

Spring 2017

Lowering Language Demands: How High-Frequency Word Homework Activities Affect Kindergarten Word Recognition

Katie Marie Meyer
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all

Recommended Citation

Meyer, Katie Marie, "Lowering Language Demands: How High-Frequency Word Homework Activities Affect Kindergarten Word Recognition" (2017). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 136.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all/136

This Master's Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects and Master's Theses at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Running head: LOWERING LANGUAGE DEMANDS

Lowering Language Demands: How High-Frequency Word Homework Activities Affect
Kindergarten Word Recognition

Katie Marie Meyer

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education

California State University, Monterey Bay

May 2017

©2017 by Katie Meyer. All Rights Reserved

LOWERING LANGUAGE DEMANDS

Lowering Language Demands:

How High-Frequency Word Homework Activities Affect Kindergarten Word Recognition

Katie Marie Meyer

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Kerrie Chitwood, Ph.D.
Advisor and Program Coordinator, Master of Arts in Education

Casey McPherson, Ph.D.
Advisor, Master of Arts in Education

Erin Ramirez, Ph.D.
Advisor, Master of Arts in Education

Kris Roney, Ph.D. Associate Vice President
Academic Programs and Dean of Undergraduate & Graduate Studies

LOWERING THE LANGUAGE DEMANDS

Abstract

With the growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States, increasing early literacy in students who come from non-dominant language homes and from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is becoming increasingly important. Lowering the language demands of home-based activities is an opportunity to improve reading skills in kindergarten students, especially in ELLs. This quasi-experimental quantitative study used a pretest/posttest design to investigate the benefits of assigning homework based solely on 25 high-frequency words. The control group ($n = 13$) received traditional weekly reading homework packets and the treatment group ($n = 13$) received weekly high-frequency word packets with five flashcards per week. Independent samples t-tests and paired t-tests were conducted to determine the difference in student achievement scores. The results suggest the use of high-frequency word homework packets did not significantly affect student achievement in reading. Implications include that merely lowering the language demands of the home-based activities is not sufficient in increasing family involvement in kindergarteners' reading.

Keywords: high-frequency words, homework, kindergarten, family involvement

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Literature Review.....	1
Learning to Read.....	2
The Homework Debate.....	2
The Role of Family.....	4
Choosing Appropriate Homework.....	5
Method.....	7
Intervention.....	11
Procedures.....	11
Ethical Considerations.....	13
Data Analyses.....	14
Results.....	14
Discussion.....	16
Limitations & Future Studies.....	18
Summary.....	19
References.....	21
Appendix A.....	27
Appendix B.....	28
Appendix C.....	29

Lowering Language Demands:

How High-Frequency Word Homework Activities Affect Kindergarten Word Recognition

Literature Review

For the past half-century, the percentage of kindergarten students attending an extended or full-day schedule has been steadily increasing (Walston & West, 2004). With the removal of the statute limiting the kindergarten school day to no more than four hours, there was a dramatic increase in American kindergarteners attending full-day programs (Baldassare, Bonner, Kordus, & Lopes, 2016). As of October 2013, more than three-quarters of kindergarteners are enrolled in a full-day program, according to the United States Census Bureau (2015). There is ample evidence of the benefits of a longer school day for kindergarteners, including the fact that children in these classes spend more time on each of the academic subjects (Walston & West, 2004). Additionally, full-day kindergarten programs are associated with higher scores in early word reading, and teachers have reported higher reading scores later on in elementary school for students in such programs (Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016).

Conversely, kindergarten teachers who work in a half-day setting often feel restricted by the reduction in allotted instructional minutes and feel pressure to teach only Language Arts and Mathematics (Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman, & Meisels, 2006). This can make kindergarten a less creative and more stressful experience for both students and their teachers; especially in light of the changing demands on students as new standards are adopted and curriculum evolves. The majority of the United States has taken the initiative to extend the kindergarten school day in response to the increasingly rigorous academic standards that require reading mastery of kindergarteners, yet teachers who remain in a half-day settings continue to struggle to meet these expectations (Gibbs, 2014).

Learning to Read

No longer is kindergarten devoted exclusively to learning letters and numbers. According to the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), kindergarteners are expected to develop both social and academic oral language, and they must also develop the skills and concepts that are prerequisites for written language (California Department of Education, 2013). Most importantly, kindergarteners must begin to achieve reading mastery in order to prepare them for the academic rigor of first grade (California Department of Education, 2013). There are a number of component skills required to develop reading mastery. These components include alphabet knowledge and letter-sound correspondence, phonological awareness, and oral language (Heath et al., 2014).

