

Dolch Word Practice: Can Struggling Readers Benefit?

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Abstract

This action research study was conducted to determine to what extent regular Dolch word instruction would impact the fluency of 4th grade students who are a year below grade level in reading. These students read orally with the teacher daily as a part of guided reading time. In addition, during this four-week study, the students in these guided reading groups used Dolch word flashcards to practice high frequency words and practiced and read timed fluency passages. Overall, students showed an increase in the number of words they read correctly on the fluency passages. Data analysis showed an increase in the number of words read correctly per passage from Monday to Friday, after practice sessions during the week. Additionally, the students called the Dolch flashcards correctly in fewer seconds than they did at the beginning of the study. General conclusions were that with regular Dolch word practice struggling readers were able to call the Dolch words correctly in less time and were able to read more words correct per minute with less errors on weekly fluency passages.

Dolch Word Practice: Can Struggling Readers Benefit?

I currently teach reading and language arts at a rural school in central Illinois, and am working on a Master's degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Reading. While completing a practicum course in Remedial Reading at Eastern Illinois University, I was working with a particular student who had fallen behind her current grade level in reading. During my time with her, I noticed that she often miscalled high frequency words, but correctly called other more difficult words. We began to work on recognizing high frequency words, such as the Dolch words. Over time, I noticed that the more high frequency words she called correctly, the more her fluency and reading comprehension improved. I questioned whether other students with reading difficulties would experience this same success.

This year, our school adopted a new reading curriculum. This reading curriculum divides the students into four categories during guided reading time with the appropriate level guided reading books. The four categories are: *Intensive* (two or more years below grade level), *Strategic* (one year below grade level), *Benchmark* (on grade level), and *Advanced* (beyond grade level). I selected to conduct my study with the students in the Strategic reading group. I wanted to work with these students, because I felt that this additional motivation and support would assist them in becoming stronger readers.

In order to do this, I wanted the students in this group to get additional practice with high frequency words. With this practice automaticity and fluency would potentially increase. Therefore, the primary research aim of this study was to determine if Dolch word practice leads to an increase in the automaticity of Dolch words recognition and an increase in reading fluency for fourth grade students who are in the strategic category.

Literature Review

Fluency

Reading fluency is one essential skill for readers to master. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) from 2000, the National Reading Panel stated fluency is one of the five critical components of reading and defined fluency as the ability to “read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression” (p. 11). Young and Rasinski (2009) commented that fluency is commonly categorized into three aspects: *accuracy*, *rate*, and *prosody*.

Accuracy in word recognition refers to readers’ ability to read the words in a text without error in pronunciation. *Automaticity* refers to the ability of proficient readers to read the words in a text correctly and effortlessly so that they may use their finite cognitive resources to attend to meaning while reading. *Prosody* refers to the ability of readers to render a text with appropriate expression and phrasing to reflect the semantic and syntactic content of the passage. (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 4, emphasis in original)

When students learn to do these three things correctly, reading should sound like natural speech.

Hudson, Lane, and Pullen (2005) expressed that “reading fluency is one of the defining characteristics of good readers, and a lack of fluency is a common characteristic of poor readers” (p. 702). Rasinski (2003) researched four ways to build reading fluency: phrasing, modeling good reading, providing oral support for readers, and offering plenty of practice opportunities. First, Rasinski (2003) said that fluency should be encouraged through phrasing. He explained that in addition to practicing words in isolation, words should be practiced in short sentences and phrases. According to Deeney (2010) “prosody also includes phrasing or parsing text into

appropriate segments” (p. 441). This appropriate use of prosody shows that readers understand the text that they are reading.

The second way Rasinski (2003) encouraged building reading fluency is through modeling good oral reading. This means that students should hear their teacher model fluent reading. This happens when the teacher reads aloud to the students and explains what he/she is doing to make the text sound appealing.

Rasinski’s (2003) third method to build fluent reading is to provide oral support for readers. He explained that this is the step from where students should move from hearing fluent reading from the teacher to becoming independent readers. This can be done during guided reading time. The NICHD (2000) report from the National Reading Panel noted, “Two instructional approaches, each of which has several variations, have typically been used to teach reading fluency. One, guided repeated oral reading, encourages students to read passages orally with systematic and explicit guidance and feedback from the teacher” (p. 12). The other instructional approach is independent silent reading, which encourages students to read silently by themselves, with little help or feedback from the teacher. This may be done inside or outside of the classroom.

Guided Reading

Guided reading is considered part of a balanced literacy program (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005). During guided reading time, small groups of students meet with the teacher. The students are all reading the same text. While these students are working with the teacher, the other students are performing another task, such as seatwork or individual silent reading. Schwartz (2005) explained that guided reading time is the perfect opportunity for teachers to observe and investigate early literacy.

