The Effects of Leveled Reading on Second Language Learners

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***Abstract*: This study aimed to research the significance of using leveled texts in the improvement of second language learners' word recognition skills, accuracy, and fluency. The findings showed steady growth in word recognition abilities and improved automaticity. Results from running records exhibited a substantial increase in accuracy. Fluency assessments showcased a rise in fluency rate and fluency scores provided by three assessors. Implications from this study indicate the positive effects of reading at the frustration level. Therefore, it is encouraged to further explore the impact of providing challenging reading material.**

***Keywords*:leveled reading, second language learners, fluency, accuracy, word recognition**

I. INTRODUCTION

This research constitutes an approach that has been influential education, and it is widely known as 'Leveled Reading'. Leveled readinginvolves assessing students' ability to read different texts, then assigning them reading material appropriate for them (Pondiscio & Mahnken, 2014). The proposition of the levels of reading challenge is attributed to Emmett A. Betts who was a theorist and educator specialized in the field of reading. This theory was first introduced in his published work "Foundations of Reading Instruction" in 1946. The reading levels place readers in a specific level. The goal is to identify learners' needs and provide them with the corresponding assistance. The method used to determine the reader's level of reading challenge is through an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). An IRI is a type of assessment used to judge a reader's ability to read words in a text correctly. This assessment places the reader in one of the levels of reading challenge, which are: independent; meaning to successfully read text and comprehend 90% of it, while pronouncing 99% accurately, Instructional; referring to the maximum level of appropriate challenge, or frustration; in which the text is deemed too difficult for the child to comprehend (Stange, 2013). Then, it is encouraged for readers to be given texts at their instructional level. Some aspects of Marie Clay's implementation of Reading Recovery (RR) are also key components to this research as it focuses on how to help students read proficiently (Cazden, 2017). It is emphasized to provide sufficient intervention through the explicit teaching of skills such as word recognition to guide students to become proficient readers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research examines the role of leveled reading for English as Second Language (ESL) learners. A wide practice in some schools is the use of the same-leveled book for the whole class, ignoring individual differences in skills. The topic was chosen due to many incidents evident in government schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Most of the reading done by students in the classroom was from the textbook, shared among all students. In that way, students are not receiving individually tailored material to interact with. On the other hand, schools that do use leveled readers do not utilize them adequately enough for learners to reach an independent reading level. One study done in Ireland showed that the text at many schools in the country proved to be difficult for some students because it was not at their level of instruction. After implementing a fusion of two approaches in which a phonics program and guided oral reading with appropriate texts were used with students, there were significant improvements for students who previously struggled (O'rourke, Olshtroon, and O'halloran, 2016). It is in question how well this will work with English Second Language Learners (ESL). Moreover, in the Progress Report of the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2016, it was revealed that the UAE received 450 points in the overall reading average scale of fourth graders, which is considered between low and intermediate (Warner-Griffin, Liu, Tadler, Herget, Dalton, and Thompson, 2017). Thus, this research aims to use leveled texts as a medium to improve UAE students' reading skills gradually.

1.3 Research Purpose

The importance of matching students with the appropriate text lies in learners' engagement factor as they interact with reading material suitable to their needs. They would also be challenging their cognitive skills to the right extent while putting their decoding skills into practice (Hastings, 2016). It is more likely that the love of reading will be instilled in students, especially if they are given good experiences with reading from a young age. According to Stange (2013) "The more time children spend reading books at the appropriate level, the greater the growth in word knowledge, fluency, and reading skills." (p. 112). Engaging with the right reading material from a young age is linked with the development of accurate reading strategies and skills such as word recognition. This research will be implemented with elementary school students to see how well they respond to being assessed and matched to the right text, and how that effects their reading accuracy and fluency.

1.4 Operational Definitions of Terms

Informal Reading Inventory (IRI): A tool used to identify a student's reading level (Araim, 2016).

English as a Second Language (ESL): Individuals who learn English as a second language (Genesee, Leary, Christian, W. Saunders, and B. Saunders, 2006).

Reading Recovery (RR): A tutorial program created for children who need to develop their reading skills (Cazden, 2017).

English Language Learners (ELLs): Learners who study English in addition to their first language (Genesee et al., 2006).

Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA): A cycle that emphasizes continuous improvement (Johnson, 2002).

1.5 Research Questions

1. Do leveled texts significantly improve English Language Learners' word recognition skills?
2. Do leveled texts enhance students' reading accuracy?
3. Do leveled texts enhance students' reading fluency?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

This literature review will provide a detailed look into the topic of leveled reading, including aspects such as its background, theories, among other issues. The main components of the following bodies include: An introduction to leveled reading, theoretical background, advantages, negative criticisms and challenges, context in the UAE, and a synthesis of the literature presented in this research.

2.2 Introduction to Leveled Reading

Leveled reading offers a tailored approach to reading, in which the reader is matched to the right text (Zrna, 2012). There are ways in which appropriate material to the reader are determined. The levels brought forth by Betts include independent, instructional and frustration. The independent reading level is the highest level in which a child can read without any assistance, with a criterion of more than 97% of words correctly read. The instructional reading level is indicated by reading 93% to 97% of the words correctly. The frustration reading level is apparent when less than 93% of the words are read correctly, deeming the material inappropriate for the child's level. Research shows that there is more of an achievement when students are reading at their instructional level. Reading is assessed using an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), which is used to evaluate how accurately a child can read a text. The procedure works as follows: Students read samples of text, and the number of words they read are recorded. Afterward, the words that were correctly read are divided by the total number of words in all, multiplied by 100. This would provide the assessor with a percentage score that indicates the level of difficulty the text is considered to the child (Burns, Pulles, Maki, Kanive, Hodgson, Helman, McComas, and Preast, 2015). Each publisher's program of leveled books differs from the other, and no specific criteria as to how the levels were determined was available. For that reason, it was revealed in a publication by Rog and Burton (2001) that a group of teachers researched the aspects of many different literacy materials and set up a 10-level system for reading instruction, encompassing five different considerations for the criteria. The first is vocabulary, referring to the number of words on a page. The second is the size and layout of print, in which the appearance of the text and font are evaluated. The third is predictability, where literary patterns, such as rhyme and rhythm, are used to make the text predictable. The fourth is illustration support, referring to the relationship between pictures and text. The last is the complexity of concepts, exploring how familiar and predictable the story's events are. The books at each level gradually contain more complex text and concepts. Level one generally has less text (one or two words a page) with clear font and familiar concepts, as well as literary patterns that make the text predictable. As the levels increase, text becomes longer, with new words, and requires readers to use cueing strategies to comprehend some aspects of the story (n.p.). There have been numerous studies to investigate proper reading intervention strategies. An analysis designed by remedial reading specialist Marie Clay in New Zealand addressed children who performed poorly in reading after their first year in school. They were given teaching sessions on how to develop their own reading and writing skills. In a Reading Recovery (RR) lesson, the learner rereads a known text. Then, a new text is introduced. Afterward, the task difficulty increases gradually. A running record is used to provide information on reading performance accuracy (Cazden, 2017). The previous study is relevant to this research as it aims to enhance the reading accuracy of learners with texts that gradually increase in difficulty. Research done in the 21st century highlights some critical aspects of teaching reading to students nowadays. For instance, it is encouraged to incorporate digital texts to provide students with an incentive to read. Also, vocabulary development requires the use of explicit instruction to increase awareness of the details of structures (Roskos & Neuman, n.d.). These practices aim to produce readers who are capable of catering to the demands of the 21st century.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The basis of theorist Lev Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the importance of providing students with instructional support at a challenging learning level (O'rourke et al., 2016). Only when challenge is provided will students be reaching their full potential in attaining new knowledge and skills. In knowing the child's level, the teacher can tailor the instruction slightly above the developmental level. That way, the learner can gain independence in doing the task on their own. Teachers need to know the level of support for learning to occur (Antonacci,

