

The Impact of Explicit Phonics Instruction

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Abstract

This action research study was conducted to determine the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a 2nd grader's reading accuracy and speed. There was a problem with my students' accuracy and speed while reading a grade level text. I wanted to know how explicit phonics instruction impacted a 2nd grader's speed and accuracy on a cold read as measured by scores on pre and posttests. The participants in this study were current 2nd grade students in my classroom. I used pre and posttests as instruments to determine growth after Tier 1, explicit phonics instruction. A quantitative method was taken to score participant accuracy and speed as well as to determine the mean, median, and mode of overall cold read accuracy, phonics subskills of oa, igh, and long vowel silent-e, and words read per minute of all participants. The data concluded that explicit phonics instruction had a direct and positive impact for all participants in most areas.

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Chapter 1: Topic and Problem

Topic

The topic of this action research study is the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a 2nd graders accuracy and speed while reading. This aligns within the field of curriculum and instruction for a variety of reasons. First, many states have standards that require students to read and decode grade level appropriate words using phonics. For example, the Utah State Board of Education has one umbrella standard for 1st grade phonics skills: “Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words” (Utah State Board of Education, n.d.) However, they then list off an additional 7 sub-skills that mention specific phonics skills needed (USBE, n.d.) This means that teachers need instructional strategies and curriculum to teach those phonics skills. Additionally, many literacy curriculums already provide phonics instruction, but the amount and type of phonics instruction can vary based on the curriculum and grade level. For example, the basal reader Wonders has approximately 30 minutes weekly for phonics for 2nd grade (Shanahan, Fisher, & Hasbrouck, 2016) yet the 95% Core program has 30-45 minutes daily for the same grade level (95 Percent Group Inc., n.d.)

Researchers have explored the importance of explicit phonics instruction. Schwartz and Sparks (2019) assert that explicit phonics instruction is the “essential first step in becoming a reader.” Additionally, Langenberg’s (n.d.) summary of the National Reading Panel concludes that explicit phonics instruction is beneficial for all students in grades K-6, including students who are struggling to learn how to read. They further state that teachers must know how to “develop curricula and teaching methods based on the soundest and most scientifically rigorous studies” (Langenberg, n.d.) Lastly, Ehri (2020) details that systematic (explicit) phonics instruction is key in moving students into realizing patterns within words that then turns into

reading and recognizing words automatically and therefore becoming a fluent reader.

Consequently, it is evident that teachers must be aware of the research surrounding explicit phonics instruction and the impact that it has on student learning.

Problem Statement

There is a problem with my 2nd grade students' speed and accuracy while reading a grade level text. Students need to master grade level phonics skills so they can decode grade level texts. This may be occurring because the students have not had adequate explicit phonics instruction.

Problem Impact and Root Cause(s)

There is a significant impact on a child's learning if they are struggling readers. When students are not able to fluently read a grade level text, many academic areas are impacted. For example, their writing may suffer because they are unaware of how to spell certain words. Math problems may become more complicated when students must first decode the word problem. Science and non-fiction texts may also seem out of reach for a child who cannot decipher grade level phonics patterns. If students are unable to have appropriate speed and accuracy while reading, many academic areas are impacted. The Children's Reading Foundation (n.d.) supports this by stating that "children who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade struggle in every class, year after year, because over 85% of the curriculum is taught by reading."

Furthermore, if a child is unable to decode a grade level text, more than just their reading comprehension suffers. A lack of foundation reading skills can impact behavior and the ability to self-regulate. Morgan et al (2008) discovered that first graders who struggled with reading were "significantly more likely to display poor task engagement, poor self-control, externalizing

behavior problems, and internalizing behavior problems in third grade.” This means that students are impacted beyond reading in a short scope of time. Additionally, students who are unable to master proficient, grade level reading by 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out and not graduate from high school (Hernandez & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). This puts a larger scope in play with a more serious impact. More than just a child’s ability to read is at stake: lifelong skills like self-control and a steppingstone for a successful adult life are at risk.

It can be difficult to pinpoint a specific cause as to why a child struggles with reading. In fact, within the past few decades “the science of reading” has exploded with research and data to show what works best for reading instruction. If a teacher does not adequately cover the main aspects covered in the science of reading, like explicit phonics instruction, there could be potential issues in a child’s ability to learn how to read. Ehri et al (2018) discovered that when teachers were appropriately taught and mentored in phonics instruction, their students’ reading and spelling scores showed a significant improvement. Without proper support and training teachers may not have been teaching phonics effectively and students therefore were unable to learn the necessary skills.

Furthermore, this particular group of students has had a disrupted education for the past two years. In March of 2019, their kindergarten was abruptly moved online due to COVID-19. The following year in 1st grade, students attended twice a week for shortened days for about 1/3 of their year. Then they attended four days a week, still on a shortened schedule for another 1/3 of the year. The last 1/3 of the year they attended 5 days a week but still missed 2 hours of instruction each day on a shortened schedule. This is their first year of all day, normal school. Dorn et al (2021) conducted research and determined that students across the country lost anywhere between four and 12 months of educational ground depending on location and

demographic. A large and probable cause of students being unable to read on grade level is because they simply haven't had the instruction.

Research Questions

How does explicit phonics instruction impact a 2nd grade student's accuracy on a cold read as measured by scores on pre and post testing? How does explicit phonics instruction impact a 2nd grade student's speed on a cold read as measured by scores on pre and post testing?

Justification

There is a significant need to provide explicit phonics instruction to students learning to read. The impact of learning to read grade level texts is a necessity for students to succeed immediately, the near future, and long term.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction to the Literature Review

There are several themes regarding explicit phonics instruction and its impact on students learning to read in the literature and research. The first theme that was prevalent is that the modern foundation of American literacy focuses on the National Reading Panel findings. While this study was extremely comprehensive, additional research has been conducted to further support the need for explicit phonics instruction. An additional theme of evidence of reading growth as a direct consequence of explicit phonics instruction was repeatedly found. Lastly, a final theme of evidence that explicit phonics instruction works and is beneficial for a variety of learners in a variety of settings was determined.

