



A TUTORING PROGRAM IN READING: EXAMINING THE GROWTH IN READING ACHIEVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY GRADE STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

David D. Hampton, William F. Morrison and Mary Rizza

Bowling Green State University, United States

This evaluation examined the effects of a supplemental reading intervention for students identified with specific learning disabilities in reading, and who had at least one reading goal listed on their current IEP. All consented participants in the study presented with below grade level on fall benchmark scores on DIBELS 6th ed. Revised. Findings of the study show statistically significant growth in overall reading proficiency in students in grades 2, 3, and 4.

Keywords: Reading, Dyslexia, Elementary school, Tutoring.

Introduction

One-to-one tutoring, provided as an extension to classroom teaching, is commonly considered to be the most effective way of increasing students' academic proficiency, particularly in the area of early reading skills. The effectiveness of one-to-one tutoring as an effective reading intervention has been validated by empirical research, especially for those children who are considered at-risk for academic failure, or have been identified as having reading or learning disabilities. Elementary teachers routinely identify trained volunteer one-to-one tutoring, an optimal instructional strategy to implement in their classrooms. Yet, these teachers report that it is challenging to implement in their classrooms (Pullen, Lane, & Monahan, 2004). The importance of reading interventions in the primary grades is underscored by Hecht and Greenfield (2001), who note that few changes in individual reading skills occur after the third grade. As other important consequences to lack of early intervention include, poor academic outcomes, increased behavioral issues, higher probability of these students dropping out of school will lead to limited employment opportunities later in life.

Literature Review

Students with reading difficulties

Despite the success of early reading interventions studies in assisting students to improve their reading skills, many students continue to have significant reading difficulties (Vaughn et al., 2009). Other research findings indicate that some students progress in their reading proficiency at a much slower rate, even in the presence of a highly qualified teacher and evidence-based instruction (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002). Students who may present a resistance to evidence-based reading instruction may have different

characteristics from students with reading difficulties. Multiple research findings examining the differences in students' response to reading interventions indicate that the areas of phonological processing, rapid-naming ability, and verbal ability could indicate differences in the level of these students progress in reading (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). Students who fail to respond to evidence-based reading instruction provide a population from which we can explore the development of reading skills, effective instruction, and those students who present with reading difficulties and/or disabilities (Vaughn et al., 2009).

Volunteer Tutoring

The implementation of tutoring programs has existed in education for several decades. Multiple reasons are frequently cited for the growth of a variety of tutoring programs in schools. The attention of the public was focused on the deficiencies of student proficiency in reading, particularly after the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). With this increased attention came a resurgence of volunteers ready to tutor students who may be struggling in reading development. Yet, despite the increased use of volunteer tutoring in schools, particularly with volunteers considered to be "non-professional" volunteers, there is not yet a sufficient body of evidence to confirm the effectiveness of the use of a diverse population of volunteer tutors (Ritter, Barnett, Denny, & Albin, 2009).

In a review of 17 studies which employ volunteer tutors to improve students' reading skills, Wasik (1998) found that some of these programs could assist students who are struggling with reading development; only 2 of the 17 programs reviewed compared targeted students with a comparison group. This review has led to an increase in the evaluation of programming to meet the needs of students who struggle with reading development. Many of these studies have provided a beginning body of evidence for the effectiveness in the implementation of volunteer tutors in providing additional instructional supports for students in need of support in the area of reading (Moore-Hart & Karabenick, 2009). The intention of continuing to build the body of evidence on the use of volunteer tutors for assisting students with reading difficulties formed the basis of this evaluation. Researchers were asked to evaluate a currently used program for using volunteer tutors to assist students with reading disabilities improve their reading development as a supplement to core reading instruction and special education services.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to report the relative benefits of the PM tutoring program for use as a supplemental reading intervention for students with SLD using a regression discontinuity analysis. Using regression discontinuity analysis, we were able to examine statistically significant gains in reading proficiency for students in the treatment condition when compared to their same grade level typically performing peers. The performance of the students receiving the PM intervention will be detailed relative to outcomes of DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) given at grade level three times during the academic year. The initial benchmark score served as the pretest score and the spring benchmark score served as the posttest score.

Method

The participants in this evaluation consisted of 246 second, third, and fourth grade students from 11 schools from nine rural districts in a Midwestern state. All students were identified as having been identified with a SLD in reading as determined by IEP disability category, and each participant having at least one goal in reading listed on their respective IEP. While the sample for this study was based upon convenience in their attendance in a school that had previously adopted the PM program for their students, for the purpose of the study, students were randomly assigned to the treatment or control group.

Procedures

The treatment for this study consisted of the PM intervention delivered three times each week for approximately 30 minutes for each session. This intervention was delivered in addition to any reading instruction given in the general classroom or during special education minutes. The control group differed from the treatment group in only the delivery of the PM intervention.

PM provided the overall structure to deliver the reading intervention. The goal of PM is to supplement reading instruction for students who have been identified with disabilities in reading proficiency, with each participant having at least one IEP goal in reading (Osborn, et al, 2007).

