

The effect of a reader's theater on preschool children's reading fluency and comprehension

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Previous studies revealed that Readers Theater instruction has improved fluency and comprehension skills of kindergarten children. In this study Reader's Theater has been implemented to investigate its effectiveness towards improving fluency and comprehension skills of kindergarten children in Malaysia. Using quasi- experimental research design and qualitative methods, data was collected from 50 kindergarten children in the District of Batang Padang, Perak. The experimental study was carried out for six weeks where the control group was given the passage of the story, while the treatment group received Readers Theater scripts of the same story. Test statistics indicated significant differences between the treatment and control groups; $Z = -3.00$, $p < .05$ and no significant differences between the control group and the treatment group; $Z = -1.06$, $p > .05$ in comprehension skills. It can therefore be concluded that Readers Theater instruction is beneficial to increase fluency skill for the kindergarten children in Malaysia and thus recommended as part of literacy enhancement in the kindergarten classroom.

Keywords: Kindergarten; children; reader's theater; repeated reading; fluency; literacy; comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Proficient readers are those who are able to read a text with comprehension and fluency (Flynn, 2004). In contrast, struggling readers do not grasp these skills as most struggling readers are unable to read the texts fluently as they are unable to spell the words spontaneously (Hall, 2007; Ehri, Satlow & Gaskins, 2009). This inability to spell spontaneously causes readers to read very slowly which has an impact on their understanding and reading performance (Rasinski, 2006). Readers who continue to experience such difficulties in reading tend to avoid participating in reading activities (Strickland, Ganske & Monroe, 2002). This avoidance will result in the lack of reading practice which is greatly needed by struggling readers (Caudill-Hansen, 2009). Many studies have proven that fluency skills can be enhanced through repeated reading (Cooper & Kiger, 2009). Therefore, an interesting technique should be employed to encourage children to read repeatedly as repetition will enhance their reading skills.

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The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) has listed five components of reading that are crucial for the children to acquire i.e., phonemic awareness, phonetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Unintentionally in Malaysia, less attention is given to the mastery of fluency and comprehension in the kindergarten classrooms as most methods used to teach reading are focused more on acquiring phonetics skills than the other components. In view of the fact that the combination of the five components are crucial in determining whether a child is a proficient or struggling reader, it is necessary to create a complete reading program that includes all the components in our classroom reading curriculum (NICHD, 2000). Due to the neglect in the area of fluency and comprehension in the teaching of reading in kindergartens, some children's reading problem has gone undetected and the problem persists in the lives of the effected children in the primary school as well.

Problem statement

Several reasons have been identified as the cause of the reading problem among the kindergarten children in Malaysia. Abdul Rasid Jamian (2011) states that the school's complex curriculum system and the insensitivity to the needs of the students with different reading ability as the reasons hindering reading and comprehension. Teachers are more intending to complete the syllabus rather than focus on the individual child's learning abilities or the lack of it. Hence, we find many children with reading disability whose needs have been neglected. This in turn has widened the gap between the struggling and the proficient readers.

Another reason attributed to the matter at hand is the implementation of the reading curriculum itself. The curriculum places more emphasis on the children acquiring the phonetics skills. It stipulates that a series of phonetics assessments to be carried out throughout the year, which does not include the assessment of fluency or comprehension – the components necessary to achieve the ability to read and comprehend. Currently, it is assumed that the ability to read with comprehension is achieved if a child is able to spell and read the word correctly. Unfortunately, the ability to spell and pronounce words is not sufficient to be construed as reading if it is done without comprehending the text, as comprehension is the main purpose of reading (Rasinski, 2006). In view of this, lack of fluency in reading is also a key factor which attributes to the inability to comprehend the text that affects the overall reading development (Rasinski, Blachowicz & Lems, 2006). Therefore, both the components of fluency and comprehension need to be given some emphasis within the kindergarten period, that is, by the end of the school year.

One of the methods suggested for a kindergarten classroom is to incorporate Reader's Theater instructions in the teaching of reading. It is believed that through Reader's Theater, the children's motivation and interest in reading could be achieved (Rasinski, 2006).

