

Kennesaw State University

Various Forms of Reading Assessments to Improve Comprehension with English
Language Learners

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Students must comprehend grade-level texts in a multitude of subject areas throughout school. With the growing diversity in the United States, schools are facing a more differentiated way of learning that fosters and encourages students' confidence in their abilities. This study examined the effects that various reading comprehension assessments had on student knowledge of a piece of literature.

Abstract

Reading skills play a key role in the ability to succeed in all subject areas in schools due to the demand to explain answers and expand on how an answer was attained. Students, during assessments, must first be able to understand the question that is being asked of them, then grasp the text or problem and lastly answer the problem in a way that successfully meets the criteria for the assessment. In this study, different forms of comprehension assessments were given. By measuring the success of comprehending a text, the various types of reading assessments were measured for success.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Purpose of Study

During the past 4 years, I have been around many diverse students in many different schools. I have always been interested in teaching reading and how students comprehend what they study. There are so many strategies and curriculums available to teach and assess reading. Determining how a student grasps literature can be difficult and includes many complex ways to verify learning has taken place. Previously, I have used various types of assessments in my classroom including formal and performance tasks.

The purpose of this study is to uncover the most effective way of assessing comprehension of literature with ESOL students. By using several tactics to study the way students perform during different reading assessments, the most effective way to facilitate the learning process will stand out. There are many approaches to assess successful understanding of a story including performance assessments and research-based assessments.

Context of Study

As a 3rd grade teacher in Doraville, Georgia, I work in a Title I school with students from all over the world. These students come from many different backgrounds and speak many different languages. I teach all subject areas. By far the majority of my students receive ESOL services. My students are assessed in many different ways throughout the year. The majority of students that I teach are Hispanic and speak Spanish at home. I have twenty-six students; three students are Bengali and twenty-three students are Hispanic. I work with other teachers throughout the day that provide accommodations for my students. The materials that students must work with are heavy in content that they must read in order to solve problems. Literature is a major part of assessments because of the involvement reading has on almost every test. My students need to strengthen their resilience in reading comprehension and solving problems. With the increase of Latinos in the United States, the school systems seem to struggle with meeting the educational needs of the changing population.

Statement of Problem

Throughout the school year, I work with several teachers to help support my students the best that I can. I have many concerns with the language barriers that I perceive with the students and the other academic obstacles the students experience in school. Some of my concerns are with the vocabulary used in assessments and the self-esteem of students after taking assessments. I worry about how assessments affect my

students because of how difficult they are for my students to complete. Because of the large amount of ESOL students I have in my classroom, testing my students in reading and other subject areas is a hefty concern.

I often wondered about the experiences my students had in regards to assessments in school. Students are assessed in school throughout the entire year. Because I teach 3rd grade, state testing is a topic that is, unfortunately, always on my mind. I want to delve into how assessments affect the learning process. Reading comprehension is crucial for all subject matters, and different types of assessments can show growth of students in many ways. I want to research formal and informal assessments to determine which type helps students understand a story.

Focus of the Study

My research question will be, do different forms of assessments help students grasp a story more effectively? To determine how students comprehend information that they read, I will give several forms of formative and performance assessments. Students will complete pre and post-assessments to determine their understanding of literature on their ability level. Part of the study will involve an interview portion on story elements. I want to clarify the most effective way to assist students in becoming resilient readers that are capable of delving deeper into works that they read.

This research project is important because of the demands placed on students due to testing requirements. Students are required to think on a more profound way to unravel questions. By determining the best way to improve reading comprehension, I can discover how to facilitate the learning process for my students in all subject areas. Students that face barriers due to language and diversity need more assistance in most matters of learning. My diverse group of students requires more differentiated learning processes and encouragement to persevere when faced with difficult tasks.

Definition of Terms

ESOL stands for English to Speakers of Other Languages. This standard of learning asks students to use English for communication and academics.

Differentiated instruction is a more fluid way of learning. Teachers design more unique lessons to appeal to the various types of learners.

Formal assessments are designed as a standard assessment. Many standardized assessments are given to determine the growth of learning every other year of school.

Performance assessments require students to perform a task. These assessments are also known as an authentic way to determine growth.

