

Chapter 58

Leveled Literacy Intervention: An Elementary Reading Intervention for English Language Learner Newcomers

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the qualitative study will investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) framework with English Language Learners (ELL) newcomers and their literacy achievement using the case study method and cross case analysis. Student case studies will consist of LLI pre and post assessment data, guided reading data, and information gathered from student interviews. The triangulation of student interviews, teacher surveys, and extant literature provide the foundation for answering questions regarding the effectiveness of LLI with the ELL newcomers. Findings are presented through student case studies, resulting from cross case analysis that identified themes, patterns, and commonalities in student reading achievement data and teacher survey results. Results show that ELL newcomers needed to develop social, academic, and content-related language. Findings from the study show that the students made progress while participating during the intervention but have not maintained or increased their reading levels after the intervention that provides opportunities for future research. Recommendation for future studies and conclusion are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

With the influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants and the continued work toward closing the achievement gap across the country, identifying the effective reading interventions for these newcomers to the country is imperative. The goal of education is to ensure that all students achieve academic success in the United States. The federal government has mandated accountability for this goal by requiring school systems to provide test results for all students, including test scores for the diverse subgroups within the school districts (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). The continued arrival of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the U. S. has generated much debate regarding the pedagogical issues that face educators in public schools across the United States (Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes, & Kwok, 2008). According to Roseberry-

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Leveled Literacy Intervention

McKibbin and Brice (2005), English Language Learners (ELL) constitutes approximately 40 percent of the school-aged population (Tong et al., 2008). Notwithstanding ELLs, function at a lower level in the area of literacy, are retained more, and drop out of school at a higher rate than their English-speaking counterparts (Orosco & Klinger, 2010).

English Language Learners (ELL) come from a variety of language and socioeconomic backgrounds (Gibbons, 1993; Haynes, 2007). They have varied levels of ability in their first language that range from being able to understand the language but not speak the language to being fluent and literate in their first language (Gibbons, 1993; Haynes, 2007). In order for the linguistically and culturally diverse ELLs to attain lasting achievement academically and socially, they must be exposed to a demanding, enriching, and inclusive educational experience (Haynes, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act, Response to Intervention (RTI) mandates, and district-level changes have required educational leaders to face the challenges of creating a new organizational structure that meets the needs of ELL newcomers despite simultaneously experiencing severe budget cuts. In school system within which the current study was conducted, ABC Elementary School (pseudonym) adopted a tier-2 reading intervention strategy designed to meet the federal-and state-level mandates while focusing on improving reading achievement for the ELL newcomers. While the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program was widely implemented as a tier-2 reading intervention for struggling readers within the district, ABC Elementary School decided to utilize LLI to specifically support their ELL newcomers in the area of literacy (D. Jones, personal communication, August 7, 2010).

Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) is a series of sequential reading and writing lessons designed to provide reading interventions to students in kindergarten, first, and second grade who function below grade level in the areas of reading and writing. A systematic assessment is utilized to identify the student's instructional reading levels and intervention groups are then formed with up to three students who read at similar levels. Sequential lessons offered within the intervention are implemented over an 18 to 20 week period for approximately 30 minutes a day and involve a variety of research based instructional strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009a).

Although a plethora of federal policies, reading research theory and best practice have been available on reading research for ELLs, a gap still continues to exist in the research that addresses successful reading interventions for at-risk learners, and particularly newcomers in the ELL population, regardless of academic age (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008; Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). As a preface to the study, I now provide information concerning the RTI mandate and its relationship with the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as a historical and theoretical review of federal mandates, reading interventions, and effective reading strategies for ELL learners.

BACKGROUND

The No Child Left Behind Act evolved from a history of educational reform policies that can be connected to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, & Crump, 2008; Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). The ESEA provided federal dollars to the state and local education organizations and became involved in public school policy with the creation of Title I. Title I was designed to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged children in American schools (Duffy et al., 2008). Because of the ESEA of 1965 and based on child poverty data, approximately one

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