Modern Foundation of American Literacy: The NRP

The best way children learn how to read has been debated for decades. In the late 1990s, American classrooms were caught in an instructional debate: what is the best way to teach children how to read? So dubbed the “reading wars,” educators had such differing approaches that the view of public education was threatened (Shanahan, 2005.) To determine the best instructional way to teach children literacy, President Bill Clinton and Congress authorized a panel to assemble and discover what the research said about reading. In 2000, the National Reading Panel was assembled and reviewed literature and studies on how children learn to read. The NRP consisted of 14 scholars and researchers who meticulously screened and reviewed previously conducted studies on literacy (National Reading Panel, 2000.) After two years of meeting, the NRP results were published in a nearly 500-page report aptly titled *Teaching Children To Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. From their review, panelists asserted a

variety of claims, which included that explicit phonics instruction was beneficial for young readers. From the NRP (2000) report:

In sum, these findings show that systematic phonics instruction helped beginning readers acquire and use the alphabetic system to read and spell words in and out of text. Children who were taught phonics systematically benefited significantly more than beginners who did not receive phonics instruction in their ability to decode regularly spelled words and nonwords, in their ability to remember how to read irregularly spelled words, and in their ability to invent phonetically plausible spellings of words. In addition, phonics instruction contributed substantially to students' growth in reading comprehension and somewhat less to their oral text reading skill. (p. 2-116)

While the NRP report is continued to be seen as “the cornerstone of federal literacy policy” (Shanahan, 2005), it did not address all areas of literacy for all types of learners. A growing population of our schools, English language learners, were not addressed. Additionally, because of the size of the report, many subgroups varied greatly in demographic, such as 2nd-6th graders, or had a vague label, like “disabled readers” (NRP, 2000, p. 2-117.) Further studies have been conducted to fill in what the NRP left out. While it was not perfect, the National Reading Panel report provides the backbone of American literacy instruction.

Evidence of Reading Growth with Explicit Phonics

While the NRP concluded that explicit phonics instruction showed growth, critics continue to use other methods of literacy instruction. However, multiple studies have shown that explicit phonics instruction has more growth when compared to a control or other style of instruction. Maddox & Feng (2013) proved just that when they compared explicit phonics instruction to whole language instruction. 1st graders that were part of the explicit phonics group

had double the score increase on a reading fluency test when compared to their whole language instructed peers. McGee et al (2015) found similar growth when researching 1st graders. They studied students who were identified as below grade level at the beginning of the year, enrolled them Reading Recovery (an explicit phonics instruction program), and compared their end of year reading tests. Students who had moved to on or above grade level had “more frequent use of letters, sounds, and word parts in attempts to solve unknown words” (McGee et al, 2015, p. 289) compared to their below grade level peers.

Additionally, explicit phonics instruction has been proven helpful to help to students with decoding and word chunking. Burton & Evangelou (2021) found that when students were explicitly taught word stems, their spelling scores showed significant improvement when compared to implicit and no-teach groups. Ehri (2020) details that explicit phonics instruction is key in moving students into realizing patterns within words that then turns into reading and recognizing words automatically and therefore becoming a fluent reader. They state:

Words may be read by decoding letters into blended sounds or by predicting words from context, but the way that contributes most to reading and comprehending text is reading words automatically from memory by sight. The evidence shows that words are read from memory when graphemes are connected to phonemes. This bonds spellings of individual words to their pronunciations along with their meanings in memory. Readers must know grapheme–phoneme relations and have decoding skill to form connections and must-read words in text to associate spellings with meanings. (2020, p. S45)

Large scale growth can also be seen with groups of students who learned to read through explicit phonics instruction. Sohn (2020) details events that have whole states showing significant gains on state-wide 4th grade reading scores after students have been taught using explicit phonics

instruction. Additionally, Sohn details that when students aged 5-7 in England were taught using explicit phonics instruction, “81% of the students passed...[and] reading comprehension at age 7 has risen, and gains seem to persist at age 11” (202, p. 4.)

Explicit Phonics with a Variety of Learners

Since the NRP was published, many studies have been conducted that supplement and provide insight to all types of learners. In 2006, August & Shanahan assembled a new panel that focused solely on students that speak English as a second language. Their research indicated that phonics instruction has “clear benefits for language-minority students” (p. 3.) Further studies have offered similar conclusions. Martínez (2011) conducted a study with Columbian 1st graders and found that English explicit phonics instruction made an impact in their reading comprehension, spelling, and verb usage. Coates, Gorham, & Nicholas found supporting results from their study with Italian students. Evidence from their study concludes that students with explicit phonics instruction “significantly improved in orthography and pronunciation” (2017.)

Studies have also been conducted with students with learning disabilities or identified as struggling readers. Schwartz & Sparks emphasize that “children at risk of developing future reading problems, children with disabilities, and children from all socio-economic backgrounds all benefited” (2019) from explicit phonics instruction. This may be in part because of the direct instruction that comes with explicit phonics instruction. Ortlieb & Cheek assert that students with a learning disability struggle more than their peers with the foundational skills and therefore “benefit from explicit instruction focused on sounds, letters, and the relationship between sounds and letters.” (2013, p.313)

Vadasy & Sanders conducted a study with kindergarteners identified as low performing in literacy. Students in the explicit phonics group were better at decoding, word reading, and

spelling compared to the control group by the end of the study (2020.) Furthermore, Copeland & Keefe (2018) assert that the structured and direct format of explicit phonics instruction allows “students to learn and apply new skills in a logical manner and have opportunities to continue to practice previously learned skills. Students with complex support needs, in particular, need this type of instruction.”

Additionally, the age group for phonics instruction has been widened. The NRP report studied grades K-12 but stated that “findings indicate that the strong impact of phonics instruction was evident in normally developing 1st graders as well as at-risk kindergartners and 1st graders” (2000, p 2-117.) Data beyond 1st grade was grouped into 2nd-6th grades. No data was reviewed beyond 6th grade. Studies hence have shown that explicit phonics instruction is beneficial to learners beyond 11 and 12 years old. Coates, Gorham, and Nicholas’s study was conducted on Italian high schoolers (2017.) In fact, the researchers admitted that the program materials had a “cognitive gap (the materials were designed for 8–12-year-old L1 learners)” (Coates, Gorham, & Nicholas, 2017) but their participants still showed significant phonics growth. Additionally, phonics instruction has been used on adult learners as well. Researchers Yoncheva, Wise, and McCandliss instructed adult learners in a new language. They then had them read words by sight or decoding and measured brain activity via EEG. Brain activity spiked when participants had to decode, “showing that learning via phonics generates more left-brain hemispheric activity than the whole word method” (Dean, 2015.)

Conclusion

While some teachers may disagree as to the impact of explicit phonics instruction, the evidence is very clear. The findings of the NRP in 2000 are still a critical part of American literacy to this day. Current research and publications support that explicit phonics instruction is

effective and has been proven to show growth for students learning how to read. Lastly, the findings of the NRP with explicit phonics instruction are further supported to show that explicit phonics instruction works with a variety of learners, such as English language learners, at a variety of ages. These themes all support my research questions. My research questions target a specific age group (7–8-year-olds) and how explicit phonics instruction will benefit that group in learning how to read. I will be documenting their change in growth by the accuracy and speed of a cold read story. Additionally, in my classroom, I have a diverse population with varying needs. The research has shown that explicit phonics instruction is just as beneficial, if not more, for my demographic.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Question(s)

How does explicit phonics instruction impact a 2nd grade student's accuracy on a cold read as measured by scores on pre and post testing? How does explicit phonics instruction impact a 2nd grade student's speed on a cold read as measured by scores on pre and post testing?