A lack of phonological awareness and low oral language skills in parents are widely-accepted predictors of children who will struggle with early literacy (Bergen, Zuijen, Bishop, & Jong, 2016; Heath et al., 2014; Sim, Berthelsen, Walker, Nicholson, & Fielding-Barnsley, 2014), and even develop dyslexia (van Bergen, de Jong, Maassen, & van der Leij, 2014). As most family members do not have training in the key components of reading mastery, primary educators with specific training best teach these skills in early literacy. However, given the time constraints within a half-day instructional schedule, many students could benefit from additional practice (outside the classroom) in one or more of these key component skills.

The Homework Debate

Considering the pressures that accompany short school days, it is crucial for educators to maximize their instructional strategies for literacy in early childhood education, including deciding which standards can be mastered through home-based activities (i.e., homework). When it comes to homework, Cooper (1994) has published the most readily accepted definition, stating

that homework consists of “tasks that teachers assign to students that are meant to be completed during out-of-school-hours” (p. 7). Interestingly, findings related to the impact of homework on academic achievement in elementary-aged students are inconclusive and unclear (Bempechat, 2004).

Specifically, mixed empirical data exists in the literature regarding homework. Many studies have argued that homework plays an important role in achievement of early readers (Bempechat, 2000; Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Dudley & Shawver, 1991; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Marzano, 2003; Mo & Singh, 2008; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). However, many educators and researchers maintain that homework has only a slight effect on primary students, if any at all (e.g., Kralovec & Buell, 2001; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). The inconsistency that comes with operationalizing variables regarding both homework and academic achievement has resulted in a wide range of conclusions involving this matter (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Additionally, most research on the effectiveness of homework has been conducted at the secondary level, and the evidence that has been published for elementary school is mostly qualitative and outdated (Cooper, 1989b; Cooper, Jackson, Nye, & Lindsay, 2001; Epstein, 1988). For all of these reasons, primary teachers have been debating the cases for and against homework for decades. Rather than debating the case for the benefits of *homework* on elementary school students’ learning and achievement, it may be more significant for teachers to focus on the impact of *parental involvement* on elementary students’ learning and achievement, which has shown to have a significant impact on student achievement (Cooper, 1989b).

The Role of Family

Literature defines parent involvement in various ways; for this study, parent involvement is defined as: the context of the participation of parents, guardians, older siblings, or any other caretaker that may guide home-based school activities. According to Cooper (1989b), family involvement leads to more positive attitudes about school. When parents read with their children and help them with school assignments, children are unconsciously absorbing the idea that school matters and that reading is important, which tends to lead to higher reading achievement later on in the child's education (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Similarly, Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, and Simpkins (2005) found that high levels of family involvement in home-based activities led to positive feelings about literacy and positive performance in literacy in students from kindergarten through fifth grade. Therefore, rather than focus on the benefits of assigning homework, primary educators should emphasize the importance of parent participation in homework. Initiating discussions about school with questions such as, "Tell me about what you did in school today," or "Remind me to read you a story before bed," can have extraordinary positive effects on children's notions about school.

Despite its potential impact on student achievement, increasing parent involvement in homework is not always an easy task. Many reasons exist as to why parents are not more involved in their children's education. For example, parents have reported neglecting their children's home-based activities due to the multiple demands on their time, such as cooking, chores, and relaxing (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Another factor impeding family involvement in student learning is the ability level of the family member facilitating the activity. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggest that a strong predictor of parent involvement is their feelings of self-efficacy in helping with their

child's homework. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's personal capabilities (Bandura, 1997), and Ardelt and Eccles (2001) have proven that parents' self-efficacy is a strong predictor of children's self-efficacy and even academic achievement. Whereas parents with high self-efficacy raise children who feel similarly, parents with lower parenting self-efficacy who do not feel capable of helping their children often unintentionally affect their children's self-motivation (Baker & Heller, 1996). Parents who have not yet acquired the target language are bound to feel inadequate in assisting their children with schoolwork. With the growing prevalence of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States, the language barrier frequently interferes with parents being able to help their children with Language Arts homework (De Gaetano, 2007; Rahman & Azim, 2015; Thelamour & Jacobs, 2013). If family members are not capable of helping with homework, then students are left on their own to complete the tasks, which can serve as a significant obstacle to kindergarten students who cannot yet read independently.