Chapter 2:

Review of the Literature

Diversity in Schools

The amount of students who speak a language besides English is growing in American schools. Migrant students often face challenges that typical students do not face; teachers must be prepared to deal with the different issues that may arise when teaching a migrant population in a caring way. According to Irizarry, and Williams (2013), many migrant students find it hard to trust a teacher that has no real knowledge of their culture, and they find it difficult to feel comfortable sharing and growing in a classroom led by a teacher who speaks a different language. Attending a school in a new country or with a teacher that does not speak the same language can create a complicated schooling experience for students. Roessingh's (2014) research showed that teachers must provide meaningful learning experiences that are appropriately leveled for the students in their classrooms.

In many ways, diversity can help students connect to the world around them and foster compassion. According to Show Mei (2015), there are many different experiences that assist students with writing, and students that are English Language Learners (ELLs) may struggle with translating and writing in English. Furthermore, self-regard plays a role in

the approach that someone takes in his education. Research shows that diversity and stigmatism can cause positive and negative effects on the way a person performs in school (Mendoza-Denton,2014). Experiences in school and with peers are very important in the promotion of a positive self-esteem. Menten and Hantopouloz(2015) discuss how students can reach for a more global perspective and how teachers can facilitate that process. Teachers need to incorporate the real world into the standards that are required by the state. The authors go on to examine an afterschool program where students participate in activities that involve hands-on learning and communication. Students study a new country each day during the afterschool program. ELL students who were able perform a task that makes connections to the literature (Srikaew., Tangdhanakanond,, & Kanjanawasee, 2015). Creating a classroom that involves different cultures and countries is possible with a vision and merging diversity with learning.

Significance of Reading across Subject Areas and Determining Success

The importance of reading in school and beyond is obviously important due to the fact that words are embedded into every subject and skill. Kitson (2015) identifies certain strategies to establish how different subjects include reading; this approach involves reflecting on practices at the end. A certain knowledge base is necessary to be able to answer questions and solve problems across subjects and requires activities that include

constructing schemas (p.58). The demands of different subjects including reading prove difficult because of not only the level of the literature but also the vocabulary.

There are many practices that go into measuring a student's ability to understand what they read (O'Reilly, 2014). Due to the complex ideas of measuring a child's abilities in comprehension, many different assessments must be given to determine how a child is progressing in this area. The research on the factors that influence reading abilities discusses the importance of differentiating assessments and creating lessons that interest the students taking them (p.419). ELL students need background knowledge and vocabulary to be able to grow the skills to complete assessments. A study by Silva , and Cain, (2015) showed that making inferences and short-term memory affected the way the students comprehended material that they read. This research shows that students need the knowledge about the words that they are reading to be able to make inferences about a topic and answer questions. There is a certain skillset that comprehension includes, and teachers can ensure that their students are using the utmost efficiency when reading and taking exams. Teachers can encourage students to hone their test-taking skills. Readers must be able to infer and use context clues to decode and understand literature (Gutiérrez-Braojos, Rodríguez Fernández, and Salmerón-Vílchez, 2014).

Alternative and Performance Assessments

Alternative assessments are growing in popularity as a way to authentically evaluate student learning. According to Austin Lee, Sun Park, & Choi, (2011, p.11), alternative assessments allow teachers to leave textbook learning behind for a more creative learning environment where personal expression can occur. The authors further address the amount of time that alterative assessments can involve. By evaluating students in an unconventional manner, teachers and students are able to work in a creative and authentic way. Students are able to gain real-world experience by completing assignments that demand high-order thinking. Including art in education can improve the way that students think about themselves and school. According to Shelton (2014), students from low-income families who participate in art are affected in even greater ways and are more likely to have a better view of themselves. Creativity fosters students' critical thinking and a sense of connection to the world.

According to Gilson, Little, Ruegg and Bruce-Davis(2014), there are differences in reading levels and how talented readers are able to think on a deeper level. Furthermore, the authors discuss that during reading conferences teachers ask students different levels of questions, and the study is done to identify the types of questions teachers ask different students. Teachers use various methods to assess student comprehension, and the way teachers ask students questions affects the way the students respond.