Broad overview of essential components. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) have determined that there are several essential components that are necessary for guided reading groups to be most effective. The teacher must work with a small group of students. The students must be grouped by development and/or reading level. The teachers help the students develop independent reading strategies. Each child is responsible for reading the whole text. The goal for the student is to become a more independent reader over time, as well as be able to read more challenging books. Groups must be flexible and change as students' needs change.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) argued that there should be a specific place in the room designated as the guided reading area. This should be an area of the room that is quieter than the rest. The students and teacher may sit at a kidney-shaped table, or the teacher and students may choose to sit on the floor or a rug. The teacher must be able to see the rest of the classroom from where he/she is sitting. The researchers also suggested that the guided reading area should have a bookshelf or basket of books close by. Materials that the teacher may want to keep in this area could include the following: a clipboard for running record forms, sentence strips, paper and writing material, student records, markers or pencils, and a whiteboard or easel with chart paper (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Rooms where guided reading is taking place should be full of quality literature (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). All students should have access to books that offer just the right amount of challenge (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Iaquina, 2006). In a classroom, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested having big books, leveled readers, hardback and paperback books, poems, informational books, a word wall, word charts, and dictionaries. This wide variety of reading material will give students opportunities to read many different types of quality literature.

Group size and makeup. Guided reading occurs with small groups of students. In a study conducted by Fisher (2008) group size was between five and six students. These small groups work best when the groups are homogeneous. It is necessary for students to have similar reading processes and students should be at about the same reading level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Iaquina, 2006). By grouping students by level for guided reading, students who are reading at a lower level can get the help they need, while advanced readers can be challenged. Hollingsworth, Sherman, and Zaugra (2007) stated, “During these groups lower students can feel successful and higher students can be challenged. Homogeneous groups are a place where children can take risks and not fail” (p. 53). The teacher has more time to focus on the developmental needs of the students in the group, instead of worrying about meeting the needs of heterogeneously placed students. The teacher’s job is to match his/her instruction with the needs of the students in a specific group (Iaquina, 2006). In this way, the teacher is able to provide a lesson that is “just right”.

Teachers should be able to group students after ongoing observations and systematic assessments (Iaquina, 2006). Groups should be dynamic, and students should be moved in and out of groups as their needs change (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Iaquina, 2006). When grouping is flexible and varied, students feel as though they are a part of a community of readers (Iaquina, 2006). The students are therefore more likely to support one another as readers.

In these groups each student is to have his/her own copy of the text (Fountas & Pinnell 1996; Frey et al., 2005). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested that the students should read silently. Frey et al. (2005) on the other hand stated that students may read silently or aloud, and recommended that the students should do the majority of the reading while the teacher guides the students.

Teaching strategies. One of the main purposes of guided reading is to provide teachers the opportunity to teach reading strategies at students' individual reading levels (Iaquinta, 2006). Hollingsworth et al. (2007) explained that students need to be explicitly taught reading strategies, and the best time for this to occur is during guided reading groups. This is due to the fact that the students are grouped by need, and therefore all students in the group should require similar instruction. When planning a guided reading lesson, Cunningham and Allington (1999) proposed that the teacher's "major task is to decide which thinking strategies will help students make sense of the text they are reading today and be better, more strategic, readers when they are reading on their own" (p. 56).

The ultimate goal in guided reading is to help the students learn how to independently use reading strategies successfully (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The hope is that students will learn how to use the strategies in guided reading groups and then put these strategies in practice when they are reading on their own. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) identified three strategies to help students become independent readers: maintaining fluency, detecting and correcting error, and problem-solving new words.

Frey et al. (2005) also thought that the teacher should teach effective strategies that students can use to process novel texts. By using these strategies, the students will then be able to read and comprehend texts at increasingly more difficult levels. Schwartz (2005) explained that guided reading gives teachers the opportunity to provide immediate feedback to students. This guidance can help many struggling readers construct problem-solving strategies "on the run" as they are reading.

However, in one study conducted in 2008, the researcher concluded that teachers do not use guided reading time to teach reading strategies to the students. Instead, she observed that

teachers typically use this time to simply to listen to the students read. She stated that if teachers understood, “that questions need to be genuine, and that exploratory dialogue considers all viewpoints in a quest for common understanding, perhaps guided reading will be seen as a learning opportunity rather than ‘twenty minutes for listening to readers’” (Fisher, 2008, p. 27).

Finally, the fourth way Rasinski (2003) suggested to build reading fluency is to offer plenty of practice opportunities. The NICHD (2000) report from the National Reading Panel stated that, “Reading practice is generally recognized as an important contributor to fluency” (p. 11). One such method of this is repeated readings. This can be done by helping students learn to automatically recognize high frequency words.