Choosing Appropriate Homework

One solution that may encourage family members to become more involved is to decrease the academic language demands of the homework so that it is more accessible to non-native English speakers and uneducated parents. Because letter names and sounds vary according to the alphabet of the given language, alphabet knowledge is a demanding concept of the English language; adults who do not have a command of letters and sounds will not be successful in teaching other components of reading, such as phonological awareness (Armbruster, 2010). If parents do not have alphabet knowledge of the target language, it is not feasible to expect parents to help with literacy homework. Thus, it would be best for teachers to avoid assigning homework that involves these concepts.

If parents are capable of helping their children with the assignment, kindergarten homework gives parents a starting point for academic discussions (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009). This can lead to positive parent-child interactions about school, which in turn results in more valuable learning (Maertens & Johnston, 1972). As Epstein and Becker (1982) point out, the key for the teacher is prescribing appropriate homework given the skill levels of both the students and their parents; otherwise, parents will be less inclined to participate. Therefore, teachers must provide rapid and convenient support for parents as either they assign reading homework, or they can assign activities that require fewer English reading skills. Parents are more likely to devote time to their children's education if they feel they will be successful in improving their children's learning (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

One such alternative to homework that demands parent-reading skills is assigning activities related to practicing high-frequency words. High-frequency words, also known as sight words or Instant Words (Fry, 1980), are a set number of words that students can memorize to help them with early reading (Ravitch, 2010). Learning high-frequency words is a relatively simple cognitive task for students and their families, considering the countless online resources that can assist with proper pronunciation of sight words, and the possible advantage of utilizing older siblings who likely have memorized these words previously.

Although homework is usually centered on practicing the skills that students learn in class (Epstein & Becker, 1982), with the limited instructional minutes of a half-day kindergarten, the effects of assigning homework involving skills that are not practiced in class (e.g., high-frequency words) could be highly beneficial for both student learning and teacher efficiency. If family members could master the reading standard for memorizing sight words, not only would

the teacher's instructional minutes be free to focus on the more demanding elements of early literacy, but relations between students and their families could also improve.

Despite high-frequency word homework's possible effect on kindergarteners' literacy achievement, a gap in the literature exists regarding its effectiveness for ELLs and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. It is uncertain if creating systematic homework assignments for at-risk kindergarteners that focus on automaticity of words has any effect on oral reading diagnostic tests. Because the language demands of recognizing high-frequency words are fairly low (unlike skills such as alphabet knowledge, letter-sound correspondence, phonological awareness, and oral language), there are significant implications for greater success involving high-frequency word homework as a means of increasing student literacy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the effects of assigning nightly high-frequency word activities on word-recognition tests in kindergarteners. Overall, the goal is to lower the language demands to create homework assignments that combine basic student skills with positive parent-child interactions about school in order to improve student reading achievement and thus maximize instructional time for the teacher.

Method

Research Question

Does assigning nightly homework focusing on high-frequency words affect kindergarten students' sight-word recognition?

Hypothesis

Based on Fry's research (1980), assigning nightly homework centered on Fry's first one hundred Instant Words (Fry, 1980) will improve achievement on oral reading diagnostic tests.

Research Design

This study used a quantitative experimental design involving a treatment and control group. The treatment group received homework intervention while the control group did not receive the intervention. There was an equivalent amount of ELLs in each group, and each group had equivalent achievement levels in high-frequency word recognition.

Independent variable. The independent variable was early literacy homework involving high-frequency words. A high-frequency word, also known as a sight word or Instant Word (Fry, 1980), is any highly common word that successful early readers memorize rather than decode (Ravitch, 2010). There are 22 high-frequency words that Californian kindergarteners are expected to memorize, but the most common list of sight words that primary educators use is much more extensive. This list comes from Edward Fry's first one hundred "Instant Words"; Fry (1980) has revealed that half of written English is made up of only these words and their variations.

Dependent variable. The dependent variable was achievement in high-frequency word recognition. This was measured in a binary fashion using Fry's one hundred Instant Words (Fry, 1980). Students were assessed by the researcher on whether or not they could recognize the given word in three seconds or less. This time limit served as a way to determine that the child had developed automaticity with the given word, which demonstrated mastery rather than decoding the word (Chateau & Jared, 2000). The word recognition test was administered before and after the five weeks of sight-word homework.

Setting and Participants

The study took place in a central California school district located in an agricultural community. The study used stratified random sampling to monitor kindergarten students in a

school comprised of 89.4 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged students and 62.9 percent ELLs. First, the class was split into ELLs and English-only speakers in order to account for the families who would encounter difficulties with assigned homework due to the language barrier. Next, each of these two groups was split into three subgroups according to achievement level on the high-frequency word recognition portion of the district-required kindergarten assessment. Finally, every other student was chosen from each subgroup until there was a relatively equal amount of each of the ability levels split into two groups: the treatment and the control.