Participants or Stakeholders

For this research, I will be using participants. 17 students agreed to be participate in the study. All participants are in 2nd grade and will receive the same amount of whole group phonics instruction. Additionally, participants will have a variety of backgrounds and be at differing levels academically. This will provide data that is reflective of a wide population and the impact of explicit phonics instruction on different types of students. As the sole researcher, my relationship with the participants is that I am their 2nd grade teacher.

Data Collection Instruments and Methods

For this research, I will use a quantitative method. This method is justified because students will be scored on their accuracy and speed (words per minute) which is numerical data. No descriptions will be present which qualitative or mixed methods irrelevant.

To collect this data, students will be scored on a pre and posttest. Students will read an unfamiliar short story before instruction and another new story after instruction. Both stories will heavily feature the phonics patterns that will be taught. While reading, I will be marking their mistakes and timing them. After reading, I will calculate their accuracy overall, the accuracy of the phonics-based words, and their words per minute rate. Scores will be compared by pre and post individually as well as subgroups such as high academically, English language learners, and students with special education needs.

Using pre and posttests as my research instrument will address my research questions. I am specifically exploring the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a students' speed and accuracy. I will be measuring both and comparing their progress before and after instruction.

Data Analysis Techniques

One data analysis technique I will use is using the mean, median, and mode of students' accuracy and speed. Each of these data points will give me a viewpoint as to how the instruction went. Additionally, I will use those measures of central tendency to compare growth individually and within subgroups. For example, I can look at the mean scores of students who have special needs and compare the pre and post assessments for growth within just that subgroup. This addresses my research question on how explicit phonics instruction directly impacts students' accuracy and speed.

Timeline

The following is a proposed timeline for the research:

Days 1 & 2: Assess all students on cold read and determine accuracy and speed

Days 3-12: 60 minutes daily of Tier 1 explicit phonics instruction

Days 13 & 14: Assess all students on a cold read and determine accuracy and speed
Each step of this timeline is appropriate. For the first step, students must be tested in an environment isolated from other participants. This will require non-instructional time, of which there is sparing moments during the day. Two days will be necessary to screen students. Step two will require 10 hours of explicit phonics instruction given during a Tier 1/ whole group setting. This amount of time will be enough for students to learn and practice two separate phonics skills. The last step will be assessing all students on a cold read post-instruction. Similarly, to Step 1, this will require non-instructional time away from other participants. This requires two days for all students to read the story and have data collected.

Resources

This research requires a variety of resources. First, an explicit phonics instruction curriculum must be available. The proposed curriculum is 95% Core Phonics which includes a teacher manual, student workbooks, and a variety of tools (such as chip kits) to teach. This material is necessary as it is the required Tier 1 material for my district. This study will not be focusing and evaluating 95% Core Phonics as it has been deemed appropriate by curriculum advisors for Provo School District. This assessment will also require pre and post stories, copies of the story to be marked, pen/pencil, and a stopwatch. Pre and post stories will heavily focus on the specific phonics skills taught. These stories will be necessary to show if students learned and are able to apply the phonics skills that were taught. Additional testing materials (pens, stopwatch) are necessary to fully assess and evaluate students accurately. Lastly, a quiet testing environment away from the other participants will be needed. This will ensure that the participant reading will not be distracted and that other participants will not have an unfair advantage if they overhear the story being read.

Data Security and Confidentiality

Participants will be assigned a random number. Any data collected will be tied with that number, not their name. Hard copies of student permission, roster with random numbers, and assessments will be stored in a locked room in a locked cabinet.

Conclusion

Participants in this study are 2nd graders in my current class. Students will read a story and be timed for speed and accuracy. This quantitative study will compare growth between and pre and posttest. Measures of central tendency will be taken and used to compare students within the class and within subgroups. Data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and confidentiality will be kept by assigning students a random number and associating the data with a number.

Chapter 4: Results

Summary of Research

The purpose of this action research study was to see the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a 2nd graders ability to accurately decode a new text as well as their speed while reading. In order to assess this, students read an unfamiliar story (known as a cold read), received two weeks of explicit phonics instruction, and then read another cold read. Each cold read heavily used words with the phonics patterns oa, igh, and long vowel-silent e. 17 students agreed to participate however one student was removed from the study due to lack of instructional time received.

After giving the posttest cold read, I then compared pre and posttest data for each phonics skill as well as their words per minute and overall accuracy to calculate the growth. Using descriptive statistics of the mean, median, and mode, I was able to determine that explicit phonics instruction had a direct and positive impact on all participants reading.