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify the level of comprehension and fluency skills achieved by kindergarten children.
- ii. To examine the effects of Reader's Theater on kindergarten children's fluency and comprehension skills.

Research questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the levels of reading comprehension and fluency of the kindergarten children?
- ii. Is Reader's Theater able to increase the comprehension and fluency levels of the kindergarten's children?

Significance of the study

This study focuses on the effects of Reader's Theater on the comprehension and fluency of kindergarten children. Comprehension and fluency skills are important aspects of literacy which should be given equal consideration and emphasis by kindergarten teachers as it is part of the reading curriculum. Therefore, this study is important as it will develop Reader's Theater modules that could be utilized for the kindergarten children.

This study also emphasizes the importance of reading fluency and comprehension for kindergarten children. It is expected that both of these components will be seen as skills that must be attained by the kindergarten children by the end of the school year. Teachers should conduct assessments on the children to ensure that they have acquired these skills before entering Year One.

Reader's Theater is an interesting instruction for teaching reading to children. It does not only improve their reading skills, but also enhances the social emotional development of the kindergarten children. Overall, this study intends to introduce Reader's Theater as one of the interesting teaching instruction that will help to overcome some of the reading problems among the kindergarten children in Malaysia.

Limitation of the study

This study involved 70 children from two schools that were located in the same district. The children from the two schools were found to come from families with similar social-economic background. However, as the setting only involved one district, the findings do not apply to all children in Malaysia. A more comprehensive and detailed research should be carried out to obtain results that could be generalized to the population.

Foreseeing the difficulty of conducting this study with two groups of children from the same school the children were not randomly divided as such but the two groups of children were chosen from two different schools. Understandably it is noted that different settings bring about the exposure of external variables that cannot be controlled by the researcher; namely the teacher's personality and the respective school's environment which had influenced the research findings.

Literature review

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), to become a good reader, the child should have an intrinsic motivation to read. However, if the child is experiencing difficulties in reading, he will not have the motivation to read which will lead to less participation in the reading activities (Strickland, Ganske & Monroe, 2002). In order to help children with reading difficulties, teachers need to provide activities that are not too difficult or too easy for the children (Caudill-Hansen, 2009). It has been proven in previous researches that by using reading aloud and repeated reading techniques improvement has been observed in young children's fluency and comprehension skills (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Therefore, in this study Reader's Theater will be implemented on a group of kindergarten children to enhance their reading skills.

Reader's Theater in kindergarten classroom

Reader's Theater does not constitute an activity of memorizing but it entails a dramatic oral expression, through reading aloud. Children perform Reader's Theater by taking turns reading lines from given scripts with stress on intonation, inflection and fluency. Children have enough time and opportunity to practice and perform in a dramatic play (Flynn, 2004).

Kindergarten children develop their language and social-emotional skills through script reading and expressing emotions. Children are able to develop their social skills by rehearsing and performing Reader's Theater in groups (Buzzeo, 2011).

Reader's Theater is an instructional activity that involves rehearsing a passage, with the incorporation of movements such as actions, gestures, and facial expressions, and presenting it to an audience with a script in hand (Johnson, 2011). As children practice reading the script, repeated reading occurs and they are able to read the script spontaneously (Samuel, 1979). Support given by friends through interaction and cooperation (Prescott & Lewis, 2003) during practice also encourages the learning process (Cole, 2002) and enhances the motivation to read.

Hudson (2006) has listed the advantages gained through Reader's Theater activities such as: (a) an authentic way to motivate children to read the text repeatedly; (b) improve the pronunciation of words and use of appropriate expressions and tone; (c) help children understand the importance of intonation and how to use it in a readable text; (d) increase children's understanding of a text through repeated readings; (e) constructive attitude to cooperate and interact with each other and (f) enjoyable activities for the children. Reader's Theater is an entertaining and engaging means of improving fluency and comprehension (Shepard, 2004). As these benefits could be gained through Reader's Theater instructions, the researchers believe that it will also benefit the kindergarten children in Malaysia.