Treatment and control groups. The treatment group and the control group consisted of generally the same demographics. Based on the criteria by which both samples were chosen, they had equivalent numbers of ELLs and English-only students, and a similar number of students from three ability levels: high, medium, and low. The ability levels were determined using the students' scores on the Basic Phonics Skills Test, which is a district-mandated assessment for kindergarten and contains a raw score for 22 sight words. There were 13 students in each group, chosen randomly after stratifying according to the criteria above.

Measure

The measure came from Edward Fry's instant one hundred (Fry, 1980), which are one hundred words determined by frequency in written English, such as "they," "have," and "here." Fry developed this list by compiling thousands of samples of written language in English and analyzing the frequency of words in all of them collectively (Fry, 1980). The participants practiced five words per week for five weeks, so they were expected to memorize only 25 words instead of the entire list of one hundred words. The 25 words were selected because they were never explicitly introduced or studied inside the classroom; so students were unlikely to have recognized them in the pretest. The students were assessed individually by a proctor on whether

or not they could recall each word in under three seconds, which demonstrates automaticity of said word. If so, the word was “checked” and considered memorized. The measure was given one-on-one to every child before the treatment as a pretest, and after the five-week study as a posttest. The order of the words was changed between the pre and posttests (see Appendices A and B).

Validity. The measure was a binary assessment that used a list created by Edward Fry, who is an expert in the field of word recognition (Fry & Kress, 2012). Additionally, districts nationwide use similar tests to determine amount of early word knowledge acquired. As the study sought to determine high-frequency word recognition, rather than a more linguistically demanding skill such as fluency or comprehension, it was valid for the purposes of this study. The measure did not take more than five minutes per child to administer.

Reliability. The researcher was reliable in measurement because each participant either recognized the word or he or she did not. For example, if the sight word was “about,” the researcher would check it off if the participant said “about” in three seconds or less. If the participant did not say “about” in three seconds or less, the researcher would move on to the next sight word without placing a check mark.

In order to ensure inter-rater reliability, another teacher oversaw and administered a portion of the pre- and posttest. Five students were chosen at random, approximately 20% of the sample, and the outside teacher oversaw these students’ assessments. The outside teacher and the researcher scored each student simultaneously, and both teachers came to at least an 80% agreement with the results.

Intervention

The intervention consisted of varying homework assignments for the treatment and control group. The homework assigned to the treatment group contained five pages of homework. The packet was collected on Friday. Each weekly list contained five of the most frequently occurring words in the English written language, also known as Instant Words (Fry, 1980) or high-frequency words. For each list, students were asked to read, trace, and write each sight word. They also were given flashcards to practice daily, and one worksheet per word to complete. The directions were written in English and Spanish to facilitate parental support, and online resources were suggested to help families pronounce the words correctly.

The control group received weekly packets of homework containing a few activities in four varying subjects, including fine motor skills, Mathematics, letter-sound correspondence and reading for fluency. A few examples of these activities included drawing and labeling objects, dictating previously read stories to a family member, and copying colors or numbers. These packets were also collected each Friday.

Procedures

Before beginning the study, parents of every child in the class received a written letter in English and Spanish that outlined the fact that homework may be different from student to student and ensured the best intentions for their children. Next, all students were assessed on the high-frequency word-recognition pretest. The class was split into two groups using stratified random sampling. One group was randomly assigned as the treatment group, with the other serving as the control group. The treatment group was sent home with high-frequency word packets, while the control group received the other homework packets. On the first Friday, the researcher collected all of the homework packets. This process continued four more times. After

five weeks passed and five weekly packets were collected, the researcher administered the posttest with the help of a colleague.

Data collection. The study began with a pretest. All participants were assessed on the previously selected 25 of Fry's first 100 Instant Words. Fry's Instant Words were determined through an in-depth analysis of over five million running words in various forms of text, such as magazines and textbooks (Fry, 1980). Fry condones using them as an oral reading diagnostic test, but advises that the teacher not ask students too many at a time, especially for younger children (1980). The test administrators "checked" any words that the student correctly identified in under three seconds, which – as previously stated – demonstrated automaticity. The posttest was administered after the five-week homework packet intervention.

The homework packets were collected from both the treatment and the control groups at the end of each week; participants who did not complete the intervention activities were noted. No other data were collected within the five-week period of the intervention.

