The Effects of Sight Word Instruction on Students' Reading Abilities

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The Effects of Sight Word Instruction on Student Reading Abilities

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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Abstract

This action research paper focused on the question “how does effective sight word instruction impact students’ reading abilities?” Effective sight word instruction will improve a student’s overall reading abilities. Data was collected through daily observation of students and recorded notes, formal and informal interviews, and student work samples. After analyzing the data, three major themes were found: sight word instruction improved students’ overall reading abilities, sight word instruction improved students’ confidence in reading, and sight word instruction alone is not beneficial without other literacy instruction. The implications of this study suggest that all elementary teachers need to provide students with a literacy rich environment, sight word instruction, and daily practice through the use of literacy centers and activities.
The Effects of Sight Word Instruction on Student Reading Abilities

In order for students to become adequate readers, they must first learn to read sight words. Although there are many other factors in literacy acquisition, learning sight words is the foundation a child needs to become an adequate reader. Learning to read will in turn help to assure that a student will grow into a successful adolescent, and eventually a successful, contributing member of society as an adult (Burns, 2007; Denton & Otaiba, 2011; McGrath, McLaughlin, & Derby, 2012). For some students learning to read is not an easy task, and they will require extra supports and instruction in order to become adequate readers. Sight word instruction is a successful strategy to use with all students, but especially when working with students with disabilities and struggling readers.

Sight words play a huge role in reading acquisition as well as the ability to become a lifelong learner. Children begin to acquire literacy skills long before entering into formal schooling, but learning to read whole-words, phrases and sentences is something that needs to be taught to students once they enter the school system. Early literacy skills, such as sight words, should be taught to students as early as preschool. Once a student begins learning sight words it will give them more confidence in their reading abilities and in turn will reduce frustration that comes with learning to read (Yaw, 2012). Once students feel confident in their abilities to read sight words it will help them to become adequate readers. Being an adequate reader is not only a necessity throughout the elementary and adolescent years of a person, but it is also a necessity in order to be a successful adult in our society. Being able to read will allow an adult to be an independent, contributing member of society. In order to be independent a person must be able to drive or navigate themselves from one place to another, go grocery shopping, fill out an application, and even order off a menu at a restaurant; all of these things require a person to be
able to read adequately. If as an adult one cannot read adequately it can make their life challenging and even increase the risk of high school dropout, delinquency, and even suicide (Denton & Otaiba, 2011). Although sight words are just one area of literacy, the acquisition of sight words is a foundation for other reading skills such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Sight word instruction is crucial for all students, but has proven to be especially successful for students with disabilities. Alberto et al. (2013) found that “the primary format of reading instruction for students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities is sight word instruction” (p. 332). It is even more difficult for students with disabilities to learn how to read, especially the words with irregular sound patterns in them, which is why they must learn sight words. Learning important sight words and phrases will help them to communicate with their peers and adults, as well as to understand what is going on in the world around them.

Researchers have found many different effective methods that can be used to teach sight words to students with disabilities (Alberto, Waugh, Fredrick, & Davis, 2013; Denton & Otaiba, 2011; Hong & Kemp, 2007). The most common and basic way to familiarize students with sight words is to present them in a flashcard drill and practice format. Flashcards allow students to see the word numerous times in the same setting and will help them to memorize the words easier. Another popular method for teaching sight words to students with disabilities is to use technology programs. Coleman et al. (2015) and Yaw et al. (2012) have both found successful computer-based sight word programs that can be used during interventions with students with disabilities. There is no question that sight word acquisition is critical in order to become an adequate reader, so it is important for educators to understand that students with disabilities require more instruction and more practice than their typically-developing peers. Therefore, there
are many methods, strategies, and procedures that can be used in order to teach sight words to all students, and especially students with disabilities.

There are also many strategies and techniques that are used to facilitate sight word learning for students who are considered at-risk in reading. Many students are labeled as struggling readers that do not have a disability; they just need more exposure and instruction in order to learn to read. Across all levels of schooling, there are reading specialists who work with students who are considered below grade level in reading. The largest number of struggling readers is often apparent in primary and elementary schooling, and because of reading intervention at these levels, the number of students who struggle with reading is smaller as you move to the middle and high school years. Reading intervention, specifically sight word instruction, is crucial in order for a student to be successful in not only reading but all content areas of school. Again, learning to read basic sight words is the first step in a student becoming a successful reader. There are many different techniques that can be used, but one that has been found most popular is incremental rehearsal. Much of the research uses this technique when working with struggling readers. Incremental rehearsal presents unknown and know words to the learner numerous times before it can be considered as a mastered word.

This research was conducted to see if sight word instruction had any impact on students’ overall reading abilities. The main research question for this study is how does effective sight word instruction impact students’ reading abilities? The data for this study was collected through daily observation of students and recorded notes, formal and informal interviews, and student work samples. After analyzing the data, three major themes were found. My findings were that sight word instruction improved students’ overall reading abilities, sight word instruction improved students’ confidence in reading, and sight word instruction alone is not beneficial
without other literacy instruction. This information indicates that effective sight word instruction did, in fact, increase students’ overall reading abilities. The findings of this research present several implications for elementary education teachers. The first implication from the findings is that all elementary teachers need to incorporate sight word instruction into their classroom schedules. The second implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to incorporate daily practice of sight words into their schedule through the use of independent or small group literacy centers and activities. The final implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to provide students with a literacy rich environment in order for students to have multiple opportunities to read sight words in context and not just in isolation.

**Theoretical Framework**

Literacy can broadly be described as the way that a person reads, writes, and communicates within a society. However, literacy is a complex, multimodal process that is always progressing and changing in the world around us. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), “literacy is a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of the text” (p. 15). What Freebody and Luke have stated in their definition of literacy is that it has four major areas. Those four areas are the code breaker, the text user, the text analyst and the text participant. As a code breaker, you learn the relationships between sounds and letters, and understand how words create sentences, and sentences create paragraphs (Freebody & Luke, 1990). As a text user, you apply the alphabetic principle that the code breaker has led you to understand, so that you can use text in a meaningful way. Being a text user involves having resources to know and apply what a text is for in that moment (Freebody &
When you participate with a text you are essentially using your knowledge as a code breaker and text user to comprehend and process the text to determine the necessary and relevant parts. As a text analyst you look at texts critically and begin to ask questions (Freebody & Luke, 1990). All of these factors combine to aid in using and understanding text in the society and culture of everyday life. In relation to this research topic, students must be able to do all four of these things while they are reading in order to be successful in and outside of the classroom.

Language and literacy acquisition occur in a variety of ways as children are exposed to oral and written language. They are very much a social process, and communication and interaction are crucial factors. According to Gee (2001), “literacy is mastered through acquisition, not learning, that is, it requires exposure to models in natural meaningful, and functional settings” (p. 23). Before children can acquire literacy skills, they must first acquire a language. Children begin to learn language as soon as they are born and begin to hear and see what is going on around them. They eventually learn basic language and literacy concepts by engaging in conversations with adults and peers, and once they get older and enter school they will build on these basic skills to become literate and knowledgeable members of society.

The Culture “as” Disability theory is used to guide this study. McDermott and Varenne (1995) discuss how the Culture as Disability theory allows people to be accepted or disregarded in society and how that can have an impact on the lives of children who are not accepted in the mainstream culture. In terms of this paper, the mainstream culture is the school system that not all students, in this case struggling readers and students with disabilities, will fit in with perfectly. In turn, because school is considered such a mainstream society, it disregards and disables those who do not fit into the general education classroom. Because students with disabilities and struggling readers need to receive supplemental support and instruction while
attending school, they may not be given the same opportunities as their typically-developing peers. If all students are not given the same opportunities to participate it can cause major issues in these students, such as a lack of self-confidence and self-worth. Struggling readers and students with disabilities can be looked at differently by their peers because they are always getting pulled out or a teacher pushes in to provide them with the extra supports that they need. McDermott and Varenne (1995) also discuss how the lack of differences being praised will continue to aid in these children’s suffering through miscommunication and alienation, and in turn can cause them to give up on school. It is important that struggling readers and students with disabilities are praised for their differences, as they are already at a higher risk of school dropout and delinquency. The Culture as Disability theory will be evident throughout all the themes discussed in this paper.

