

READING DIFFICULTIES THROUGH THE STUDENTS AND ITS EFFECT ON PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to assess the reading Difficulties among students and their effects on their teachers performance. The study was conducted in Jordan. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively with the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). From the total of 525 copies of questionnaire distributed, 431 copies, representing 95.0% were filled and returned. The findings showed that majority of the respondents acknowledge the importance of reading, 81.9% of the respondents neither read novel notification within the last two semesters while 62.0% of the respondents only read for the purpose of passing examination."The study confirmed that reading Difficulties has influence on teacher's performance and there is a relationship between reading Difficulties and teacher's performance. The study recommended among others that lecturers should be advised to stop providing handouts to students but rather encourage them to use the library for research and also, the current system of assessing students should be given a second thought with respect to the formulae of assessment.

Keywords: reading difficulties, performance, school teachers

1.1 INTRODUCTION

School systems are often challenged to meet the needs of students who are not performing at grade level expectations and provide support services to help those students to close the achievement gap. One program that has been adopted in the hopes of achieving that goal is Response to Intervention (RtI) which promotes early intervention for students who are only slightly behind their peers; however, state funding isn't available to operate this type of program.

For school sites where funding is limited, such as the one involved in this study, it is possible that the limited resources available for early intervention programs can be allocated towards a single subject area which can improve student performance in other areas. Since reading is a skill utilized in every academic subject area, it is a logical domain to examine for a correlation relationship with other subject areas.

According to Wixon, Peters, Weber and Roeber (1987), reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader, the text and the context of the reading situation. Reading process involves visual motor skills and perception of the symbols by the brain. It is generally broken down into two components: „reading“ the words, or decoding and understanding what is read, or comprehension (Cooper, Warnock & Shipman, 1988; Samuels, 1988). This study intended to use the definition according to Manzo and Manzo (1993) who define reading as the act of simultaneously reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines.

„Reading the lines“ is the process of decoding the words in order to reconstruct the author's basic message. „Reading between the lines“ is the process of making inferences in order to reconstruct the author's implied messages. This requires an understanding of the integral logic of facts presented as well as an understanding of connotative and figurative language. „Reading beyond the lines“ is the process of judging the significance of the author's message and constructively applying it to other areas of knowledge and experience.

The ability to read is an essential skill for students to master because information is presented in text throughout the world. Web sites, books, magazines, and newspapers, while sometimes including pictures for visual reference, utilize print to share information with the reader. Educational systems also rely more heavily upon text as students reach higher grade levels. In early elementary grades, students do not typically have textbooks at home and they primarily work with decodable readers and short stories borrowed from the library. However, beginning around third grade, textbooks are introduced to the home environment and students' abilities to pull and process information from textbooks becomes increasingly necessary for student achievement. By the time students reach high school, many history teachers expect students to build their background knowledge by reading at home and then demonstrate their understanding during in-class discussions.

The textbooks that students utilize in science, math, and history are typically several hundred pages in length, featuring diagrams, pictures, and, primarily, text to transmit knowledge about the subject to the reader. English teachers also assign novels and stories for reading at home. Unfortunately, textbooks are challenging for students to access. Textbooks use advanced vocabulary, cover a vast number of topics, use direct language that doesn't engage the reader, and lack the structure that promotes reading comprehension (Bryce, 2011). In primary school, students are still building their reading competence, but at the secondary level they are expected to have the necessary skills.

In this paper, data was collected on student reading performance and performance at the school site of study. The data was then assigned to performance levels and an average performance level

was determined for each student in reading. Finally, the performance levels for each student were analyzed to determine if a correlation existed between student reading performance and performance in individual grade levels and overall in grades two through five.

Statement of problem

It is important"to understand the correlation between reading performance and teacher's performance in other subject areas at the elementary grade level and to determine if there are key years where the correlation is strong enough to consider utilizing a reading intervention program as the primary intervention for low student performance in other teacher's areas. For this paper, reading performance includes fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary abilities as compared to grade level norms teacher's performance encompasses student performance on"summative assessments.