Fidelity. The researcher ensured fidelity to the intervention by sending home a letter to parents of both the treatment and the control groups revealing the nature of the research (see Appendix C). The letter did not include any details of the study specifically, but it did include the fact that some students may not be receiving the same homework as others. This letter was not meant to deceive parents, but rather keep them focused on their own child's homework rather than comparing their child's homework to that of others. The researcher also discussed the homework packets with the participants, letting the children know that they should not be completing anyone else's homework assignment other than what is sent home. The researcher also had a colleague present while the intervention homework packets were passed out to the participants. This ensured that only the treatment group received the intervention. The

intervention maintained fidelity because the participants and their families only completed the homework packets that they were assigned.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the study was conducted correctly, it was necessary to maintain confidentiality of the participants at all times. It was also critical that the researcher did not completely withdraw from teaching students about sight words inside the classroom. If high-frequency word instruction was removed from the classroom, the control group would not have any exposure to these words, which would be unfair to these participants. Furthermore, this intervention was intended as an at-home supplement to classroom-based reading instruction, not as a replacement. Considering the study should not negatively affect any student's learning, the classroom teacher continued with classroom instruction on high-frequency words as usual.

Validity threats. The main threat to validity that existed in the study was if parents from the control group deviated from the normal homework routine. One possible way this might have occurred is through parents from the treatment and control groups discussing the homework packets with one another. If this had happened, the parent from the control group may have become worried that his or her child was not receiving the "better" homework. In order to be capable of concluding statistically accurate results in the study, it was critical that the letter was sent home before the study began and that it thoughtfully encouraged parents and students to complete only the homework that they were assigned.

An additional threat to validity involved researcher bias. In order for the results to be highly reliable, it was necessary for the researcher not to become partial or affect the study for a more favorable outcome. For the purpose of avoiding confounding variables or sampling bias, the study used stratified random sampling. This helped to avoid too many English-only

participants being placed in one group over the other, which would have skewed the results of the study. Additionally, the criteria by which the researcher placed the participants according to achievement level helped to eliminate the threat that one group may have been higher performing than the other.

Data Analyses

All data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences® (SPSS®) for Windows, version 24.0.0 (SPSS, 2016). No names or identifying information were included in the data analysis. Before analyses were conducted all data were cleaned to ensure no outliers were present (Dimitrov, 2012). One participant was removed from the data file due to missing or incorrectly completing the pretest or posttest. After cleaning the data, the final sample size was 25 participants; 13 for the treatment group and 12 for the control group.

Independent (control and treatment groups) and paired (pretest and posttest) sample t-tests were conducted to determine the significant difference in high-frequency word recognition on the word recognition measurement. Further, before interpreting the analytical output, Levene's Homogeneity of Variance was examined to see if the assumption of equivalence was violated (Levene, 1960). If Levene's Homogeneity of Variance was not violated (i.e., the variances were equal across groups), data would be interpreted for the assumption of equivalence; however, if the variances were not equal across groups the corrected output would be used for interpretation.

Results

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted on the whole sample ($n = 25$) for both the pre and posttest scores. Results for the pretest were: Levene's Homogeneity of Variance was not violated ($p > .05$), meaning the variance between groups was not statistically different and no

correction was needed, and the t-test showed non-significant differences between the mean scores on the pretests between the two groups $t(23) = -.51, p > .05$. The means of the two groups were not significantly different, meaning the groups were comparable (see Table 1).

Results for the posttest were: Levene's Homogeneity of Variance was not violated ($p > .05$), meaning the variance between groups was not statistically different and no correction was needed, and the t-test showed non-significant differences between the mean scores on the posttests between the two groups $t(23) = -.37, p > .05$. Therefore, the means of the two groups were not significantly different, because they scored similarly on the posttest (see Table 1). These findings do not support the original hypothesis that assigning nightly homework focusing on high-frequency words would improve achievement on oral reading diagnostic test, because there were not statistically significant differences on the posttest between the two groups.

Table 1

Results of Independent Samples T-Tests

	Mean	SD
Pre Test		
Treatment	1.31	4.72
Control	2.33	5.30
Post Test		
Treatment	3.08	6.51
Control	4.08	7.30

Note. SD = Standard Deviation.

After determining the differences between pre and posttest scores between groups, two paired t-tests were run for both groups (i.e., treatment and control) to determine if participants' mean scores from pre to posttest were significantly different within each group (see Table 2). Results for each group were as follows: treatment group, $t(12) = -2.23, p = .05$; control group, $t(11) = -2.20, p > .05$. Therefore, the researcher did not find a statistically significant difference

between the mean scores of the pre and posttests for the treatment and control groups. Additionally, the negative t-value for each group indicates an increase in scores from pre to posttest, meaning that both groups demonstrated growth in high-frequency word knowledge. These findings do not support the original hypothesis, since both groups increased their scores, however neither group showed significant statistical growth; thus the intervention was no more effective than the normal instructional routine.