Art and music in school are often seen as something extra and often are left to the side when budgets are cut. According to Bron and Weugelers (2014), students who may choose the way that they show their knowledge are more likely to take ownership and pride in their work. Attitudes about learning are more likely to improve when students are able to decide how they are going to learn (p.127). There is vast research on the topic of the unique ways that people learn most effectively. ELL students need to be able to discover and grow through different experiences, and art can cultivate this process.

Student Attitudes and Accommodations

Accommodations are used during numerous tests that occur in schools. Many students receive accommodations on standardized tests and throughout the school day, including longer amounts of time to complete an assignment and having tests and questions read to them. ELL students are required to take the same standardized tests as their non-ELL counterparts, which raises the discussion of the validity of ELL students' test scores. Bailey and Carroll (2015) discuss the importance of accommodating students and the "linguistics gap," which refers to the lack of background knowledge students have relating to the content and the vocabulary included on exams. ELL students face challenges with not only reading the English language but with understanding vocabulary that is culturally related; culturally related vocabulary can cause an assessment to determine how well a student understands the culture not the question itself. Creators of

assessments, including standardized and classroom assessments, need to guarantee that they are creating tests that are valid and are evaluating a true skill, not vocabulary and language (p.282). The read aloud accommodation is argued to create a lack of fairness in test scores because the adjustment is not available to every student. Buzick,Stone (2014), discuss the different types of delivery for read alouds: by a human or a computer; in a group setting or alone. The authors' study showed all students' scores increased with the read aloud accommodation while being assessed in reading. A teacher can help students develop reading and writing skills using many methods. Offering assistance to students during tests can help students' abilities over time by building confidence and reading skills (Witmer, Cook, Schmitt, and Clinton, 2015).

Students are not shy about sharing their feelings about being tested in school. Many students feel confident about showing what they have learned, but exams cause stress on many students. According to Baas, Castelijns, Vermeulen, Martens, and Segers, M. (2015, p.34), some students have the ability to be self-regulated learners. The authors go on to discuss how students set goals and gauge whether they are on track to meet their goals in a timely manner. When students have a positive outlook on school and assessments, they are more likely going to perform better. According to Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, and Alkalbani, (2014), when students get to choose the type of assessment to complete, they become more motivated to do well. Students who believe in

themselves are going to be happier to come to school and put effort into their work (Ferguson, Hanreddy, and Draxton, 2011). Confidence to complete a task can be a key to being successful; a person must believe he can do something to strive to reach for more. Research shows that creativity can improve skills in many areas, including critical thinking and perseverance (Shelton, S2014). These studies prove that schools should focus more on allowing students to pursue their creativity and freedom of choice

Chapter 3. Methodology

Research Setting and Participants

Assessments are a major part of teaching and learning. I want to do my research project on reading assessments. I teach third grade, and the Georgia Milestones are putting added pressure on students' ability to read and comprehend information. I wanted to determine the most effective way to assess students in reading.

The research will be completed in my classroom, which includes twenty-six students. My students are ages eight to nine years old. 21 students were involved in the study; all students in the study receive ESOL services. An ESOL teacher delivers services during my reading block to thirteen of my students. I teach all subject areas and give pre and post-assessments in all areas. Three students are in the RTI (Response to

Intervention) process to receive services which include more time and question and answer read aloud.

Intervention

The learning goals for this research project were to determine how reading assessments aided in the learning process and to support students in becoming resilient readers. I allowed students to choose the type of performance assessment that appealed to them. To begin this process, I will allow students to choose a book from a series of predetermined books. The students will be allowed to read the story several times. I will discuss different ways to connect to the story to complete the performance assessment. The students should gain a deeper understanding of information to answer questions and make connections.

Data Collection and Procedures

I will use both quantitative and qualitative research. The students will select a story on their reading level. I will preselect a few choices of literature for each level. The students will then complete four rounds of performance assessments. After each round, the students will take an AR test on the story and a paper comprehension test independently. The students should read the story a few times before taking the AR test. I will use the AR test scores as my quantitative data.

The next assessment will be students taking AR tests without a performance assessment. I will get a view into which performance assessments encouraged reading comprehension. This would allow a comparison of their understanding through different assessments, either showing that performance assessment has a positive effect on understanding, a negative effect, or no effect at all.