High frequency words are words that appear regularly in our language. Some examples include the following: *the, at, over, and gave*. Students need to be able to look at these high frequency words and know them automatically. This automaticity of high frequency words will allow students to focus on the important task of making meaning of the text (Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Rasinski, 2003). Teachers today may refer to the Dolch word list when determining which high frequency words to stress with their students.

Dolch Words

In 1936, Edward Dolch developed a basic sight vocabulary list. Dolch (1936) explained that teachers wanted to help their students learn the sight words that were essential, but that teachers did not know which words should be drilled. He created a list of 220 basic sight vocabulary words. Dolch (1936) did this by combining “all words, except nouns, common to the word list of International Kindergarten Union, the Gates List, and the Wheeler-Howell list” (p. 458). These were three common word lists in use at the time Dolch was conducting his research. Dolch (1936) explained that nouns were not included in his basic sight word vocabulary list,

because nouns are not universal. He believed that nouns are tied specifically to subject matter and must be taught as the subject matter changes, thus he did not include nouns in his basic sight vocabulary list.

Dolch (1936) determined that students needed to know these words by sight. He also indicated that if a student did not know all of these sight words, the student and teacher should focus on practicing the miscalled word(s). One method Dolch (1936) proposed that would help students learn to recognize words was through the use of flashcards. Additionally, he encouraged teachers to keep a daily record of words that are known so that the student and teacher can see if improvement is made.

In 1977, Jerry Johns, Rose Edmond, and Nancy Mavrogenes completed a replication and validation study of Edward Dolch's work. Johns et al. (1977) found that Dolch's basic sight vocabulary words still accounted for more than 50% of words found in children and adults' reading material. The Dolch basic sight vocabulary words also accounted for 55% of the words that children read in grade 3 through grade 9. The researchers confirmed the validity of Dolch's list even with the passage of time.

Conclusion

Fluency is a skill that good readers should attain. However, teachers handle teaching this skill in a variety of ways. By helping students learn to have automaticity with sight words, such as the Dolch basic sight vocabulary list, students may spend more time attending to unfamiliar words. When teachers hear students read aloud, such as during guided reading time, teachers can focus on specific word(s) the students read incorrectly. The literature indicates that by helping students become more fluent, comprehension will likely increase. Reading strategies should be taught and used in guided reading groups and these groups should be homogeneous. Using this

information, I chose to answer the research question “What effect will regular Dolch word practice have 4th grade students who are at least one grade level below reading in the area of fluency?”

Method and Results

Participants

This action research study was conducted in a fourth grade classroom in a rural central Illinois school for four weeks from February to April 2012. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed. A convenience sample was used to determine participants in the study. There were 11 students selected for this study, six boys and five girls, and these students were nine and ten years of age. Each student was assigned a random participant number to ensure confidentiality.

As part of my school district’s new curriculum, the students are given a Quarterly Benchmark Assessment four times a year. Using the results of this assessment, the students are grouped into the four reading categories previously mentioned: *Intensive*, *Strategic*, *Benchmark*, and *Advanced*. The students selected for this study received scores that place them in the *Strategic* group (one year below grade level in reading). In my school district, we partner teach, and I teach reading to both my classroom and my teaching partner’s classroom. Each classroom had a Strategic guided reading group. One guided reading group was composed of six students and one was composed of five students. Both guided reading groups met in the afternoon. One student who participated has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for speech; the other students had no documented educational challenges.

Data Collection Strategies

Five instruments were used to collect data for this study. Each instrument used in the study provided unique data to help determine benefits of regular Dolch word instruction for struggling readers.

Quarterly Benchmark Assessment. This assessment was given to all the students in the classroom at the beginning of the study. It was given as part of our regular reading curriculum. The assessment was comprised of 34 multiple-choice questions and two short answer questions. It was used to assess students in each of the following areas: reading, language arts skills, and writing. This assessment measured the students' progress against grade-level standards.

Reading Progress Assessment. This instrument was used as a pretest and posttest assessment. The assessment is marketed through our reading series, however our district does not require that we use it. I chose to use this instrument as a measure of reading fluency and it was individually administered to only the study participants. I asked the students to read the passage to me in their best voice, while I made notes on the student's oral reading. This assessment was designed to show how students' fluency skills progress over time, and it measures the students' oral reading accuracy, as well as oral reading fluency. This assessment gave me an overview of how the students were reading and as a pretest/posttest measure; it provided information about how accuracy, phrasing, and expression developed over time.

Dolch Flashcards. Fifty flashcards with Dolch words were used to test the participants' knowledge of sight words. These 50 commercially made flashcards contain high-frequency words that the students see on a daily basis while reading. The participants used the flashcards to practice calling these high frequency words. The students read these words to the researcher on Monday. Their score and time were charted on a spreadsheet. Then the students practiced with

the flashcards for 10 minutes on Monday and 10 minutes on Wednesday. I then tested each of the students on Friday and recorded the student's score out of 50. The number of words the students called correctly and time was entered into the spreadsheet. The flashcards were used as a measure to determine if regular practice helped students call more Dolch words correctly and to measure the amount of time it took the students to call these words. These flashcards were used with the participants in the study in addition to the regular reading curriculum.