Fluency and comprehension

Fluency is defined as the ability to read words accurately, spontaneously and with intonation (prosody) to achieve a good understanding (Young & Rasinski, 2009). Accuracy refers to the ability to read words in a text correctly without pronunciation error. Spontaneous refers to the ability to read the words correctly with ease and be able to understand it at the same time. Subsequently, intonation refers to the ability to read with expressions and using appropriate intonation when reading a text (Rasinski, 2006).

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand the meaning of the word in the text and also to understand the meaning of the reading materials as a whole. Elish-Piper (2010) describes understanding as the interaction between reader, text, and context. The reader brings previous knowledge, reading, and interest into reading situations. Text refers to the genre or type of literature and the purpose of reading, that is, either reading for leisure or to seek information. When a child can relate to these three components through his or her reading, this will lead to understanding.

Reading researchers assume there is a relationship between oral reading fluency and the quality of reading comprehension (Cooper & Kiger, 2006). As children are more fluent in their reading, more understanding of the reading materials is achieved. For that reason, any teaching method that promotes fluency in reading should be applied in the classroom. Besides that, one of the most primary technique is repeated reading. Studies carried out by Gereghty (2005), McGee and Schickendanz (2007), Bramuchi (2009),

Carley-Stine (2009) and Eun Hee Jeon (2009) and Nor Fairizan Che Hussein (2010) have reported positive feedback. They agree that repeated reading affect fluency and reading comprehension. National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) also states that repeated reading is able to enhance the reading fluency skills of the children in a short span of time.

The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) report also stresses the importance of the assessment of reading fluency as reading fluency is one of the main predictors of efficient readers. This panel has also established five elements needed by teachers to enable them to teach reading skills effectively. The elements are phonemic awareness, phonetic mastery, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The concept of good reading instruction should combine phonetic mastery, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension to create a complete package. As a result, fluency and comprehension should be part of reading instruction for the kindergarteners in Malaysia.

Theory of automaticity

The theory of automaticity was initiated by Laberge and Samuels (1974) which states that an increase in fluency also increases the understanding. Automaticity is the ability to perform complex skills with minimal focus and effort (Samuels & Flor, 1997). Despite its accuracy, decoding skills of a slower rate will affect the understanding process. Readers who are still at decoding stages will need a lot of time to focus on their reading which will reduce their focus to understand the text. Therefore, fluent readers are those who are able to master all reading skills spontaneously and simultaneously, not just for reading words but also to understand the text at the same time.

Good readers are able to decode words and understand text quickly and easily (Corcoran, 2005). Conversely, a slow readers will struggle to decode words, therefore they will not be able to grab the meaning of the text (Garrett & O' Connor, 2010). Through Reader's Theater children are able to read the text repeatedly that will lead to reading fluency and understanding. Reader's Theater exposes students to basic sight words to built recognition, fluency and decoding skills, and also comprehension (Garrett & O' Connor, 2010).

Reader's Theatre: Fluency and comprehension

There have been a few studies on the effect of using Reader's Theater in the classroom. Jagger (2008) studied Year Five Students using quasi-experimental method of nonequivalent control group design. Two classrooms (n=43) were assigned as the treatment group and another two classrooms (n=39) were assigned as the control group. The treatment groups were divided into small groups of four to six children and given Reader's Theater intervention scripts each week for 6 weeks. The scripts ranged from the levels of Year 3 to Year 6. The reading materials were from books and internet web-site. The researcher spent about 20 minutes to read and practice the script with the children to prepare them for their weekly performance. Pretest and posttest were carried out to analyze the fluency, automaticity and word recognition for both treatment and control groups using DORF (District Oral Reading Fluency) assessment. GMRT was also administered to assess the student's comprehension. ANOVAs analysis indicated there were no differences in fluency and comprehension achievement between both groups after 6 weeks. Conclusively, typical intermediate grade students (third to fifth grade) usually exhibit relatively consistent growth in reading rate from year to year. As a result the duration of 6 weeks Reader's Theater intervention failed to improve their fluency. It is suggested that specific instruction focused on developing comprehension skills and vocabulary skills should be incorporated with

Reader's Theater to increase these skills. However, Reader's Theater showed positive effects in terms of socialization of children in this study.