Alternative Assessments:

Round 1: Diary Entry

Round 2: Wanted Poster

Round 3: Comic Strip

Round 4: Brochure

Data Analysis

At the end of the research, I will compare the quantitative and qualitative data for the pre and post-assessments. The different forms of data will be assessed to determine if the students did a better job of understanding what they read after a formal assessment or after an alternative assessment. The various forms of assessments will help me get an understanding of the best way to use performance assessments to encourage reading comprehension. I am curious if the different forms of assessments will help students grasp a story better.

The qualitative data will be taken on student engagement. A big part of reading comprehension includes self-monitoring and attention. I will monitor the students to determine who is on-task and who is not paying attention to their story and AR test. I will also monitor how the students are doing while working on their creative assessment.

Results

I used two types of data to monitor how performance assessments affected reading comprehension of ESOL students. Students went through six rounds of choosing a story, reading it several times and taking an AR test on the story. Four of the six rounds including an assessment that included story elements and creativity. During the first four weeks of the process, the students completed a performance assessment then took an AR test. Every round, the students were able to draw a picture to go along with the assignment. The first round was a diary entry from the point of view of the main character. The students were required to include the plot of the story and the setting. The second round was a wanted poster. The students were required to discuss different character traits of the main character and the plot. The third round was a comic strip that involved the sequence of the story. The fourth round was a brochure. This was the biggest performance assessment that involved questions for the author, the child's favorite part, characters and plot.

Figure 1

Quantitative Whole Group: Rubric Between Pre-Test and Post-Test

The quantitative data showed that the diary entry was the most effective strategy for student comprehension. The brochure was the least effective performance assessment. The scores did decrease when the students did not do an alternative assessment. Figure 1 shows the average AR scores for the rounds including creative assessments as 88.5%, 77.5%, 80% and 75%. The scores for the stories that the students did not complete a performance assessment are 73% and 63.5%. The quantitative data shows that the students comprehended the story more effectively when they completed some sort of creative assessment. The creative aspect of learning added a meaningful aspect that all students could complete despite language struggles.

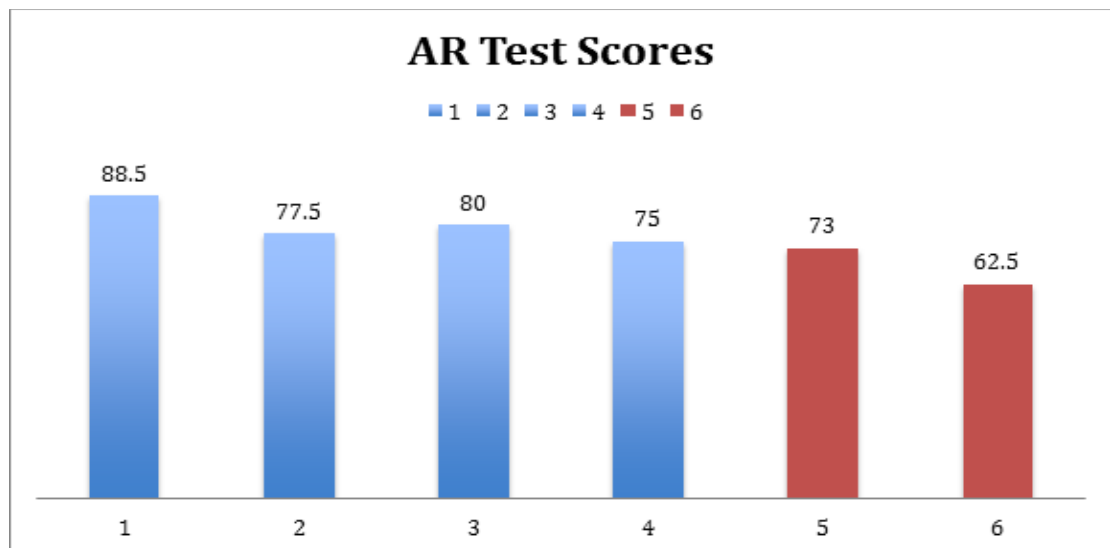


Figure 2.1 and 2.2
Qualitative Whole Group: for Time Spent on Task with and Without Intervention

1. Students were engaged during the assigned reading time. (E)
2. Students were not engaged during the assigned reading time. (NE)

The process took over six weeks to complete. I observed the students while they read. I took notes on a chart on my desk. I also monitored the students during their creative assessment. The majority of my students were engaged throughout the entire process. Some of the students struggled to read for the entire allotted time. The chart shows that students were the most engaged during the Diary Entry assessment.

