (Goodreads.com, n.d.). Rereading words can lead to

more enjoyment and a better understanding of the text as comprehension is strengthened in the process. Comprehension is the main goal of reading and should be a targeted skill for improvement at all ages and for all levels of students.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT/PARENT CONSENT LETTERS

Dear Wise County Student,

I am currently working toward my Educational Doctorate from the University of South Carolina. As part of my degree, I am planning a research dissertation project. This is a very exciting time for me, and I am so happy our Wise County students have the opportunity to be participants in this research.

As a reading and language arts teacher, I have seen the struggles some students have with reading. This affects all academic classes and can also affect confidence levels as a student. It was with this concern regarding reading struggles that I designed my research problem and research question. This research is similar to the steps you take in your science classes as you plan research projects!

If you decide to participate in my dissertation research process, then you will be involved in a process called repeated reading. This is simply rereading a short passage with a goal of improved expression and better speed while reading. My hypothesis is that students will demonstrate an improvement in the way words are read and comprehension of what is read.

Attached to this letter is a chart that shows the steps for my research plan. As you can see, it is a fun and simple idea that involves reading. All research information will be secret and will be stored in a private locked cabinet. No names will be used in order to maintain student privacy. I would love to talk with you about my research plan, if you have any questions. It is my hope that this research will improve students' reading. Thank you for thinking about participating in this interesting research project! This is completely voluntary, so I do appreciate you thinking about participating in reading work that will be done outside of regular class time as part of this research project. Your family has a letter explaining this research; please talk with them about your participation. I am looking forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth C. Dotson-Shupe
School Phone Number: 276-523-0195
School email: eshupe@wisek12.org

I, _____, would like to volunteer to participate in Mrs. Shupe's research dissertation project. I understand that all research will be completed outside of regular class time and no physical measures will be taken. All names and results will be kept in a locked cabinet, and no names or other identification will be known to anyone other than the researcher and her dissertation committee at the University of South

Carolina. I understand that this is a completely voluntary project, and I can withdraw if I need to do so without any penalty, problem, or conflict.
Date_____

Dear Family of our Wise County Student,

I am currently working toward my Educational Doctorate from the University of South Carolina, one of the leading research universities in the country. As part of my degree, I am planning my research dissertation. This is a very exciting time for me, and I am so happy our Wise County students have the opportunity to be participants in this research.

One of the unique aspects about a doctorate from the University of South Carolina is that the dissertation is based on a problem of practice within the researcher's classroom. I have been teaching at Powell Valley Middle School for seventeen years, and I have seen the struggles some students have with reading. This impacts all of their academic classes and can affect self-esteem as well. It was with this concern regarding reading struggles that I designed my research problem and research question.

If you decide to allow your student to participate in my dissertation research process, then your student will be involved in a process called repeated reading. This is simply rereading a short passage with a goal of improved expression while reading and better speed while reading. My hypothesis is that, after repeated reading and tracking progress, students will demonstrate an improvement not only in fluent, expressive reading, but also in comprehension of what is read. Comprehension is, after all, the main goal of reading. I also hope to see an increase in self-esteem as a result of better comprehension and more fluent reading.

Attached to this letter is a chart that shows the steps for my research plan. As you can see, it is a fun and simple idea that involves reading, with no physical measures involved. All research data will be strictly confidential and will be stored in a private locked cabinet. No names will be used in order to maintain privacy. I would love to speak with you about my research plan, if you have any questions. It is my hope that this dissertation can have a positive impact on Wise County students and their reading, which will be reflected in all classes as well as in their daily lives. Thank you for considering allowing your student to participate in this fun, interesting research project! This is completely voluntary, so I do appreciate you thinking about allowing your student to participate in reading work that will be done outside of regular class time as part of this research project.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth C. Dotson-Shupe
School Phone Number: 276-523-0195   School email: eshupe@wisek12.org

I, _____, give my permission for
_____ to participate in Mrs. Shupe's research dissertation project. I understand that all research will be completed outside of regular class time and no physical measures will be taken. All names and results will be kept in a locked cabinet,

and no names or other identification will be known to anyone other than the researcher and her dissertation committee at the University of South Carolina. I understand that this is a completely voluntary project, and my student can withdraw if needed without any penalty or conflict.
Date_____

Before the strategy is incorporated: Determine fluency scores and comprehension scores for each student with a pretest.

Incorporate repeated reading strategy.

After the strategy is incorporated: Evaluate the new fluency scores and comprehension scores with a posttest to determine the effect of repeated reading.

APPENDIX B

READING QUESTIONNAIRES

What is your favorite subject in school?

What type of book is your favorite to read?

Where do you most like to read when you are reading just for fun?

How much time each day do you usually spend reading outside of class?

What are two reading strategies that you use when you are reading text?

1.) I enjoy reading books or magazines.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

2.) I spend a lot of time on social media.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

3.) I consider myself to be a good reader.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

4.) I like it when my teacher reads aloud to the class.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

5.) I prefer to read class materials by myself rather than in a group.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

6.) I prefer printed material rather than electronic versions of books and magazines.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

7.) I use reading strategies, such as making predictions and rereading, as I am reading.
1------------------------2--------------3-----------4----------------------5
Strongly Disagree---Disagree---Neutral---Agree---Strongly Agree

READING PRETEST/POSTTEST AND PASSAGES

The morning of December 7, 1941 dawned beautifully on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, but soon the tranquil morning was shattered by the sounds of Japanese aircraft and naval ships bombing Pearl Harbor. When the attack was over, more than 2,400 people had lost their lives, and the United States Navy had lost several ships and aircraft due to the attack.

On the following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a speech before a Joint Session of Congress. His speech was broadcast to the shocked American people. Read the following introduction to President Roosevelt's speech and answer the following questions.

President Roosevelt's Speech, Introduction:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

Questions about President Roosevelt's Speech:

1. On what day did President Roosevelt deliver his speech?

2. What is meant by "a Joint Session of Congress?"

3. As it is used in the opening sentence, what does "infamy" mean?

4. The United States was at _____ with the Empire of Japan before December 7, 1944.

5. What did the reply message say that the Japanese Ambassador delivered prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

6. Was there any hint or forewarning about a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor? Provide evidence for your answer from the speech.

7. Based on the information in the speech, Japan is a _____ distance from Hawaii.

8. What did President Roosevelt mean when he said the Japanese government was giving "false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace"?

9. How would you classify the tone of the opening portion of the speech?

10. What do you think was the intended purpose of the speech Roosevelt gave?

Passage One:

History of the English Language: Latin Roots

How Did Latin Get in There? When Alfonso worries that Sandra will call him *menso*, he is using the Spanish word for "stupid." If you know that a word is Spanish or comes from a Spanish word, then you can be pretty sure it has a Latin root. Why? Because Spanish is Romance language. No, not "romance" with flowers and violins. Romance languages developed from the language spoken by Roman soldiers who, for six hundred years, went about conquering the Western world, or at least most of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.
[101 words]

[101 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Two:

The Roman Armies Spread Latin. The Romans usually won their battles. They spoke Latin, and they made everyone else speak Latin too. Then they kept things peaceful for hundreds of years. In that peaceful time the language they spoke took on regional variations, so that eventually the modern language of French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian developed. Thus, when Alfonso speaks Spanish, he is actually speaking a modern version of Latin, as people do when they speak any of the Romance languages.

[82 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Three:

Latin Comes into English. Alfonso also speaks English, about 60 percent of which can be traced to Latin. However, English isn't a Romance language. Then how did so much Latin get into it? Well, thanks to the Romans and, later, the Roman Catholic Church, Latin got around. Just about every language in the Western world eventually borrowed from it. Latin was also the language of scholars for many centuries. But there was one other event that resulted in the addition of thousands of Latin words to the English language. That was the Norman Conquest of England.

In the year 1066, William the Conqueror, a Norman (from Normandy, in France) who spoke French, invaded England and became king. As a result, French—and, through it, Latin—became a major influence on the development of English.

[134 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Four:

My parents kept me from children who were rough
Who threw words like stones and wore torn clothes
Their thighs showed through rags they ran in the street
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the county streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
Their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe they sprang out behind hedges
Like dogs to bark at my world. They threw mud
While I looked the other way, pretending to smile.
I longed to forgive them but they never smiled.

[110 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Five:

History of the English Language: Finding our Roots

The written record of English dates back about fourteen hundred years, but the ancestry of English goes back much further. Long ago, people living near the Caspian Sea (between what is now Asia and the Middle East) spoke a language we call Proto-Indo-European. (*Proto-* means "original or earliest." *Indo-* refers to India.)   These people were fighters, farmers, and herders, and they had an urge to travel. Eventually they took to their great four-wheeled carts and spread east through modern-day Iran and India and west through Turkey and most of Europe. As groups settled in different areas, their language changed into the languages we now call Persian, Hindi, Armenian, Sanskrit, Greek, Russian, Polish, Irish, Italian, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian—and English. All these languages share ancient roots and are called Indo-European.

[145 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Six:

Influences on English: All in the Family

The histories of English words can give us a glimpse of the history of the English-speaking peoples themselves. Thousands of words that we use every day have come into English from other languages. Some countries, like France and Germany, have tried to prevent their languages from borrowing foreign words. English, however, has always been like a giant sponge, absorbing words from every group it comes in contact with. The Vocabulary words in Petry's biography of Harriet Tubman all come from Latin. Latin is an ancient language that is no longer spoken. Because of its rich literature and its influence on English, however, it is still taught in some schools. The Word Bank, below, contains a list of the Vocabulary words and the Latin words they come from.

[134 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Seven:

Kids Should Be Paid for Chores

I strongly believe that kids should be paid for doing chores around the house. Kids all across the country constantly nag their parents for money to go to the movies, buy CDs, go to McDonald's, and do many other things. Many parents complain about kids always asking for money.

Parents constantly complain that kids don't help out around the house enough. Lots of times parents nag kids until they clean up their rooms, put out the trash, cut the lawn, do the dishes, shovel the snow, and do many other chores.

[97 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Eight:

Why can't kids and parents reach a compromise about money and chores? Parents would pay kids who remember to do their chores, without being reminded, a small fee for the work done. Kids would no longer ask for money.

This compromise teaches kids responsibility. They would learn that you don't get anything for doing nothing. When their cores are completed, with no nagging, they'd be paid whatever the parents had agreed to pay them. Kids could spend the money on things they like. They'd learn to save money for the expensive items.

No more nagging kids begging for money. No more nagging parents begging kids to clean up. Both kids and parents would be getting something they want.