2000). Adams (1990) wrote that if a reader encounters difficult words, they should not skip them; rather, they must use their decoding skills to study the words (p.103). Furthermore, texts of suitable difficulty prompt the reader to use problem-solving strategies (Cazden, 2017). As young readers attempt to decipher difficult words, their word recognition skills improve. Based on Haring and Eaton's (1978) instructional hierarchy, individuals require academic interventions to gradually increase performance (n.p.). Acquisition interventions aim to increase reading accuracy. The first phase of the instructional hierarchy is acquisition, and it involves slow and inaccurate reading performance. The learner is guided by a teacher who demonstrates the required skills and provides immediate feedback. The first phase aims to decrease the teacher's support gradually. The second phase is the proficiency phase, characterized by slow attempts at using new skills yet aiming for increased fluency. The third phase, which is generalization, is reached when the learner is significantly more fluent and can use new skills across multiple settings and situations. The fourth phase is adaptation, and it is signified by fluent reading, the use of new skills in different contexts, and no prompting from others (Parker & Burns, 2013).

2.4 Advantages

Leveled texts aim to make reading an authentic experience and emphasize students' comprehension of the text. If a child was given incomprehensible text due to the high level of difficulty, then there is no point of assessing the reader's knowledge. Moreover, when readers read at their own pace, they are gaining experience to become fluent and learning new vocabulary. Leveled reading helps familiarize students with reading and ensures readers' success as they slowly build up their reading strategies, which will result in better reading skills (Zrna, 2012). In countries like the UAE, where English is a second language, English Language Learners (ELLs) can find it discouraging to come across difficulties while reading a text. Often, learners tend to give up and lose interest in learning to read in a second language. Reading instruction techniques have a significant effect on students' attitudes toward reading. Some methods that aim to assess rather than focus on teaching reading skills tend to have an adverse impact on learners (Farrell, 2008). This is where leveled texts can be beneficial. Referring back to Betts reading challenge levels, using appropriate text to the child will prevent them from getting frustrated and raise their confidence in their reading skills. Moreover, there should be a focus on the continuous assessment to check for reading accuracy.

2.5 Negative Criticism and Challenges

Emmett A Betts explained that reading above the instructional level would put learners in the frustration level of reading. However, others believe that the level of challenge provided by the instructional level (93% to 97% percent of text is read correctly) is not enough of a challenge to help students become better readers. Therefore, many other researchers believe that reading more difficult reading material is more beneficial than following Betts' levels (Pondiscio & Mahnken, 2014). However, to assess students' levels, the levelling process could be useful as a gauge. Another study showed that many schools were too focused on providing students with texts at their instructional level, valuing the numerical scores over providing students with text that will enable them to stretch their cognitive skills. Consequently, low achievers in reading would not have received the chance to practice valuable reading strategies that derive from encountering difficult text (Hastings, 2016). In this case, it is the implementation that produced negative results. Traditional leveled approaches teach students to read through a series of text that enforce reading skills. However, the instruction lacked consideration for individual literacy needs. As stated by Clay (1994) children are placed into categories due to their inability to reach their classmates' levels, but no attention is given to the methods that should be applied to help those students reach the same level of learning as the others (p. 122). Guided reading alleviates this problem as it is an instructional reading approach where students receive direct instructions as they read. Thus, a major focus in guided reading is to look at individual differences. Moreover, there is an emphasis on on-going assessment and observations, which are used to inform future grouping changes to match the reader's level. The approach involves students reading a whole text by themselves, using appropriately leveled texts. In this method of reading instruction, the teacher assists students in developing reading strategies like self-correcting their errors (Antonacci, 2000). There are considerable challenges to the process of implementing leveled reading in schools. A significant disadvantage would be the cost of buying a vast number of graded books, as it is a large investment for some schools (O'rourke et al., 2016). Based on a literature review regarding school-based reading interventions, studies showed that there was a lack of classroom aids in some schools, in addition to a resistance from teachers due to higher workloads. It was proposed that more practical methods of intervention should be used for it to be feasible for teachers who do not have teaching assistants (Stentiford, Koutsouris, and Norwich, 2018).

2.6 Studies in the UAE

In 2011, a study was done in the UAE by Mohammed Salhyyah to explore the effects of a guided program on fourth graders' reading comprehension skills. The study's purpose was to enhance reading comprehension and test students' ability to read for gist, specific information, and details. The guided program aimed to gradually decrease a teacher's role in assisting the child in reading while increasing the learner's role. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' overall comprehension skills, indicating that the guided program influences comprehension skills (Salhyyah, 2011). Another study in the Emirate of Al-Ain examined the reading and assessment strategies employed by teachers in the classroom and the difficulties students encounter while

reading English. The results showed that students struggled with several things while reading, including pronunciation, using features of the text, and identifying main ideas. The preceding factors were attributed to the use of traditional reading strategies and lack of engaging reading techniques. This study's recommended follow-up procedure is to cater to students' learning styles and provide them with texts that suit their level. It was encouraged to investigate the efficacy of implementing leveled reading in a similar setting (Al Nuaimi, 2018). It is evident that the research done on reading in the UAE focuses on aspects different than that of what this research proposes, which the use of leveled texts is. In addition, most schools that use leveled texts do not consider the level that the student is reading in based on Betts' three levels. Therefore, this study focuses on assessing students to find their appropriate level of instruction and checking their fluency and accuracy throughout the process.

2.7 Reading Interventions

Whole language instruction is an approach to teaching reading through exposure to vocabulary, where new words are explicitly taught, and the structure is memorized. Phonics instruction refers to letter-sound correspondence, where letter sounds are explicitly taught (Maddox & Feng, 2013). Countless studies have proven both methods to be effective in teaching reading. Maddox and Feng's (2013) findings showed that "A literacy approach should combine phonics and whole language into one cohesive curriculum" (Maddox & Feng, 2013). This study does not aim to check for the effects of using either approach. Instead, it seeks to find out how impactful leveled texts are, as opposed to using texts that are not catered to the child's needs when providing such interventions.

2.8 Digital Literacy

Presently, learning materials are transitioning from traditional forms to technological modes of learning. Digital literacy refers to skillful use and navigation around digital platforms. It is a valuable skill to use technology efficiently because then students can get access to more materials. Some characteristics that make online learning fascinating for students are audiovisual information, which engages users and creates a deeper understanding of the content. To keep up with modern-day developments, it is suggested that schools incorporate electronic teaching to improve the quality of learning in schools (Santoso, Siswandari, and Sawiji, 2018). A study done to explore the impact of e-books on children's reading motivation and reading skills across the United Kingdom revealed that more than half of the participants said that they preferred to read using electronic devices compared to reading in print (Picton, 2014, p.4). Moreover, another study investigated the impact of online storybooks on first-grade students' reading motivation, and the results revealed a significant increase in student engagement (Flynn, 2013, p.11). Various results indicate the alluringness of digital books as opposed to printed forms. Moreover, characteristics of e-books such as the animation of print aided in the improvement of children's decoding skills and print knowledge. Some e-readers also enable students to hear words that they cannot read, which serves as a guide for when they get stuck (Flynn, 2013). Many positive e-book features are not found in printed books and can be useful for beginning readers who need extra support. Other crucial reading skills are reinforced using digital books as mentioned by Short (2010), "Benefits such as increased comprehension and fluency have been linked to the use of electronic books" (p.39).