Summary of Results

Analysis of Words Per Minute

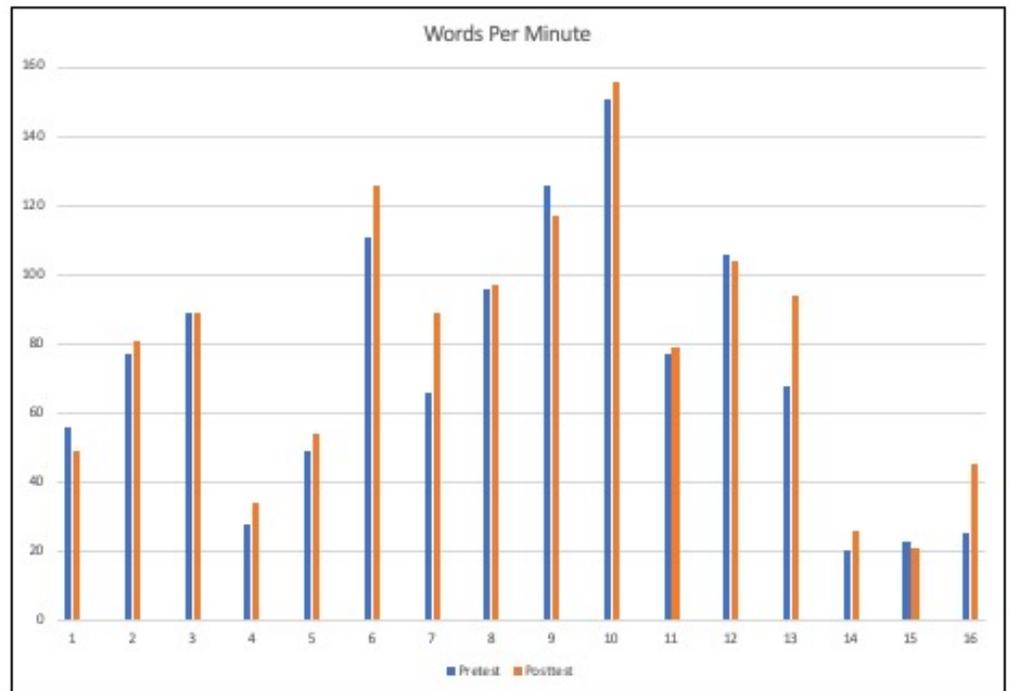
WPM Statistics

Pretest

- Mean- 73 wpm
- Median- 72.5 wpm
- Mode- 77 wpm

Posttest

- Mean- 79 wpm
- Median- 85 wpm
- Mode- 89 wpm



In the area of words per minute (wpm) read, all measures of central tendency increased between the pre and posttests. Mean scores had a smaller increase of only 6 wpm but the median and mode had an increase of 13.5 wpm and 12 wpm, respectively. 4 participants had a decrease in their wpm, 1 participant remained the same, and 11 participants had an increase in their wpm. When looking at the data, it is apparent there is a widespread between participants. Pretest raw data scores ranged from 20 wpm to 151 wpm and posttest scores ranged from 21 wpm to 156 wpm. Additionally, half of the participants had differences between their pre and posttest that were within 5 wpm, 3 participants had a 6-wpm difference, and 5 participants had difference of 9 wpm or more.

Analysis of Overall Accuracy

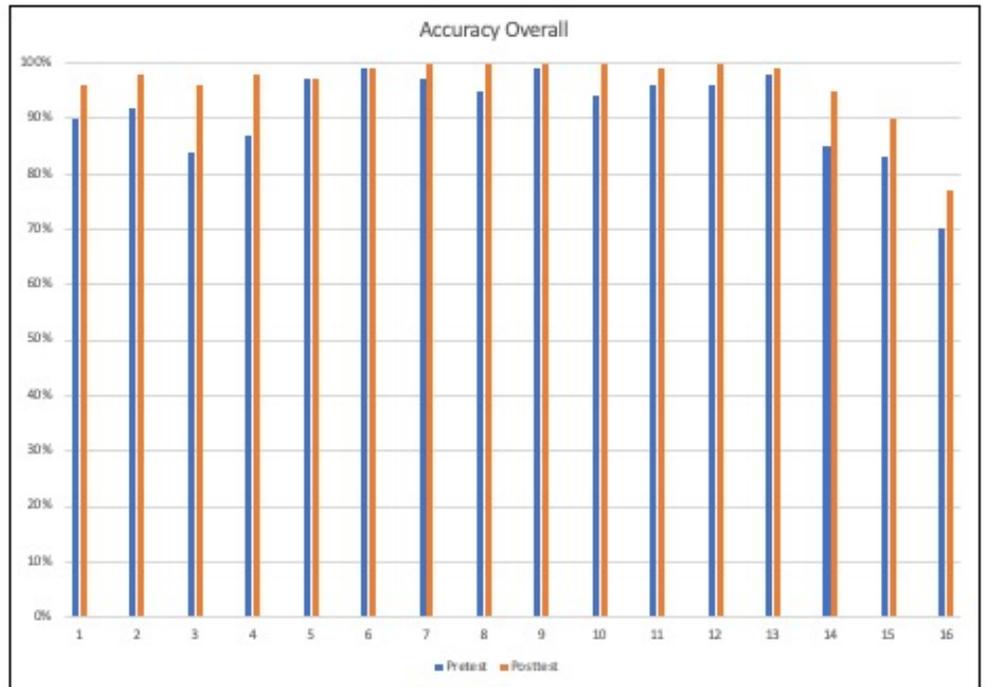
Accuracy Overall Statistics

Pretest

- Mean- 91%
- Median- 95%
- Mode- 97%

Posttest

- Mean- 97%
- Median- 99%
- Mode- 100%



In overall accuracy, all areas had a positive increase. The mean had an increase of 6%.

The median increased from 95% to 99%. The mode increased from 97% to 100%. When looking at the data, only 5 participants did not score a 90% or higher on the pretest yet on the posttest, only 1 participant did not score a 90% or higher. Additionally, 5 participants made no mistakes on the posttest. Lastly, the range of the pretest was 70%-99% but the gap closed slightly for the posttest from 77%-100% range.

Analysis of Accuracy Long Vowel Silent-E Words

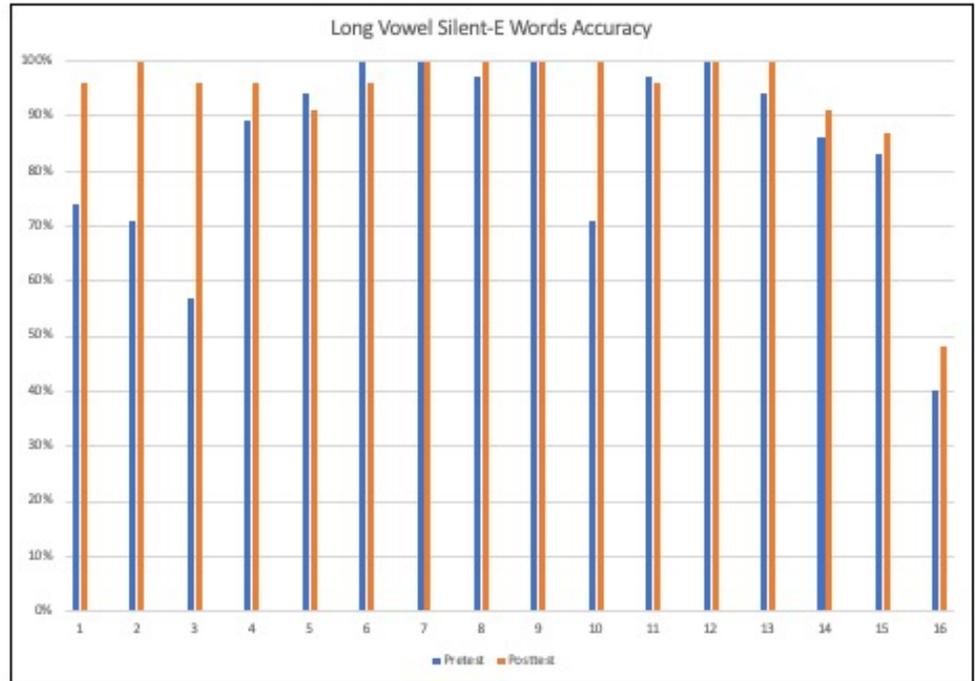
Long Vowel Silent-E Words Accuracy

Pretest

- Mean- 85%
- Median- 92%
- Mode- 100%

Posttest

- Mean- 94%
- Median- 96%
- Mode- 100%



For long vowel silent-e pattern words, participant mean accuracy scores increased 9% from 85% to 94%. The median increased from 92% to 96%. While the mode did not change from 100%, the number of participants who scored 100% accuracy almost doubled from 4 participants on the pretest to 7 on the posttest. Additionally, when looking at charted data, 5 participants showed double digit percentage growth and 4 of the 5 had growth over 20%. Lastly, only 3 participants had negative growth. All 3 participants scored over 90% on both the pre and posttests and had a difference of 4% or less between pre and posttests.