[118 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Nine:

History of the English Language

Digging into the Past. Where did English come from? England, of course! Not entirely. People didn't wake up one morning speaking the English of today. Today's English developed over a long period of time. The history of English can be divided into three periods: **Old English** (A.D. 450-1066), **Middle English** (1066-1485), and **Modern English** (1485 to the present).

[67 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Ten:

Old English. In the fifth century, the Anglo-Saxons migrated from northern Europe to the island of Britain. There they found the Britons, a Celtic people who had earlier been conquered by the Romans. The Anglo-Saxons settled in and proceeded to develop a new language, combining bits from their old Germanic language and bits from the Celtic language of the natives. Soon Britain was invaded again, this time by the fierce Northmen, or Vikings, from Scandinavia. Their language, Norse, was also added to the language of Britain. We call this new language Old English. It was a spoken, or oral, language. Anyone who wanted to write something down wrote it in Latin. Here are three Old English words that survive today: *horse, night, wife*.

[123 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Eleven:

Middle English. In the year 1066, William the Conqueror, who was from Normandy, in France, conquered England. Soon French words were added to the mix. Because French developed from Latin, Latin also became an important influence on English. For several hundred years, England was a bilingual country. French was spoken by the upper classes and used in courts and government. English was spoken by the lower classes and was used for the purposes of daily life. Latin was used by the Church. Most people spoke English, but they were borrowing words from French at a rapid rate. English continued to grow and change with all these borrowings—from Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Latin, French—resulting today in a language with a huge vocabulary that is both rich and international. Here are three words derived from French: government, justice, literature.

[137 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Twelve:

Modern English. In 1485, Henry VII, the first Tudor king, came to the throne of England. The House of Tudor helped to promote all things English—including the language. Printed books helped make it possible for all English people to speak, read, and write the same language.

Clearly, there's more to English words that the present-day definition. Our words have a past! You can dig into this past by looking up the etymology, or origin, and development of a word, in a dictionary. Consider this entry for the etymology of obscure. (The symbol < means "derived from" or "came from.")

This means "The word obscure evolved from the Old French word obscur, which in turn came from the Latin word obsurus, which means 'covered over'".

[126 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Thirteen:

"Barbara Frietchie"
John Greenleaf Whittier

Up from the meadows rich with corn,
Clear in the cool September morn,

The clustered spires of Frederick stand
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

Round about them orchards sweep,
Apple- and peach-tree fruited deep,

Fair as a garden of the Lord
To the eyes of the famished rebel horde,

On that pleasant morn of the early fall
When Lee marched over the mountain wall;

Over the mountains winding down,
Horse and foot, into Frederick town.

Forty flags with their silver stars,
Forty flags with their crimson bars,

Flapped in the morning wind: the sun
Of noon looked down, and saw not one.

Up rose old Barbara Frietchie then,
Bowed with her fourscore years and ten;

Bravest of all in Frederick town,

She took up the flag the men hauled down;

In her attic window the staff she set,
To show that one heart was loyal yet.

Up the street came the rebel tread,
Stonewall Jackson riding ahead.

[163 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Passage Fourteen:

"Barbara Frietchie"
John Greenleaf Whittier

Under his slouched hat left and right
He glanced: the old flag met his sight.

"Halt!"— the dust-brown ranks stood fast.
"Fire!"— out blazed the rifle-blast.

It shivered the window, pane and sash;
It rent the banner with seam and gash.

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf;

She leaned far out on the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.

"Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag," she said.

A shade of sadness, a blush of shame,
Over the face of the leader came;

The nobler nature within him stirred
To life at that woman's deed and word:

"Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!" he said.

All day long through Frederick street
Sounded the tread of marching feet:

All day long that free flag tossed
Over the heads of the rebel host.

Ever its torn folds rose and fell
On the loyal winds that loved it well;

And through the hill-gaps sunset light
Shone over it with a warm good-night.

Barbara Frietchie's work is o'er,
And the Rebel rides on his raids no more.

[198 words]

Source:
Elements of Literature, Second Course. (2005). Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

APPENDIX D

FIELD NOTE FORM

Observation Number _____ Date_____ Time_____	Noted Observations and Student Comments	Observer/Researcher Comments

APPENDIX E

TABLE 1

FLUENCY SCALE

NAEP - Oral Reading Fluency Scale

NAEP Oral Reading Fluency Scale, Grade 4: 2002

Fluent	**Level 4**	Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, these do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the story. Preservation of the author's syntax is consistent. Some or most of the story is read with expressive interpretation.
	Level 3	Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups. Some small groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present.

| Nonfluent | Level 2 | Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage. |
| | Level 1 | Reads primarily word-by-word. Occasional two-word or three-word phrases may occur—but these are infrequent and/or they do not preserve meaningful syntax. |

Note: The source of this data is U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2002 Oral Reading Study. Retrieved from: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/ors/scale.asp.
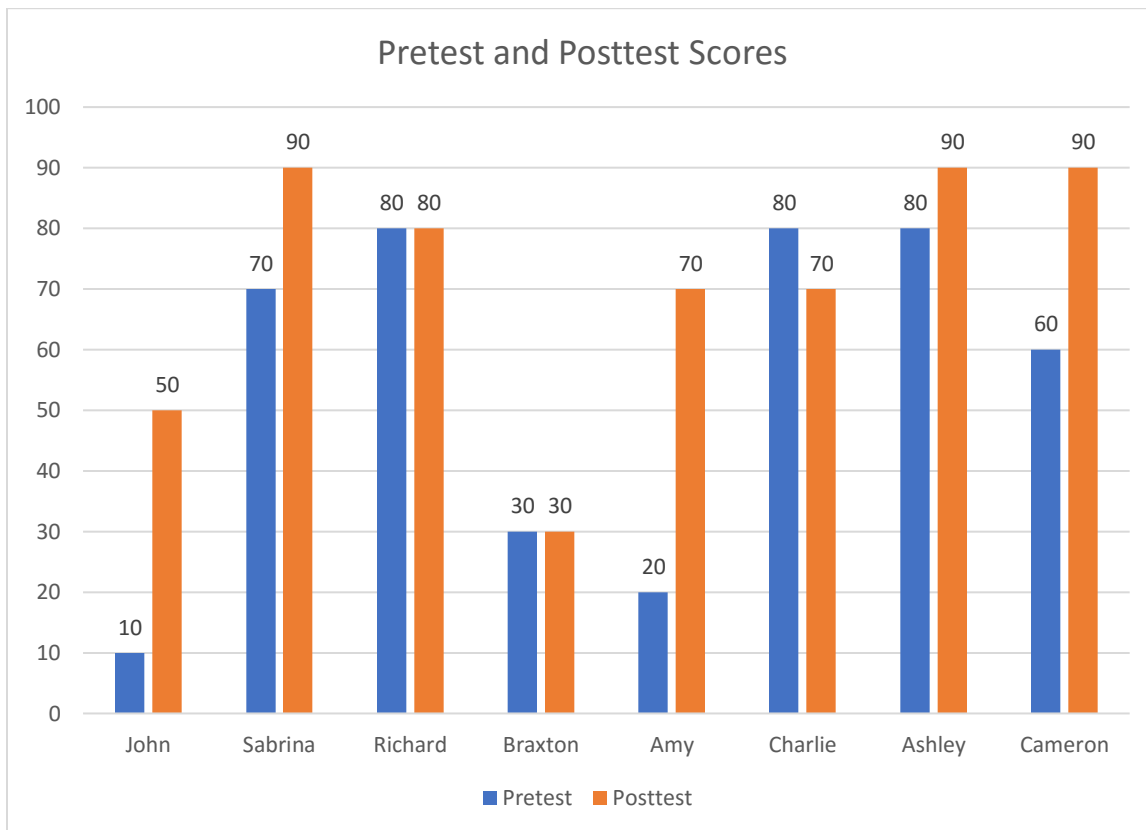
APPENDIX F

RESULTS OF DATA

Figure F.1
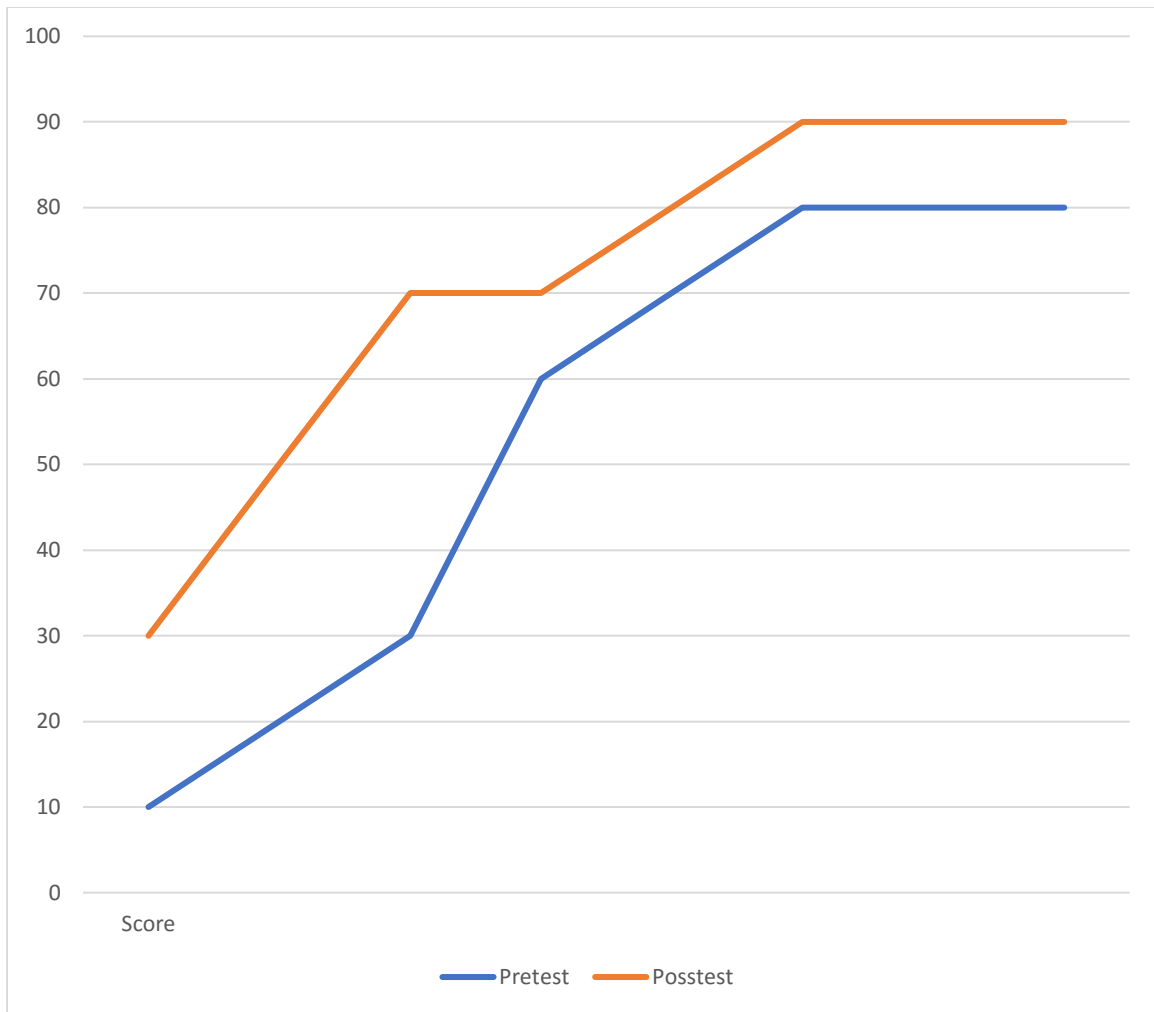Student Pretest/Posttest Scores