Weekly Fluency Passages. These Weekly Fluency Passages correspond to the topic the students were reading in their guided reading groups. These passages are also marketed through our reading series, but are not required by our district as part of our reading curriculum. I selected to use these passages as an instrument to collect data in addition to regular reading curriculum. They were used to record the participants' reading errors and calculate words read correctly per minute (WCPM). The students read the Weekly Fluency Passage individually to me on Monday. The students then practiced reading the passage with their peers on Wednesday. On Friday, each student once again read the passage to me. I recorded how many words the student read in one minute, and how many errors were made. The results were recorded in a spreadsheet and individual participant errors were denoted on a copy of the fluency passage as the student read aloud to the researcher. I also made observations to determine if the students used expression while reading, if they read at an appropriate rate, or if they self-corrected while reading. I also noted when the students missed Dolch words or words with similar configurations.

Teacher Journal. A daily teacher journal of notes and reflection was maintained throughout the study. Information such as student absences, testing dates, and a record of whom the students practiced with were noted throughout the day. At the end of each day, I went back

and added information to the entries such as student observations and comments, as well as remarks made by other teachers in the building who interact with study participants.

Results

I used the results of the Quarterly Benchmark Assessment to divide the students into the four guided reading categories. I met with the 11 students who scored in the Strategic range for 20 minutes each day for four weeks during the guided reading block of time where they practiced oral reading and were assessed twice a week.

The Reading Progress Assessment was divided into two sections that the students were tested on: Oral Reading Accuracy and Oral Reading Fluency. The Oral Reading Accuracy test divided the students into three categories for reading accuracy. These categories were as follows: reads with high accuracy (0 to 2 errors), reads with fair accuracy (3 to 10 errors), or had difficulty reading with accuracy (11+ errors). As seen on Table 1, 10 out of the 11 participants read with *fair accuracy* or *high accuracy*. Only one student fell into the *difficulty reading with accuracy* category. On the posttest, three students went from *fair accuracy* to *high accuracy* and one student moved out of the *difficulty reading with accuracy* category to the *fair accuracy* rating.

Table 1

Frequency Results for Oral Reading Accuracy of all Participants as Measured on the Pretest and Posttest

Frequency Results of All Participants on the Reading Progress Assessment in the area of <i>Oral Reading Accuracy</i>		
	Pretest	Posttest
Reads with high accuracy	3 participants	6 participants
Reads with fair accuracy	7 participants	5 participants
Has difficulty reading with accuracy	1 participant	0 participants

For the Oral Reading Fluency section of the assessment, the students scored in one of three categories: reads with appropriate phrasing and expression, had difficulty with phrasing and expression, or reads in a labored, word-for-word manner. As seen on Table 2, when the pretest was given, seven of the participants demonstrated *difficulty with phrasing and expression* and *reads in a labored, word-for-word manner*. Four students read with *appropriate phrasing and expression*. On the posttest, three participants moved from the *difficulty with phrasing and expression* category to the reads with *appropriate phrasing and expression* category and both students who were in the lowest category on the pretest moved to a higher level. No students were classified in the *reads in a labored, word-for word manner* category on the posttest.

Table 2

Frequency Results for Oral Reading Fluency of all Participants as Measured on the Pretest and Posttest

Frequency Results of All Participants on the Reading Progress Assessment in the area of <i>Oral Reading Fluency</i>		
	Pretest	Posttest
Reads with appropriate phrasing and expression	4 participants	7 participants
Has difficulty with phrasing and expression	5 participants	4 participants
Reads in a labored, word-for-word manner	2 participants	0 participants

Each participant was also asked to read 50 Dolch word flashcards to the teacher on Monday and on Friday. There were 11 students who participated in the study, so the students called a total of 550 words. Student responses were recorded in a spreadsheet each session. Data indicates that participants made gains in the number of Dolch words that were recognized between the first week and the fourth week. On Monday, week one, the students read 527 words correctly and by week four, the students read 540 words correctly. The students read the most words correctly on week three, when 542 words were called correctly.