**Research Question**

For my action research project, my goal is to determine if effective sight word instruction will increase student reading abilities and overall student achievement. More specifically, if interventions based solely on sight word instruction can significantly impact reading acquisition. In my research I aim to find effective and beneficial methods, approaches, and techniques that can be used for sight word instruction. This action research projects asks, how does effective sight word instruction impact students’ reading abilities?

**Literature Review**

Prior to completing the action research project, a review of the literature was essential in order to understand the key points on the topic. It is crucial that researchers develop a deep knowledge and understanding of the different perspectives, implementations, and effective
practices that surround this specific area of study. In this literature review, there will be three themes that prove the importance of sight word use for all students. The first theme discusses the importance that adequate reading has on lifelong learning and a successful adulthood. Within this theme, the importance of early, intermediate, and secondary literacy instruction and intervention are explained and compared, as well as the effects that inadequate reading can have on adulthood. The first theme also describes the impact of sight word acquisition on all preceding areas of reading acquisition. The second theme discusses the use of effective sight word instruction with students with disabilities, as well as the benefits that result from such instruction. The third and final theme discusses the use of sight word instruction with students who are considered “at-risk” in reading and are receiving literacy intervention. Within this theme approaches and strategies used to teach sight word acquisition and retention will be analyzed and compared to prove the effectiveness.

Importance of Reading on Lifelong Learning and the Impact of Sight Words on Reading Acquisition

Learning to read is one of the most important skills for humans to acquire. In order for a person to be successful in both schooling and adulthood, they must learn to read adequately (Burns, 2007; Denton & Otaiba, 2011; McGrath, McLaughlin, & Derby, 2012; Sullivan, Konrad, Joseph, Luu, 2013). Children begin to acquire literacy skills long before entering into formal schooling, but learning to read whole-words, phrases and sentences is something that needs to be taught to students once they enter the school system. Early literacy skills, such as sight words, should be taught to students as early as preschool. According to Yaw et al. (2012) :

Supplementing early literacy-skill instruction with sight-word reading instruction designed to teach students to read commonly used words may enhance students’
confidence in their reading abilities, improve their daily living skills, and reduce frustration associated with learning to read and/or reading instruction. (p. 355)

The sooner that children are exposed to sight words, the sooner that they will become familiar with them, and in turn they will be able to begin reading such words. If a student is not adequately responding to such literacy instruction, it is crucial to begin supplemental instruction as soon as possible so that the student does not fall behind their peers. Erbey et al. (2011) states that “students who struggle in the area of reading during their primary stages of their education career often have difficulties into their secondary education and adulthood” (p. 214). This information is extremely important to primary education teachers, as they need to closely monitor their students and intervene as soon as they become aware of any reading difficulties. Musti-Rao et al. (2015) further stress the importance of reading acquisition in the primary grades and the effects that it will have on students throughout their schooling. These authors state, “students who fail to acquire basic reading skills in primary grades fall further behind their peers in intermediate and later grades” (p. 34). With all of this research describing the importance of early literacy acquisition, it is a wonder how so many students continue to struggle in reading throughout their entire school career. This research is a clear implication that explicit instruction and intervention need to be a part of all children’s education. Denton and Otaiba (2011) also discuss the consequences of low reading proficiency, and the danger that students who do not learn to read in early elementary school face for the remainder of their school years. Therefore, it is crucial that students are given effective literacy instruction, including sight word practice, in their primary years.
Learning to read is also a necessity in order to be successful as an adult in our society. According to Griffin and Murtagh (2015):

The ability to read is one of the most important academic and life skills that one can learn. Literacy skills are viewed as crucial to a person’s ability to develop fully as an individual and to participate wholly in society. (p. 186)

If students struggle with reading throughout elementary and secondary education, it is likely that they will continue to struggle as adults and will have a difficult time in higher education and/or the work force. Similarly, Volpe et al. (2011) discusses how students who read adequately are more likely to be successful in the school setting and also become productive members of society. If as an adult you are unable to read adequately it could cause you to become isolated from the rest of society. If you are unable to read it will be difficult to fill out job applications, read the newspaper for current information, and even participate in social events. Volpe et al. (2011) also discuss the importance of sight word recognition as the core of students’ reading abilities. Before a person is able to read sentences, paragraphs or whole texts they must first develop a foundation in reading, and sight words are an essential place to start. Burns (2007) agrees with Volpe et al. on the importance sight word instruction; Burns states, “sight-word instruction can improve functioning with various daily, recreational, and work-related tasks among children with moderate to severe disabilities, and reading is an essential skill for independent living” (p. 251). Independent living is one of the ultimate goals of adulthood, and one aspect of independence is being able to read and manage your daily life skills without the assistance of someone else. Meadan et al. (2008) also agree with Burns that literacy skills are a necessity for independence in society. Not only is reading a necessity for school related tasks,
but reading is necessary in everyday life. A person must be able to read in order to drive or navigate themselves from one place to another, go grocery shopping, and even order off a menu at a restaurant.

Without the ability to read, an adult’s life can be very difficult. According to McGrath et al. (2012), “most children who do not learn to read in the early grades begin life’s journey on a path of failure and poverty as adults” (p. 50). These authors also discuss how job performance, higher education, finances and leisure all require the ability to read and comprehend written material. If a student struggles with reading, especially in secondary education, it is likely that the student will struggle in their content areas as well because the reading in science, history, and math also becomes more complex and challenging. Therefore, if students are unable to read adequately it will directly impact their grades in their content area subjects. In turn, these students will have a difficult time getting into higher education, or may be completely uninterested to continue their education if they are aware of their inadequate reading abilities. Students who cannot read adequately also have a higher risk for school dropout, delinquency, and even suicide (Denton & Otaiba, 2011). All of these aforementioned behaviors could be prevented if students are given more opportunities to engage in literacy intervention and/or more explicit literacy instruction, starting with the acquisition of the necessary sight words that they need in order to be successful readers. Although sight word instruction is just one method of literacy intervention, acquisition of sight words is the foundation for fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Sight word recognition is a fundamental element to reading and academic success (Coleman, Cherry, Moore, Park, & Cihak, 2015; Denton & Otaiba, 2011; McGrath, McLaughlin, & Derby, 2012; Volpe, Mule, Briesch, Joseph, & Burns, 2011). In order for a student to be able
to read fluently, they must first learn how to automatically recognize words in isolation. Once words are recognized in isolation, students can begin to read them in the context of books. Once a student begins to read fluently, they can then begin to focus on the meaning of what they are reading, which is the ultimate goal of reading. According to Sullivan et al. (2013), “an important part of reading instruction is teaching children to read high frequency words and irregular words, as learning to read these sight words will contribute to reading words fluently in connected text, which will aid in comprehension” (p. 102). Sight words are listed as the first step in this reading process. Students should begin to learn sight words as soon as they enter school so that when they begin to read books they will be more familiar with the words inside and be more motivated to read. Musti-Rao et al. (2015) state that “instruction in sight words not only can result in a corresponding increase in reading fluency and comprehension but also can improve students’ confidence levels and reduce their frustration with reading” (p. 34). The impact that sight word reading has on fluency and comprehension is an extremely important factor that is often overlooked. If a child does not feel confident in their reading ability, they will be less likely to read books as well as take risks while reading. Learning sight words first will allow students to feel motivated and confident about reading new books and learning new words. Denton and Otaiba (2011) discuss that when there is a lack of exposure to text “a decoding problem may eventually become a generalized reading deficit characterized by low fluency, poor vocabulary, and limited word knowledge, all contributing to impaired reading comprehension” (p. 1). If sight words are not practiced, it will be difficult for students to improve their overall reading ability.