2.9 Synthesis

Past studies in the field of leveled reading have shed light on the fact that readers who read books at the appropriate level show growth in reading skills (Stange, 2013). The combined conclusions of researchers such as Betts and Clay indicate that differentiation must be apparent regarding children's reading levels. In contrast, other researchers strongly encourage the use of texts above the instructional level to increase the challenge, believing that complex texts lead to learning (Pondiscio & Mahnken, 2014). Overall, leveled reading is a reading intervention that can be found in countless studies and has been discussed by many researchers. Additionally, it has shown positive results in some cases when used efficiently. Despite decades of research, it is still in question why most schools do not emphasize the use of leveled material when students show weaknesses in reading. Moreover, existing research lacks a focus on ELLs when it comes to using leveled texts. Additionally, it is the educators' responsibility to integrate electronic means of learning within the curriculum (Short, 2010). Thus, e-books will be administered to keep learners motivated to read.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the methods used to implement this research, including the research design, method, participants, data collection tools, and ethical considerations. The main questions informed the design and procedures of this research.

3.2 Research Design

Action research is a process that takes place in order to find a solution to a problem (E. Koshy & V. Koshy & Waterman, 2010). An issue is first identified, from which an investigation occurs, leading to possible answers to the problem. A more relevant type of action research that pertains to this research's particular context is known as educational action research, which is an approach used by teachers to develop as researchers who can find ways to better their own teaching and students' learning (Tripp, 2005). There are two types of research data, and they are quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is information that is collected in number form. Qualitative data is collected by observing the characteristics of the information and is usually displayed in narrative form (Macalester College, 2019). The method

followed for collecting data for this research used a combination of both a quantitative and qualitative approach, known as a mixed-methods research design. Mixed methods research combines aspects of both quantitative and qualitative data collection, and it serves the purpose of providing in-depth results (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Data is collected in both number and characteristic form, from which they are combined, whereby one form serves as a support to the other.

3.3 Research Method

A research procedure must follow specific steps, particularly a research cycle. A research cycle is a recurring process used throughout the implementation of research (Clifford, n.d.). This research follows the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle, also known as the Deming Cycle, which is a model that emphasizes continuous improvement based on constructing and re-constructing the original plan following the results of an action (Johnson, 2002). The concept was first introduced by the American physicist Walter Shewhart in 1939. Later in the 1950s, W. Edwards Deming reintroduced the cycle, with the name "Deming cycle" (Moen, 2009). An article published by Tripp (1995) presented several ways in which this reflective model can be used. One of the many variations of the PDCA cycle is displayed in the diagram below. It is presented by David Tripp, who labeled this variation "The diagnostic practice cycle," as it is based on the assessment of a situation, followed by an explanation of the diagnosis, then an intervention is presented, from which the implementation process occurs. The cycle repeats itself until satisfactory results are apparent. Tripp (1995) relates this process to the term "Action Inquiry" and defines it as a way to perform thoughtful action (Tripp, 1995).

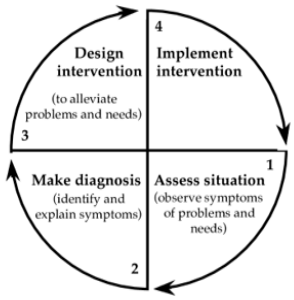

Figure 1: The diagnostic practice cycle (Tripp, 1995)

This particular research cycle was utilized due to the process of diagnosis and implementation of interventions to assess students' ability to read. The same research cycle was used across both preliminary and final phases of the research. The first step began with assessing students' reading skills with a variety of leveled books from Raz-kids, a reading program that offers e-books at twenty-nine levels of reading difficulty (see Appendix A, p. 60). The first level is level aa, containing few words and recurring two-word phrases. As the level of the books increase, the number of words and variety of phrases become more complex. The second step was to rate the students' reading skills, so that a proper diagnosis is made, to match them with a story that is at their instructional level. The measures taken include conducting a running record and recording the accuracy percentage using an informal reading inventory. The way that the instructional method was found was through the use of Clay's accuracy rate formula (Clay, 2000). The third step involved the gauging of students' needs and their areas of weakness in reading. Pupils' development areas were noted and then the appropriate activity was located on the educational application Starfall, which contains reading games, activities, short stories, and videos. The fourth step was the intervention process, in which students continued to read stories from a set level, which was their instructional level. Intervention strategies included the phonics approach and the whole language approach, depending on the child's needs. After the initial interventions, students were regularly assessed using running records to check for areas that have developed and areas needing improvement; thus, the cycle repeats itself.

3.4 Research Site and Participants

The study at hand includes data collected from several participants. However, the main targets of the research were four students who are second graders aged seven to eight. The students are all of the Arab ethnic group, and their first language is Arabic. The selection of the group of students was made through the use of voluntary sampling, a sampling technique in which participants are chosen based on their willingness to participate (Murairwa, 2015). In accordance, the pupils in question are at varying emerging, developing, and mastery levels. For the sake of protecting the participants' confidentiality, identities will not be revealed throughout the writing of this study, and pseudonyms will be employed as a replacement for students' real names. The participant at the emerging level will be referred to as "Fatima". The participants at the developing level will be identified as "Mahra" and "Sara". The participant at the mastery level will be referred to as "Reem". The research was based in an online environment, and the students came from different private schools in the emirate of Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Other contributors to this research include the parents of the students and experienced English teachers who helped oversee the results of the data collection.

3.5 Data Collection Tools

Various data collection tools were utilized throughout the course of this research. The collection techniques provide both quantitative and qualitative data results. The main tools are informal reading inventories (Betts, 1946), word recognition assessments (Jennings, Caldwell, and Lerner, 2006), running records (Clay, 2000), multidimensional fluency scales (Rasinski, 2004), oral reading fluency rates, and surveys. First of all, an informal reading inventory was used to note down the students' accuracy percentage while reading; this information indicated which level of challenge the text provided to the student and which text provides a suitable challenge to them. The formula for finding the accuracy

percentage is accredited to Marie Clay, and it involves calculating the total number of words in a text, known as the Running Words (RW), minus the errors made while reading, divided by the RW, then multiplied by a hundred to find the accuracy percentage (Clay, 2000). Second of all, reading logs recorded students' errors and the teacher's intervention strategies. Third of all, word recognition assessments were administered, and they served the purpose of assessing students' word recognition skills. Fourth of all, running records were used to assess learners on a weekly basis to check on their progress. Fifth of all, multidimensional fluency scales rated readers on their fluency. A score of less than 8 indicates poor fluency. Sixth of all, oral reading fluency rates were used to test students on the Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM). Finally, two surveys were conducted. One survey investigated English teachers' perspectives about leveled reading, and their outlook about parental involvement, and whether it could affect the child's learning.