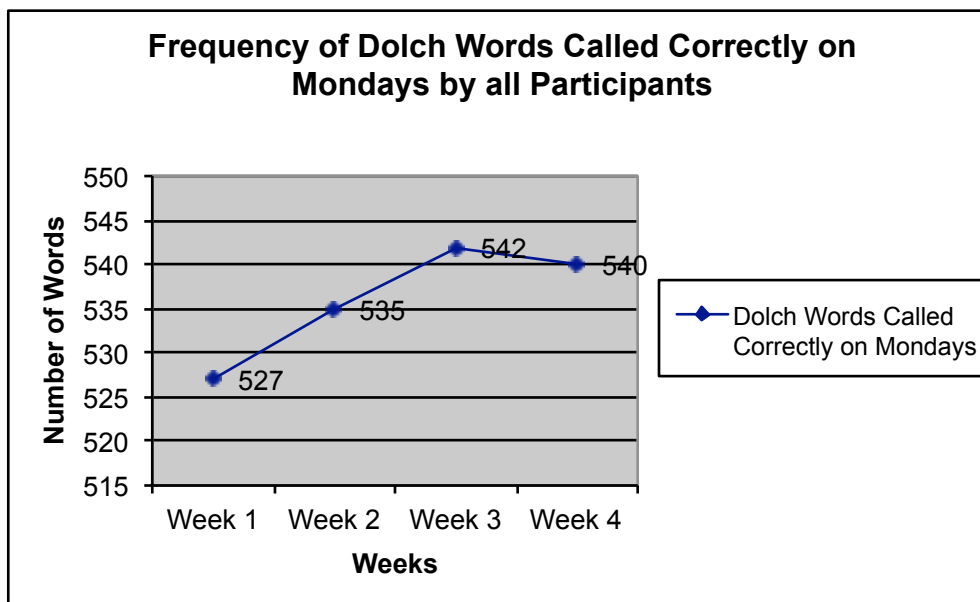


Figure 1. Dolch words read correctly by all participants on Mondays. Weeks two and four were four day weeks.

On Friday, week one, the students read 542 words correctly and on week four they read 545 words correctly. Once again, the students read the most words correctly on week three, when they read 547 words correct.

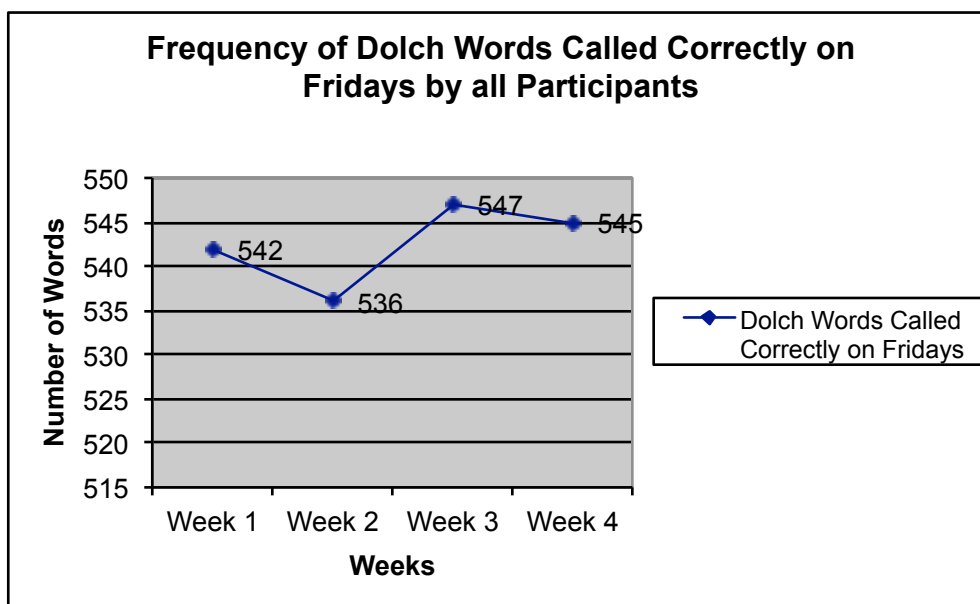


Figure 2. Dolch words read correctly by all participants on Fridays. Weeks two and four were four day weeks.

I also determined that practicing throughout the week helped, as students were able to call more of the Dolch words correctly on Friday, than they previously had on Monday. For example, on Monday week one, the students called 527 words correctly out of a possible 550, but on Friday these students called 542 out of the possible 550 words correctly. By week four, the students began the week by calling 540 words correct, and ended week four by only miscalling 5 words out of 550.