The immediate goal of sight word instruction is for students to automatically recognize words and also to retain the words learned in order to read them in context. However, many times the goal is also to increase students’ fluency so that they can build their stamina and
eventually focus on the meaning of the text. Griffin and Murtagh (2015) discuss the importance of what they call Precision Teaching (PT), which is just a more positive name for the well-known term intervention. In their study they discuss how “PT emphasizes on high response rates in basic skills as a necessary prerequisite for fluent performance of complex skill composites” (p. 187). In this specific study they not only stress the acquisition of sight words (the basic skill), but they add that a student should be reading as many sight words as possible in a short time. In other words they think that speed (part of fluency) is an important factor for sight words in isolation, as it will prepare students for using the same speed when reading the known sight words in context. This study focuses on the importance of quick sight word recognition so that it will transfer specifically to their reading fluency. They add that, “only additional practice and attainment of fluent performance rates in sub-skills would allow students to ‘lift the ceilings’ and achieve fluency on more advanced performances” (p. 188). In other words, fluency of sight words is crucial to the fluency of reading texts, and even more important to the comprehension of the text, and should be practiced regularly in order to achieve mastery. McGrath et al. (2012) and Volpe et al. (2011) also discuss the importance of repeated practice with sight words, especially with struggling readers, in order to gain reading fluency. Before a student becomes familiar with a word they must practice it numerous times in isolation in order for them to master the word and transfer it to reading texts. According to McGrath et al., “poor readers often need systematic and explicit instruction in reading fluently and sufficient opportunities for intense, fluency-focused practice incorporated into their reading program” (p. 51). This statement emphasizes and supports the idea of using sight words for all students in order to aide in their reading fluency. Not only should explicit and systematic instruction be used with struggling readers in intervention, but also in the classroom with every single student. Similarly, Coleman
et al. (2015) discuss the correlation between sight word recognition and reading fluency. They state, “the ability to recognize sight words enables students with disabilities to become more active and fluent readers which promotes their access to the general education curriculum” (p. 196). Although their study is specifically on teaching sight words to students with autism, the statement above is true for all students. If a student is struggling with reading who is not labeled with a disability at the time does not receive any intervention or explicit instruction in literacy, they too will be unable to access the general education curriculum because they will not be able to read, comprehend, or participate in class.

**Using Sight Words with Students with Disabilities**

Many researchers have found that using sight word intervention with students with disabilities is successful (Alberto, Waugh, Fredrick, & Davis, 2013; Denton & Otaiba, 2011; Hong & Kemp, 2007; McGrath, McLaughlin, Derby, & Bucknell, 2012). As discussed previously in this literature review, sight word acquisition is essential in order to become an adequate reader. Although reading comprehension is always the final goal of reading acquisition, for students with disabilities it is also important that they learn the meaning of words or phrases that they will need to be successful outside of school, and to communicate with others. Hong and Kemp (2007) conducted a study with four preschoolers with developmental delays, and compared whether an activity based intervention or traditional didactic instruction was more effective for sight word acquisition. The sight words that they used for both types of intervention were: biscuit, cereal, juice, onion, fruit, pasta, sauce, and tissue. Although these are not traditional sight words used in instruction, they chose them because the activity based intervention was implemented during the students’ free-play time using a simulated grocery store. The words were then also presented in the didactic condition where the teacher would use
explicit instruction of each word. At the end of the study all four children were able to read all eight of the words, and maintained the words for at least three weeks following the intervention. The aforementioned study is just one example of a successful sight word intervention with students with disabilities. In another study by Alberto et al. (2013), seven students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities (MSID) participated in sight word intervention. In this study the researchers found that “instruction in word identification is successful when systematic instructional procedures are used, and that the primary format of reading instruction for students with MSID is sight word instruction” (p. 332). This study was very well designed, as it incorporated four new words each time the previous four words were mastered. The words incorporated built upon the previous words, so by the end of all 10 word lists, students would be able to read and create short sentences using the sight words. All seven students completed each stage of the intervention, and maintained the sight words. Both of these examples prove that sight word intervention with students with disabilities are successful, even when more non-traditional words and implementations are used.

In two of the studies that were reviewed, the researchers used the same instructional method with students with disabilities and both studies showed successful learning of sight words. Both Erbey et al. (2011) and McGrath et al. (2012) used a drill and practice procedure called reading racetracks. The racetrack has 28 cells that are shaped into the form of a racing track, and has checkered flags at the start and finish line. The words that are placed in the cells come from the student’s specific word list. Each word list should have seven words on it, three of them being known words so that the student is not overwhelmed by being presented with all new words. The seven words are then randomly put into the cells on the racetrack, each of them being incorporated four times. The racetrack procedure is timed for one minute, and students
must read as many words as they can in that one minute. If students are unable to get all the way around the track and read all 28 words they make a mark next to the last word and call it a “pit stop” (McGrath et al., 2012, p. 55). Progress is monitored by the teacher, and each time the student is expected to read more words than the previous attempt. According to Erbey et al. (2011), “flashcards can be paired with reading racetrack to improve sight word recognition of a child with learning disabilities” (p. 214). Prior to beginning the racetrack procedures, teachers can use the traditional flashcard method to introduce the new words to the students. This way, the student will be more familiar with the words before being timed on the racetrack. Using flashcards and the reading racetrack together will provide the students with more exposure and repetition of the words, and it will help them to better retain the newly learned words. This procedure has proven to be very successful with students with disabilities as well as in other settings such as resource rooms and general education classrooms (McGrath et al., 2012). Therefore, using reading racetracks to teach sight words to students with disabilities is an effective and successful procedure, and should be used more often in schools.

Some researchers have turned to technology to assist them in sight word intervention with students with disabilities. Both Coleman et al. (2015) and Yaw et al. (2012) have studied the effectiveness of computer-based sight word programs during interventions with students with disabilities. Both of these authors have found positive effects of using technology to acquire sight words with students with disabilities. According to Coleman et al. (2015), “computer-assisted instruction (CAI), a relatively newer method of instruction for students with ID, is growing in popularity due to its effective academic outcomes and positive effects on students’ self-esteem and language skills” (p. 197). Since the use of technology has been rapidly increasing as of late, teachers are finding many programs that can provide instruction and
support to students. Yaw et al. (2012) used a computer program in which a sight word would appear on the screen for two seconds, followed by a voice recording that would read the sight word for the student, and then the sight word was displayed for two additional seconds after the word was read. The student’s goal was to try and read the word aloud before the voice recording played and also repeat the word after the voice recording. Therefore, if the student was unable to identify the word in the first two seconds, the voice recording would read the word so that the student could repeat it. There were 10 words used in each session, and each session lasted only three minutes and 20 seconds so as to elicit quick responses from the students to prove the automaticity of the word reading. The teacher would have to observe the sessions to know when the student was able to read all of the words before the voice recording played, and once the student was able to read all the words, 10 new words would be implemented. This intervention was extremely successful for the student. According to Yaw et al. (2012), “across all baseline assessments Leah only read three words correctly within 2 s. After the last intervention session, Leah read 28/30 words correct within 2 s” (p. 362). Maintenance of the words is another important factor in any intervention. In this intervention, the sight words were assessed eight weeks after the initial intervention and the student and she still was able to read 28/30 of the words correctly. The success of the Yaw et al. study proves that computer-based sight word intervention is another successful method that can be used with students with disabilities.

