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Tiffany Tipton

Brooke Moore

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Effects of Audiobooks and Group Discussion in Inclusive Special Education

Tiffany A. Tipton, Fort Hays State University Graduate Student

Brooke Moore, Ph.D., Faculty Mentor

Abstract

Research has shown us that reading while listening has potential benefits. With the popularity of audiobooks growing along with technology advances, it is much easier to implement audiobooks in the classroom than in past years. There have also been indications of positive effects from social interactions on student reading skills and habits, such as those occurring during group discussions and literature circles. This action research study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of using both of these techniques in conjunction with one another to improve reading comprehension among a small group of students identified as struggling readers receiving special education support within the general education English language arts classroom. Data will also be gathered to assess the effect of audiobooks on the participants' voluntary engagement in independent reading activities.

Problem/Purpose

Suzy, John, Jacob, and Lisa (pseudonyms used) are middle school students receiving special education services for a specific learning disability (LD) in the general education English language arts (ELA) classroom which utilizes a class-within-class (CWC) model of instruction. All students have deficits in the area of reading fluency due to low cognitive processing speeds, poor vocabulary development, and difficulty with decoding skills. To further compound their reading struggles, these students face immense challenges with reading comprehension when reading independently. The purpose of this action research study is to increase their exposure to accurate models of reading fluency by utilizing audiobooks during independent reading (IR) time in their ELA classroom. By reducing the burden of the decoding and processing aspects of reading, it is plausible they will be able to reroute some of that freed focus to comprehension skills.

Literature Review

Research has indicated assisted reading methods like audiobooks to be effective in improving reading fluency (Esteves & Whitten, 2011; Moore & Cahill, 2016). However, there has been no statistically significant effect shown on overall reading comprehension when using audiobooks alone (Moore & Cahill, 2016; Schmitt, Hale, McCallum, & Mauk, 2011; Wolfson, 2008). Research pertaining to attitudinal change as a result of audiobook use is still developing. Esteves and Whitten (2011) found no significant change in participant attitude towards reading in their study, which involved participants independently listening to audiobooks with the option to follow along in the printed book. In contrast, participants in the study conducted by Whittingham et al. (2013) not only listened to audiobooks but also engaged in group discussions about the books they read. Their results showed an overall positive attitudinal change among the participants, which was also noted by their parents and classroom teachers. These contrasting studies are indicative of the power dialogue and social interaction can have on literacy development. Many studies and literature reviews discuss the importance of utilizing a comprehensive approach to reading instruction; employing a synchrony of multiple forms of support methods is crucial to reading success (Aaron, Joshi, Gooden, & Bentum, 2008; Esteves & Whitten, 2011; Moore & Cahill, 2016; Wolfson, 2008).

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Research Questions:

1. How does participating in discussion after listening while reading affect reading comprehension?
2. How does utilizing audiobooks during independent reading (IR) time in conjunction with group discussion affect participants' time spent voluntarily choosing to engage in independent reading, either with or without some form of assisted reading?

Phase	Procedures
Pre-Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather individual participant background data• Participants complete individual pre-intervention survey• Participants' teachers and parents complete pre-intervention surveys
Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants listen to selected audiobook while following along in printed copy• At the conclusion of each chapter participants write a summary of chapter• After designated section of chapters are completed, participants take multiple-choice comprehension test
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue with phase 1 steps with the addition of facilitated group discussion following each chapter prior to written summary
Post-Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants complete individual post-intervention survey• Researcher facilitates discussion in focus group with participants• Participants' teachers and parents complete post-intervention survey

Data Collection & Analysis

Pre- and post-intervention survey questionnaire data will consist of categorical scale responses, which will convert to single-item response scoring. Data between the pre- and post-intervention survey questionnaire will be analyzed to determine if any change has occurred. Data from the written summaries will be analyzed using a rubric rating system, which will rate the quality of summaries from a 1 (Poor) to a 4 (Excellent). The multiple-choice comprehension tests will be analyzed using descriptive statistics with particular interest in the mean score among the participants'.

Expected Outcomes

Based on previous research highlighted in the literature review, it is expected participants will show an overall improvement with their reading comprehension skills. After the baseline phase is complete, it is highly likely the ratings of the participants' summaries will improve during the remaining duration of the intervention due to the immediate group discussion following each chapter. It is also anticipated the participants' scores on the multiple choice comprehension tests will improve as the group progresses through the book.