Analysis of Accuracy igh Words

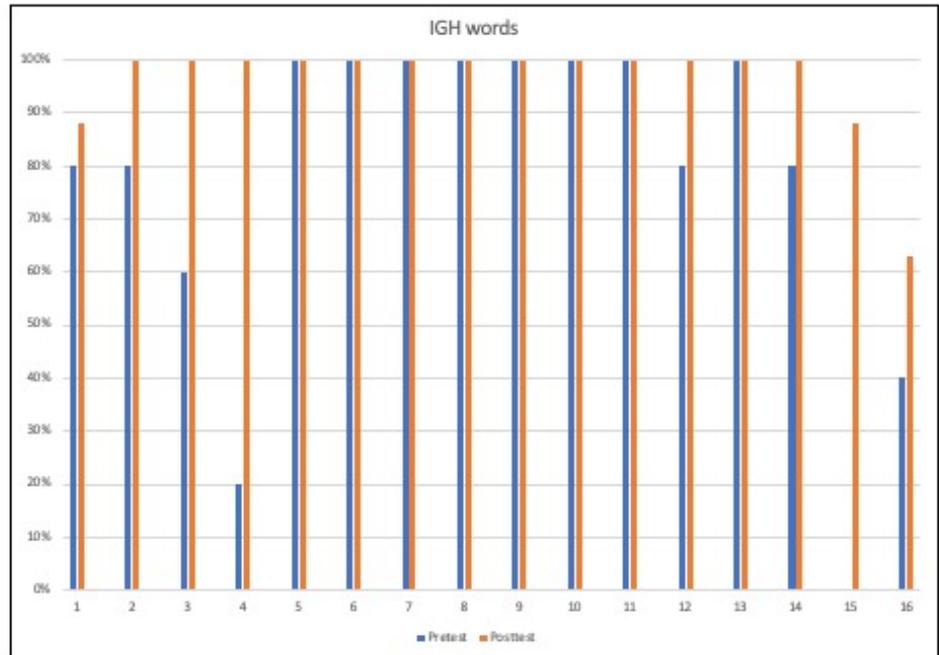
IGH Words Accuracy

Pretest

- Mean- 78%
- Median- 90%
- Mode- 100%

Posttest

- Mean- 96%
- Median- 100%
- Mode- 100%



For the accuracy of reading words with the igh spelling pattern, both the mean and the median increased. The mean increased from 78% to 96%, a 18% increase. The median score also increased from 90% to 100%. While the mode did not change, 8 students scored read 100% of igh words correctly on the pretest while 13 students read 100% on the posttest. The pretest scores had the total range from 0%-100% while the posttest range was significantly smaller from 63%-100%. When looking at the collective data, all students showed improvement or had no mistakes on the pre and posttest. Only 1 participant scored below 80%, which is considered mastery level.

Analysis of Accuracy oa Words

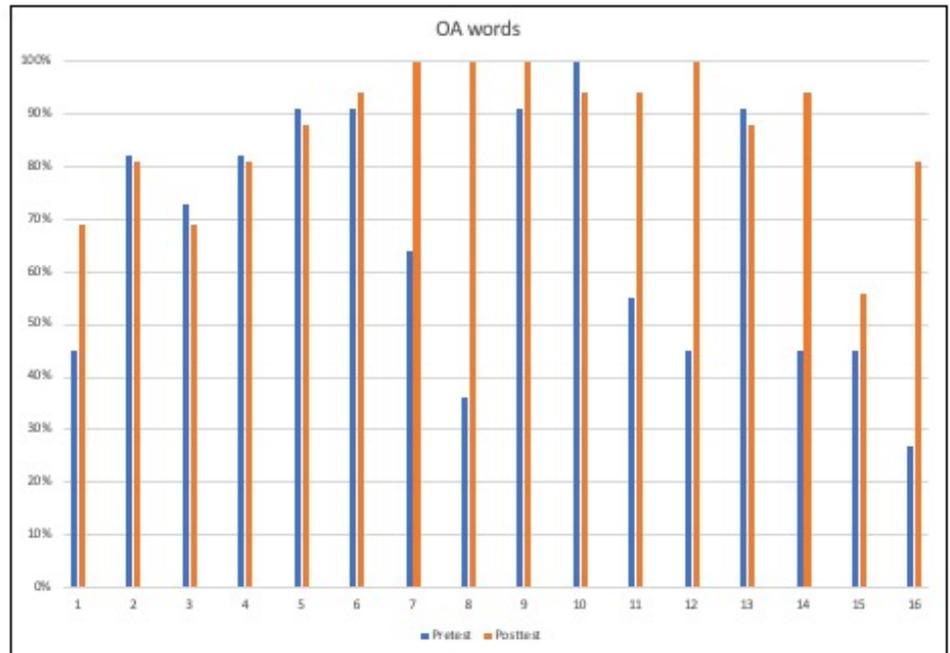
OA Words Accuracy

Pretest

- Mean- 66%
- Median- 69%
- Mode- 45%

Posttest

- Mean- 87%
- Median- 91%
- Mode- 94%



All measures of central tendency showed double digit positive growth. Mean accuracy scores improved 21%, with pretest scores averaging 66% and posttest scores averaging 87%. Median scores also improved from 69% to 91%, a 22% increase. Lastly, the most common score for accuracy of oa words on the pretest was 45% however on the posttest it was 94%. Additionally, the range of scores on the pre and posttest shrank. Pretest scores ranged between 27%-100% accurate while posttest scores ranged between 56%-100%. Of the 9 participants who scored below 80% on the pretest, 6 scored above 80% on the posttest.

Implementation

To implement this research, I first obtained permission from my school principal as well as my school district's coordinator for student research. After receiving permission, I obtained IRB approval to work with a vulnerable demographic. Once approval from the IRB was granted, I then began asking for participants from my classroom.

While waiting for participant permission, I began to compose both the pre and posttest cold reads. While they are not identical, I try to have a similar number of words that focused on the phonics pattern between the pre and posttests. For example, the pretest cold read had 35 long vowel silent e words and the pretest had 23. Additionally, I coded each test so I could visually see the pattern words. Some words appeared to follow the phonics patterns that would be taught, like 'eye' or 'were', however they were not coded because they phonetically do not follow the explicit phonics rule. Lastly, I ran each reading through a Flesh-Kincaid readability formula to ensure that both stories were similarly leveled.