Similar to Yaw et al. (2012), Coleman et al. (2015) compared computer-assisted and teacher directed sight word intervention. In this study, the researchers used the computer-assisted instruction in addition to teacher directed instruction because they stress that the computer program should not replace teacher instruction, but rather add to it for further reinforcement. In this study three students with intellectual disabilities participated in both computer-assisted
instruction (CAI) and teacher directed simultaneous prompting (TDSP). All three students were able to increase the percentage of sight words read correctly in both conditions, but for two of the three students the TDSP was significantly more effective than the CAI; the remaining student showed slightly better results using CAI. Although this study did not show significant benefits of CAI for all students, it should still be noted that all students did increase sight word reading using the program. All students have different learning styles, and this data showed that with these particular students. This study was still successful, though, because all of the students increased their sight word reading with the TDSP. Finally, Coleman et al. gives special educators insight into CAI and how it can be an effective alternative for some students and further proves that sight word intervention is effective and successful for students with disabilities.

Although there are many different approaches to sight word instruction for students with disabilities, the most important factor for educators to understand is that students with disabilities require more instruction and more practice than their typically-developing classmates. No matter what type of approach an educator decides to use there are elements they must include in order to provide effective word-reading instruction. According to Denton and Otaiba (2011), “this instruction is most effective when it is delivered within structured, carefully sequenced, well-organized lessons and when it includes daily opportunities to read and respond to connected text at an appropriate level of difficulty” (p. 6). Many of the studies discussed in this literature review have showed how students have successfully acquired and maintained specific sight words, but it is important to remember that these sight words are being acquired so that students can transfer the knowledge to the reading of texts. Alberto et al. (2013) conducted a study over the course of four years that focused on the identification of individual words and connected text. In this study there were ten phases of instruction per word set, and each phase included four words. The first
The first phase was always nouns, which for one example included the words “cup, ball, book, hat” (p. 336). The second phase included adjectives. The words in the second phase included, “big, small, red, blue”, the third phase was then a combination of the nouns and adjectives, “big cup, small ball, red book, blue hat” (p. 336). The fourth phase taught verbs. The verbs included in the fourth phases were, “take, put, give, push”, and then the fifth phase was a combination of the nouns, adjectives, and verbs (p. 336). The sixth phase was prepositions. The words in the sixth phase included, “in, on, under, next to”, and the seventh phase was a combination of the nouns, adjectives, verbs, and prepositions (p. 336). The eighth phase was labeled as other and words included in this phase were “the, and, is, a”, and the ninth phase was a combination of all the word forms previously mentioned. Finally, the tenth phase focused on plurals of the previously learned words such as “balls, hats, books, cups” (p. 336). The aforementioned instruction is extremely explicit and well planned, and showed to be extremely successful with all students. The instruction was so successful because all of the previously learned words were continuously used in the following phases, so by the tenth phase the students had used the words numerous times in their reading and writing and had mastered them at that time. This sequencing of sight words sets students up for success because they are not only being taught how to read the words, but how to use them in relation to other forms of words. This study incorporated all of the elements of effective word-recognition instruction that Denton and Otaiba (2011) described, as previously mentioned above. Educators should take note of this effective and successful method of sight word instruction so that it can be used more often with all students, and specifically students with disabilities.

Another highly effective strategy that is used in sight word instruction for students with disabilities is allowing multiple opportunities to respond. Opportunities to respond (OTR) are
provided more readily to students when the content being instructed includes both known and unknown material. In Burns (2007), Kupzyk et al. (2011), and Volpe et al. (2011), the researchers use an interspersing technique which includes words that the student already knows as well as unknown sight words that the student needs to learn. Therefore, they are alternating between known and unknown words which allows the students to feel more confident and successful. Burns (2007) found that “when students with learning disabilities were provided learning tasks that represented an appropriate level of challenged, called instructional level, they demonstrated higher task completion, task comprehension, and on-task behavior” (p. 252). However, there is no set ratio of known to unknown words that has been proven to be most effective, so the instructor use their knowledge of the students to decide this ratio. The range that is suggested for this technique is “70% to 85% known items to 15%-30% unknown or new items to be learned” (p. 252). In using this approach, especially with students with disabilities, the student has sufficient prior knowledge to successfully interact with the task at hand and learn the new material. According to Volpe et al. (2011), “the inclusion of known words increases motivation, task preference, and task completion rates and enhances learning through differential reinforcement” (p. 118). If a student is presented with a word list and sees a majority of known words, rather than a majority of unknown words, the student will feel more confident and willing to participate in the task. Once the unknown words are mastered, they replace the original known words from the list. This aspect creates increased repetition of words that were once unknown. Burns (2007) found that “providing more opportunities to respond through an increased number of presentations while rehearsing new items improved retention of the newly learned items” (p. 253). Not only does this method increase student confidence and motivation, but it also proves to
be highly effective in the retention of the words acquired during the intervention. Therefore, high OTR is a crucial element of instructional techniques for students with disabilities.

**Using Sight Word Instruction with Students Who are Considered “At-Risk” in Reading**

There are many strategies and techniques that are used to facilitate sight word learning for struggling readers. Many researchers have been examining one specific technique, incremental rehearsal, which has proven to be effective in numerous studies (Joseph, 2006; Sullivan, Konrad, Joseph, & Luu, 2013). Volpe et al. (2011) compared the effectiveness and efficiency of two different methods targeting sight word recognition, traditional drill and practice (TD) and incremental rehearsal (IR). The TD approach has proven to be effective in helping students to learn words that were previously unknown. In this approach, the student is presented with flashcards that contain 100% unknown words. In the first trial, the teacher presents the word, models reading the word accurately, and then asks the student to repeat the word aloud. In the trials to follow, the student must attempt to read the word independently and is provided with corrective feedback on incorrect responses. In the IR approach both known and unknown words are presented incrementally, “(e.g., 1U, 1K, 1U, 1K, 2K, 1U, 1K, 2K, 3K, etc., where 1U is the first unknown word, and 1K is the first known word)” (p. 119). Another feature specific to IR is that once the instructor presents the first unknown word five to nine times, it becomes the first known word in the next IR sequence. This feature of presenting the words allows for multiple presentations of the new words and many opportunities to practice the words. As a result, IR has consistently demonstrated “high retention and increased generalization rates, as well as enhanced reading fluency and comprehension” (p. 119). This method for sight word instruction is extremely effective in learning new sight words and also retaining them over time. However, because of the strict and repetitive implementation of this method it can be quite lengthy (in
comparison to the TD method). Therefore, Volpe et al. found that IR is a more effective approach to use with students but the TD approach is more efficient. The TD approach takes far less time to present the new words to students, and it had still proven to be effective in the acquisition of sight words, so many teachers continue to use this approach. Similarly, Nist and Joseph (2008) compared three different intervention techniques, incremental rehearsal, interspersal word procedure, and a traditional drill and practice flashcard method. They found that “students as a group read more accurately words that were taught under the incremental rehearsal condition” (p. 301). Not only did the students learn more words from IR, but 5 out of 6 of the students retained all the words learned using IR. In this study, the IR method was proven to be most effective in comparison to the other two methods used. However, this study showed that the traditional drill method was most efficient, and it was preferred by students and teachers because it took the least amount of time to complete. Therefore, Nist and Joseph’s finding were nearly identical to that of Volpe et al. (2011).