3.5 (a) Informal Reading Inventory (IRI)

An Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) (see Appendix B, p. 61) is an assessment that measures reading performance, focusing on word identification. It is a tool that provides quantitative data. It is considered a diagnostic test that assists in identifying the individual's needs, and what their level of instruction is; indicating what intervention strategies will be suitable based on the results (Eells, 2013). In the first part of the study, each student read stories from various beginner levels from the Raz-kids e-books, and the number of incorrect words was recorded. The higher the number of inaccuracies, the harder the book is for the child. The formula used for calculation is to divide the correct words read by the text's total words, multiplied by a hundred. According to Betts (1946), when many errors are made while reading, the child experiences frustration, making them at the frustration level (Betts, 1946). Reading a high number of words accurately (97%) places the child in the independent reading level for that particular book. Reading a moderate number of words correctly (93%-97%) marks the book at the child's instructional level. If the child misreads most of the words (less than 93%), the book is at the frustration level (Betts, 1946). However, when applying the formula that provides the accuracy percentage, variables like the total number of words and different vocabulary from one story to another made the percentage vary drastically. Therefore, it was decided that the use of the percentages provided by Betts was not ideal in this situation. The instructional levels were approximated by comparing the percentage results of different books from a higher and lower level of difficulty and matching the readers to the book including a moderate number of difficult words. The existence of other variations of the criteria for deciding the appropriate accuracy percentages are apparent; one example is Harrisonburg City Public Schools in Virginia, in which the Independent level is considered 80% or higher; the instructional level at 67%-79%, and the frustration level is 50% and lower (Harrisonburg City Public Schools, 2015). Several researchers have expressed doubts about the criterion. A study was done by Burns et. al (2015) on the accuracy of results provided by an informal reading inventory revealed that three books that were at the same level of difficulty produced different results in terms of reading performance. Previous research had shed light that the variation in results is caused by the difference between text structure, prior knowledge, and the reading task, even if the books were at the same level. The study suggested that teachers should not rely on a specific criterion; in addition, IRIs are faulty due to not noting the age or grade-level of the person being tested, and the procedures are generalized for all grade-levels, causing results to fluctuate (n.p.). Therefore, decisions must be made per each child's needs, rather than depending on a set percentage for finding the instructional level. Consequently, several books from varying levels were used to assess students, and their reactions to the books, in addition to the average accuracy percentage derived from the assessments. Subsequently, students were matched to the book that were believed to be neither too easy nor frustrating.

3.5 (b) Reading Log

Reading logs tracked students' reading activity, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix C, p. 62). Each teacher designs their reading log based on what aspects they are targeting (Cruz, 2017). Thus, making reading logs convenient for data collection. The log was used to note down each students' reading errors and the corresponding intervention. Identifying students' weaknesses is essential for determining the appropriate intervention strategy, whether it be the phonics or whole language approach to reading.

3.5 (c) Word Recognition Assessment

Assessing word recognition in isolation occurs by having students read a list of words (see Appendix D, p. 63). The lists used for informal reading inventories are of increasing difficulty, where pre-primer level word lists contain shorter, simpler words, while higher-level word lists contain fewer common words (Christ & Cramer, 2011). The word lists used for this research are from Jennings Informal Reading Inventory (Jennings, Caldwell, and Lerner, 2006). According to Christ and Cramer (2011), "Word lists assess readers' ability to decode words in the absence of context" (p.9). Assessing learners' ability to decode words helps to plan for further intervention to build on a child's strengths and weaknesses. It is also an effective way to check a student's ability to recognize sight words. The assessment was administered three times, and it served the purpose of assessing students' word recognition skills before, during, and after the implementation of leveled reading. There are two columns on the word list, timed and untimed. Reading a word automatically demonstrates that the child knows the word by sight or can decode it skillfully, and therefore the teacher ticks under the timed column. If the child reads the word after several attempts, then it is considered untimed. If the word is read inaccurately, their response is noted under the timed

column.

3.5 (d) Running Records

In order to evaluate students' reading performance, a running record (see Appendix E, p. 64) was administered. Clay (2000) stated that running records are taken to guide teaching, assess text difficulty, and capture progress (n.p.). This tool serves many purposes as it collects various data. During the diagnosing phase, a running record was used to record the number of correct and incorrect words that were read. Other things that were considered errors include insertions, omissions, being told the word by the teacher, and skipping a word. When the student self-corrects, it is not considered an error. The running records were a useful guide in checking students' weaknesses and strengths. There is a system that is followed for error analysis with the acronym MSV. The M stands for meaning, if the error was caused due to the meaning of the text. The S stands for Syntax, whether the structure of the sentence influenced the error. The V stands for Visual, and it is when the error is made to the visual information of the print (Clay, 2000). The analysis of the errors helps when intervening and identifying why the student made the errors. The records' calculations involved finding the accuracy percentage through Clay's formula and finding the error rate by dividing the RW by the number of errors. Running records were conducted once a week for the length of the research period to check for progress and determine whether the child is ready to move to a higher reading level.

3.5 (e) Multidimensional Fluency Scale

The fluency of a reader is determined by the number of minutes it takes them to read a whole text, in addition to other factors such as pausing, reading in groups of words or word by word, reading with expression, and using stress. According to Rasinski (2004), the most efficient way to judge a reader's reading quality is by scoring them through a rubric that targets specific criteria (p.18). Fluency measurement tools must include three indicators of fluency, which are accuracy, pacing, and prosody. Rating students on multiple categories is a detailed method of getting insight on their fluency. A rubric designed by Zutell and Rasinski is a multidimensional scale that rates expression, phrasing, smoothness, and pace (Liben & Paige, 2016). This tool combines both quantitative and qualitative data. After rating students, each category's scores are added, and results highlight overall fluency (see Appendix F, p. 65). Scores below eight indicate poor fluency, while scores above eight show that readers are making good fluency progress. Students were assessed before and after the implementation of leveled reading.

3.5 (f) Oral Reading Fluency Rate

To determine the reading rate, students are timed for sixty seconds as they read a text. Then, the WCPM are divided by the total words read and multiplied by a hundred (University of Oregon, n.d.). This would be an indicator of the reader's fluency. The fluency rates were recorded three times; before, during, and after the research implementation.

3.5 (g) School Teachers' Survey

The design of the survey is geared toward teachers and their attitude toward leveled reading. It is a practical method for gathering data in a short amount of time from a large sum of people. The questions were mostly close ended, gathering quantitative data. Some questions required short answers for the teachers to give examples of their own practices and their view on parental involvement in a child's learning. The teachers' written answers showed some justification for their choices, which is the qualitative aspect of this survey. Using surveys gives the researcher an idea of how effective the proposed method is perceived to be amongst other potential users and what potential effects may be expected (Rhodes, 2018). This survey's main aim was to gather information about the prevalence of leveled books in the UAE (see Appendix G, p. 66-69).

3.5 (h) Parental Involvement Survey

Parent-teacher cooperation is a vital factor in the success of students' learning. Through communication, parents can understand how to help their child appropriately, and teachers gain insight on how to teach the child more effectively (Shearer, 2006). To investigate parents' perspective on the matter, a survey was sent out to gain feedback on how involved the participants' parents feel in their child's learning (see Appendix H, p. 70-73). Parents were also asked if they feel their involvement in this research has helped them engage with their child's learning more.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN

4.1 Introduction

Due to discoveries made during the preliminary phase of the research, and in light of rapid changes caused by the coronavirus pandemic, certain amendments were made to this research's plans. There has been a significant shift in how action research is implemented, whereby many researchers turned to the implementation of remote research (Saberi, 2020). Considering this, there are new tools that have been utilized, as well as new strategies and platforms of learning that were used.