A similar study by Caudill-Hansen (2009), used an experimental design on 50 students selected from 115 year six students in a small rural area in the United States. They were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. A pretest assessment was administered individually to both groups to test fluency and comprehension skills. The Reader's Theater intervention was conducted on the experimental group for 10 weeks. The Reader's Theater scripts were selected from different reading levels, from the third to the sixth grade. Each group was made up of three to six students. Each student practiced their given parts for 20 minutes every day. DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills) was used as an instrument to assess student's fluency. Student's comprehension was measured using STAR (Standardized Test for the assessment of reading). An ANOVA test was carried out to analyze the changes between pretest and posttest for both groups. The result showed that reading fluency for the experimental group was statistically higher compared to the control group. Students who participated in Reader's Theater were more fluent compared to students who did not participate. However, there were no statistic differences in reading comprehension between the two groups. The researcher suggests that Reader's Theater should be implemented in the classroom on a weekly basis as an alternative reading strategy.

Johnson (2011) also conducted a study that focused on fluency and comprehension. He collected pretest and posttest data through quasi-experimental method. The study was involved 44 Second Grade students and two teachers at the suburban Southeastern Primary School. Two of the students from the experimental group were struggling readers. Reader's Theater was carried out daily with the experimental group for 9 weeks. During the intervention period, the children were introduced to scripts that were suitable for their reading level ranging from first grade to third grade. Each group involved four to six students working together for 10-20 minutes. During the first four days of practice, the teachers guided the children in reading fluency and comprehension. At the end of the Reader's Theater performance, consistent positive feedback was received from the teachers. The data from both groups were collected using STAR (Standardized Test for the assessment of reading, (2003) and DIBEL Oral Reading Fluency. The analysis showed that there was a significant difference in fluency for the experimental group. However, the data collected for comprehension was not statistically significant. In conclusion, Reader's Theater managed to promote social change among the students who were involved in this study.. It was also proven that Readers Theater s an authentic technique to engage readers in meaningful activities and is able to increase the children's reading fluency.

Correspondingly, a qualitative study was conducted by Moore (2011) to investigate the effect of Reader's Theater towards the comprehension skills of some Second Grade struggling readers. The research involved sixteen struggling readers whose reading levels were at 13-16 that is below the average reading level. They struggled to recall the names of the main characters and the setting of the story. They also lacked the ability to retell the story in detail. Each student in this study was given an assignment to read certain parts of the scripts. The students practiced their lines several times independently, and performed the story as a group. Data was collected through triangulation consisting of observational checklist, comprehension quizzes and survey to assess students' understanding. The result of the study showed that the students were able to comprehend the story that they read with a little prompting. The researcher also found that by using music and props during the performance had improved their comprehension skills. Conclusively, Reader's Theater was able to motivate students to read and give them a chance to understand the reading material in a creative manner.

Based on the previous studies, it's apparent that Reader's Theater has been used widely for children of different ages in primary schools and it was also been implemented to help struggling readers. However, study by Jagger (2008) indicates that Reader's Theater did not benefit the intermediate (Grade Five) students. Study by Caudill-Hansen (2009) is contradictory, as Reader's Theater positively increases the reading fluency of Year Six students. Study on younger children shows that Reader's Theater had a positive effect on Second Grade children's fluency (Johnson, 2011). However, studies by Jagger (2008), Caudill-Hansen (2009) and Johnson (2011) revealed that Reader's Theater did not affect student's comprehension. On the other hand, the qualitative study by Moore (2011) that involved struggling readers did show a positive outcome in the children's comprehension. However, the number of the samples in his study was not sufficient to presume the result. Therefore, it can be concluded that majority of the researches show that Reader's Theater enhances fluency skills, but not comprehension skills.