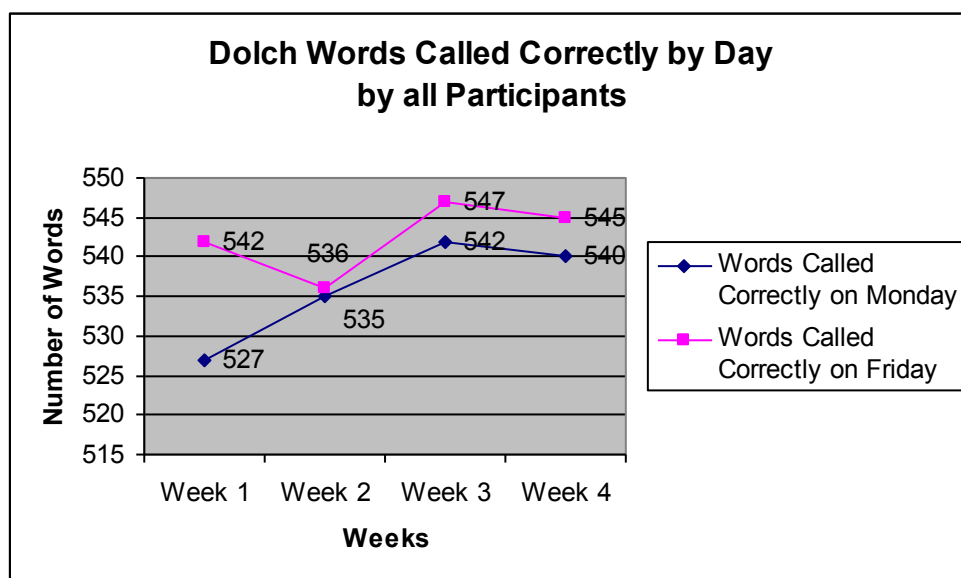


Figure 3. Number of words called correctly on Mondays and Fridays by all participants. Weeks two and four were four day weeks.

In addition, the participants were also able to call the Dolch words in less time. At the beginning of the study, the average amount of time it took for the students to call the 50 Dolch words was 58 seconds. As seen in Figure 4, the average number of seconds it took the students to call the Dolch words at the end of the study was 31. The average number of words that the participants called correctly did not vary significantly from week one to week four.

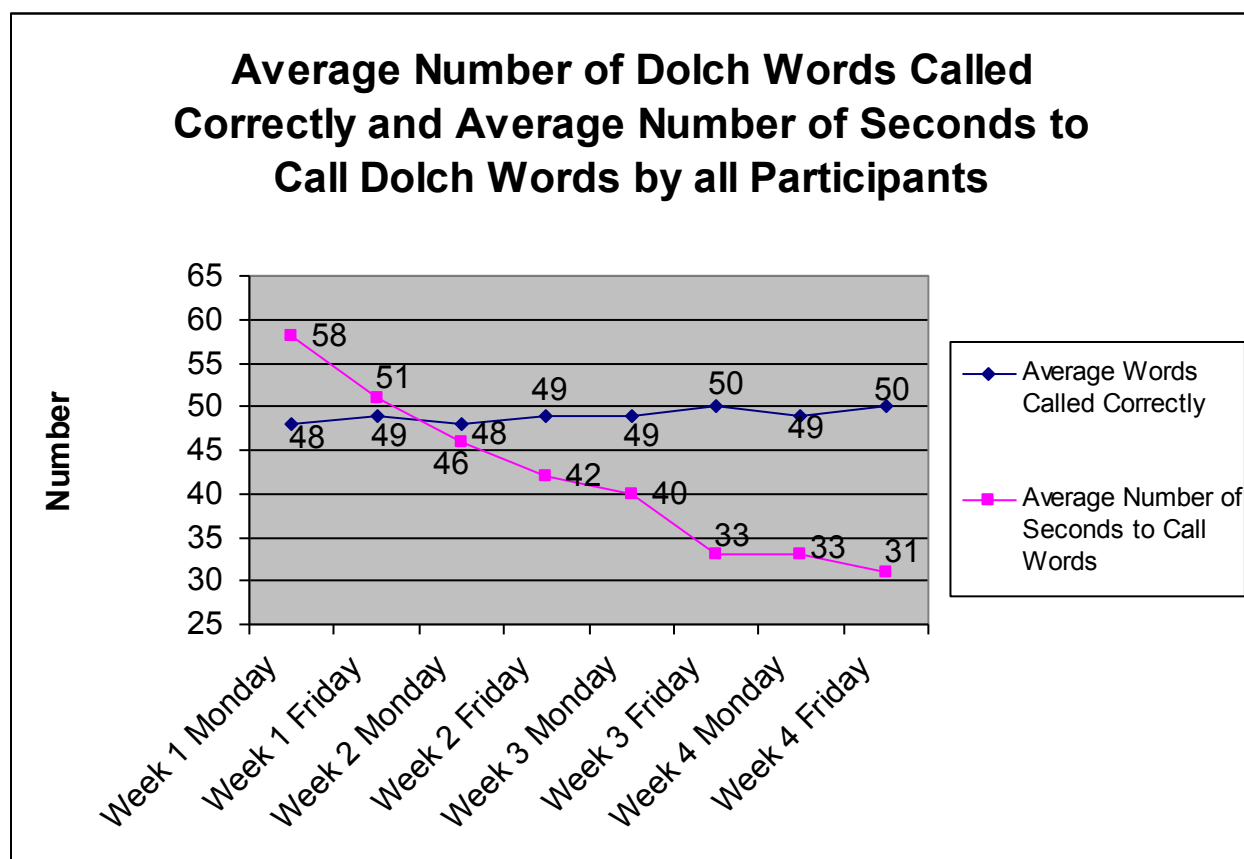


Figure 4. Average number of Dolch words called correctly on Mondays and Fridays by week and average time to call the Dolch words by all participants. Weeks two and four were four day weeks.