4.2 Implementation Strategies

Previously, participants in this research used physical books and paper-based learning activities. However, the shift to online learning has made the use of digital tools more relevant and prevalent. Accordingly, the methods for this research were switched to digital modes of learning. The first difference is the replacement of physical books with e-books. The second difference is using online applications as part of reading intervention to provide learners with educational activities that target specific skills. The number of participants was increased compared to the preliminary research phase to acquire various results for comparison, leading to increased validity. The size of a sample has great effects on the accuracy

of the results, in addition to the conclusiveness of the study (Institute for Work and Health, 2008). Including more participants raises the magnitude of the results and thus leads to a well-founded conclusion.

4.2 (a) E-books

It is encouraged for modern-day educators to transition to e-learning to keep students up to date with the changes occurring around the world. E-books are one such e-learning method that has numerous features that can help support a child's learning. Various studies have proven the positive outcomes of reading digital books, such as increasing engagement and reading skills (Short, 2010). Using e-books enables teachers to access a larger variety of texts based on each child's needs. There are specially designed reading programs that highlight the importance of matching the learner with a text of their level. This research employed texts from the program Raz-kids, which provides both fiction and non-fiction passages for beginners and more advanced readers. The use of e-books brought many advantages to this research. First of all, the teacher creates a private account for each learner and assigns them books that they can access using their device. The teacher can track students' progress and listen to their voice recordings as they read. Second of all, from the students' perspective, they were able to highlight words, listen to them, and they had the option to listen to the whole story after reading. Learners enjoyed recording their voices and listening to them afterward, which is a good way to practice metacognition. According to Keck (2012), "Students who are aware of their own cognitive processes will be more responsible for their own learning processes" (p.6). By encouraging self-correction skills, learners engage with metacognition. Some negative aspects of using e-books appeared when performing assessments with students. The e-books were online, so the strength of the internet connection was vital to the assessment process. If the book loads slowly, this could affect the results of some assessments, such as the oral reading fluency rate assessment, which records the number of words read per minute.

4.2 (b) Reading Activities

The initial plan was to use a website called Club Roy that provides reading activities. However, the website is not supported by tablets, which most students use as a learning platform. Program developers should make content more accessible for all learners to gain access to the content. Since all the participants' preferred device is a tablet, another application was used for reading interventions. Using the Starfall application, students could find activities for both phonics instruction and whole word practice for vocabulary. The application offered other materials such as short storybooks, videos, and audio. Visual and audio support helps learners and scaffolds their learning. As stated by Flynn (2013), features such as audiovisual guidance helps students recognize words quickly and improves their print knowledge (n.p.). The educational games supported students' word recognition skills, including decoding and word identification skills.

4.3 Data Collection Tools

Based on findings from the preliminary research, Betts' leveling criteria was not followed when matching learners with the suitable level of books. Studies state that using IRIs must be cautioned when checking for reading accuracy because various variables affect the results (Burns et. al, 2015). Instead, flexibility was practiced, and the student's level were decided on based on observation of their performance and looking at their accuracy percentage. Other changes include additional tools that are more accurate and help to answer the research questions more directly. First, to answer the first research question about the leveled reading approach having an impact on students' word recognition skills, a word recognition assessment was added. When checking for word recognition skills, it is essential to test how automatically a child can read a word, indicating their ability to decode and identify a word (Christ & Cramer, 2011). Second, the previous phase of the research used a rubric to score students' fluency. The rubric produced subjective results, and so a more objective and diverse assessment scale was found. A multidimensional fluency scale was used to answer the third research question about the impact of leveled reading on students' fluency. The scale can provide formative information to guide instruction. It also provides summative data that shows students' development and progress. The scale is diverse because it assesses learners on multiple categories: Expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. Alongside the scale, an oral reading fluency rate assessment was conducted to find students' reading rate. Calculating the WCPM is a quick way to assess fluency and it gives an idea on a reader's automaticity (Rasinski, 2004).

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the findings of this study. Results will be displayed and analyzed in accordance with the research questions. Additionally, the information gathered will be used to answer the questions that this study aims to investigate. Before exploring the effects of leveled reading, data was collected from teachers using a survey. Then, diagnostic assessments were used to ascertain students' levels. The first exploration area was the significance of leveled texts on English language learners' word recognition skills. The second area was to measure the impact of leveled texts on students' accuracy. The final area to investigate was the impact of leveled texts on students' fluency. Additionally, a survey was sent out to parents to explore the topic of parental involvement.

5.2 Initial Data Collection

The initial data collection procedure included collecting data from English teachers using a survey investigating their views on leveled reading. The purpose was to identify the

prominence of leveled texts, why they are not utilized enough, and what teachers think about employing the leveled reading approach. Prior to the commencement of the interventions, participants underwent diagnostic assessments using an informal reading inventory that matched each reader with the appropriate level based on their needs. Diagnostic assessments are crucial in determining what reading level a child should be in.

5.2(a) Teachers' Survey

A survey was conducted amongst English teachers in a government school in Sharjah to collect data about their views on leveled reading and it is impacts. Data was mostly close ended with a few questions that asked teachers to explain their answers. Overall, teachers showed a positive outlook toward the concept of leveled reading and believe it plays a role in nurturing students' reading abilities.

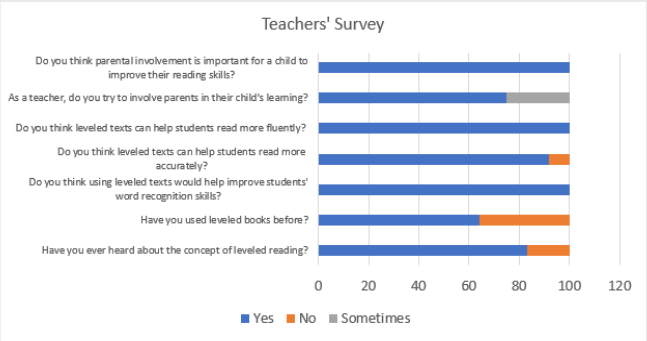

Figure 2: Teachers' Survey

The survey data shows that the majority of the English teachers believe that leveled texts can help improve students' fluency, word recognition skills, and overall reading abilities. However, contrary to their beliefs, when teachers were asked if they have used leveled texts before, 64 percent said yes, while 36 percent said no. There is significant evidence that schools are not utilizing leveled texts, although based on the survey results, many teachers view that it could improve students' reading skills. Studies revealed that teachers resist certain intervention strategies because they can be time-consuming and result in a higher workload. Moreover, not all teachers are equipped with the proper training that will allow them to conduct the specific reading assessments that come with leveling reading (Stentiford, Koutsouris, and Norwich, 2018).

Furthermore, the OECD released an evaluation report of schools in the UAE where it was revealed that school principals reported more staff shortage and less material shortage than the OECD average (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). Part of the survey investigates teachers' views on parental involvement, where teachers answered that they think it is essential for parents to help their children improve their reading skills. However, not all teachers try to involve parents as much as they should.