Since Incremental Rehearsal (IR) has proven to be so effective, many researches have conducted studies using the technique. Joseph (2006) conducted a study using this technique, but used 90% known words and only 10% unknown, in other words there was a 9:1 ratio of known to unknown words. The nine to one ratio is higher than the suggested known percentage mentioned above (70%-85%). The results of the study showed that students were able to retain 70% of the words after one day, and 90% of the words after days two and three. An addition to this study was students were also required to read a passage containing the words after the three days. Surprisingly, students were able to read an average of 90% of the words in the passages. According to Joseph, “several were able to retain more words while orally reading a passage than on the posttests, possibly due to their ability to read words with the aid of contextual clues” (p.
805). Therefore, when teaching sight words educators should also find books and/or passage containing the sight words in order to aid the student’s transfer of knowledge from words in isolation to words in the context of a passage. Kupzyk et al. (2011) is another study that extended on the current research on IR by creating a modified IR procedure called Strategic Incremental Rehearsal (SIR). The SIR procedure included 10 unknown words that would be presented and modeled to the student in the initial instructional session. The experimenter presented and modeled U1 and then asked the student to repeat the word. If the student did not respond correctly, corrective feedback was given and the word was repeated until the student was able to read the word independently in two seconds or less. Once the student was able to read U1, U2 was presented and modeled in the same fashion. Once the student was able to read U2 in two seconds or less, the experimenter then went back to U1 and had the student read both words independently before moving on to U3. This procedure continued (prompt delay, corrective feedback, error correction) until the student read each word correctly, and continued all the way up to U10. Although both IR and SIR resulted in an increase of sight word recognition, “participants read more words correctly in the SIR condition than in the IR condition” (p. 787). This study is extremely beneficial to the research on IR in that the experimenters have found a more efficient way to teach sight words, while still maintaining the same effectiveness. One major difference between SIR and IR is that there are no known words at the start of SIR, rather 10 unknown words. However, because of the strategic implementation of the words in SIR, students begin to use the previously unknown words as their known words. This process was created in an attempt to make IR more efficient. As previously discussed, IR has proven to be extremely effective, but not efficient. Given that under the SIR condition there was no known words to include, learning the ten words was much quicker. Another significant difference is that
in IR the unknown word had to be read five to nine times before considering it a known word. In SIR the unknown word can be read as few as two times in order for it to be considered a known word; this aspect also decreases the amount of time that has to be spent on unknown words. This improvement to the already effective IR intervention method is great news for educators and students alike.

Some researchers have used phonics instructional approaches for improving students’ sight word reading (Ehri, 2013; Noltemeyer, Joseph, & Kunesh, 2013; Schmidgall & Joseph, 2007). Phonics instruction is extremely relevant in sight word acquisition because students must know their letter-sound correspondences before they can begin to learn words. Ehri (2013) discusses the impact that orthographic mapping has on the acquisition of sight words. Although orthographic mapping is one specific aspect of phonics, it is important to take note of this research. According to Ehri (2013), “orthographic mapping occurs when, in the course of reading specific words, readers form connections between written units, either single graphemes or larger spelling patterns, and spoken units, either phonemes, syllables, or morphemes” (p. 5). In other words, it is the connecting of letters and their sounds to other letters and sounds in order to read words. Before a student can read words, they must first learn the alphabet and the sounds that each letter makes. Ehri found that phonics instruction can be used to aide in the acquisition of basic sight words when letters are taught with examples of their articulation. In this study, the experimenter showed the students how their mouth should be used in order to make the specific sounds. In showing them how to position their mouths, it led them to read “six words that were spelled phonetically with the trained letters: BO (bow), SA (say), TE (tea), BEK (beak), SOP (soap), TAL (tail)” (p. 11). Although this study used a phonics approach, it was ultimately successful in teaching sight words to students as well. Similarly, Noltemeyer et al. (2013) found
that using phonics instruction was beneficial in the acquisition of sight words. However, this type of phonics instruction was slightly different, and still proved successful for the students. In this study the experimenter would present an unknown word to the students and say, “this is the word clap. This letter [pointing] makes the /k/ sounds. Can you say /k/? (Children respond)” (p. 124). This process would continue for each letter of the word and then the teacher would have the students blend all the sounds together to say the whole word. She would then have them repeat the whole word independently before moving on to the next unknown word. This approach proved to be successful in the acquisition of sight words for all students in the study. Schmidgall and Joseph (2007) also used a phonics analysis condition, word boxes, to teach unknown words to children. For this study the unknown words were presented orally, so children had to rely completely on their knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. The experimenter would draw the number of “sound boxes” on a dry erase board and then provide plastic letter manipulatives for the students to choose from. The experimenter read the word orally and the student had to determine how to spell the word based on the sounds they heard. The students would slide the letters into the boxes until they had the word spelled correctly, they would then read the words aloud. This process was repeated 3 times for each new word presented. This word box technique was compared to a drill method as well as an interspersing method, and overall students who received intervention using the word boxes learned more words than both of the other methods. The word boxes proved to be most successful by, “an analysis of the group data revealed increasing trends in word-reading performance and word-reading rate among the three instructional conditions with the greatest increases in words read under the WB” (p. 325). This study showed three different intervention models that can be used to increase student sight word
knowledge. Although the phonics approach in using word boxes was the most effective, all three of the methods can be used to teach sight words to students receiving intervention.

In addition to all of the methods, approaches, and techniques mentioned above, there are more factors that can lead to effective sight word intervention for at-risk readers. Meadan, Stoner, and Parette (2008) conducted a study comparing picture supported and word-only sight word acquisition with young children. The results of this study were surprising because young children seem to favor reading when there are pictures included in addition to words. The study found that “when pictures accompanied the words, students required longer to reach criterion and made more errors than when pictures were not present” (p. 47). One reason students might make more mistakes when a picture is included is because students can interpret the same picture in numerous ways, or they could be unsure what the picture even means. Surprisingly, when asked a majority of the children stated that they thought the pictures helped them to learn new words, but based on the data the opposite is true. According to Meadan et al. (2008), “sight vocabulary was observed to be learned most efficiently by all participants when the target word was presented in isolation” (p. 48). Therefore, this study proved that the more traditional approach of presenting the students with flashcards was more effective in sight word acquisition. In a different study, researchers examined using a vocabulary focused intervention to increase student word recognition (Loftus, Coyne, McCoach, Zipoli, & Pullen, 2010). They found that students who received intervention on vocabulary sight words that were introduced in the classroom obtained higher scores on the word tests in comparison to students who received only classroom instruction. In yet another study, the researcher used poetry during interventions to build fluency, word recognition, and confidence in struggling readers (Wilfong, 2008). The Poetry Academy used a 5 step system that was created by the classroom teacher, the steps are as follows:
1. The volunteer reads a new poem to the student (modeling),
2. The student reads the poem with the volunteer (listening-while-reading and assisted reading),
3. The student reads the poem to the volunteer (repeated reading),
4. The student reads the poem at home, gathering signatures as proof, and
5. The student reads the poem one last time to the volunteer to prove mastery. (p. 6).

As can be seen from the literature review above, there are many different avenues that educators can take when creating interventions for at-risk students. Any form of supplemental literacy instruction is beneficial for a struggling reader. Supplemental instruction and interventions should begin as soon as possible in an effort to close the gap between students and their peers. If such interventions can begin at an early age it is more likely that the students will catch up to where they need to be. This is extremely important for young students so that they can gain confidence and stamina in their reading abilities, which will help them to become successful in secondary education as well as adulthood. Students with disabilities should also receive supplemental instruction and intervention as soon as possible, so that they will have a better chance of participating in activities and education with their typically-developing peers. Sight word intervention is the best place to start instruction for all students at a young age, as it is the foundation of becoming an adequate reader.

**Methods**

**Context**
Research for this study took place in a rural elementary school in western New York. According to the New York State District Report Card from the 2014-2015 school year, the total population K-12 is 422 students. The student population in the district is 92% white, 4% Hispanic or Latino, 3% multi-racial, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0% African American. In the district, exactly 50% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. There is one elementary school in the district, pre-k through sixth grade, and one Junior/Senior High School, seventh through 12 grade. In first grade there are 51 students and the common class size is 18 students. In Danny’s (pseudonym) classroom there are 17 students, 10 are boys and seven are girls. This classroom has 14 Caucasian students, two multi-racial students and one Hispanic student. In Nathan’s (pseudonym) class there are 18 students, 10 are girls and 8 are boys, and all of the students are Caucasian. In Betsy and Wyatt’s (both pseudonyms) classroom there are 20 students, 10 are boys and 10 are girls. In this class 19 students are Caucasian and one student is Hispanic.