Figure F.2
Pretest/Posttest Group Scores

Student's Name	Date 1-27	Date 2-3	Date 2-9	Date 2-13	Date 2-22	Date 3-2	Date 3-10	Date 3-17
John	57	37	94	38	40	75	48	70
Sabrina	99	89	100	93	100	88	100	88
Richard	100	100	92	83	97	89	100	98
Braxton	68	73	68	79	67	76	40	72
Amy	95	78	74	60	96	83	89	64
Charlie	88	100	100	98	76	88	78	81
Ashley	100	89	100	79	100	88	80	99
Cameron	100	89	69	80	90	88	100	100
Mean Weekly Test Score	88	82	87	76	83	83	84	84

Figure F.3
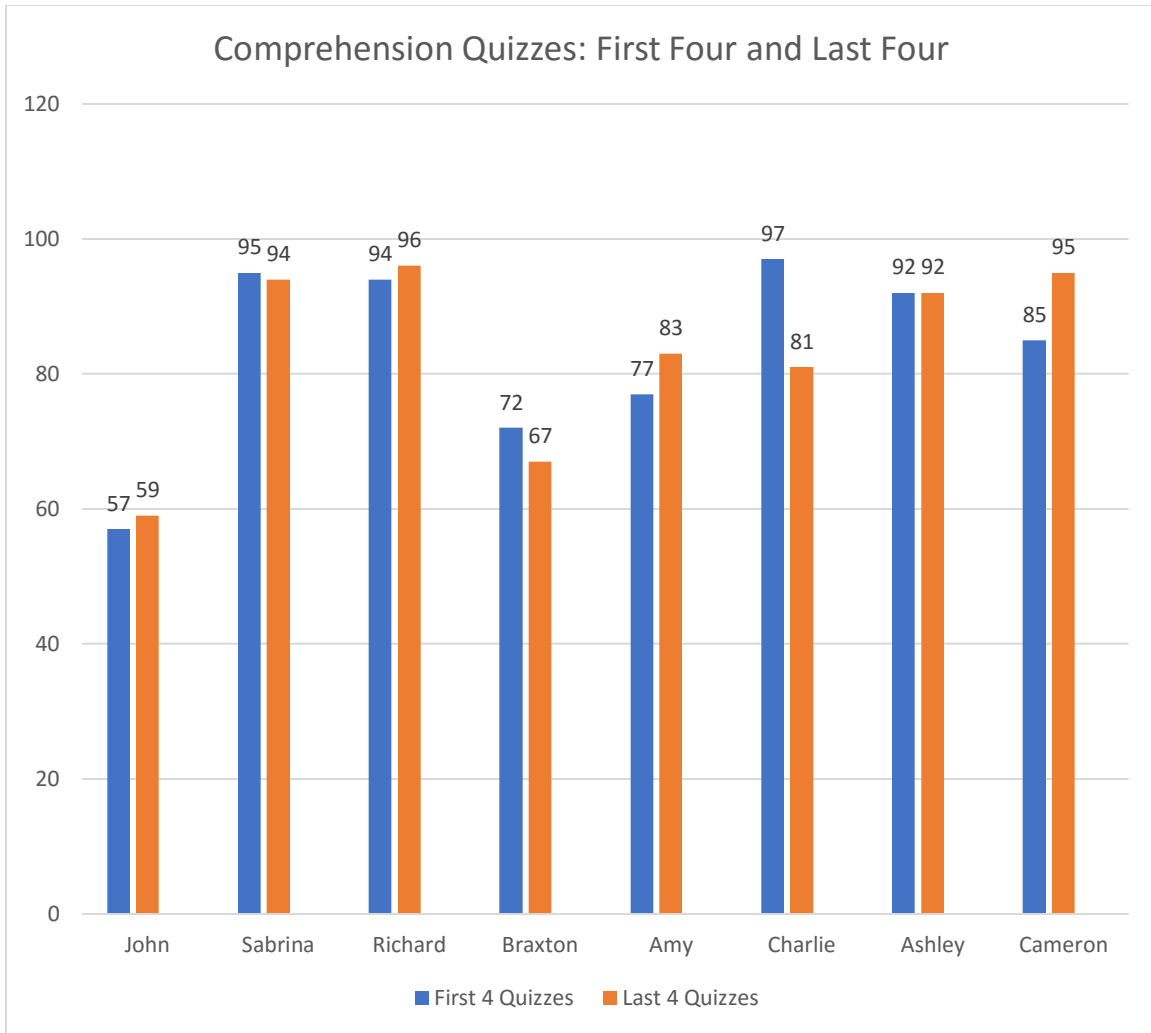Comprehension Test Scores by Date Plus Mean Score

Figure F.4

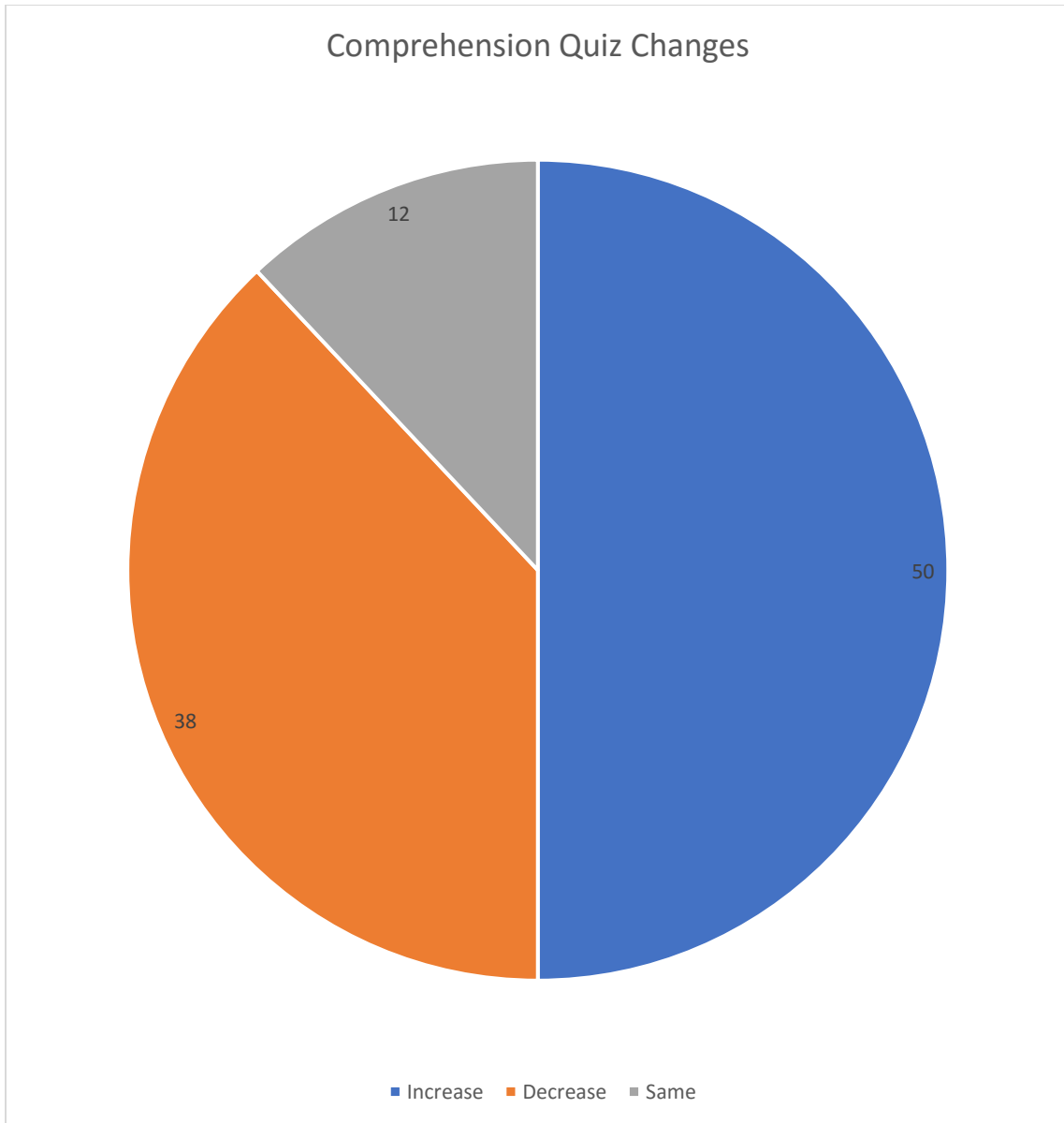Mean Scores for Comprehension Quizzes, First Four Quizzes and Second Four Quizzes