Once each story was written, I also determined a set of rules to use while assessing students. While reading, students would be reading one-on-one to minimize distractions. They would read the story aloud and if they said a word incorrect, I would not correct it. Additionally, they would have 3 seconds to sound out a word before I provided it for them. If they said a word but were unsure as to if it was correct, I would provide no verbal or nonverbal signals as to if it was correct or incorrect. Lastly, if a student requested a word, I would wait 3 seconds, minus an approximate amount of time they spent trying to sound it out. For example, if a student was attempting to sound out a word for 2 seconds, then requested help, I would wait 1 second before providing the word for them.

After student permissions were collected, each participant was given the pretest. The pretests were then scored for overall accuracy, words per minute, accuracy of oa words, accuracy of igh words, and accuracy of long vowel silent-e words. I also calculated the measures of central tendency, mean, median, and mode, for each category. One participant did not complete the reading. That same participant was removed from the study because for their academic benefit, they participated in a different phonics program in a smaller group and therefore did not have the same Tier 1 instruction as the rest of the participants.

Once all pretests were completed, Tier 1 instruction was given using the 95% Core Phonics program. Students received 30 minutes-1 hour, Monday-Friday of explicit phonics instruction in a whole group setting. Students participated in whole group activities such as sound-spelling mapping, word chains, and sorting pattern words as well as individual tasks such as identifying pattern words, reading stories and answering comprehension questions, and using sound chip kits. Students completed 5 days each of 95% Core Phonics Grade 2 Lesson 4 (long vowel silent-e) and Lesson 6 (oa as in oat and igh.)

After all instruction, students were given the posttest. I followed the same protocols for the posttest as I did for the pretest. After all students had taken the pretest, I calculated the same accuracies and measures of central tendencies. I then compared student scores to compare growth in each area.

Answers to the Research Questions

The data from this research supports that explicit phonics instruction has a positive impact on a 2nd graders ability to accurately read. Overall accuracy showed improvement and individual phonics skills accuracy showed even great gains. Some areas showed significant improvement that included double digit percentage gains. Additionally, the majority of

participants had an increase in their reading speed. In fact, the posttest mean, median, and mode wpm rates, of 79 wpm, 85 wpm, and 89 wpm respectively, all approached the recommended 2nd grade end-of-year reading rate goal of 90 wpm. This supports that explicit phonics instruction also improves a 2nd graders speed while reading an unfamiliar text.

Product

For this action research study, I implemented the 95% Core Phonics program. This program is a Tier 1 explicit phonics program. Each day, students participated in 30-60 minutes of phonics instruction that focused on one skill. Skills changed after 5 days of instruction. Instruction was supported using a visual presentation created by 95% Group as well as 95% student workbooks.

For the first week, students learned about long vowel silent-e pattern words, which was Lesson 4 of 95%. Day 1 of instruction consisted of whole group phonological awareness, modeling the phonics pattern, and sorting words. Then students sorted words based on the phonics pattern in student workbooks. Next, students participated in whole group sound-spelling mapping before completing sound-spelling mapping activities in their workbooks. The last activity was to find and underline phonics pattern words in a passage. Day 2 instruction looked very similar: phonological awareness, reviewing the phonics pattern, and sorting words. However, students completed sound-spelling mapping with a sound chip kit. They also read the previously underline passage and answered a comprehension question about the story. Day 3 of instruction continued with the phonological awareness, reading phonic pattern words, sound-spelling mapping with chip kits, and underlining phonics pattern words in a new passage. Day 4 of instruction again started with phonological awareness and continued with reading high frequency words, creating word chains, and reading the passage that was underlined on Day 3. On the last instructional day of this skill, students again had phonological awareness, practiced

spelling high frequency heart words, read fluency words and phrases, wrote dictated sentences, and then completed a skills check (spelling test.) After that, they reread the two passages from the week and answered written comprehension questions about both stories.

For the second week, students completed Lesson 6 of 95% which focused on oa as in oat and igh. Day 1 started with phonological awareness, modeling the new phonics pattern, sorting words based on the phonics pattern, sound-spelling mapping, and then underlining phonics pattern words in a passage. Day 2 followed similarly with phonological awareness, reviewing the phonics pattern, sorting words based on the phonics pattern, sound-spelling mapping with chip kits, and then reading the previously underlined passage and answering comprehension questions. Day 3 again started with phonological awareness and followed with word reading accuracy, syllable mapping, morphology of inflectional endings, and ended with a new passage being underlined that followed the phonics pattern. Day 4 had phonological awareness, reading of high frequency words, word chains, morphology of possessive and plural possessive, and reading the previously underlined passage. On the last instructional day of this skill, students again had phonological awareness, practiced spelling high frequency heart words, read fluency words and phrases, wrote dictated sentences, and then completed a skills check (spelling test.) After that, they reread the two passages from the week and answered written comprehension questions about both stories.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Overview of Conclusion

This study provides further evidence that explicit phonics instruction is beneficial to foundational readers. The majority of participants had positive growth in accuracy overall and accuracy with specific subskills as well as their speed while reading after Tier 1 instruction using explicit phonics instruction. Additionally, if participants had a lower accuracy on a subskill between the pre and posttests, the deficit was 5% or less with the exception of one subskill of one participant being a of 6% (dropping from 100% on the pretest to 94% on the posttest.)

This study supports the idea that explicit phonics instruction is beneficial for those students learning to read. Teachers, coaches, and administration should continue to use explicit and systemically planned phonics instruction to support students learning or struggling to read.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Methodology

One strength of this study was the lack of any type of judgment-based scoring. When scoring students' reading, many teachers assess fluency- which is speed, accuracy, and expression. It can be difficult to assess a reader's fluency because grading their intonation and expression while reading requires personal input that can be skewed. This particular study was very clear cut- they either read the word correctly or they did not and their speed was calculated using numbers.

Another strength of this study was the type of learner that participated. 7 boys and 9 girls participated in the full study. The participants ranged from above grade level readers to well below grade level readers, predetermined by Acadience Reading tests. Additionally, participants have a variety of home backgrounds and family input, which can influence how much time is spent reading at home. Lastly, more than one participant has an Individualized Education Plan.

One weakness of this study was using stories to assess student learning. Some participants may have been able to use comprehension reading strategies, such as using context clues, to determine unfamiliar words. This means their accuracies could have been higher. A potential solution to this could have been to use a list of words out of context or make-believe/nonsense words that follow the phonics patterns.