Participants

The participants of this study include four first grade students from the classroom noted above. The group contained three boys and one girl, ages ranging from six years and three months to seven years and two months. All of the students come from low socioeconomic homes, and all four receive free or reduced lunch. None of the students receive special education services, and they are all in general education classroom settings. Two of the students share the same classroom teacher, while the other two are in different classes. All four of the students are considered at-risk in reading, and are currently two reading levels below grade level.
Danny (pseudonym) is one of the participants. Danny is multi-racial (half African American and half Caucasian). He lives at home with his mother, and he is her only child. Danny is a very sweet and hard-working student. He has a great imagination, and he loves to make stories up and tell them aloud. He is very knowledgeable on WWE wrestling as well as the avengers’ super heroes. Danny is below grade level in reading, and receives intervention each day for 30 minutes, (in addition to the intervention received from this study). He is eager to learn new words and become a better reader, and is willing to do any work that is asked of him.

Nathan (pseudonym) is a participant in the study. Nathan is Caucasian; he lives at home with his mother and father, and he is the only child. Nathan is below level in reading and receives intervention for 30 minutes each day (in addition to the intervention received from this study). Nathan is very eager to learn his new words and become a better reader, and he is willing to do any work that is asked of him.

Betsy (pseudonym) is another participant in this study. Betsy is Caucasian; she lives at home with her mother and father, and she has one older sister. Betsy is very outgoing and social, and she enjoys working one-on-one with adults. She is below level in reading and receives intervention for 30 minutes each day (in addition to the intervention received from this study). Betsy is very eager to learn new words and become a better reader, and she is willing to do any work that is asked of her.

The last student participant of this study is Wyatt (pseudonym). Wyatt is Caucasian, and he lives at home with his mother and younger sister. Wyatt is new to the district so there is no data on his previous schooling or academic standings. Based on the data from the testing completed upon his arrival, Wyatt is below grade level in reading and receives intervention for
30 minutes every day (in addition to the intervention received from this study). Wyatt is very shy, as he is still getting used to the district, and he does not have confidence in his reading abilities. He did, however, say that he was willing to participate in the study.

In addition to the student participants, there will be four adult participants in this study. The participants are all teachers in the district, three are the students’ classroom teachers, and one is the reading department chair. All of the teachers have taught in the district for at least five years, and are all highly intelligent and respected in the district. All of the teachers signed consent forms and were willing to participate and help the researcher in any way possible.

Mrs. Moses is Caucasian and she is a first grade teacher in the district. She has 17 years of teaching experience and 15 of them have been in first and second grade. Mrs. Moses does a “slide” program where she moves from first to second grade with her class and then goes back to first grade after they finish second grade. Mrs. Moses is highly respected and intelligent, and provides a safe and fun classroom environment for her students to learn in.

Mrs. Shear is Caucasian and she is a first grade inclusive education teacher in the district. She has seven years of teaching experience in the district, all of which have been as a first grade inclusive education teacher. Her classroom is full of very diverse learners. She has some students with disabilities, students who are on grade level, as well as students who are performing above grade level. Mrs. Shear is very enthusiastic about teaching and her room is a fun and exciting learning environment.

Mrs. Pat is Caucasian and she is a first grade teacher in the district. This year is Mrs. Pat’s 27 year in the district, so she is highly respected and knowledgeable about first grade students. Mrs. Pat has spent a majority of her time in first grade, although when she first started
she was the teacher who participated in the “slide” program. Mrs. Pat’s room is colorful and bright, and she is always warm and welcoming to all students and adults.

Mrs. Reed is Caucasian and she is a Reading Specialist in the district. This is Mrs. Reed’s 10 year teaching in the district. All of her years teaching she has been a reading specialist. She started in the high school, then moved to the middle school, and is in her current position at the elementary school for her fifth year. This is Mrs. Reed’s first year serving as the reading department chair in the elementary school, so she is very knowledgeable and up to date with all of the latest reading strategies and requirements. She has worked with all of the students in this study at one point or another, and she is a great help to students and adults.

**Researcher Stance**

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am working toward a Master’s of Science in Literacy Education and certification for teaching literacy to children ages birth through grade six. I currently hold a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary and Special Education from St. John Fisher College and am certified to teach elementary and special education in grades one through six. As the researcher for this study, I was an active participant observer, meaning that I was the one teaching the students in the study as well as collecting the data and taking notes on my own observations (Mills, 2014). As an intervention teacher, I was able to pull these students at different times throughout the day and work one-on-one with them so that I could really focus on each student for the data collection. According to Mills (2014), “as researchers of our own teaching practices, active participant observation is likely to be the most common ‘experiencing’ data collection technique that we use” (p. 85). Because the participating students are already familiar and comfortable working with me, the study did not seem like
anything new or different to them. In having a relationship with the students already, it also made data collection more efficient for me, as I am used to observing and recording the instruction I complete with them daily.

Method

For this study, I collected qualitative data to determine the impact that sight word intervention has on students’ reading abilities. More specifically, I worked with four children who, based on the American Reading Company Program, were two reading levels below their grade level. The study took place over the course of three weeks, and all observations were done in the school setting (15 days). I administered two assessments, made daily observations, and also conducted formal and informal interviews.

The first part of this study was to collect the baseline data for each participant involved. In other words, a pre-assessment was given to each student containing the 60 sight words at their current reading level that need to be learned before moving to the next reading level. This pre-assessment can be seen in the appendix A. The students also read a book at this reading level which contained many of the sight words, and I kept a running record of their performance (see appendix B). The Garfield Reading Interest Survey (see appendix C) was used in the beginning of the study to determine each student’s feelings about different aspects of reading. The interest survey was administered again on the last day of the study and the responses compared. A final assessment (post-assessment) was also given on the last day that was identical to the pre-assessment in order to compare the students’ reading levels before and after the intervention. The post assessment can be found in appendix A as well.
Once the baseline data was collected, I began working with each student. Data was collected every day (Monday through Friday) for three weeks (15 days), and I worked one-on-one with each student for 10 minutes a day. Each day I would present the sight words to the students and keep track of their responses on an excel sheet. I also recorded and took notes during informal conversations I had with the students about their reading abilities. Data was also collected through formal interviews with the students’ teachers and the reading department chair. These interviews included ten pre-determined questions and the interviews were voice recorded and I took notes as well. The teacher interviews can be found in Appendix D.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Since this research was qualitative and also an action research project it is important to ensure that the study is trustworthy. Mills (2014) cites the work of Guba (1981) in explaining that in order for a study to be trustworthy it must have credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Mills (2014) explains, “the credibility of the study refers to the researchers’ ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 115). In other words, credibility means that researches need to remember that the data is being collected from real people and problems or errors can often occur. Also, the data that is collected might not all align with each other, and researchers need to be able to explain this in the study. In order to address this need throughout the study, I will meet with a critical colleague to discuss my data collection process as well as any difficulties or problems I may encounter. If I have questions I can confide in my colleague to help me reflect on the data.
The second aspect of trustworthiness is transferability. Mills (2014) defines transferability as, “qualitative researchers’ beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 116). In other words, what I learn from the data that I collect from this study cannot be stated as a fact, or assumed to be true for everyone. All the data is only applicable to the participants of this study.

The third aspect of trustworthiness is dependability. According to Mills (2014), “dependability refers to the stability of the data” (p. 116). The stability of research is established by how strong or weak the data collected is, and how well the researcher presents the data. In using sight words, the data collected for this study is concrete and objective. The student can either read the word or they cannot, and that is evident from the data.