5.2(b) Diagnostic Assessment

IRIs were conducted to place students in their instructional levels. However, the preliminary research period proposed a few problems associated with following Betts' criteria (1946). Therefore, the criterion was not utilized. Instead, the students were given an accuracy percentage for several stories from varying levels. The level that the student could read most accurately was considered a book that was at their independent level. If the student made too many errors consistently, the book was considered at their frustration level. The book that was read moderately accurately was chosen to be the book that was at the student's instructional level. Previously, the reading scheme used for this research was the Oxford Reading Tree. However, due to the shift to online learning, participants used the e-books from Raz-kids. In comparing the two reading schemes, it was found that Raz-kids has a much more predictable story pattern (see Appendix I, p. 74). The Oxford Reading Tree pushes students to decode words by offering complex illustrations that do not directly express what is written in the passage (See Appendix I, p. 75), making it harder for students to resort to guessing the words. Thus, using Raz-kids to diagnose students' levels was challenging because of the predictable patterns of writing and illustrations that tell students what is written. Therefore, the assessor might doubt the student's skills and not know if they can read fluently or not. In addition, when reading stories from an easier level, students showed signs of disinterest and disengagement. Furthermore, when looking at the correspondence of the levels with the age groups, the Oxford Reading Tree offers more difficult content for younger age groups. In contrast, Raz-kids offers easier content for an older age group (see Appendix J, p. 76). Much of the implementation of leveled reading depends on matching learners with texts suitable to their level. However, the criteria in which these levels are decided must be clarified. These findings further highlight the importance of challenging learners to read less predictable books, rather than books that are too repetitive. Moreover, educational theorists like Vygotsky emphasize the value of providing students with learning experiences, which are encountered when they are faced with challenges they must overcome (O'rourke et al., 2016).

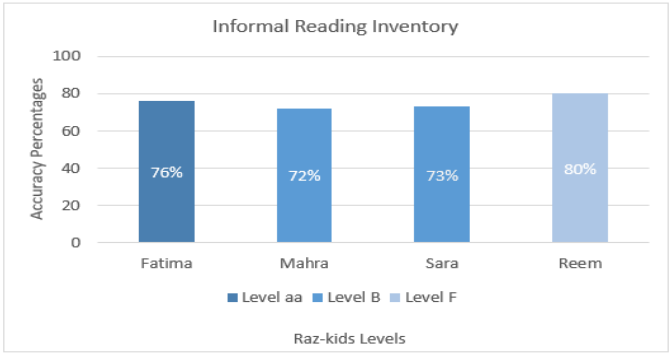

Figure 3: Informal Reading Inventory Results

Based on Betts' (1946) criteria, the accuracy percentage for the independent reading level should be 97%. The instructional reading level should be a percentage of 93% to 97%, whereas the frustration reading level is apparent when readers have an accuracy percentage of 93% or below. Based on the results illustrated in figure 2, one difference between the preliminary research and the current one is that students were matched with books that provide a higher level of challenge. According to Hastings (2016), students can only activate their problem-solving skills when they encounter challenging texts (p.69). Furthermore, a study was done to see if students who read at the frustration level with a teacher's guidance improve in reading, and the results showed a growth in reading performance (Araim, 2016). This evidence supports the theory that more challenging texts lead to the development of reading. Therefore, the percentages chosen for students as their instructional level where below what Betts considers the frustration level. The students were at levels aa, B, and F respectively based on the levels on Raz-kids. The student at the emerging level, Fatima was placed in level aa with an accuracy percentage of 76. The students at the developing level were placed in level B, where Mahra got a percentage of 72 and Sara scored 73 percent. Finally, the more advanced reader, Reem received a percentage of 80 at level F.

5.3 Significance of Leveled Texts on English Language Learners' Word Recognition Skills

To collect data to answer the first research question, a reading log was used to note down students' performance and errors, mainly in qualitative form, to inform instruction about which areas students need to focus on to recognize words more automatically. Another assessment tested students' word recognition abilities by reading isolated words from a list and scoring them on their accuracy for reading each word. This assessment was administered three times to check for improvements, and it gathers quantitative data.

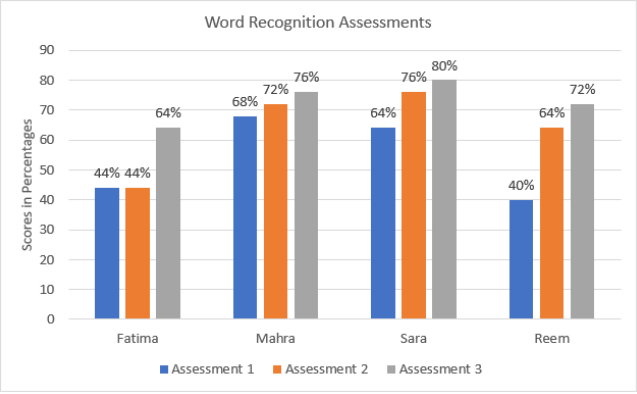

Figure 4: Word Recognition Assessments

As showcased in figure 4, all of the students' word recognition skills increased compared to their results from the first assessment. Fatima was assessed using the pre-primer level word list, and she struggled to read sight words in the beginning. During the second assessment, her score was the same; although, it is important to note that whereas she read the words incorrectly during the first assessment, she was able to read them accurately during the second assessment. The reason her score was unchanging is due to her having a higher percentage of untimed readings, i.e., words read slowly and not automatically. The rest of the students saw a steady increase in word recognition abilities by the end of the research period and could read words with increased automaticity. Christ and Cramer (2011) state that "Assessment of word knowledge in isolation provides essential information about the extent of children's sight vocabularies and the strategies and skills used to decode words in isolation" (p.19).

5.4 Impact of Leveled Texts on the Enhancement of Students' Reading Accuracy

Students underwent eight running record assessments, one at the end of each week. In order to show students' progress across the running records, the average results of students' running records were split based on four phases. The first two phases (first four weeks) were done using a lower level of books, whereas all students moved to a higher level during the last two phases (last four weeks). Thus, it would not be possible to compare the running records from the first two phases with the last two as they are done using books from a different level (see Appendix K, p. 77 for raw data). As students move to a higher level, they are expected to make more mistakes until they master that level. Consequently, when they move to a higher level, their running record scores are lower until they are able to improve their skills in reading that level of books.

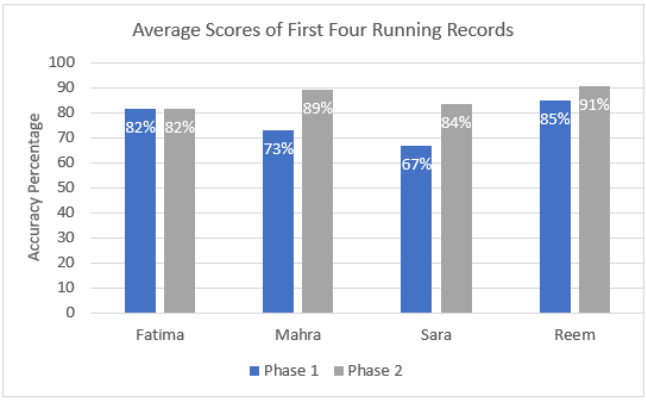

Figure 5: Average Scores of First Four Running Records

Looking at the running record averages from phases 1 and 2, there is an apparent increase in most of the students' scores. However, Fatima's average was the same due to the drastic difference in scores, where one running record was much lower, and the next being drastically higher. Fatima, being at a beginner reader, received an accuracy percentage of 95% in the fourth week, as she quickly caught on and applied the new skills, she learner, which is why she was moved to a higher level. According to Zrna (2012), "When teachers take Running Records on a regular basis to assess children's progress, they can use the information they gain to move

children from one text level to the next, through the gradient of text difficulty" (p.6). Thus, enabling the teacher to know when to move the child to a higher level.