Figure F.5
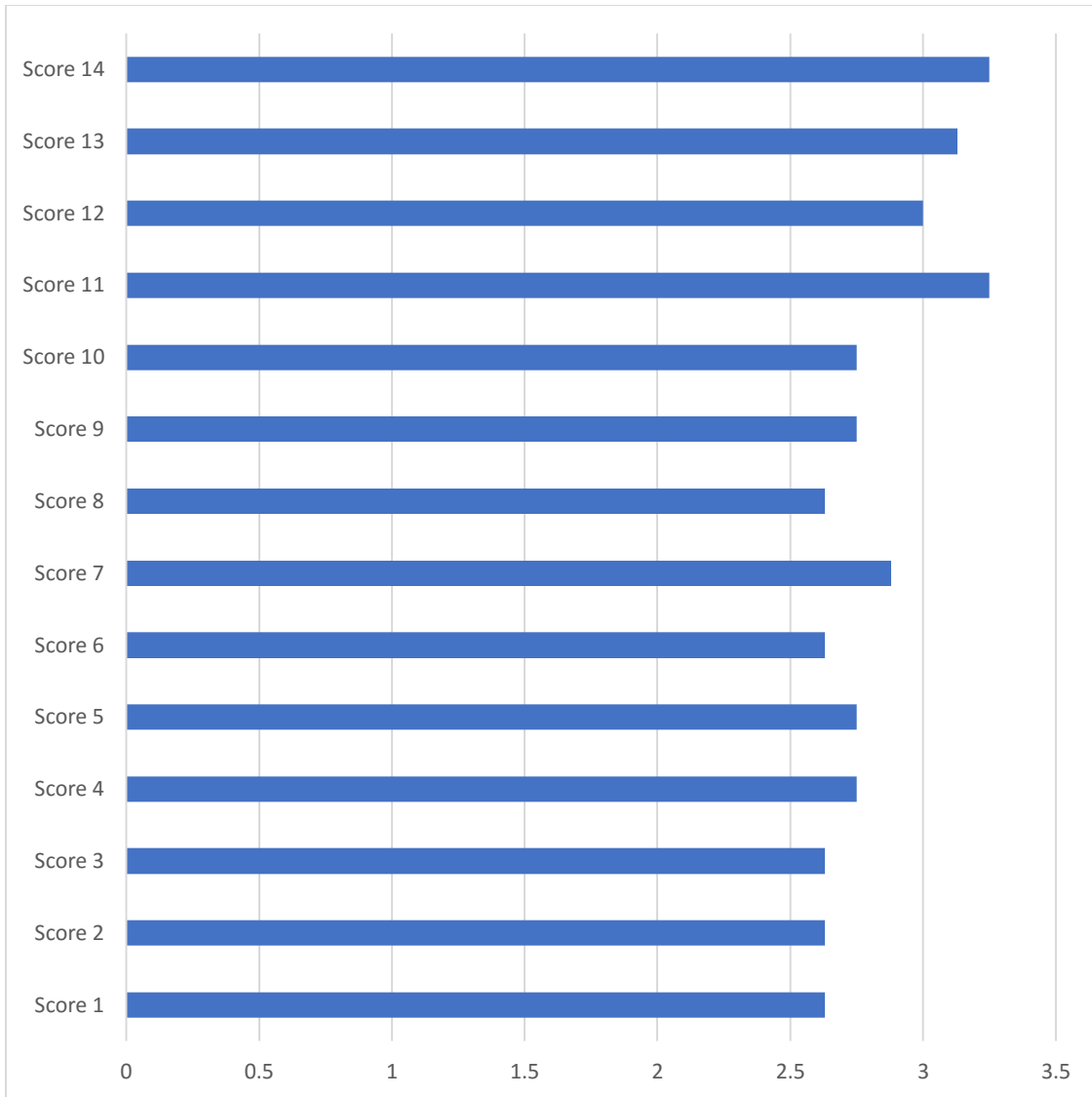Mean Scores for Comprehension Quizzes, First Four Quizzes and Second Four Quizzes
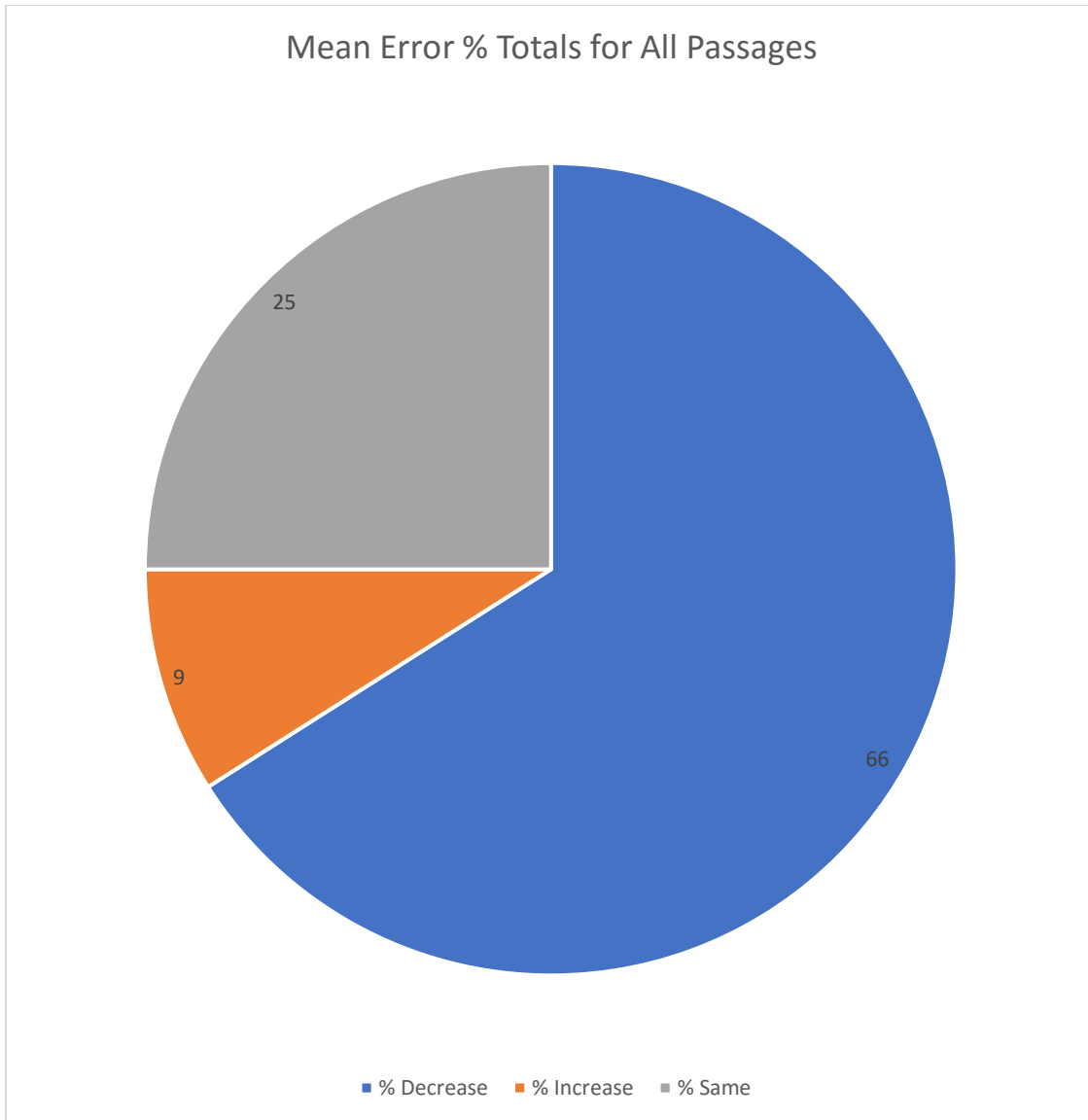
Figure F.6

Fluency Mean Scores for All Passages

Figure F.7
Total Group Error Percentages First Read to Second Read for All Passages

Figure F.8

Mean Accuracy Changes for All Passages

Student	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14
John	2, 1	2, 1	5, 4	4, 4	2, 3	3, 2	3, 3	4, 3	7, 5	6, 3	7, 4	7, 8	6, 5	4, 4
Sabrina	3, 2	1, 0	2, 1	2, 1	3, 2	2, 1	0, 2	1, 1	2, 1	2, 1	2, 1	1, 1	2, 1	2, 2
Richard	3, 0	1, 1	1, 1	1, 1	5, 1	2, 2	1, 0	0, 0	1, 1	3, 1	2, 1	5, 1	2, 1	3, 1
Braxton	3, 2	3, 1	1, 2	5, 4	7, 3	5, 2	1, 0	0, 0	5, 7	10, 10	14, 13	5, 4	8, 8	7, 6
Amy	4, 3	4, 2	4, 2	3, 3	3, 1	2, 1	1, 2	3, 2	3, 3	2, 4	7, 7	11, 11	11, 5	8, 7
Charlie	2, 0	1, 2	6, 3	1, 1	2, 1	1, 0	2, 0	4, 2	1, 2	5, 3	3, 1	4, 1	4, 4	1, 2
Ashley	1, 2	3, 1	4, 1	2, 2	5, 4	1, 1	3, 2	1, 0	1, 2	2, 0	2, 0	1, 1	2, 0	2, 1
Cameron	2, 1	1, 0	2, 2	2, 2	2, 1	3, 1	2, 1	2, 2	1, 0	1, 1	5, 1	4, 1	2, 1	3, 2