I also timed the students twice weekly on the number of words they read in one minute on their Weekly Fluency Passages. As Figure 5 shows, the students were able to read more words correctly each week on their fluency passages. The students also showed growth throughout the week, as they were able to read more words correctly. From the first read on the first week to the last read on the last week, the students gained an average of 107 words per minute.

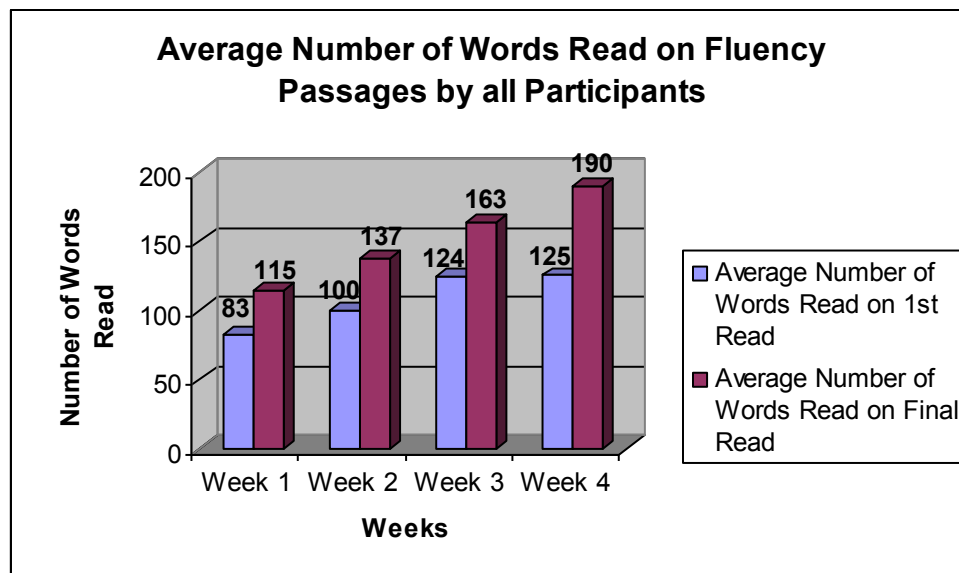


Figure 5. Number of Words Read Correctly on Weekly Fluency Passages for all participants. Weeks two and four were four day weeks.

The students also began to make fewer errors as they read the Weekly Fluency Passages. As seen in Table 3, on the final reading of the fluency passage in the first week of the study, the students made an average of five errors while reading the passage. However, by the last week of the study on the final reading, the students only made an average of 1.73 errors.

Table 3

The Average Number of Errors Made on the Final Reading of the Weekly Fluency Passages by all Participants

Average Number of Errors Made on Final Reading of Weekly Fluency Passages by all Participants	
	Average Errors Made
Week 1	5
Week 4	1.73

Findings and Implications

After analyzing the data, I felt that the Dolch word intervention helped increase the reading fluency of the students. As the students called the Dolch words in fewer seconds each week, their scores on the Reading Fluency Passages increased as well. The students were able to read more words in less time, with fewer mistakes.

However, there was a drop in the number of Dolch words the students called correctly on Friday from week one to week two. Week two was a shortened week due to a school holiday, so the students had one less day to practice with the flashcards. The participants also called less Dolch words correctly on the fourth week, than on the third week. The fourth week was a shortened week, but this could also be due to the fact that the students were taking the ISAT test during the fourth week of the study. While this testing did not interfere with our guided reading schedule, I felt this might have had an effect on student performance.

I found that the student who made the greatest progress in Dolch words called correctly, also made the greatest progress in WCPM. At the beginning of this study, this student only called 90% of the Dolch words correctly. On the last week of the study she called 98% of the Dolch words correctly on Monday and Friday. The first time she read a fluency passage, she read at a rate of 64 WCPM. Her WCPM for the last fluency passage was 197, which was an increase of 133 words.

Another student in this study has been in a reading intervention group for 30 minutes a day all year long. We recently took our school wide reading and math assessments for spring. As a result of this assessment, this student tested on grade level for reading, and no longer has the need for extra intervention.

One aspect of the study that I did not expect to see was how self-motivated the students were. In my teacher journal, I wrote down their time and errors on their fluency passages, but I did not express to them that they needed to do better next time. I noticed, however, that when the students came to be tested, they had set goals for themselves. One particular student wanted to reach 100 words in a minute for the Monday reading. He finally achieved his personal goal on the fourth week when he read 105 words on the first reading. He was very proud of his achievement. Another student told me that I needed to lay the flashcards down faster, because he knew he could say them quicker. These examples showed me that the students took ownership of their learning.