The PM intervention consisted of one-on-one tutoring by trained volunteer tutors conducted in a room outside of the classroom, and was conducted during the school day. There were three sessions each week over 26 weeks, each lasting 30 minutes. All students in the PM intervention were given an initial screening using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills-6th Edition, Revised (DIBELS). Once a student's reading proficiency was determined, PM sessions were created from the Reading Tutors reading program (reading-tutors.com, 2007). The Reading Tutors program contains 450 comprehensive lesson plans with teaching tips, instructional resource packets, formative and summative assessment, and resources in alphabet, phonological awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, fluency, and comprehension.. Each session consisted of three instructional segments, with the first segment lasts for five to 10 minutes consisting of fluency building activities which included timed cold, warm, and hot reading, based on the premise of repeated reading. The second segment of each session focused attention on skills targeted at building reading comprehension by using predicting, previewing, and asking questions in advance of reading passages, followed by tutor reading aloud as the student follows along as a model of proficient reading. The final 10-minute segment focused on high-frequency response type reading games related to specific skill development based upon the specific needs of the student as outlined in the student's IEP.

Results

2nd Grade Results

For students in the 2nd grade treatment group, fall-to-spring reading gains on the DORF increased at a statistically significant rate than those scores of the control group ($T= 7.55, p < .00^{**}$).

3rd Grade Results

For students in the 3rd grade treatment group, fall-to-spring reading gains on the DORF as evidenced by the posttest DORF scores increased at a statistically significant rate than those scores of the control group ($T= 4.20, p < .00^{**}$).

4th Grade Results

For students in the 4th grade treatment group, fall-to-spring reading gains on the DORF as evidenced by the posttest DORF scores increased at a statistically significant rate than those scores of the control group ($T= 2.25, p < .03^{*}$). It is important to note that the analysis of the participants in 4th grade revealed the lowest differences in the gain scores, although they were still statistically significant.

Discussion

When comparing the ORF scores for each grade, all grade levels reported statistically significant growth in overall reading proficiency when compared to students who did not receive the PM intervention. Students in the treatment group reported the largest growth in second grade and students in the treatment

group in fourth grade reported the lowest growth rate, while all were statistically significant. The group comparisons suggest that for each grade, students in the treatment group in reading made significant progress in their reading proficiency during the academic year over their control group peers who did not receive the PM intervention.

These comparison results may suggest important outcomes for students with reading disabilities who receive supplemental volunteer tutoring in reading during their instructional day in addition to core + special education instruction. These students who are most in need of support in reading development as evidenced by their identification as having a SLD in reading showed significant progress after an academic year program of supplemental reading instruction provided by trained volunteer tutors. This may suggest that the delivery of supplemental instruction can be provided by trained volunteers who may not be professional intervention specialists.

Implications for Practice

One practical implication emerging from this study is the need for schools and communities to emphasize the potential benefits of utilizing a trained cadre of volunteer tutors within their schools. This would assist educators and administrators emphasize educational partnerships and cooperative associations with the community at-large that could invigorate community involvement in their local schools. Another implication for practice lies in the notion of supplemental reading programs that do not take the place of core instruction or special education services can serve to support those services, this is extremely timely as populations of students with disabilities continues to grow, and the ability for all educators to support those students in effective and sustained one-one instruction becomes more difficult. While the results of this present study represent the outcomes for students with SLD in reading, the notion of one-on-one volunteer tutoring could help students who struggle, yet are not identified, and can be seen as helpful for all students who may need extra help learning new concepts.

References

1. Al-Otaiba, S. & Fuchs, D. (2002). Characteristics of children who are nonresponsive to early literacy intervention: A review of the literature. *Remedial and Special Education* 23, 300-316.
2. Hecht, S. A., & Greenfield, D. B. (2001). Comparing the predictive validity of first grade teacher ratings and reading related tests on third grade levels of reading skills in young children exposed to poverty. *School Psychology Review*, 30, 50- 69.
3. Moore-Hart, M. & Karabenick, S. A. (2009). Becoming successful readers: A volunteer tutoring program for culturally diverse students. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 48, 149-171.
4. Osborn, J., Freeman, A., Burley, M., Wilson, R., Jones, E., & Rychener, S. (2007). Effect of tutoring on reading achievement for students with cognitive disabilities, specific learning disabilities, and students receiving title 1 services. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 42(4), 467-474.
5. Pullen, P. C., Lane, H. B., & Monaghan, M. C. (2004). Effects of a volunteer tutoring model on the early literacy development of struggling first grade students. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 43(4), 21-40. doi: 10.1080/19388070409558415
6. Ritter, G. W., Barnett, J. H., Denny, G. S., & Albin, G. R. (2009). The effectiveness of tutoring programs for elementary and middle school students: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(3), 3-38. doi:10.3102/0034654308325690.
7. Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Murray, C. S., Scammacca, N., Linan-Thompson, S., & Woodruff, A. L. (2009). Response to early reading intervention: Examining higher and lower responders. *Exceptional Children*, 75(2), 165-183.
8. Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., Woodruff, A. L., & Linan-Thompson, S. (2007). Prevention and early identification of students with reading/learning disabilities. In D. H. Haager, S. Vaughn, & J. K. Klingner (Eds.). *Evidence-based practices for response to intervention* (pp. 11-27). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
9. Wasik, B. A. (1998). Volunteer tutoring programs in reading: A review. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33, 266-292.