Methodology

The research design used was the quasi-experimental method that is the non equivalent group pre-post design. This method was chosen as the study examined the effect of using Reader's Theater on fluency, comprehension and social emotional development of the kindergarten children between the treatment groups and the control group.

The selected schools were located in the district of Tanjung Malim, Perak. The selection of schools in the same area was intentional so as to reduce the effects of external variables that could influence the result of this study. Four research assistants with diploma in early childhood education were employed to assist in the implementation of Reader's Theater in the classroom. They were also trained by the researchers on facilitating Reader's Theater for young children. Among the content of the training was to be able to facilitate with the intended assessments for this study.

The children from School A were selected as the treatment group, while the children from School B were selected as the control group. The researchers were required to honor both schools' request not to divide their classroom into experiment and control groups as the move will be questioned by the children and their parents. Incidentally, at the end of the research the researchers conducted a Reader's Theater workshop for the kindergarten teachers in the school with the control group to ensure that the children also received the same treatment as the experimental group after the research had been carried out.

The selected sample involved 70 kindergarten children aged 5 to 6 years old. The number of selected samples from the first school (School A) was 35; 21 boys and 14 girls. The number of selected samples from the second school (School B) was 35 children; 20 boys and 15 girls. Thus, School A provided the treatment group while School B provided the control group for this study. However, only 25 samples from both groups remained till the end of the study. According to Myers and Hansen (2002), strong effects can be identified in a large group. As a general rule, it is recommended that at least 15 subjects per group were necessary to detect the effect of the treatment. Therefore, for this study, the sample of 50 children is considered sufficient to acquire the effect of the treatment.

The control and treatment groups had undergone pre-test to determine their level of fluency and comprehension. The study was carried out for five weeks where the control group was given a passage of a story, while the treatment group received Reader's Theater scripts of the same story. During the intervention period, the children were introduced to various reading activities such as reading aloud, choral reading, reading robins, and paired reading. After the intervention, both groups were given a posttest to determine their level of

fluency and comprehension. Data from the pretest and the posttest has been analyzed to uncover the effects of the intervention.

In order to assess the children’s fluency, the fluency checklist was translated from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Pinnell, Pikulski, Wixson, Campbell, Gough, & Beatty, 1995). The translated checklist was reviewed by three kindergarten teachers and they agreed on the appropriateness of the checklist to be used to check the fluency level of the children. As for the comprehension assessment an instrument used in a study conducted by Zainiah Mohamed Isa (2009) was utilized for this study.

The data collected was given a code to facilitate the data entry into the computer software. The data obtained was processed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data was analyzed using percentage and Wilcoxon rank test analysis the differences between treatment and control group. Items included in the checklists are as below:

1. Fluency

- i. Level 1: Read word by word.
- ii. Level 2: Read two or three words simultaneously, and pause or stop inappropriately.
- iii. Level 3: Read two or three word simultaneously, and pause or stop appropriately.
- iv. Level 4: Read fluently and use good expression and intonation.

2. Comprehension

- i. Who are the characters in the story?
- ii. When and where did the story take place?
- iii. What happen to the characters in the story?
- iv. How the characters solve his/her problem? What is the ending of the story?
- v. If you are the character in the story, what will you do?

For these questions, the scores are based on Likert Scale as below:

- 1 : Poor
- 2 : Medium
- 3 : Good
- 4 : Excellent

Results

Analysis of significant for fluency

There were 50 kindergarten children involved as samples in this research. They were divided into two groups; Control Group = 25, Experimental Group = 25. The reading levels for the kindergarten children in this research are listed below.