Also recorded in my journal was that the students also began to recognize their own errors. After a passage was read, the researcher would go over errors that were made while reading. As the weeks progressed, several of the students would tell me mistakes they missed, before I had a chance to tell them.

They also began to recognize their Dolch word mistakes. When a Dolch word was missed, one student exclaimed, "I practice that word all the time! I shouldn't have missed that!" When I was telling another student about a miscalled word, the student jumped in and said, "I said *of* instead of *and*. I knew that, because the sentence didn't make sense."

The other students in the class, who were not part of my study, began asking if they could play with the flashcards too. Of course, I allowed the other students to practice and quiz each other, so at various times of the day, I would see the other students quizzing each other. When time allowed, I also quizzed and timed these students myself.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that there was only a small population of students, ($n=11$) who took place in this research study. This limits the generalization of the test results. Another limitation was that data was only collected for a short period of time. It should be noted that I only worked with students who were one grade level below the benchmark in reading, so it is unclear how these results would translate to students who are two or more years below grade level in reading or if these interventions help the fluency of students who are at grade level or above. Participation in this study hinged solely on the Quarterly Benchmark Test which was given one time; therefore extraneous variables were unable to be controlled which may have impacted participant selection.

Reflection and Action Plan**Reflection**

While reflecting on the results of my study, I decided that if I were going to do this study again, I would not use the Reading Progress Assessment. I felt that this assessment had very broad categories, and left too much to teacher interpretation. There is no rubric to explain what the categories mean and how they should be scored. What one teacher might classify as “reading in a labored, word-for-word manner”, another may not. While I tried to be as ethical as possible in scoring the students, there was much room for interpretation. Therefore, if I were using this assessment again, I think it should just be used as an informal assessment and not as a data collection tool. I would look for another instrument to use for a pretest and posttest.

If I were to conduct this study again, I would also like to collect data for eight weeks instead of four. After eight weeks, according to the curriculum, the students would take another

Quarterly Benchmark Assessment. This data would determine if any of the students had moved out of the Strategic group and into the Benchmark (grade level) guided reading group.

As I move to improve this study, I would also like to incorporate a reading comprehension component as well. This would help me determine if this intervention was helping the students comprehend at a higher level, or if the students are just becoming better word callers. In order to accomplish this, I would need to create comprehension questions to match the fluency passages, or develop a reading comprehension pretest and posttest.

Action Plan

I found that students recognized the Dolch words in isolation quicker after working with the flashcards for four weeks, which lead me to conclude that this intervention was helpful to struggling readers. Now that the students are able to recognize these words quickly and accurately, my next plan of action would be to make flashcards that had common phrases that students see in their everyday reading. I believe that after the students recognize the individual words, they need to see them in context. I would have the students practice with the phrase cards just like they practiced with the Dolch word flashcards.

Changes I would like to make in the future are to have everyone in my classes involved and conduct the study for a longer period of time. I see this being a part of our regular schedule. The students would work with each other and be involved in monitoring their own progress. I would start with a basic deck of flashcards for the students who are two or more years below grade level in reading. As students mastered these words, I would use a deck with the more advanced sight words. When these words were mastered, students would move to a deck of cards that had common phases on them. As the phrases were mastered, the students could move onto a pack that had advanced vocabulary words on them.

The students would also practice and be timed on reading weekly fluency passages. All students would listen to others read and be taught what errors to look for. I would like to set up a rotation where I listen and time a few students everyday, while the other students are working with their partner. Comprehension of the passage would be measured at this time. The students at my school have learned to make charts and graphs during their computer class, so I would like to have them incorporate this knowledge when recording their fluency progress. From what I saw during my study, I think the students would look forward to this type of learning activity in the classroom and I would as well.

I plan on sharing what I found in my research with several different groups in my building. I will share the information with my principals, teaching partner, other reading teachers in my grade level, and the Title I staff. I feel that this intervention may be valuable for those students who are close to reading at grade level and these individuals may want to implement it in their classroom or intervention time as well.

I also plan to share this information with the students that were a part of my study. Many of the students realized from week to week that they had improved in the number of words they read correctly, or the number of Dolch words read correctly, but may not have realized how far they came in just a few short weeks.

After completing this study, I felt I grew as a researcher and my students grew more fluent in their reading. I learned that developing a worthwhile intervention takes time and adjustments will have to be made. I also learned that “feelings” need to be justified. While I feel the students now have a higher level of comprehension, those are just my thoughts. In order for this to be proven, my thoughts need to be validated by test results. I will use what I learned as I share my results with others and move forward in implementing this intervention process.

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