Figure F.9
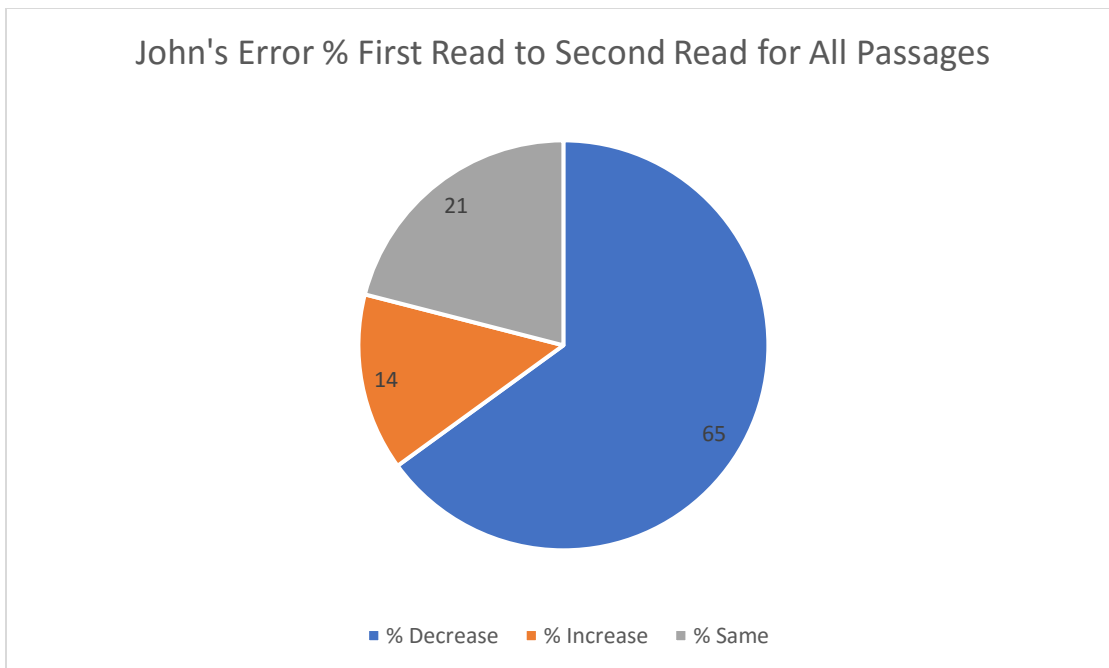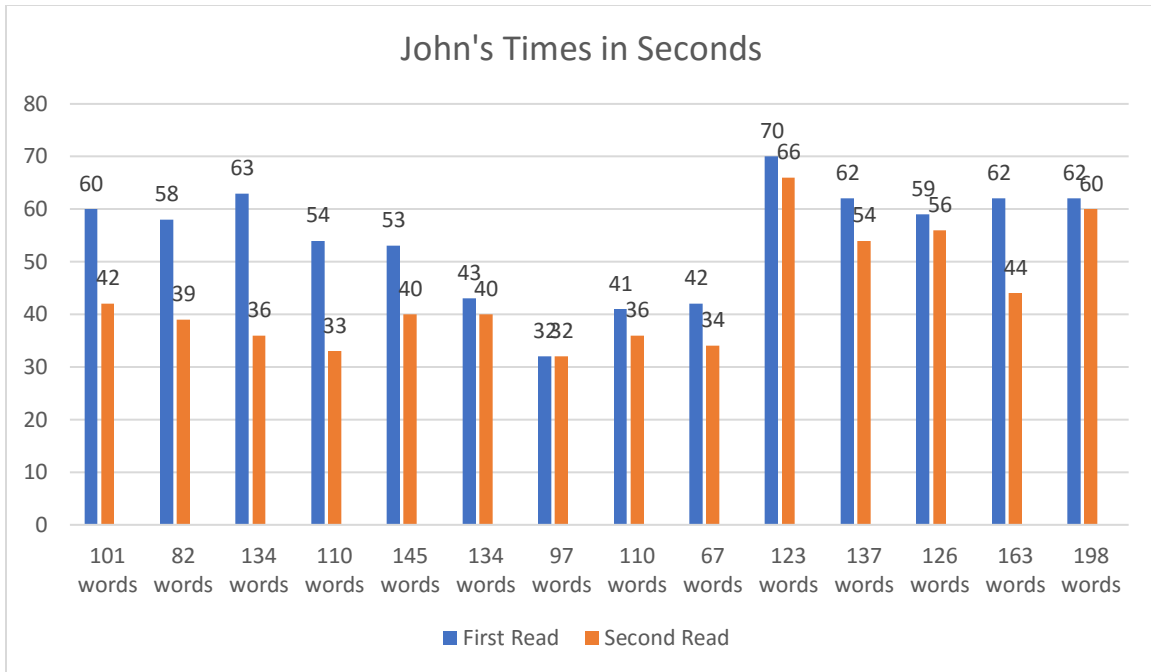Student Errors for First Read to Second Read for All Passages

John's Times in Seconds

John's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages
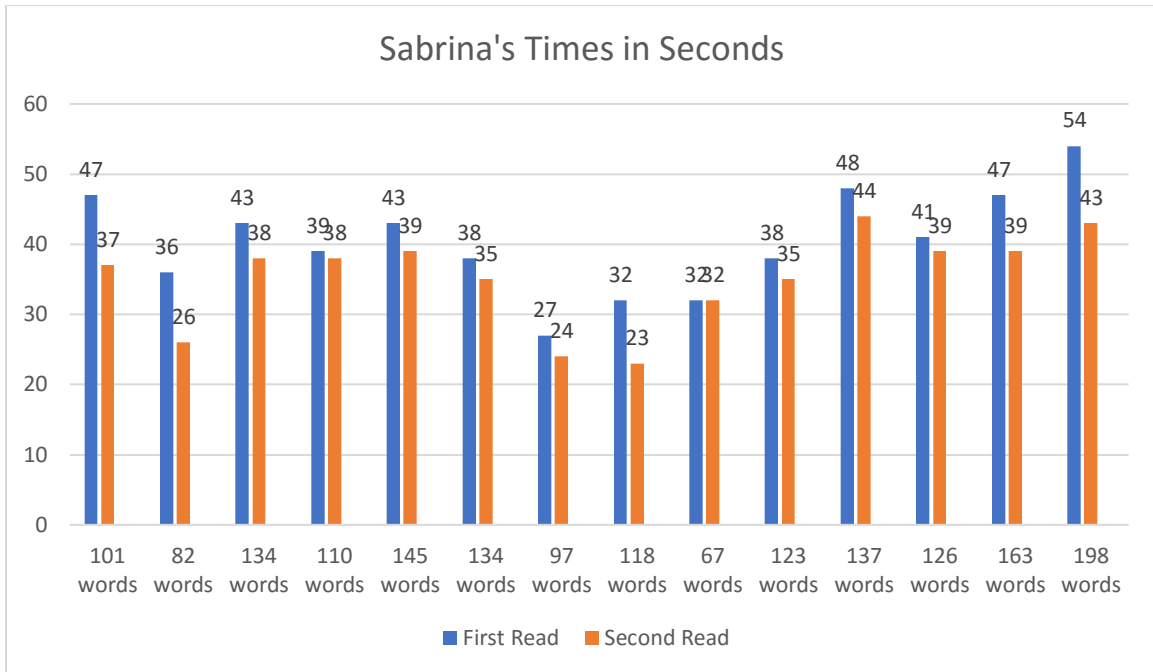
Figure F.10
John's Repeat Reading Sessions

Sabrina's Times in Seconds

First Read | Second Read

Passage	First Read	Second Read
101 words	47	37
82 words	36	26
134 words	43	38
110 words	39	38
145 words	43	39
134 words	38	35
97 words	27	24
118 words	32	23
67 words	32	32
123 words	38	35
137 words	48	44
126 words	41	39
163 words	47	39
198 words	54	43

Sabrina's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

% Decrease 72 · % Increase 7 · % Same 21
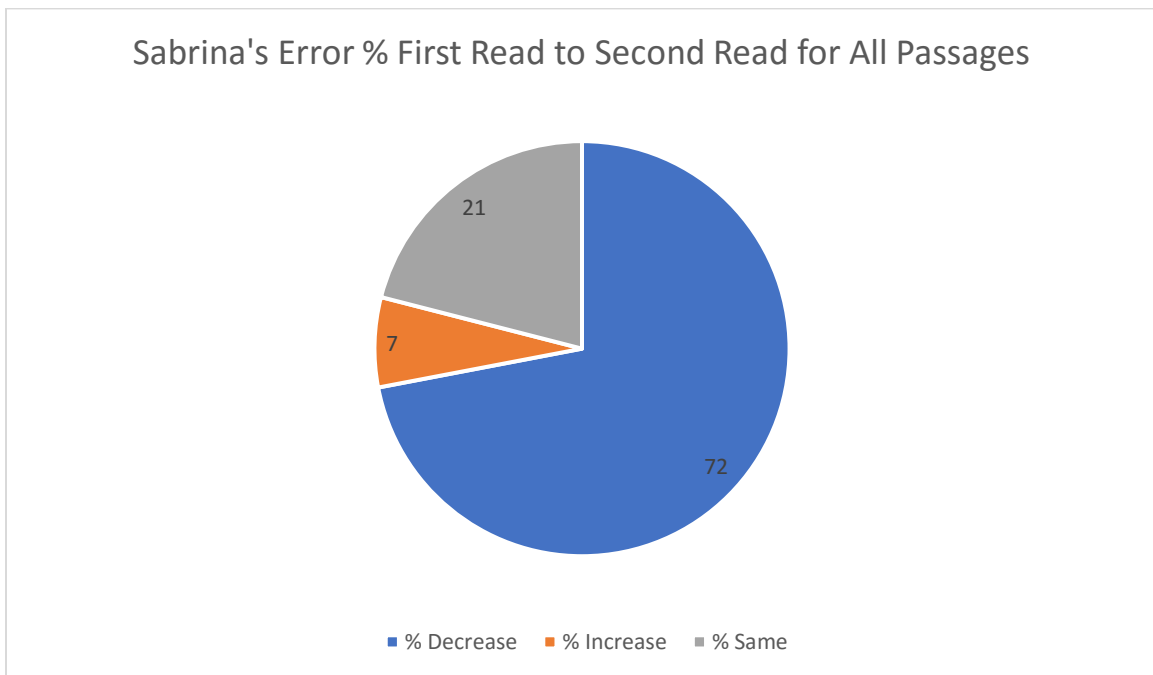
Figure F.11
Sabrina's Repeat Reading Sessions

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Richard's Times in Seconds

Richard's Times in Seconds (First Read, Second Read):
- 101 words: 45, 35
- 82 words: 33, 36
- 134 words: 60, 42
- 110 words: 40, 33
- 145 words: 64, 57
- 134 words: 62, 46
- 97 words: 30, 29
- 118 words: 36, 34
- 67 words: 40, 30
- 123 words: 89, 86
- 137 words: 50, 72
- 126 words: 35, 33
- 163 words: 50, 36
- 198 words: 39, 35