Table 2

Results of Paired T-Tests

	Mean	SD
Treatment Group		
Pre	1.31	4.72
Post	3.08	6.51
Control Group		
Pre	2.33	5.30
Post	4.08	7.30

Note. SD = Standard Deviation.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if assigning high-frequency word homework would increase student achievement in reading. The researcher hypothesized that assigning high-frequency word homework would lower the language demands for kindergarten students and their families, and thus contribute to parent participation in order for homework completion to improve and word knowledge to grow (Armbruster, 2010; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Fry, 1980). This quasi-experimental quantitative study included 26 kindergarten students in a Title I elementary school with 62.9% ELLs.

The treatment group received weekly high-frequency word homework packets, while participants of the control group were expected to complete the traditional reading and

mathematics homework packets. The intervention group's homework packets included 25 high-frequency words that were not explicitly taught to the participants during classroom instruction. This means that an increase in the results of the posttest would support the hypothesis. Results of the independent t-tests indicated that there was no significant difference between the posttest means of the treatment and control groups. Assigning easier homework did not make a significant difference on the results of the oral reading diagnostic test, which suggests that the homework did not help participants learn the high-frequency words.

The means of both the treatment and the control groups increased between assessments, which means that both groups' word knowledge increased during the five-week study. This may be due to students' general exposure to the words during regular classroom instruction. The mean of the control group ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 4.72$) was slightly higher to begin with than the mean of the treatment group ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 5.30$), which remained consistent throughout the study, as it was slightly higher in the posttest as well. Both groups made similar growth, as the treatment group mean grew by 1.77 and the control group mean grew by 1.75. This consistency demonstrates that, again, the treatment was not any more effective than the normal homework.

As stated by Dearing and colleagues (2009; 2005), family support with homework has a positive effectual relationship on student success, especially in terms of literacy. The purpose of this study was not to assign homework and hope that parents become involved, but to assign homework that would *ensure* parent involvement. By changing the typical literacy homework and making it involve easier reading skills, the researcher was utilizing research-based approaches that suggest teachers need to provide parents the chance to feel more capable of being involved in their child's education (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler,

1997). It is clear that changing literacy homework so that it involves easier reading skills is not sufficient to ensuring parent involvement and increasing student achievement.

Limitations & Future Studies

There are several root causes to explain why the intervention was not as successful as the researcher had intended. The main limitation of this study that was a key component to its intended success was parent involvement with the homework. Parents needed to be involved in the homework for the intervention to have any chance at being successful; however, not all participants may have followed the intervention as it was intended. For example, if students in the treatment group did not read the words aloud while completing the homework because they did not receive help from family members on how to pronounce the words, this would greatly affect their knowledge of how to read the words in the posttest. Therefore, future studies should provide parent support for reading the words aloud to guarantee that this skill is being practiced.

Additionally, if participants did not practice the words with their family members using the flashcards that were provided in the packet in order to increase automaticity of each word (Fry, 1980), this also would have had a negative effect on their growth in word knowledge. Thus, future researchers should be more explicit in explaining the homework process and teach students and their family members about the efficacy of using flashcards to develop word automaticity. Further, some students may have rushed through the writing portion of the homework (involving tracing, copying, and coloring) in order to finish without reading the words aloud as they did so, which is yet another factor that might have had a negative effect on their learning. In future studies, families must grasp the significance of parent involvement in children's education. Therefore, researchers should include in the instructions and explain to

participants that they should not expedite the homework process as this may cost them their learning.

Based on the results of the posttest, the researcher could generalize that some students may not have been actively engaged in the homework as they completed it (i.e., they were not reading the words out loud with their family members, they were rushing or competing with environmental factors, and/or they were not using the provided flashcards to practice until mastery). Because most of the participants cannot read independently, this factor would severely impede growth between the pre and posttest in the treatment group, and thus render the treatment ineffective. To ensure that future studies do not replicate these limitations, researchers could provide brief parent trainings before and after school, or over the phone if parents are unavailable, which would outline the intended homework process and the critical steps it entails. Future researchers could also provide optional meetings to ensure that all participants and their families have reliable internet access, and they could also share videos on provided student devices that would help participants and family members pronounce the words. Overall, participants and their families must have help understanding the directions of the homework, so any extra time and support for parents would strengthen the intervention for future studies.