Influential Factors

An influential factor of this study is that the researcher is their sole teacher. This could have led to participants overperforming or being hyper vigilant while reading in order to impress someone they have direct and daily contact with. Additionally, students knew that they were being graded and timed. This could have caused some testing anxiety and lead to errors that would have not been normally made.

Recommendations for Further Investigation

One recommendation for further investigation would be to replicate the study but use a list of words instead of a story to check for accuracy and speed while reading. This would eliminate the use of context clues to support students while reading and let them truly only use their phonics skills. Additionally, continued research into explicit phonics instruction programs could be developed. Research could be done to evaluate educational programs used to facilitate teachers and their phonics instruction.

Barriers or Limitations of Implementation

One barrier or limitation of this data is the small population size and smaller age range. All participants were in 2nd grade and 7 or 8-years-old. Additionally, only 16 students participated. With a smaller sample size, the variety of learn background in the participants could be limited.

Implications of Research on Educational Practice

The research collected is another support for explicit phonics instruction. As teachers, it is necessary to teach what is the most effective and beneficial for students. Explicit phonics instruction has been proven to be effective. It is best practice to support learners by providing explicit phonics instruction.

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Appendix A

The described lessons are from 95% Core Phonics program for grade 2. Materials are copyrighted and therefore provided only in part below. Licensing for all materials can be purchased through 95% Group.

Lesson 4- Long Vowel Silent-E	Learning Target: I can read and write words with the long vowel silent-e syllable pattern.
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 1</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Introduction to phonics pattern and syllable type- long vowel silent e • Model phonics pattern and introduce keywords and sounds • Sort pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort pattern words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound-spelling mapping use pattern words, introduction of silent-e v connections <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound-spelling mapping using pattern and review words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage “At the Lake”- underline phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue underlining pattern words in “At the Lake”

<p style="text-align: center;">Day 2</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV • 95% Chip kits 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Review and model phonics pattern- long vowel silent-e • Read pattern words • Introduction to syllable type- open syllable • Model syllable pattern • Sort words based on syllable pattern: open, closed, long vowel silent-e <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort words based on syllable pattern: open, closed, long vowel silent-e <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model sound spelling mapping using chip kits <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound spelling mapping of long vowel silent-e, open syllable, and closed syllable using chip kits <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read underline words in passage “At the Lake” • Read passage “At the Lake” • “At the Lake” Comprehension question
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 3</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV • 95% Chip kits 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Word reading accuracy of open and long vowel silent-e syllable words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound spelling mapping of long vowel silent-e, open, and close syllable words with chip kits <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllable mapping 2 syllable words following the closed-closed pattern <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllable mapping 2 syllable words following the closed-closed pattern <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage “Twigs from a Vine”- underline phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue underlining pattern words in “Twigs from a Vine”

<p style="text-align: center;">Day 4</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Fluency reading- high frequency words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency reading- high frequency words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word chains <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word chains <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read phonics pattern words in “Twigs from a Vine” <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read phonics pattern words in “Twigs from a Vine” • Read passage “Twigs from a Vine” <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension question from “Twigs from a Vine”
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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 5</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • High frequency words- sound-spelling mapping of heart words ‘write’ and ‘know’ • Fluency reading- phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency reading- phonics pattern words <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency practice- phonics pattern phrases <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency practice- phonics pattern phrases • Sentence dictation • Skills check/spelling test <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage reading: “At the Lake” • Comprehension questions for “At the Lake” <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage reading: “Twigs on a Vine” • Comprehension questions for “Twigs on a Vine”
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<p>Lesson 6- oa as in oat and igh</p>	<p>Learning Target: I can read and write words with oa as in oat and igh.</p>
<p>Day 1</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Introduction to phonics pattern and syllable type- vowel team • Model phonics pattern and introduce keywords and sounds • Sort pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort pattern words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound-spelling mapping using pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound-spelling mapping using pattern and review words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage “Roaming Goat”- underline phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue underlining pattern words in “Roaming Goat”
<p>Day 2</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV • 95% Chip kits 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Review and model phonics pattern- vowel team • Read pattern words • Sort words based on phonics pattern: igh, oa as in oat, or no <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort words based on phonics pattern: igh, oa as in oat, or no <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model sound spelling mapping using chip kits <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound spelling mapping of vowel team and close syllable words using chip kits <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read underline words in passage “Roaming Goat” • Read passage “Roaming Goat” • “Roaming Goat” Comprehension question

<p style="text-align: center;">Day 3</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Word reading accuracy of vowel team and multisyllable closed-closed pattern words <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllable mapping 2 syllable words following the closed-closed or closed-silent e pattern <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllable mapping 2 syllable words following the closed-closed or closed silent-e pattern <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflected endings: -ed and -ing <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing sentences using verbs inflected endings -ed and -ing <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage “A Toad’s Life”- underline phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue underlining pattern words in “A Toad’s Life”
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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 4</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • Fluency reading- high frequency words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency reading- high frequency words <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word chains <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word chains <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Possessive and plural possessive • Sentence writing using possessive and plural possessive • Read phonics pattern words in “A Toad’s Life” <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read phonics pattern words in “A Toad’s Life” • Read passage “A Toad’s Life” <p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension question from “A Toad’s Life”
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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 5</p> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher manual • Student workbook • 95% Presentation • Smart TV 	<p>Whole Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness- sound substitution • High frequency words- sound-spelling mapping of heart words ‘your’ and ‘both’ • Fluency reading- phonics pattern words <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency reading- phonics pattern words <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency practice- phonics pattern phrases <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency practice- phonics pattern phrases • Sentence dictation • Skills check/spelling test <p>Whole group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage reading: “Roaming Goat” • Comprehension questions for “Roaming Goat” <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage reading: “A Toad’s Life” • Comprehension questions for “A Toad’s Life”
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Appendix B

Evaluator Running Record Pretest

Student: _____

One night, Eve wanted to make a cake. "I might ask Toad to loan me a pan," she said. Eve went to Toad's but he was not home. She left a note and walked away with a sigh. "I hope he will be back soon," said Eve. She began to walk home but a huge vine blocked her path. "Whoa!" Eve yelled. "How will I get home? I can't rake this vine but I might be able to prune it?" Eve started to chop the vine into small pieces. "This is too much! I just want to bake a cake!" Eve moaned. "Hello? Who is there?" a voice croaked. "It's me, Eve!" she shouted. "Eve! It is Toad!" Toad popped up out of a hole. "I wanted to give you these." Toad gave Eve the pans. "Let me give you a ride home so you can bake your cake!" Toad and Eve rode home. Eve made a delightful cake for Toad. They were happy.

