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ABSTRACT

This study uniquely looked at the effects of fluency oriented reading instruction (FORI) on reading achievement and motivation for reading among struggling readers in First Class in Irish primary schools. The study was conducted in two phases in DEIS Band 1 & 2 primary schools in the Dublin Northside Partnership catchment area. In Phase One, the current practice of learning support teachers in relation to teaching struggling readers was investigated along with the extent to which these teachers employed oral reading fluency strategies in their instruction. The second phase of the study examined the effects of an on-site reading intervention on the reading achievement and motivation for reading of struggling readers. The intervention, which was based on fluency oriented reading instruction, took place in learning support classrooms in three DEIS primary schools selected from participating schools in the first phase of the study.

The study was conducted through a pragmatic lens with research questions framed to shed light on the underachievement in literacy of students in First Class from disadvantaged backgrounds. A mixed methods design was employed with a sequential explanatory and a concurrent triangulation strategy adopted for the first and second of the study respectively. This facilitated the exploration of multiple research questions using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents and conversational interviews and surveys with students. A wide range of assessment measures were employed to track reading achievement and motivation for reading among students.

The findings of the first phase of the study confirm that compensatory instruction for struggling readers in First Class is typified by a highly structured, bottom-up approach with an emphasis on cognitive rather than affective processes. In the second phase of the study, post-intervention results indicated that students had significantly higher achievement in oral reading fluency with modest improvement on word reading efficiency measures in comparison with pre-intervention scores.

The perspective of reading motivation guiding this study recognised the overlapping influences of teachers, parents and the student himself or herself. Findings as reported by these research informants indicate that the FORI intervention had a positive impact on the motivation for reading of struggling readers in First Class. In particular the intervention was found to decrease students' perceived difficulty with reading and increase their reading self-efficacy and orientation towards reading. The social aspect of reading was also found to play a prominent role in the motivation for reading of struggling readers. In this respect the research found parents to play a critical role in the literacy development of their children. The findings from this study suggest that in order for struggling readers to overcome both skill deficiencies in reading and any negative reading- and achievement-related self-beliefs a comprehensive approach is required. This thesis argues that there needs to be a shift from a purely cognitive interpretation of reading instruction to a motivational and emotional co-determination of beginning reading skills.