The final aspect of trustworthiness is confirmability. Mills (2014) defines comparability as, “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 116). In other words, the researcher cannot show their personal beliefs, ideas, or values in their study, they must rely on the data collected only. To ensure confirmability in this study, I triangulated my data collected. This means I collected data in three different ways and compared all of the findings.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning to collect data for this study, I had to provide information to the participants and their parents about the study. Because this study uses young children, I had to send home a letter including the purpose of the study, and the parents had to sign a permission slip stating their child could be a part of the study. One parent permission was granted, I asked each student for their verbal assent, and they had to agree to be a part of it as well. The adult
participants were also given a letter including the purpose of the study and had to sign a consent form stating that I could use the data collected from them in the study as well. All parents and participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect the identities of the students involved and to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection

For this study I collected three different forms of data in order to ensure triangulation of the results. As previously stated, I will be an active participant observer during the data collection, (I will be the actual teacher). I observed and recorded student responses reading sight words in isolation and in the context of a book. I used my district's reading program, American Reading Company, and worked on the sight words the student must master to move to the next reading level. I had each student take a pre and post assessment where they read the word list as well as a book at the reading level and compare the data. I worked with four students’ total, but worked with each student one-on-one in order to gather the most accurate data on their reading abilities. I worked with each student every day for 10 minutes each during the data collection, and they practiced the word list on each day.

The second form of data collection will be through informal and formal interviews, as well as questionnaires. I conducted formal interviews with the students' classroom teachers as well as the reading department chair. I created 10 open ended questions about literacy acquisition, sight words, their students' strengths and needs, etc. I also conducted more informal interviews with the students, asking each of them questions about their views on reading, sight words, and their own abilities, etc. I also gave the students a pre and post questionnaire using the
Garfield interest survey so that I can compare their feelings and beliefs before and after, as well as to what they responded when having informal conversations.

The final form of data collection will be through student work. I collected a variety of artifacts such as the district and student data that is accessible to me as an employee. I was able to access the students’ current reading level in order to decide which word lists to use. Each time I met with students I had a sheet with the word list on it, and I was able to keep track of what words the students read correctly and incorrectly. Each time the student read a text containing the words (beginning and end of the study), I kept a running record to track how well students were able to read the words in context. I administered a pre and post assessment of the word list as well as the reading of a book containing the words in order to track student growth. I also administered a pre and post Questionnaire to determine if students’ perceptions of reading change after the short intervention.

**Data Analysis**

After the collection of data for this research study was complete, a thorough analysis of the data took place in order to determine the findings of the research. First, I analyzed the interviews that I conducted with the three classroom teachers and the reading specialist and department chair. I asked them each the same 10 questions that I created in relation to literacy acquisition and the impact of sight words on students’ reading abilities. Each teacher was also asked about their student’s strengths and needs in relation to reading. In order to analyze the interviews I read each one numerous times, highlighting, underlining, circling, coding, and starring important information that stood out to me. I would also make notes in the margins as well as on a separate sheet of paper as I re-read and found similarities and differences in each
teacher’s responses. The teacher’s responses were very helpful in order to understand their views on sight words, as well as different strategies and activities they used in their classrooms with the students that I was also working with for the study. I found that many of their responses about literacy acquisition and the impact of sight words on reading were extremely similar and many of them even used the same words and phrases to describe literacy in general as well as their beliefs about it. The information collected from the teacher interviews was very beneficial to the outcome of this study.

Another piece of data that was analyzed for the findings of this study were the Garfield Reading Interest Surveys. Each of the four students was given the survey on the first and last day of the study. The survey asked questions about the students’ preferences in reading. The purpose of administering this survey twice (at the beginning and end of the study) was to see if the students’ opinions about reading changed over the course of the study. The students actually circle their own responses to the question on the survey based on how the Garfield character looks, (Happiest Garfield, Slightly smiling Garfield, Mildly upset Garfield, Very upset Garfield). There are pictures of Garfield displaying each of these emotions on his face and the student responds to each question based on which Garfield emotion most closely relates to how they feel. In analyzing this data, I compared the students’ responses to the questions on the first day compared to the last. In doing this, I found that there were certain questions in which all students final responses were either happiest Garfield or slightly smiling Garfield, when their responses on the same exact questions from the first time completing the survey were either mildly or very upset Garfield. After analyzing the data is was evident that all students had become more confident and motivated readers by the end of the study.
The next piece of data that was analyzed for the findings of this study were the Running Reading Records. Each of the four students were required to read a book that contained the 2G sight words that we would be practicing during the study. Each student read the same book on the first and last day of the study. The researcher was responsible for keeping a running record of each student while they read the book on the first and last day of the study. The purpose of having the students read the same book twice (at the beginning and end of the study) was to clearly see each student’s growth (specifically in reading the sight words in the book) from the beginning to the end of the study. In other words, using the same book was the most effective way to compare the students’ knowledge of the words from the first day of the study to the last day. In order to analyze this data, I had to compare the number of miscues each student made in their first running reading record and their final running reading record. A miscue is another word for an error that the student makes while reading the text aloud. In order to determine what level the book was for each student, I had to determine the accuracy of each running reading record (baseline and final). In order to determine the students’ accuracy of the text an accuracy rate can be calculated using the following formula: (total number of words – miscues / total number of words x 100). With this final number you can determine a percentage of accuracy. If the accuracy rate is 95-100 the text is considered independent for the student, 90-94 is considered instructional, and 89 and below is considered frustration. The accuracy rate was calculated on all students’ running records and the pre and post scores were compared. All students’ accuracy scores were significantly higher on the final running reader record than on the initial running reading record.

Another piece of data that was analyzed for the findings of this study was informal interviews with each student. On the first day of the study I asked each of the students, “What do
you think about reading 2G words?” and each student responded to the question. I wrote down the students’ responses to this specific question as well as other comments that they made as they made their first attempt at reading the words. Also, each day I worked with the students one-on-one we had informal conversations about the words they were reading and they would make comments on how they thought they were doing. As I collected data each day I would jot down comments made by students that I thought were relevant and important to this study. Because these interviews were informal, the students revealed a lot of their honest thoughts and opinions throughout the study. The purpose of these informal interviews was to analyze how students’ thought of themselves as readers, and how their perceptions about themselves and the words changed throughout the course of the study. In analyzing these informal student responses, I went back and read over my notes and found a common theme among all the students. After analyzing the data it was clear that over the course of the study the students’ perceptions of the words and their ability to read

The final piece of data that was analyzed was the excel spreadsheets containing the 2G wordlist. A spreadsheet containing all 60 of the 2G words was created for each of the four students. Each day during the study the students were required to read through all 60 of the flashcards, and the researcher checked off the known words and left the boxes blank (un-checked) for the unknown words. This data was collected daily in order to see how many words the students knew each day, as well as which words the students continued to struggle with each day. In working on the same words each day, it was easy to see the students’ growth along the way. Using the flashcards was an effective and efficient way to teach the sight words as well as collect the data needed for this study. In analyzing this data, each day I counted the total number of words correctly and wrote it at the bottom of the checklist, so I could track the students’ daily
growth. Since I had the total number of correct sight words each day, it was clear to see the amount of words the students knew on day one all the way up through the final day.

In order to effectively analyze the data collected, coding of all the information was done. It was crucial to use coding in my analysis of the formal teacher interviews, Garfield Reading Interest Surveys, running records, informal student interviews, and excel spreadsheets containing the word list in order to determine whether or not the use of sight word instruction impacted the students’ reading abilities. The information that was gathered through coding, taking notes, and analyzing all of the data led me to discover three themes that will be discussed in the findings section of this paper.

