Becoming Better Readers by Improving Comprehension Skills

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Introduction

Specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD) refer to students' challenges in understanding and deriving meaning from written texts (Landi & Ryherd, 2017). These difficulties can significantly impact a student's academic performance and learning outcomes. SRCD can occur at any age but typically becomes noticeable during primary school (ages 5-10) (Bell & Wheldall, 2022). Reading comprehension is a skill that allows individuals to access and understand information from a wide range of texts; it is essential for academic success and is a critical component of everyday life (Smith et al., 2021). Children with SRCD have difficulties with reading comprehension despite having at least average decoding abilities; their comprehension difficulties are tied to weaknesses in vocabulary (Nation, 2019). By understanding the significance, context, and specific language and literacy-related difficulties associated with reading comprehension, educators and support professionals can develop targeted interventions and strategies to support students in improving their comprehension skills and becoming more effective readers (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

The simple view of reading theory helps professionals understand the components of proficient reading. According to this theory, reading comprehension explains the interaction of two key components: decoding and language comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Regarding SRCD, the simple view of reading theory can help identify areas of weakness and guide interventions. Suppose a student has challenges with language comprehension; they will need help understanding the meaning of words, sentences, or complex passages, which can hinder their ability to comprehend the text and connect ideas (Nippold, 2017). It is important to note that individual factors, such as motivation, attention, and working memory, can also influence SRCD. The simple view of reading theory has a comprehensive perspective and a balanced approach, as the theory recognises that decoding skills and language comprehension are necessary for proficient reading comprehension. However, this theory has a limited scope as it

needs to include other factors that can influence reading comprehension and oversimplifies the interaction between decoding skills and language. By identifying and addressing specific difficulties in these components, an intervention can be provided to support language and literacy development and improve reading comprehension in individuals with specific difficulties (Snowling & Hulme, 2012).

Methods and Proposed Intervention

Reciprocal teaching is proposed to tackle this educational challenge; it is a strategy that helps improve reading comprehension by teaching students specific skills to engage with the text actively. It involves four main strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarising. Reciprocal teaching has been extensively researched and shown to improve reading comprehension skills in children facing difficulties (Mafarja et al., 2023). A study by Mafarja et al. (2023) found that reciprocal teaching interventions can help improve active engagement, metacognitive skills, vocabulary development and critical thinking. Teaching students these strategies will enhance their overall language and literacy skills. Implementing this intervention should be done with the guidance of a trained professional to ensure its effectiveness and appropriate implementation for individual students.

Reading materials, vocabulary resources, timers, and assessments are needed to implement the intervention. The indicated intervention can be delivered to primary school children aged 5-10 years at the microsystem level of intervention. Research suggests that introducing the intervention at this age can be beneficial for improving reading comprehension skills, as children have already have developed basic reading skills and can engage in more complex reading activities (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The intervention should comprise 30-minute lessons taught two to three times per week by teachers within a classroom setting or by teaching assistants with smaller groups with guidance from psychologists. Evidence suggests that

reading comprehension approaches must be tailored to pupils' current reading capabilities, so teachers must receive professional development in effective diagnosis and training in using techniques and materials (Sims et al., 2021).

The intervention begins by assessing students' reading comprehension levels using standardised tests such as the English reading test, which evaluates students' comprehension skills and understanding of texts (Bojovic, 2010). The test pinpoints the problem areas and helps determine where each student should start. To engage students and make the strategies more approachable, teachers define the four strategy's goals and significance, give examples, and include interactive activities and visuals. The teachers model the reciprocal teaching strategies by reading a text aloud to demonstrate how to use each strategy. Then provide guided practice opportunities where students work together in small groups to apply the strategies. The intervention has selected texts appropriate for each student's reading level; it also providea support, such as vocabulary lists and sentence stems, to assist students in applying reciprocal teaching strategies. Psychologists should monitor students' progress through formative assessments and observations, which will help identify areas of growth and areas that may require additional support. Teachers can promote metacognition by regularly engaging students in reflection activities and asking them to evaluate their understanding of the text, identify helpful strategies, and set goals for improvement. Finally, teachers should encourage them to discuss the impact of reciprocal teaching on their reading comprehension.

Reflection and Conclusions

The reciprocal teaching intervention positively impacts learners by improving reading comprehension and enhancing critical thinking skills. The intervention can also impact educators by enhancing instructional strategies, allowing data-informed decision-making, and professional growth and collaboration. The reciprocal teaching intervention can impact the

broader educational community by improving literacy outcomes, knowledge dissemination and inclusive and equitable education. Several challenges may arise, including time constraints, teacher expertise, and student engagement. The dissemination of reciprocal teaching interventions in primary schools can involve various strategies and approaches to ensure the widespread implementation and effectiveness of the intervention. Involving parents and the wider community can enhance the dissemination of reciprocal teaching interventions. Informing parents about the intervention, providing resources for home support, and fostering partnerships between schools and families can reinforce reciprocal teaching strategies beyond the classroom. Conducting research studies on the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching interventions and publishing the findings can contribute to disseminating evidence-based practices. Sharing research outcomes in academic journals, conferences, and educational platforms can inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders about the positive impact of reciprocal teaching interventions.

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