Table 1. The reading level for kindergarten children

	Emergent Reader	Early Reader	Fluent Reader
No. of Children	24	12	14
Percentage	45	26	29

A total of 24 students (45%) were at level 1, 12 children (26%) were at level 2, followed by 14 children (25%) at level 3. This descriptive analysis showed that 45 percent of the children were emergent readers. This is considered to be critical as this research was conducted at the end of the year. Therefore, the teachers are in need of proper training in observing children’s reading performance and to plan reading instruction that is efficient for the children’s reading development. They should also be well-versed about reading models and how to apply the model in the classroom. As a result, effective reading instruction could be implemented in the kindergarten classroom to benefit the children involved.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for fluency

Fluency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Control Group	25	.192	.401	.00	1.00
Experimental Group	25	.538	.508	.00	1.00

Table 3. Wilcoxon Ranks test

Fluency		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Control Group	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
Experimental Group	Positive Ranks	9 ^b	5.00	45.00
	Ties	16 ^c		
	Total	25		

a. Experimental Group < Control Group

Table 4. Test Statistics for Fluency

Test Statistics ^b	Control Group – Experimental Group
Z	-3.00 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.003

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Experimental Group > Control Group

c. Control Group = Experimental Group

Wilcoxon Test result above shows that there are significant differences in fluency level between the treatment and control groups. Results of the analysis by the rank test clearly indicates that the significant differences between the two groups ($T = 0.00$, $p < .05$). Test statistics also indicates significant differences between the treatment and control groups; $Z = -3.00$, $p < .05$. It can be concluded that the use of Reader’s Theater technique is able to improve kindergarten children’s fluency level.

Based on the interview with the classroom teacher, the effect of Readers Theater was found to be positive as they stated, “Many of our children are able to read fluently after practicing the scripts every week. They are not just more fluent in reading the scripts, but they are also better in reading other given materials”.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for comprehension

Comprehension	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Control Group -	25	2.42	1.67	.00	6.00
Experimental Group	25	1.96	1.88	.00	6.00

Table 6. Wilcoxon Ranks Test

Comprehension		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Control Group - Experimental Group	Negative Ranks	14 ^a	12.40	186.00
	Positive Ranks	9 ^b	12.67	114.00
	Ties	2 ^c		
	Total	25		

a. Experimental Group < Control Group

b. Experimental Group > Control Group

c. Control Group = Experimental Group

Table 7. Test statistics for comprehension level

Test Statistics ^b	Control Group – Experimental Group
Z	-1.06 ^a
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.291

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Wilcoxon test result above shows that there is no significant difference in the comprehension level between the treatment and the control groups. The result of the analysis by the rank test clearly indicates there is no significant difference between the two groups (C). Test statistic also shows no significant difference between control group and treatment group; $Z = -1.06$, $p > .05$. It can be concluded that the use of Reader’s Theater technique is unable to improve kindergarten children’s comprehension level.

Overall result shows that Reader’s Theater technique is able to improve children’s fluency, but not their comprehension. Therefore, Readers Theater intervention has proven to be an effective technique for improving fluency skill in the kindergarten children.

Discussion and recommendations

Fluency level of kindergarten children

The outcome of the research shows that during the pretest, most of the children's fluency level were low. A total of 24 children (45%) were at level 1, 13 children (26%) were at level 2, 15 children (25%) were at level 3 and none of the samples reached level 4. It can be concluded that even though the study was conducted at the end of the year, the children's literacy level were not sufficiently fluent. The reason for this might be because in Malaysia, the kindergarten assessment system does not include fluency as one of the skills that need to be evaluated at the end of the year. This is a set back as without fluency assessment, kindergarten teachers will be uncertain about children's fluency performance. Therefore, the children who were not fluent in their reading by the end of the year will be left behind as they would not be detected. If this lack of fluency is continuously ignored by the teachers, these children will be inefficient in their reading when they enter Year One. Nevertheless, they still have to undergo LINUS (Literacy and Numeracy Test) at the beginning of the year and this will affect their LINUS performance. On the other hand, if the children are fluent readers at the end of their kindergarten years, they can practice reading at home on their own and they will perform better in their LINUS test.

Consequently, it is recommended that teachers administer fluency assessment during the last two months before school end. By monitoring children's fluency progress at the end of the year, teachers could intervene and improve children's fluency skill before they enter Year One.

Reader's Theater and children's fluency level

The result of the analysis by the rank test clearly indicates that the use of Reader's Theater technique is able to improve the fluency level of the kindergarten children in this study.