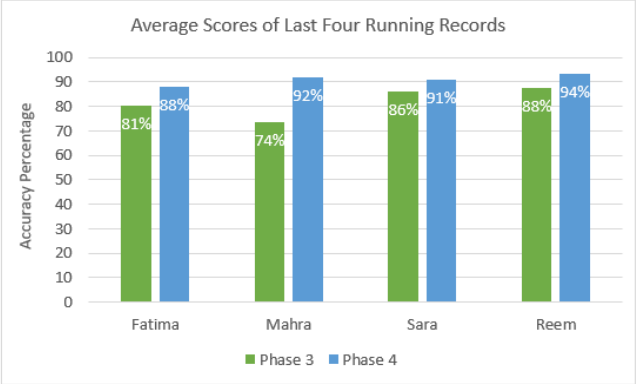

Figure 6: Average Scores of Last Four Running Records

The results from the last two phases were gathered using a higher level of books from when students started the leveled reading program. Figure 5 exhibits learners' substantial growth when comparing phase 3 with phase 4. These findings support the findings of researchers (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Hiebert, 1999; Peterson, 1990) who support the use of leveled texts due to their positive effects on students' reading accuracy and skills in general.

5.5 Impact of Leveled Texts on the Enhancement of Students' Reading Fluency

Students' reading fluency was assessed using two tools, one being the oral reading fluency rate, and the other is the multidimensional fluency scale. The oral reading fluency rate recorded students' WCPM across the eight weeks, and a steady improvement was seen. Additionally, students' fluency in reading has seen an improvement compared to their first reading performance.

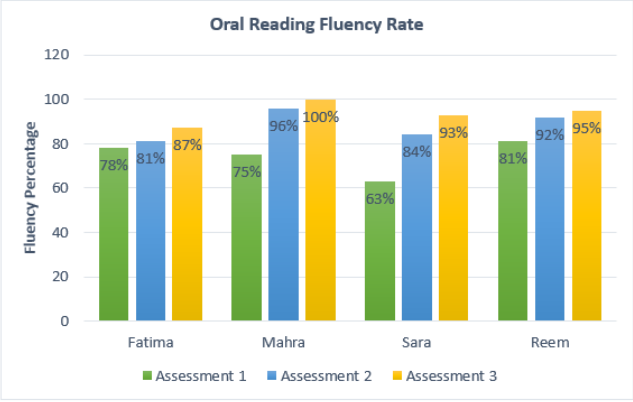

Figure 7: Oral Reading Fluency Rate

It is apparent from figure 7 that all of the students experienced an increase in WCPM, which is the fluency rate, after the implementation of leveled reading. While most of them made an increased number of errors in the beginning, with an average fluency rate of 74 percent, their average fluency rate by the end was 93 percent. This substantial evidence highlights the impact of leveled reading on fluency. Additionally, it shows that matching learners with texts that provide an appropriate challenge will allow learners to reap more benefits than just assigning all students the same text based on their grade level. According to O'rourke et al. (2016), there is a growing use of the 'one size fits all' approach in schools, where all learners are given the same text, which ultimately leads to adverse effects (p.151). Learners find it difficult to engage with the texts, let alone cultivate reading fluency skills that can only be practiced if the child is able to decipher the text. One study showed that after assessing over 3000 students in the United States from kindergarten through grade 12, it was revealed that there was a wide range of reading skills in each classroom, indicating a concern that students are assigned books that are not appropriate for their skills and level (O'rourke et. al, 2016, p.152). Furthermore, there are significant consequences to setting grade-level standards. In an article, Hargis (2006) wrote that "Some students enter a grade already exceeding the grade-level standards; others enter a grade without having reached the standards of previous grades" (p.394). Therefore, students must receive assessments to ascertain their levels so that content is tailored to their needs. To check for students' fluency performance, they were assessed based on four categories on the multidimensional fluency scale: Expression and volume, Phrasing, Smoothness, and Pace. Rater reliability is essential when rubrics are used. It ensures that multiple raters perform assessments producing similar scores. Studies proved that the multidimensional fluency scale is a highly reliable assessment technique. However, multiple assessors' ratings must still be considered (Smith & Paige, 2019). The fluency scale provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Three people used the rubric to score the reading performances of the four participants. One assessment was conducted prior to implementing leveled reading, and one was conducted at the end of the research period. The first observer was the researcher, the second was an acquaintance, who is an English teacher, and the third is an English teacher, whom the researcher is not acquainted with.

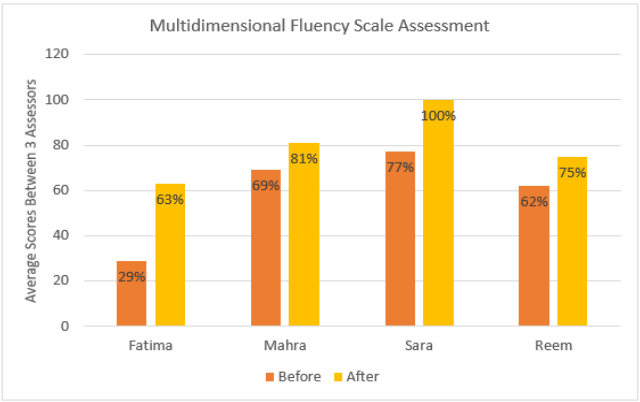

Figure 8: Students' Average Multidimensional Fluency Scale Assessment Scores between Three Assessors

Figure 8 highlights students' fluency scores before they underwent the research program. As the bar graph illustrates, after implementing the leveled reading program, all students' fluency scores increased based on the average scores provided by the three assessors (see Appendix L, p. 78 for raw data). Moreover, Fatima, who had first scored very low, has received a score of eight and above across the observers, indicating the achievement of a higher level of fluency. The inclusion of other observers accomplishes triangulation, in which various perspectives are regarded to extend and validate findings (P. Turner & S. Turner, 2009). Thus, further validating the results.

5.6 Parental Involvement

The parents of children who participated in this research were asked to complete a survey to gain feedback and insight into their views after the leveled reading program. Throughout the research period, parents were being involved in various ways, such as receiving comments about their child's performance, weekly reports, and recommendations on how they can help their child enhance their reading performance.

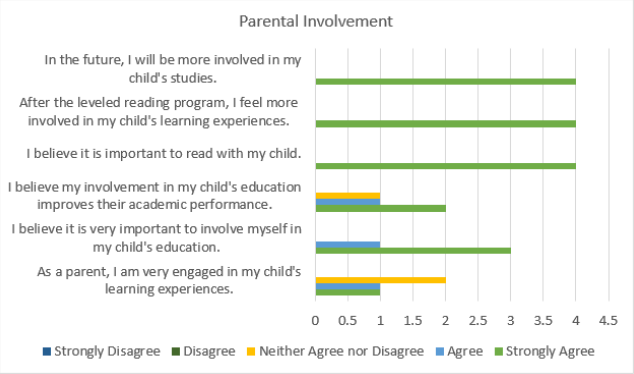

Figure 9: Parental Involvement Survey

Parents conveyed that before the research implementation, their views on parental involvement were generally average. However, after the leveled reading program, they feel more involved in their child's learning experiences. Throughout the study, parental involvement resulted in an increase in student activity, as parents provided encouragement to their children and reminded them to do their assigned tasks. This discovery is supported by studies that revealed how parental involvement is directly related to improved academic performance (Topor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins, 2010). Bandura's theory about self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief about their abilities to reach a goal. Adimora, Onyishi, and Helen (2019) state that "When parents are apparently concerned or involved in children's activities, it appears to energize the child's academic self-efficacy" (p.70). Therefore, self-efficacy, parental involvement, and academic success go hand in hand.

VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The conclusive details regarding the findings will be displayed in this chapter. The findings aim to present possible new ways to think about leveled reading and what ways to approach it with. Moreover, implications for further investigation can be derived from the following content. Some limitations and delimitations will be discussed, in addition to recommendations for further practice and research.

6.2 Summary of Findings

Analysis of the results found several significant implications for the leveled reading approach. First of all, the findings implicate that students experience reading growth when faced with challenging reading material. The conclusions of researchers Hastings (2016) and Araim (2016) support the same notion that this study presents. Concerning the first research question, findings from the word recognition assessments showed that participants' word recognition skills were at a consistent increase throughout the research. Students were able to apply new reading skills taught and practiced through the use of Haring and Eaton's (1978) Instructional Hierarchy. In regard to the second research question, based on running record results, students' reading accuracy grew substantially across the four phases of the research, further affirming the findings of researchers who support the use of leveled reading to increase students' reading performance (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Hiebert, 1999; Peterson, 1990). Looking at the final research question, all students experienced an increase in oral reading fluency, whereby their average scores by the end of the study were at 93 percent. This shows that when students engage with texts that are suitable to their needs, they can cultivate and hone their reading fluency (O'rourke et. al, 2016). Additionally, results from the multidimensional fluency scale revealed students' scores across three assessors, and it was apparent that all the participants' fluency scores grew immensely.

6.3 Conclusion

This study confirms previous findings, whereby the use of IRIs must be cautioned in terms of various variables affecting the results (Burns et al., 2015). Therefore, future IRIs should be more flexible in deciding students' instructional levels. An important finding that emerged from this study is that students must be provided with challenging material to help them activate their problem-solving and decoding skills. Overall, this study substantiated the use of leveled texts alongside reading interventions to enhance students' word recognition abilities, reading accuracy, and fluency.

6.4 Recommendations

A leveled reading scheme should be one that offers complex texts and less predictable illustrations, especially since students should be in the learning zone in order to gain new

skills, based on Vygotsky's theory (O'rourke et al., 2016). The survey completed by the schoolteachers highlighted important insights that show teachers' positive views of leveled texts, yet also revealing that the approach is not implemented enough. Teachers might resist using leveled texts due to an increase in workload. However, if teachers in the UAE were offered specialized training programs to assess learners and practice accurate intervention strategies, it would be less intimidating to use the leveled reading approach.

6.4(a)Recommendations for Practice

A common practice in the United Arab Emirates is the unification of all materials across all students of the same grade level. According to Al Nuaimi (2018), "The governing body writes the curriculum, sends them to schools with resources. Teachers implement these standards without adapting them to meet their students' needs" (p.61). Hargis (2006) states that "Curricular standards should not be assigned to the grades. Standards need to be determined for individual students" (p.394). Content must be tailored to students' needs and not generalized for all learners. While teachers perform reading interventions, it is recommended to follow the instructional hierarchy model proposed by Haring and Eaton (1978). It solidifies and consolidates students' reading skills, whereby they can practice and master skills gradually. Additionally, teachers should use weekly running records that assess learners' progress and rate of improvement. Above all, when picking a reading scheme to use with students, teachers must consider the predictability factor of the reading materials, where there is diverse content that engages all levels of learners.

6.4(b)Recommendations for Future Research

This study utilized e-books to perform the leveled reading program. Further research is warranted to find out what implications the approaches will have under different circumstances. It is recommended to investigate whether the approaches implemented will yield the same results if certain variables were replaced, such as using physical books, or a different reading scheme. Findings from this research, supported by findings from other studies implicate the positive aspects of reading in the frustration level (Araim, 2016). Therefore, it is encouraged to study the effects of matching learners to the frustration level of reading further.

6.5 Limitations

It must be taken into consideration that there were several limitations for this research and ways in which alterations were made to be able to collect sufficient data. First of all, some research practices were altered due to the global challenge caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, the research was done mostly using online, virtual tools, which is a deviation from the original plan. However, the most suitable tools that could assist this research the most were utilized. Second of all, the Raz-kids' reading program encompassed various stories that followed predictable writing patterns, word structures, and illustrations, making it difficult to judge students' levels. Therefore, caution was practiced surrounding the interpretation of running record results and accuracy percentages. Third of all, while using e-books is a very effective strategy since students can have access to tools such as highlighting words, listening to them, and adding them to their electronic word journal, there are some disadvantages. For example, there are connection problems where the book's pages take a while to load, which caused a hindrance during critical moments that involve assessments where each second counts toward the final result. This was combated by taking screenshots of the book so the student can move swiftly from one page to the next without needing the internet connection.

Summary

This study aimed to research the significance of using leveled texts in the improvement of second language learners' word recognition skills, accuracy, and fluency. The research was implemented with four students from the second grade who attend private schools in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. The research followed a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data. An informal reading inventory was used as a diagnostic assessment to ascertain students' levels. A reading log was used to note errors and interventions. Word recognition assessments tested students' word identification and decoding skills. Running records were utilized to check weekly progress on reading accuracy. A multidimensional fluency scale scored students' fluency before and after the leveled reading program, and the oral reading fluency rate assessment recorded students' fluency percentages. Additionally, one survey investigated English teachers' perspectives about leveled reading and their outlook on parental involvement, while another collected data from parents to gain insight into their views on parental involvement. Graphs were used to compare progress, while thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the results. The findings showed steady growth in word recognition abilities and improved automaticity. Analysis of the results found several significant implications for the leveled reading approach. First of all, the findings implicate that students experience reading growth when faced with challenging reading material. The conclusions of researchers Hastings (2016) and Araim (2016) support the same notion that this study presents. Concerning the first research question, findings from the word recognition assessments showed that participants' word recognition skills were at a consistent increase throughout the research. Students were able to apply new reading skills taught and practiced through the use of Haring and Eaton's (1978) Instructional Hierarchy. In regard to the second research question, based on running record results, students' reading accuracy grew substantially across the four phases of the research, further affirming the findings of researchers who support the use of leveled reading to increase students' reading performance (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Hiebert, 1999; Peterson, 1990). Looking at

the final research question, all students experienced an increase in oral reading fluency, whereby their average scores by the end of the study were at 93 percent. This shows that when students engage with texts that are suitable to their needs, they can cultivate and hone their reading fluency (O'rourke et. al, 2016). Additionally, results from the multidimensional fluency scale revealed students' scores across three assessors, and it was apparent that all the participants' fluency scores grew immensely. This study utilized e-books to perform the leveled reading program. Further research is warranted to find out what implications the approaches will have under different circumstances. It is recommended to investigate whether the approaches implemented will yield the same results if certain variables were replaced, such as using physical books, or a different reading scheme. Findings from this research, supported by findings from other studies implicate the positive aspects of reading in the frustration level (Araim, 2016). Therefore, it is encouraged to study the effects of matching learners to the frustration level of reading further.

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