According to Lerner (2006), a number"of learners, for unexplained reasons, are unable to use reading as a tool for learning, getting new information, ideas, attitudes, and values from standard 4 upwards. Even after they have been taught, it is quite unfortunate that a large number (17.5 per cent) of them are unable to read efficiently at higher class levels (Lerner, 2006). According to Mercer and Mercer (2001), between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of school - going learners have reading difficulties. Lerner (2006) notes that, more than 17.5 per cent of learners have reading"difficulties.

The purpose of this paper is to extend the current research linking reading performance to teacher's performance by examining the relationship between reading and teacher's performance at the elementary level at Jordanian public secondary schools.

Reading and teacher's performance

Coining a"definition of acceptable reading to all educators and psychologists has been difficult and problematic. This is due to many perspectives with which different professionals may approach the same issue. This study employed the Piaget (1983) theory of cognitive development to define reading. According to this theory, mental development progresses as a result of learners" interactions with their surroundings. The role of the educator is to provide material and appropriate opportunities in which learners can interact (Piaget, 1983). The researcher, therefore, agreed with Manzo and Manzo (1993) view of reading"as the act of simultaneously "reading the lines", "reading between the lines", and "reading beyond the lines".

Typical reading"difficulties of adolescents with mild disabilities include problems with vocabulary, word recognition, reading comprehension and reading rate (Feagans, 1983; Hallahan, Kauffman & Liold, 1985). Reading problems stem from many causes, and is a

complex process as many reading difficulties can exist (Kluger & Kolson, 1978; Kirk et al., 1978). Bond, Tinkel and Wasson (1979) provide the following general classifications of the more prevalent reading difficulties: faulty word identification and recognition, "inappropriate directional habits, deficiencies in basic comprehension abilities, limited special comprehension abilities (such as inability to locate and retain specific facts), deficiencies in ability to adapt to reading needs of content fields, deficiencies in rate of comprehension and poor oral reading.

Comprehension Errors and Students teacher's Performance

Reading difficulties are the principal causes of failure in school (Carmine, Silbet & Kameenui, 1997). According to Mercer and Mercer (2001), between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of school-going learners have reading difficulties. Teachers should be in a position to identify a learner's problem including those related to reading from a holistic point of view in order to help such a learner manage academically in school (Dreikurs, Gronwall & Peper, 1998). Lerner (2006) also notes that teachers should identify children with reading problems early and provide them with appropriate early interventions rather than practicing the policy of wait - and - fail method (Lerner, 2006). Researches conducted in Kenya highlights that learners with problems in reading English have problems in school performance in general (Chege 1999, Kirigia 1991 & Njoroge 2000).

According to Jordan Institute of curriculum development, secondary education syllabus volume one (2002), the ability to read fluently is vital both in school and for life. Good reading skills will improve performance in all school subjects. Reading helps in information gathering and learning of concepts. Through reading, the learner is exposed to new vocabulary, new sentence structures and different registers. Reading also acquaints the learner with good models of language use. A good foundation of reading should be laid in Form One. This is because reading is a very important component of language learning. It will also help in the study of all other subjects.

Agbezree, (2001) on identification of reading disabilities and teacher oriented challenges in teaching reading to standard five concludes that the learners who scored poorly in the wordlist and reading passage were equally poor performers academically in primary schools. This was in line with the conceptual framework which indicated that both internal and external factors cause reading difficulties, hence poor academic performance. Further concludes that there is need to train the primary school teachers on the methods of identifying reading difficulties in learners to avoid learners' continued failure in school subjects.