Summary

Epstein and Baker (1982) have suggested impactful ways to improve parent involvement in school. The researcher took one of these suggestions into consideration while designing this study, as its purpose was to assign homework that requires less difficult English reading skills. One way to improve the effectiveness of similar studies in the future is to provide parent trainings for helping with reading homework. Clearly, it is not sufficient to merely lower the language demands of kindergarten homework. Educators should also provide rapid and

convenient support for families of this population (Epstein & Baker, 1982) so they not only feel a greater sense of self-efficacy, but also so that they understand how important family involvement can be for the long-term success of their children.

References

- Ardelt, M., & Eccles, J. (2001). Effects of mothers' parental efficacy beliefs and promotive parenting strategies on inner-city youth. *Journal of Family Issues, 22*, 944-972.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019251301022008001>
- Armbruster, B. B. (2010). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read: Kindergarten through grade 3*. Washington, DC: Diane Publishing.
- Baldassare, M., Bonner, D., Kordus, D., & Lopes, L. (2016). Californians and Early Childhood Education. Retrieved from
http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=1193
- Baker, B. L., & Heller, T. L. (1996). Preschool children with externalizing behaviors: Experience of fathers and mothers. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 24*, 513-532.
doi:10.1007/bf01441572
- Bandura, A. (1997). Insights. Self-efficacy. *Harvard Mental Health Letter, 13*(9), 4-6.
- Bempechat, J. (2000). *Getting our kids back on track: Educating children for the future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Bempechat, J. (2004). The motivational benefits of homework: A social-cognitive perspective. *Theory into Practice, 43*(3), 189-196. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tip.2004.0029>
- Bergen, E., Zuijen, T., Bishop, D., & Jong, P. (2017). Why are home literacy environment and children's reading skills associated? What parental skills reveal. *Reading Research Quarterly, 52*(2), 147-160.
- California Department of Education. (2013). *California Common Core State Standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finaelacssstandards.pdf>

- Chateau, D., & Jared, D. (2000). Exposure to print and word recognition processes. *Memory & Cognition*, 28(1), 143-153. doi:10.3758/bf03211582
- Christenson, S., Rounds, T., Gorney, D., & Witt, J. (1992). Family factors and student achievement: An avenue to increase students' success. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 7(3), 178-206.
- Cooper, H. (1989). Synthesis of research on homework. *Educational Leadership*, 47(3), 85-91.
- Cooper, H. (1994). *The Battle over Homework: An Administrator's Guide to Setting Sound and Effective Policies*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press.
- Cooper, H., Jackson, K., Nye, B., & Lindsay, J. J. (2001). A model of homework's influence on the performance evaluations of elementary school students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 69, 181-199.
- De Gaetano, Y. (2007). The role of culture in engaging Latino parents' involvement in school. *Urban Education*, 42(2), 145-162.
- Dearing, E., McCartney, K., & Taylor, B. A. (2009). Does higher quality early child care promote low-income children's math and reading achievement in middle childhood?. *Child Development*, 80, 1329-1349.
- Dearing, E., McCartney, K., Weiss, H., Kreider, H., & Simpkins, S. (2005). The promotive effects of family educational involvement for low-income children's literacy. *Journal of School Psychology*, 42, 445-460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2004.07.002>
- Dimitrov, D. M. (2014). *Statistical methods for validation of assessment scale data in counseling and related fields*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

- Dudley, S., & Shawver, D. L. (1991). The effect of homework on students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness. *Journal of Education for Business*, 67(1), 21-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.1991.10117511>
- Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1993). Parent-school involvement during the early adolescent years. *Teachers College Record*, 94, 568-568.
- Epstein, J., & Becker, H. (1982). Teachers' reported practices of parent involvement: Problems and possibilities. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83(2), 103-113.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/461298>
- Epstein, J. (1988). Parent involvement. *Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools*.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000023.supp>
- Fry, E. (1980). The new instant word list. *The Reading Teacher*, 34(3), 284-289.
- Fry, E. B., & Kress, J. E. (2012). *The reading teacher's book of lists (Vol. 55)*. Washington, DC: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gibbs, C. (2014). Experimental evidence on early intervention: The impact of full-day kindergarten. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Virginia.
- Heath, S. M., Bishop, D. V., Bloor, K. E., Boyle, G. L., et al. (2014). A spotlight on preschool: The influence of family factors on children's early literacy skills. *PloS One*, 9, 952-955.

- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., & Sandler, H.M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education?. *Review of Educational Research*, 67, 3-42. doi:10.2307/1170618
- IBM Corp. Released 2012. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 24.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.
- Lee, V. E., Burkam, D. T., Ready, D. D., Honigman, J., & Meisels, S. J. (2006). Full-day versus half-day kindergarten: In which program do children learn more?. *American Journal of Education*, 112(2), 163-208.
- Levene, H. (1960). *Contributions to probability and statistics; essays in honor of Harold Hotelling*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kralovac, E., & Buell, J. (2001). End Homework Now. *Educational Leadership*, 58(7), 39-42.
- Maertens, N., & Johnston, J. (1972). Effects of arithmetic homework upon the attitudes and achievement of fourth, fifth and sixth grade pupils. *School Science and Mathematics*, 72(2), 117-126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-8594.1972.tb08815.x>
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). What works in schools: Translating research into action. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/102271.aspx>.
- Mo, Y., & Singh, K. (2008). Parents' relationships and involvement: Effects on students' school engagement and performance. *RMLE Online*, 31(10), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2008.11462053>
- Pallas, A. M., Natriello, G., & McDill, E. L. (1989). The changing nature of the disadvantaged population current dimensions and future trends. *Educational Researcher*, 18(5), 16-22. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x018005016>

- Patall, E. A., Cooper, H., & Robinson, J. C. (2008). Parent involvement in homework: A research synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 78*, 1039-1101.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325185>
- Rahman, M., & Azim, F. (2015). Bangladeshi migrant parents' involvement in their children's schooling: Identifying the barriers. Retrieved from
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2586045
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *Edspeak: A glossary of education terms, phrases, buzzwords, and jargon*. ASCD. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.45-2980>
- Sim, S. S., Berthelsen, D., Walker, S., Nicholson, J. M., & Fielding-Barnsley, R. (2013). A shared reading intervention with parents to enhance young children's early literacy skills. *Early Child Development and Care, 184*, 1531-1549.
doi:10.1080/03004430.2013.862532
- Thelamour, B., & Jacobs, D. L. (2013). Homework practices of English and non-English-speaking parents. *Urban Education, 49*, 528-542. doi:10.1177/0042085913481360
- Thompson, J. A., & Sonnenschein, S. (2016). Full-day kindergarten and children's later reading: The role of early word reading. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 42*, 58-70.
doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2015.11.005
- U.S. Department of Commerce. (2015). *Facts for Features: Back to School: 2015-2016* (Rep.). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2015/cb15-ff17.html>
- Van Bergen, E., De Jong, P. F., Maassen, B., & Van der Leij, A. (2014). The effect of parents' literacy skills and children's preliteracy skills on the risk of dyslexia. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 42*, 1187-1200. doi:10.1007/s10802-014-9858-9

Walston, J., & West, J. (2004). Full-day and half-day kindergarten in the United States: Findings from the early childhood longitudinal study, kindergarten class of 1998-99. NCES 2004-078. *National Center for Education Statistics*. doi:10.1037/e492142006-005

Appendix A

Pretest 2/27/17

1. that _____
2. from _____
3. by _____
4. were _____
5. there _____
6. use _____
7. other _____
8. about _____
9. many _____
10. some _____
11. into _____
12. time _____
13. look _____
14. more _____
15. write _____
16. number _____
17. way _____
18. could _____
19. people _____
20. been _____
21. now _____
22. find _____
23. long _____
24. down _____
25. made _____

Appendix B

Posttest 3/31/17

- 26. were _____
- 27. by _____
- 28. there _____
- 29. down _____
- 30. about _____
- 31. that _____
- 32. long _____
- 33. some _____
- 34. time _____
- 35. many _____
- 36. way _____
- 37. now _____
- 38. use _____
- 39. from _____
- 40. other _____
- 41. more _____
- 42. write _____
- 43. made _____
- 44. been _____
- 45. number _____
- 46. people _____
- 47. find _____
- 48. look _____
- 49. could _____
- 50. into _____

Appendix C

February 27, 2016

This week we will be starting a new homework process. Some students will receive different homework than others. Please only have your child complete the homework packet that you receive. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me through phone or email. Thank you! 😊

♥ Miss Meyer

27 febrero 2016

Esta semana comenzaremos un nuevo proceso de tarea. Algunos estudiantes recibirán tareas diferentes que otros. Favor de completar sólo el paquete de tarea que recibe. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, por favor póngase en contacto conmigo por teléfono o correo electrónico. Gracias! 😊

♥ La Sra. Meyer