Legend: First Read, Second Read

Richard's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

Pie chart values:
- % Decrease: 57
- % Increase: 0
- % Same: 43

Legend: % Decrease, % Increase, % Same

Figure F.12

Richard's Repeat Reading Sessions

Braxton's Times in Seconds

Braxton's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

Figure F.13
Braxton's Repeat Reading Sessions
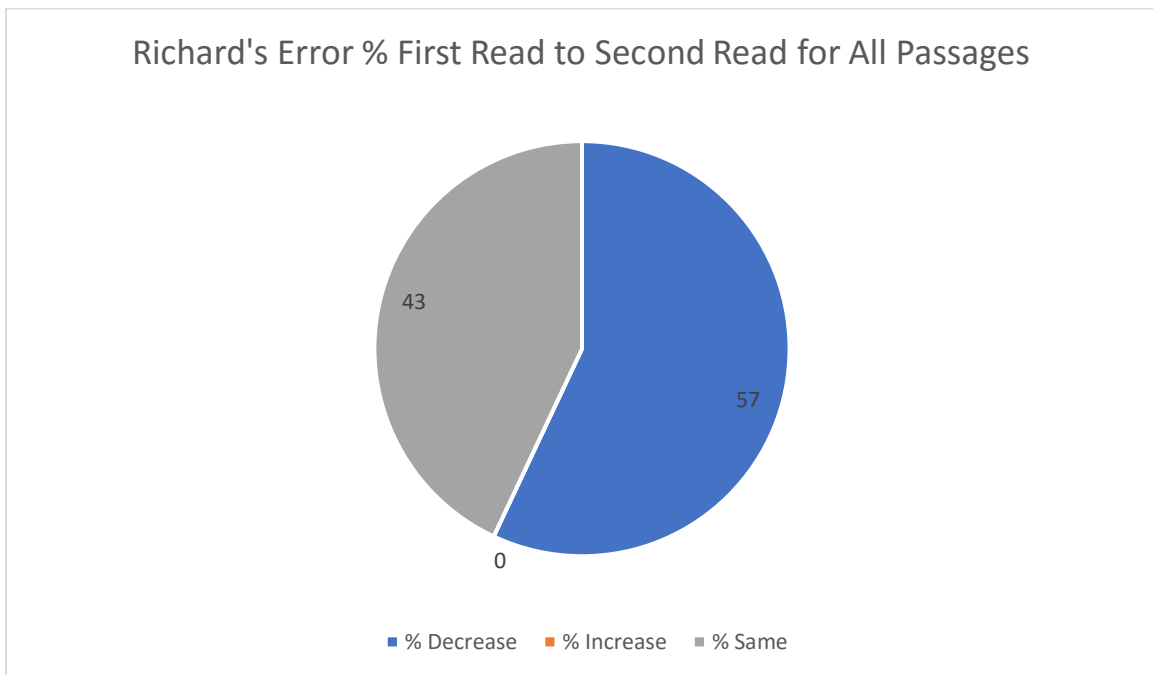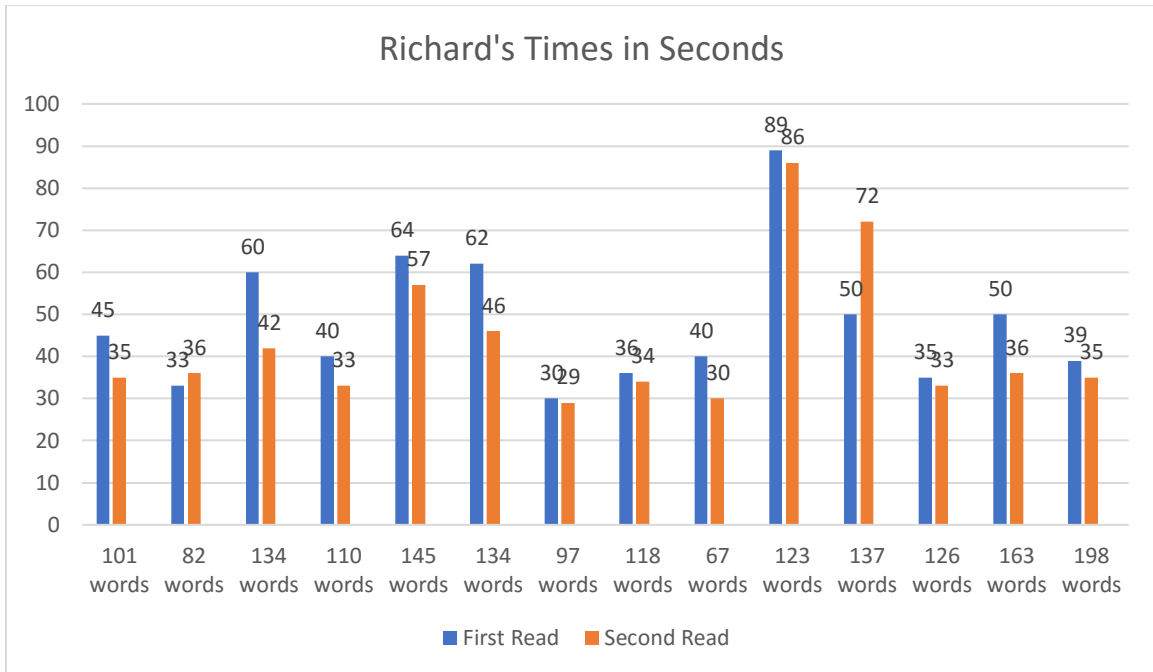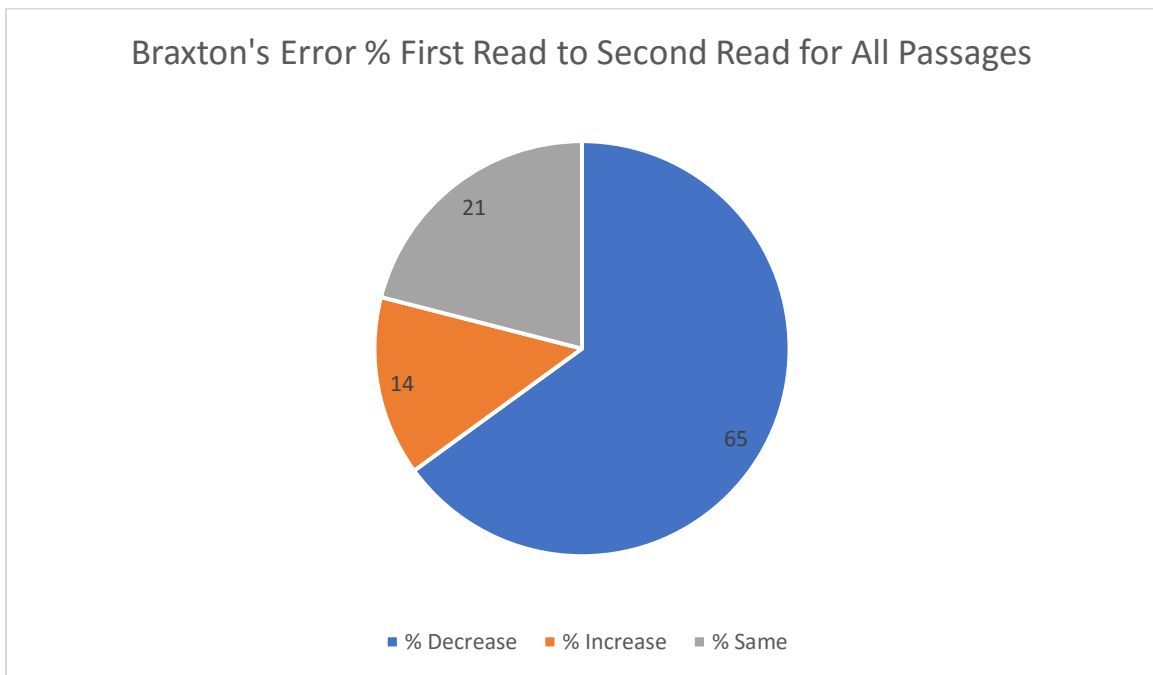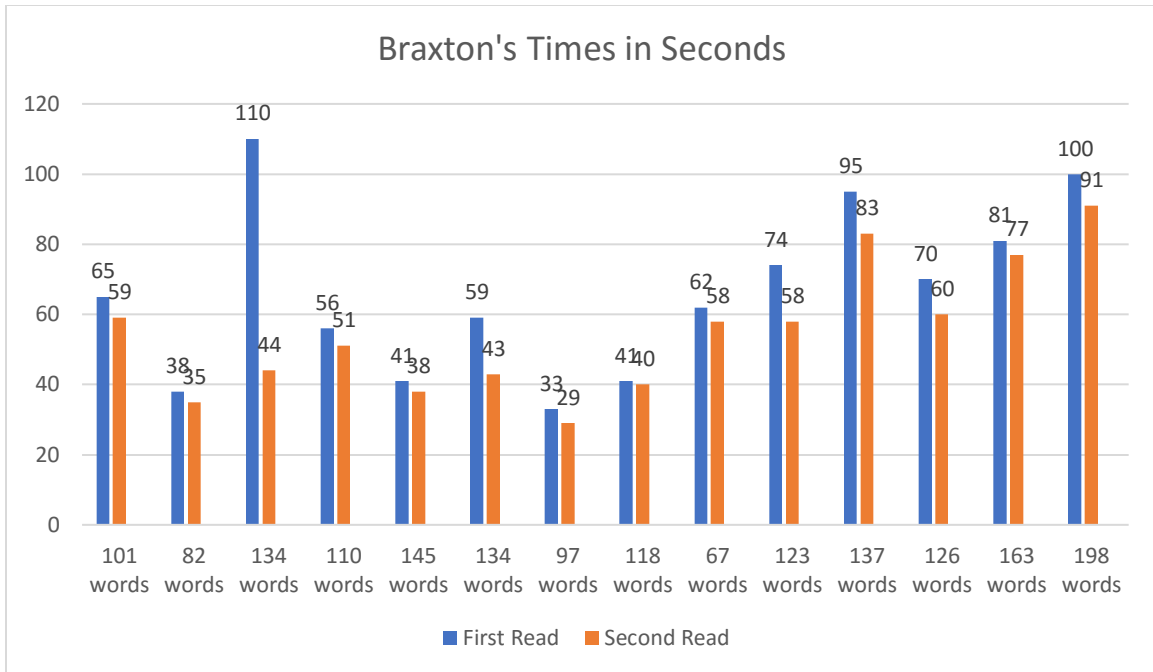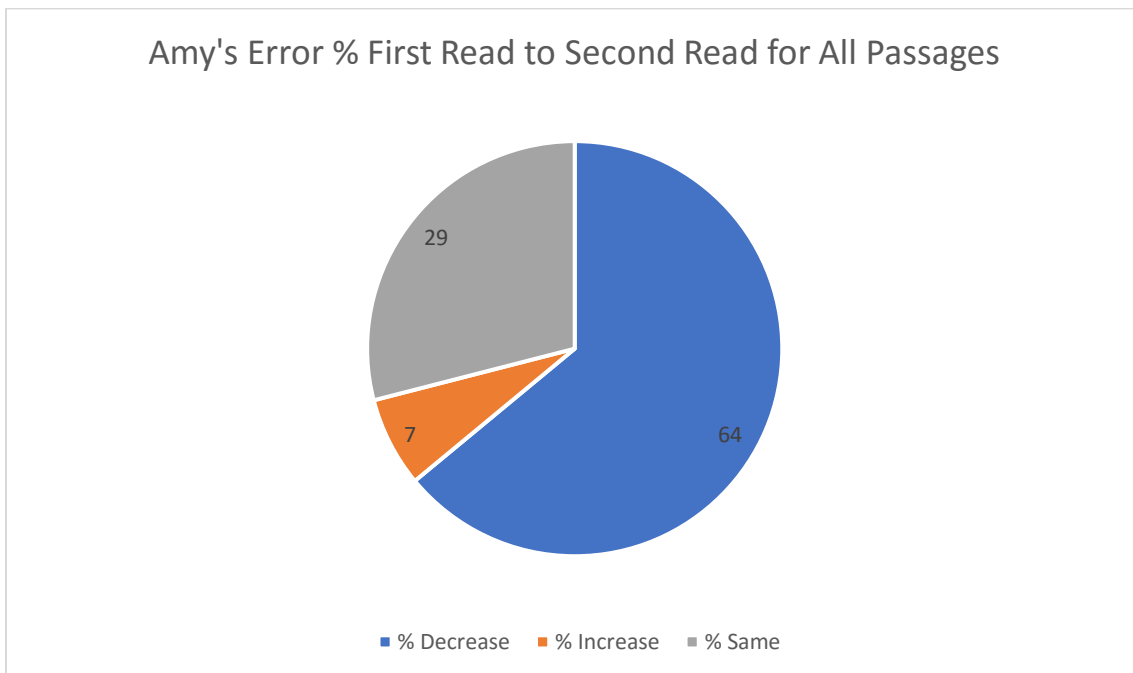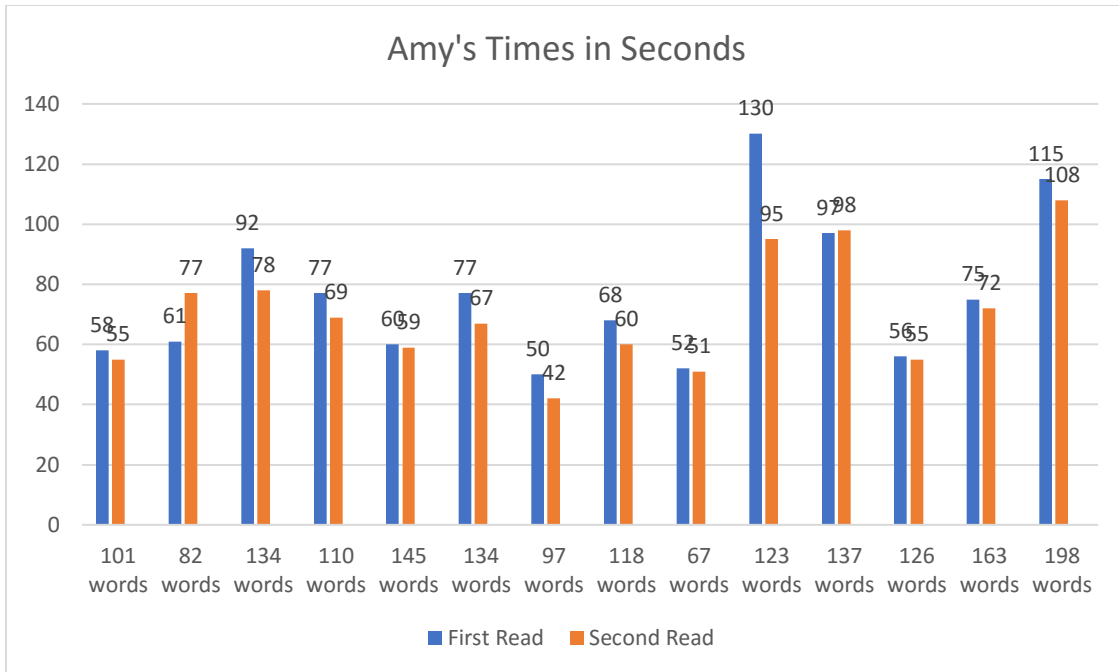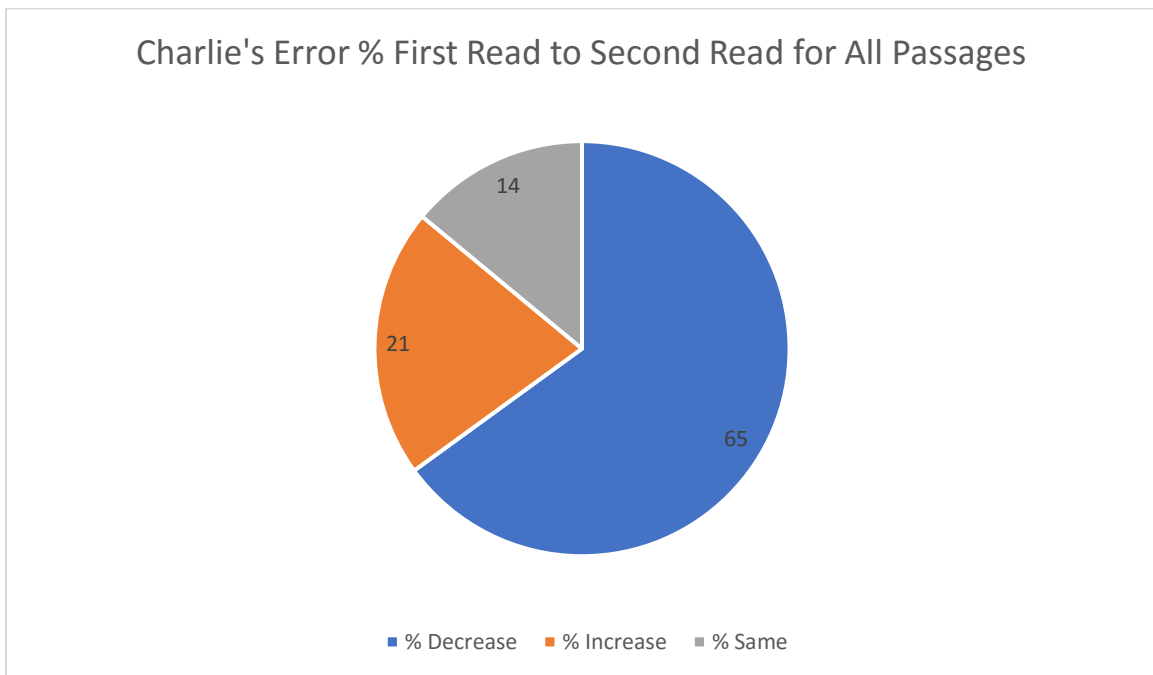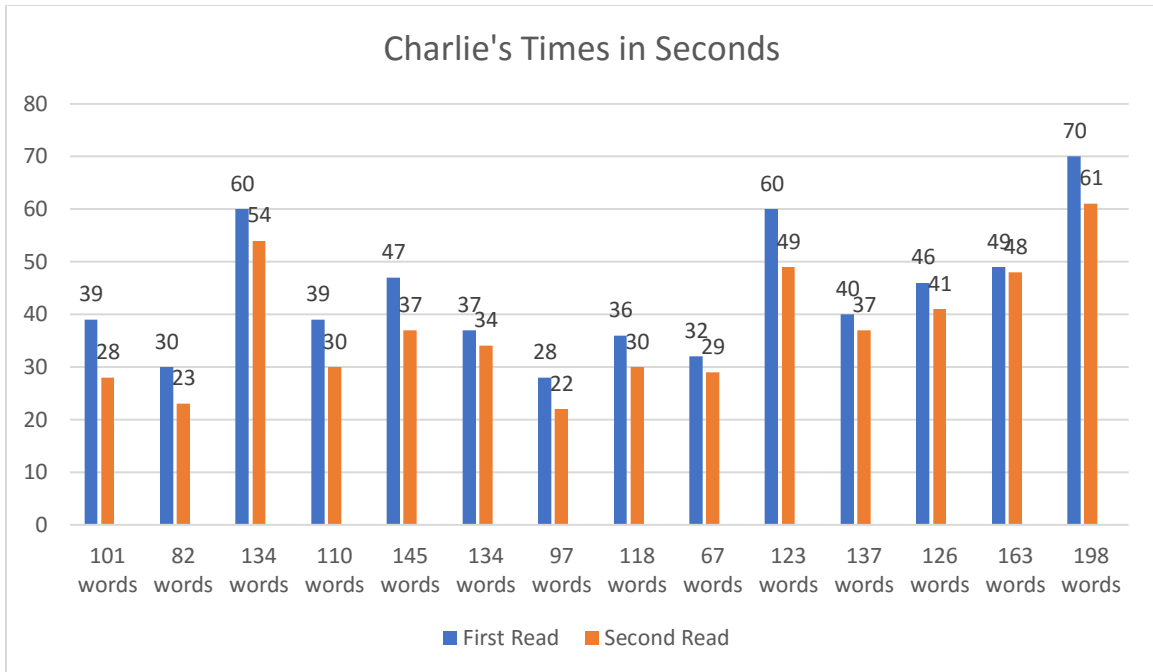
Figure F.14
Amy's Repeat Reading Sessions