Reading difficulties and learning disabilities argument

According to Runo (2010), about 80 per cent of all learners with learning disabilities experience reading difficulties. It is estimated that among all learners who have any sort of disability, 51 per

cent of them have learning disabilities. Inability to learn to read has been called “word blindness”, “alexia” or dyslexia. Reid et al., (2009) maintain that dyslexia is conventionally defined as difficulty in the ability to identify printed words and letters in learners who have at least normal average intelligence and who are not impaired by general learning difficulties. Estimates of the prevalence of learning disabilities vary widely ranging from 19 per cent to 30 per cent of the school population. Majority of learners with learning disabilities are found in regular schools. This means that there are many learners in Jordanian school population who have reading difficulties. This paper used the terms learning disabilities, reading disability and dyslexia to mean reading difficulties as teachers in secondary schools were not aware of their meanings or their differences.

Challenges of Dealing with Students with Reading Difficulties

Teachers face a lot of challenges while handling students with reading difficulties. The purpose of reading is comprehension and many students with reading difficulties lack that aspect of comprehension which poses a big problem to teachers trying to teach them. Learners with reading disabilities have problems with reading and spelling and find comprehension a challenge. They also find it difficult to transfer their thoughts to paper when answering comprehension questions.

According to Runo (2010) teachers faced such challenges as teaching sounds, inadequate materials, and inadequate time to teach reading and mother tongue interference. Lerner (2006) argues that problems of low self -esteem and poor social relationships are carried forward into adolescence where they can develop into learned helplessness, a significant drop in their confidence to learn and succeed, low motivation to achieve, attention problems and maladaptive behavior which can affect secondary school student's performance negatively. Many of the students end up dropping out of school before the duly time and others portray chronic absenteeism.

Research Methodology

Survey method with the use of questionnaire was used for data collection. Copies of questionnaire were administered on students of public schools in Jordan during class hours with the assistance of trained research personnel during the second semesters of the 2014/ 2015 academic year. Twenty percent (20%) of the entire public schools in Jordan student population of 3073 was sampled for the study through systematic simple random sampling technique. The sample size is supported by Babbie, (2005). He was of the opinion that for a population of 1000 and above, a sample size of 10 -20% is acceptable. To improve the Reliability and validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on similar but smaller sample group from

neighboring school during the second semester of the 2014/2015 academic year. Observed errors, corrections and re-wordings discovered were affected and incorporated into the main instrument from the total of five hundred twenty five copies of questionnaire distributed; four hundred thirty one copies were filled and returned, representing a response rate of 95.0%.

Table 1: Population of study

Schools	Total number	Sample Size	No Retrieved Per School	Percentage Retrieved Per Sch.
TAJ	1210	205	172	81.2
AAJ	987	163	148	16.7
IAJ	876	157	111	2.1
Total	3073	525	431	100

Field Data, 2014

The paper revealed that 62.5% of the respondents acknowledge the importance of reading and said reading helps them to express themselves better. However, the study also found that 81.9% had not read a novel or fiction within the two preceding semesters and only 18% said they had read a novel or fiction within the same period. The study further confirmed that 75.0% respondents engage in reading just to pass an examination. It was also confirmed in the study that 62.0% of the respondents visit the library to read class notes, 25.0% to read textbooks and only 3.0% visit the library to read novels or fiction. The study revealed that majority of the respondents had the view that reading habits have effect on teachers performance and that there is a direct relationship between reading habits and teachers performance. The study further found out that laziness is one of the basic hindrances to reading among the respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

School staff should encourage students to visit the library and read not only class notes but novels and fiction as well, and further borrow some from the library. The onus therefore lies with the library to always stock its house with novels and fiction.

It is further recommended that course like communication skills should be made mandatory for all first year students to read at least two novels or fiction in each semester and, non-scoring courses for all level 200 and 300 students for a semester but students need to pass that course before he or she can graduate. This will go a long way to inculcate reading habits into the students.

It is becoming quite a major issue in many academic institutions that students tend to depend on class notes rather than visiting the library for information. As a result, management of teacher's institutions should caution faculty staff to prepare only handout for students and they will complement it by further research in the library.

Finally it is recommended that parents should help their children cultivate the reading skills when they are young, so that it becomes part and parcel of their life. Today, there are many community libraries where children can be encouraged to go and read novels and fiction. When this is done, it will help them express themselves well and write good English which will eventually lead to better teacher's performance in the near future.

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