The result from the interview of the teachers also supports this finding. Teacher A gave good comments about children's fluency; "Many of the children in my class are able to read fluently after practicing the scripts every week. They were not just more fluent in reading the scripts but they were also fluent in reading other given materials".

Research Assistant 1 observed Girl A whose fluency was at level 1. Girl A was a slow reader and read the scripts word by word. However, she enjoyed reading the scripts with her friend during reading together session and she brought the scripts home to read with her parents. At the end of the research she could read the repeated words and sight words spontaneously without decoding it. Even though, Research Assistant 1 had detected that she had memorized most of the sentences in the scripts, but the number of words that Girl A could read had increased at the end of the study.

In this study, the researchers conducted Reader's Theater with young children ages five and six, whose fluency level were at level 1, 2 and 3. Even though this study involved children from the younger group compare to the study by Caudill-Hansen (2009), and Johnson (2011) that involved older children, the finding shows a similar outcome. The students in the Caudill-Hansen (2009) study made nearly three times the mean reading rate that confirmed the effectiveness of Reader's Theater intervention for older children fluency skills. As for this study, it is proven that Reader's Theater improves kindergarten children's fluency, that is the children at the age of five and six and most of them have moved up higher in level 1 and level 2. This study also reveals that Reader's Theater have a positive impact on Level 1 readers by increasing the number of reading words.

Researchers suggest that Reader's Theater instruction is suitable to be utilized among kindergarten children in Malaysia. It could benefit the Level 1 readers by increasing the number of reading words and it could also enhanced fluency skills for the Level 2 readers. However, the most important reason for the implementation of Readers Theater is that the children enjoy reading the scripts repeatedly. Therefore, it is suggested that every classroom in Malaysia employs this technique, particularly towards the end of the year to ensure every child is able to reach their competency level of reading.

Reader's Theater and comprehension

The result of the analysis by the rank test clearly indicates that the use of Reader's Theater technique alone was incapable to improve the comprehension level of the kindergarten children in this study.

This finding is similar to the study conducted by Jagger (2008), Caudill-Hansen (2009), and Johnson (2011). Jagger (2008) suggests that vocabulary skills could be incorporated with Reader's Theater. The researchers agree with this suggestion in view of the fact that to understand the text is not just to decode the words, but it also depends on reader's previous knowledge and the reading contexts (Hancock, 2000). Therefore, the best way to build reading and writing potential is by fostering language development (Gunning, 2010), for the reason that, without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, it is difficult for readers to understand the text.

Furthermore the duration of the intervention with Readers Theater in this study is only six weeks which is too short for vocabulary development to happen. Consequently, the researchers suggest the implementation of direct teaching instruction on comprehension techniques which is more suitable to enhance kindergarten children's comprehension skills. One of the techniques that could be used is retelling. Through retelling technique teachers can help children to memorize the story. Other instruction is through questioning children before, while and after read aloud session that will guide their understanding of the story. As for vocabulary skill, indirect instruction could be used through the daily classroom interaction that encourages children to learn new vocabulary. The more vocabulary they acquired, the more effortless comprehending texts will become.

Recommendations for further research

In future studies, it would be beneficial to collect data from a bigger sample as it will have better validity of the result. The bigger samples should also involve children from the various ethnic groups that will give a clearer view about the impact of Reader's Theater on children who employ Malay Language as a second language.

Future research should investigate the effect of Reader's Theater on children's reading skills of different levels. Perhaps by focusing in detail on these levels will provide more information about the characteristics of each level that will assist teachers to build on teaching instruction.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal the positive effect of using Reader's Theater on the fluency of the kindergarten children at a lower age group. It is also proven that children in this study enjoyed reading the scripts and were motivated to read other materials as they gained confidence in themselves. Although the study was conducted on a small sized sample, this study can make way for future researches. As for the comprehension the outcome is not

encouraging as this skill involves other components such as prior knowledge and the command of vocabulary. Therefore it is strongly recommended to use Readers Theater as part of literacy enhancement in kindergarten classrooms.

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