Word count: 164 words

Time:

Wpm:

Accuracy overall:

Accuracy of oa words:

Accuracy of igh words"

Accuracy of long vowel silent e words:

Student Copy of Pretest

One night, Eve wanted to make a cake. "I might ask Toad to loan me a pan," she said. Eve went to Toad's but he was not home. She left a note and walked away with a sigh. "I hope he will be back soon," said Eve. She began to walk home but a huge vine blocked her path. "Whoa!" Eve yelled. "How will I get home? I can't rake this vine but I might be able to prune it?" Eve started to chop the vine into small pieces. "This is too much! I just want to bake a cake!" Eve moaned. "Hello? Who is there?" a voice croaked. "It's me, Eve!" she shouted. "Eve! It is Toad!" Toad popped up out of a hole. "I wanted to give you these." Toad gave Eve the pans. "Let me give you a ride home so you can bake your cake!" Toad and Eve rode home. Eve made a delightful cake for Toad. They were happy.

Evaluator Running Record Posttest**Student:** _____

One night, a boy walked his dog down a long road. Soon, the boy got tired. He spoke to his dog and said "I wish you were a goat so I could ride you!" The dog groaned. His nose started to grow! In the light of the moon, the dog turned into a goat! The boy hopped on his goat. "Whoa!" the boy yelled. "You make a mighty fine goat!" They went down the road, jumping over holes, vines, and toads. They were having loads of fun when suddenly five, huge snakes popped up. "What will we do?" croaked the boy. "We must fight! That will make us safe." The boy and his goat raced to the snakes. "I don't like these snakes! Use your feet, goat!" The goat jumped up and kicked the snakes. They went soaring through the air! "You are the best goat!" the boy boasted. The two walked home in the bright moonlight. "I had a fun time but I hope you turn back into my dog," the boy sighed. The goat made a moan and closed its eyes. Just as quick as it happened, the goat became a dog. "What a night this has been!" the boy said.

Word count: 203 words

Time:

Wpm:

Accuracy overall:

Accuracy of oa words:

Accuracy of igh words:

Accuracy of long vowel silent e words:

Student Copy of Posttest

One night, a boy walked his dog down a long road. Soon, the boy got tired. He spoke to his dog and said "I wish you were a goat so I could ride you!" The dog groaned. His nose started to grow! In the light of the moon, the dog turned into a goat! The boy hopped on his goat. "Whoa!" the boy yelled. "You make a mighty fine goat!" They went down the road, jumping over holes, vines, and toads. They were having loads of fun when suddenly five, huge snakes popped up. "What will we do?" croaked the boy. "We must fight! That will make us safe." The boy and his goat raced to the snakes. "I don't like these snakes! Use your feet, goat!" The goat jumped up and kicked the snakes. They went soaring through the air! "You are the best goat!" the boy boasted. The two walked home in the bright moonlight. "I had a fun time but I hope you turn back into my dog," the boy sighed. The goat made a moan and closed its eyes. Just as quick as it happened, the goat became a dog. "What a night this has been!" the boy said.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Student (K–12) Classroom Research

*Western Governors University - Teachers College
Master of Science: Curriculum and Instruction
Katrina Shultz Goodson*

The Impact of Explicit Phonics Instruction

Introduction

My name is Katrina Goodson and I'm currently a graduate student researcher at Western Governors University. I am researching the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a student's reading accuracy and speed. Approval by the [REDACTED] principal and [REDACTED] District Director of Assessment, Data, and Research to conduct this study was obtained prior to this announcement. By signing this consent form, parents or legal guardians agree to allow their child to participate in the study. Any data collected will be reported as part of a group; individual student names will not be used.

Description of the Project

This study will focus on the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a student's reading speed and accuracy. Students will be taught phonics via the 95% Core Phonics program. A pre/posttest method will be used to show changes in reading speed and accuracy. The research will be conducted during the school day during the daily, one-hour language block. The study will run for 14 days: 2 days for pretests, 10 days of instruction, and 2 days for posttests. Instructional time will be 10 hours.

All students will participate in 95% Core Phonics as part as our routine classroom instruction. Students are voluntarily participating in data collection related to reading speed and accuracy. If a student chooses not to participate in the study, they will continue with regular, routine classroom activities.

Benefits and Risks of the Study

Some students may feel anxious about being timed while reading and having mistakes marked. However, this is a routine assessment and will be done in a similar fashion as Acadience benchmark and progress monitoring assessments. All anticipated risks of participation in this study are minimal and no greater than those that are normally encountered in normal daily classroom activities. Students will also be informed that their participation or nonparticipation in the study will not influence their grades in any way.

Students will be told that we are looking to see how teaching phonics helps them read. Possible participant benefits may include an increase in phonics understanding, reading speed, and reading accuracy. The study may also help the researcher and other educators understand the impact of explicit phonics instruction on a child's ability to read.

Confidentiality

The data gathered from this research will be private and confidential. Your child's information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your child's name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your child's name will not be used in any report. Data will be reported in the aggregate.

Voluntary Participation

95% Core Phonics is our district curriculum for phonics instruction and all students are expected to participate in those activities as part of our regular classroom instruction. However, students may opt-in to the reading pre/posttest and data collection. Students that choose to not participate in or withdraw from the study will not be required to do the reading pre/posttest or have data recorded.

Withdrawal

Participants may withdraw at any time from non-regular classroom instruction and will not be penalized for nonparticipation. To withdraw from the study, the parent or participant must notify the researcher. Parental or legal guardian consent, as well as permission from the school principal or district administrator, must be granted in order for the student researcher to gather data for the purposes of their research project. Participants or their parents can request that their individual results be excluded from the final report. Grades/enrollment will not be impacted in any way as a result of withdrawing from this study.

Questions, Rights, and Complaints

Participants and their parents/legal guardians have a right to view the results of the study. If you have questions about this study, please contact me, Katrina Goodson, by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at kshult8@my.wgu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights, unresolved questions, or complaints pertaining to the study, contact the WGU IRB Chairperson by email: irb@wgu.edu.

Consent Statement

By signing this document, the administrator grants permission for student data collection and all reporting necessary for this study.

By signing this document, the parent/legal guardian grants permission for their child to participate in the study and has the opportunity to have his or her questions answered.

Student participants will be informed of the research purpose and activities and will be asked for their assent to participate upon parental approval.

<u>School Administrator Signature</u>	<u>Student Signature (Assent)</u>
<u>Title of School Administrator Typed</u>	<u>Student Typed/Printed Name</u>
<u>School Administrator Typed/Printed Name</u>	<u>Date (Student)</u>
<u>Date (School Administrator)</u>	<u>Parent/Legal Guardian Signature</u>
<u>School Administrator Phone Number</u>	<u>Parent/Legal Guardian Typed/Printed Name</u>
<u>School Administrator Email Address</u>	<u>Date (Parent/Legal Guardian)</u>