Charlie's Times in Seconds

	First Read	Second Read
101 words	39	28
82 words	30	23
134 words	60	54
110 words	39	30
145 words	47	37
134 words	37	34
97 words	28	22
118 words	36	30
67 words	32	29
123 words	60	49
137 words	40	37
126 words	46	41
163 words	49	48
198 words	70	61

Charlie's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

- % Decrease: 65
- % Increase: 21
- % Same: 14

Figure F.15
Charlie's Repeat Reading Sessions

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Ashley's Times in Seconds

	101 words	82 words	134 words	110 words	145 words	134 words	97 words	118 words	67 words	123 words	137 words	126 words	163 words	198 words
First Read	39	41	57	32	67	55	34	39	30	59	44	31	47	60
Second Read	33	30	46	31	67	52	29	35	28	59	41	30	42	47

Ashley's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

- % Decrease: 65
- % Increase: 14
- % Same: 21
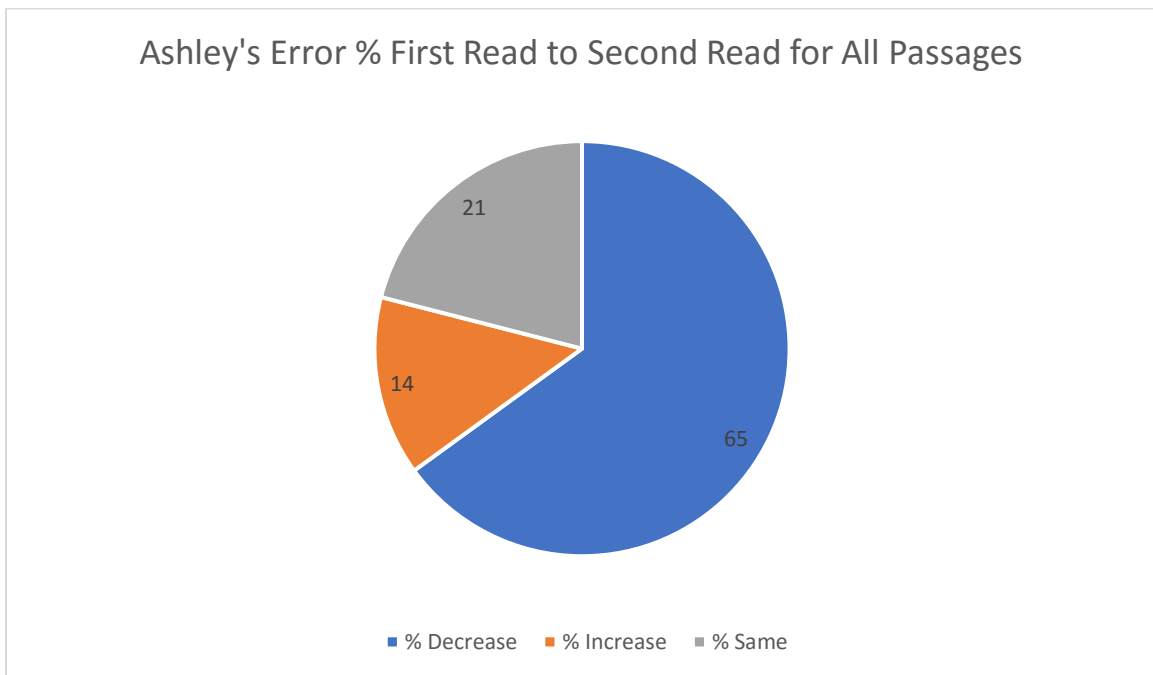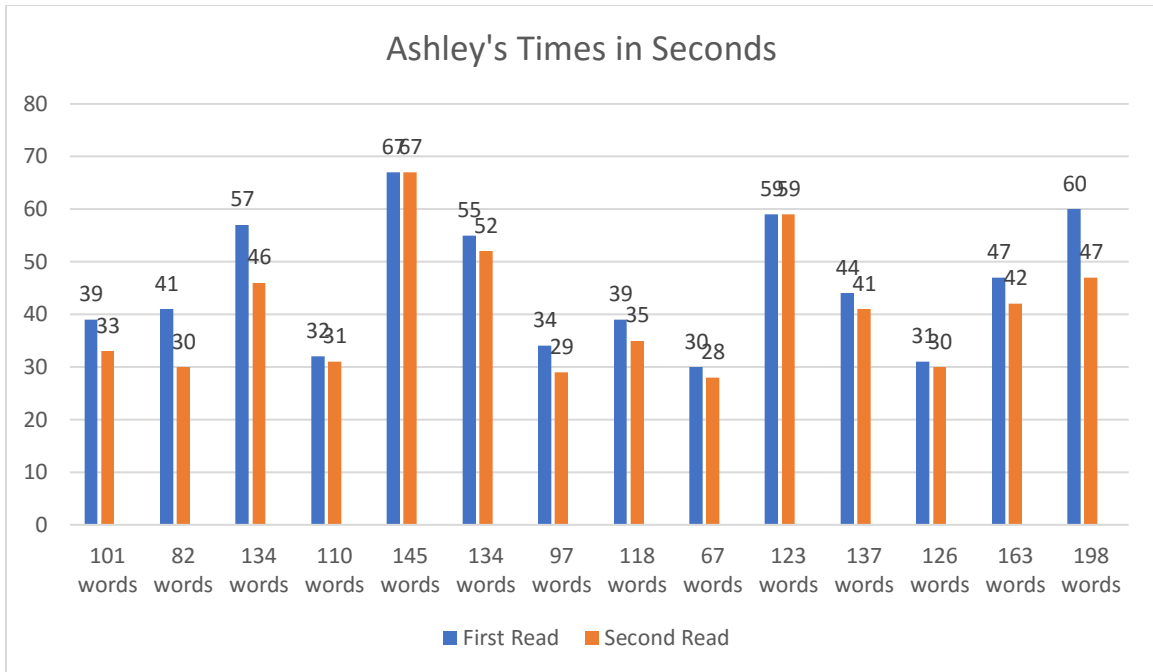
Figure F.16

Ashley's Repeat Reading Sessions

Cameron's Times in Seconds

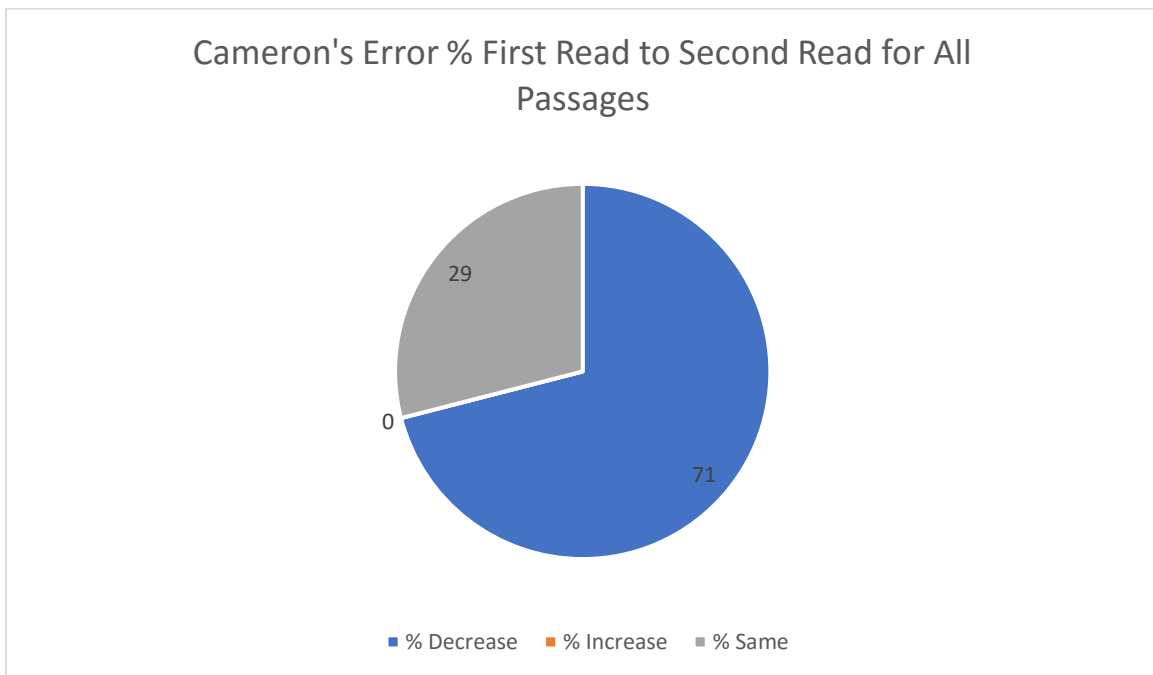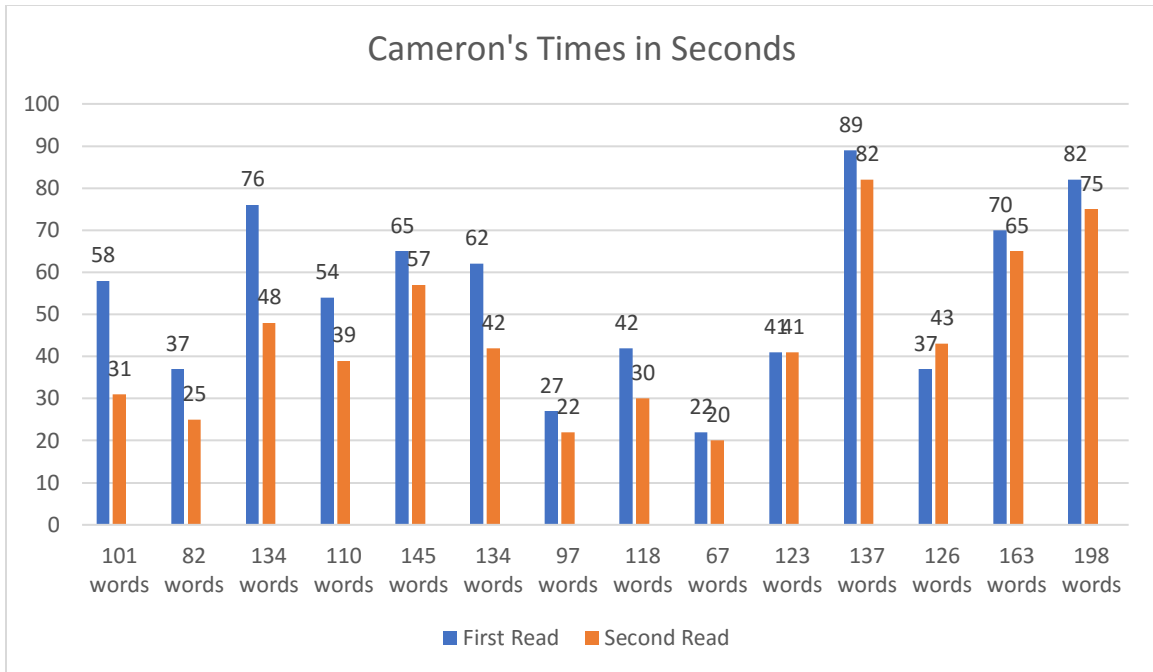Cameron's Error % First Read to Second Read for All Passages

Figure F.17
Cameron's Repeat Reading Sessions

Question Number	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Expected Value	p-value
#1	1	3	0	1	3	1.6	0.3425
#2	1	2	0	3	2	1.6	0.5168
#3	1	2	0	4	1	1.6	0.2186
#4	0	1	0	4	3	1.6	0.0828
#5	2	3	0	1	2	1.6	0.5168
#6	0	3	0	4	1	1.6	0.0828
#7	1	1	0	5	1	1.6	0.0497

Figure F.18
Likert Scale Questionnaire