	Diary Entry	Wanted Poser	Comic Strip	Brochure	No Performance Assessment	No Performance Assessment
Dylan	E	E	E	NE	NE	NE
Shahid	NE	E	E	E	NE	NE
Sara	E	E	E	E	E	E
Huy	E	E	E	E	E	E
Jeymi	E	NE	NE	E	E	NE
Mariam	E	E	E	E	E	E
Mohammad	E	E	NE	E	NE	E
Chris	E	E	E	E	E	E

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Betzy	E	E	E	E	E	E
Roberto	E	E	E	E	E	E
Jonathan	E	E	E	NE	NE	E
Jasmeth	E	E	E	E	E	E
Esmeralda	E	E	E	E	E	E
Nancy	E	E	E	E	E	E
Ronald	E	E	E	E	E	E
Yeison	E	E	E	E	E	E
Salvador	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE
Eddy	E	E	E	E	E	E
Riasha	E	NE	E	NE	E	E
Danitza	E	E	E	E	E	E

Figure 2.2

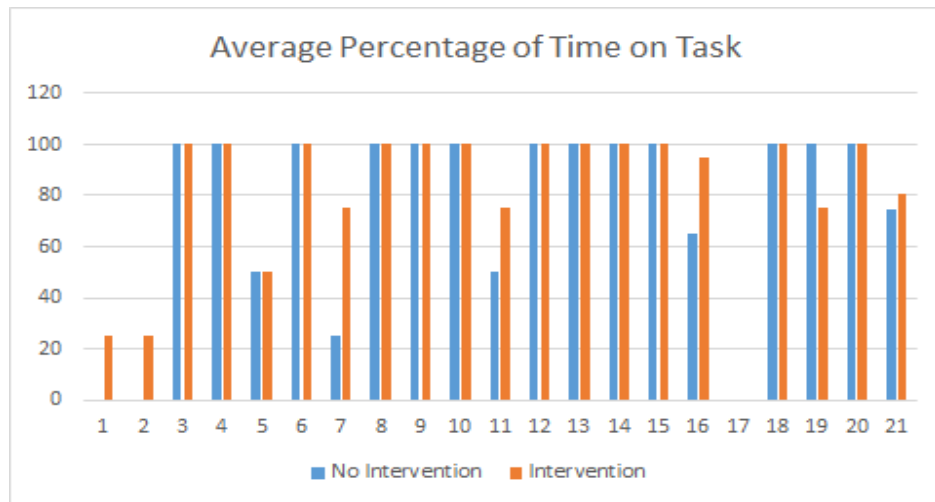


Figure 2.1 and 2.2 displays the average time students were on task during each reading block. The chart shows an overall positive rate of engagement during reading. Students were more often engaged during the reading blocks that included a creative assessment. I used the graph to show the data in a way that easily showed the average of time the students were on task.

Conclusion

The study showed that the implementation of alternative assessment improved reading comprehension for ESOL students. The most effective form of creative assessment was the diary entry from the point of view of the main character. When students who come from different backgrounds are able to explore learning in a creative way, they are more likely to be successful and involved in their learning. ESOL students need to be provided with authentic learning experiences in which they can find success.

Performance assessments can be easily implemented across subject areas. Performance assessments can also become part of student-choice; students will become more interested in learning when they are able to making choices and succeed. Differentiated is a major aspect of classrooms all across the country, and creative assignments allow teachers to provide content related tasks that appeal to every student in the classroom. Many teachers have found progress with ESOL students by using assessments that truly show what they know and not how much of the language they

know. Students often have negative feelings about being tested and frequently feel apprehensive about taking a test. Comprehension and reading skills are embedded throughout every subject, and students need to be provided a chance to practice recalling information in a way that works for them.

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