**Findings and Discussion**

Sight word instruction is a necessary part of every child’s education. The purpose of this study was to determine if sight word instruction impacts students’ reading abilities. While analyzing the formal teacher interviews, the Garfield Reading Interest Surveys completed by students, running records, informal student interviews, and each student’s excel spreadsheet containing their known and unknown words, three recurring themes seem to emerge. The first theme that was evident from all of the data is sight word instruction improved students’ overall reading abilities. This theme focuses on each students’ ability to read sight words in isolation and in context before, during, and at the completion of this study. The second theme is sight words improved students’ confidence in reading. The second theme focuses on the students’ perceptions of themselves as readers before, during, and at the end of this study, as well as their teachers’ responses in the interviews. The data collected from the excel sheets and running records will also be used to show an increase in students’ confidence throughout the study. The
third theme that will be discussed is sight word instruction alone is not beneficial without other literacy instruction. The third theme focuses on the fact that during this study the students were not only reading sight words daily, but they were engaging in other forms of literacy and literacy instruction as well. All of these themes found while analyzing the data showed that sight word instruction, in addition to other literacy instruction, was beneficial for all students involved in the study. Each of the students improved their overall reading abilities, and reading levels throughout the course of this study. This section highlights the data collected while working with students, the students’ responses from the Garfield Reading Interest Survey as well as from informal interviews, and the teachers’ responses from the formal interviews conducted. All of these findings suggest that using sight word instruction with students does increase their overall reading abilities.

**Sight Word Instruction Improved Students’ Overall Reading Abilities**

In order for students to become adequate readers, they must first learn their sight words. The ability to read sight words in isolation and in context will help students to become more fluent readers. The first source of data that I identified this theme in was the excel spreadsheets containing the known and unknown sight words of each student. The study lasted a total of 15 days, and on each day the students would read through 60 flashcards which had the 2G sight words on them. As the students went through the flashcards, the researcher would check off all of the known words (the words the students were able to read from the flashcard automatically) and would leave the boxes empty (un-checked) for the words that the students were unable to read. As seen in table 1, each student grew in the number of sight words they were able to identify at the beginning of this study versus the end of the study.
Table 1
*Number of Sight Words Read Correctly on First and Last Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the number of sight words each student was able to read when the baseline data was collected as well as the number of sight words each student was able to read when the final data was collected. There were 60 sight words total at the 2G reading level that they were trying to master, and each of those same 60 sight words were assessed each day of the study using flashcards. All of the student names are pseudonyms. Danny was able to read 21 of the sight words correctly at baseline compared to all 60 correct at final. The increase in the amount of words read proves that Danny’s sight word reading ability significantly improved over the course of this study. Danny started off knowing the least amount of the sight words, but was still able to learn all of the words by the end of the study proving that his overall reading abilities increased.

Nathan was able to read 43 of the sight words correctly at baseline compared to all 60 at final. The increase in the amount of words read shows that Nathan’s sight word reading ability improved over the course of this study as well. Nathan started off being able to read a large number of the sight words, but still needed the entire three weeks of practice to master all 60 of the words. In mastering all of the words, it proves that Nathan’s overall reading ability increased.
by the end of the study. Betsy was able to read 29 of the sight words correctly at baseline compared to all 60 at final. Betsy’s sight word reading ability also increased significantly over the course of the study. Compared to the other students, Betsy had the second lowest score to start with, and was still able to learn all 60 words. Because she was able to learn all of the words, this proves that Betsy’s overall reading ability improved over the course of this study. Lastly, Wyatt was able to read 40 of the sight words correctly at baseline compared to all 60 words at final. The increase in the number of words read shows that Wyatt’s sight word reading ability also improved over the course of this study, and subsequently his overall reading abilities did as well. It is evident that all students’ sight word reading abilities at this reading level grew over the course of this study, and all of the students actually mastered all 60 sight words at this level.

Similar research conducted by Nist and Joseph (2008) would support this finding because it was found in their research that using the traditional drill and practice flashcard method was the most effective and time efficient method for students to learn a large number of words in a short time. This information indicates that using traditional drill and practice methods such as flashcards for instruction of sight words with students is effective, and also improves their overall reading abilities.

The increase in students’ overall reading abilities was also made evident in the pre and post running records. The ability to read sight words in isolation is extremely helpful in order for students to be able to read the words in the context of books. Each student was given the book “Polar Bear Babies” by Gina Cline and Traci Dibble to read aloud on the first and last day of data collection. This book is at the 2G level, the same level as the sight words they practiced, and the book contained many of the sight words at this level. While the students read the researcher kept a running record in order to keep track of their miscues (errors) while reading. Based on the
number of miscues, an accuracy rate can be calculated using the following formula: (total number of words – miscues / total number of words x 100). With this final number you can determine a percentage of accuracy. If the accuracy rate is 95-100 the text is considered independent for the student, 90-94 is considered instructional, and 89 and below is considered frustration. The accuracy rate was calculated on all students’ running records and the pre and post scores were compared. Tables 2 and 3 show the total number of words in the text, the miscues, the accuracy rates of each student, and the personal reading level on their pre and post assessments. Below is Table 2 which shows the pre-assessment running record scores.

Table 2
*Pre-assessment Running Record Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>Miscues</th>
<th>Accuracy Rate</th>
<th>Text Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows each of the students’ scores on their pre-assessment running record. This assessment was administered on the first day of the study. On the final day of the study, the post-assessment was administered using the same book. Table 3 below shows the data collected from the post-assessment running record.
Table 3

Post-assessment Running Record Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Name</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>Miscues</th>
<th>Accuracy Rate</th>
<th>Text Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table’s 2 and 3 show each of the students’ scores on their pre and post running records. The total number of words in the text is the same for all, 181 total words, as they each read the same text. On Danny’s pre-assessment he had a total of 36 miscues giving him an overall accuracy rate of 80%, which made the text at his frustration level meaning it was too hard for him to read. In Danny’s post-assessment he had 16 miscues giving him an overall accuracy rate of 91%, making the book now at his appropriate instructional level. Danny’s miscues significantly decreased from the first reading of the text compared to the final reading of the text. This data shows that as a result of the sight word instruction, Danny’s overall reading abilities improved over the course of the study. On Nathan’s pre-assessment he had a total of 23 miscues giving him an overall accuracy rate of 87%, this made the text at his frustration level meaning it was too difficult for him to read. On Nathan’s post-assessment he had only 8 miscues giving him an overall accuracy rate of 95%, this means the book is now at his independent reading level. Nathan’s miscues also significantly decreased from the first reading of the text to the final reading of the text. This shows that Nathan was also able to increase his overall reading abilities. This data also shows
that the book is independent for Nathan, meaning that it is actually too easy for him, and that he should move on to more difficult books at the next reading level. Betsy’s pre-assessment showed she had a total of 20 miscues giving her an overall accuracy rate of 88%, which made this text at her frustration level meaning it was too difficult for her. On Betsy’s post-assessment she had a total of 10 miscues giving her a 94% accuracy rate, and making the text at her appropriate instructional level. This data proves that Betsy’s miscues also significantly decreased from the first reading of the text to the final reading of the text. Betsy was also able to increase her overall reading ability throughout the course of this study. On Wyatt’s pre-assessment he had a total of 13 miscues giving him an accuracy rate of 92%, making the text at his appropriate instructional level. On Wyatt’s post-assessment he had only 7 miscues giving him an accuracy rate of 96%, this made the text at his independent level. Similar to the other students, Wyatt’s miscues also significantly decreased on the final running record in comparison to the first running record. Wyatt’s overall reading ability also increased over the course of this study. Overall, each of the students did significantly better on their post-assessment after the 15 days of sight word instruction. Each student was able to increase their sight word reading as well as their fluency on their post-assessment, which significantly impacts their overall reading abilities. These findings are similar to that of McGrath et al. (2012) because they discuss that in order for a student to be able to read fluently, they must first learn how to automatically recognize words in isolation. Once words are recognized in isolation, students can begin to read them in the context of books. Sullivan et al. (2013) also discusses the impact sight words have on fluency by stating, “an important part of reading instruction is teaching children to read high frequency words and irregular words, as learning to read these sight words will contribute to reading words fluently in
connected text, which will aid in comprehension” (p. 102). All of this information further proves that sight word instruction helps to improve students’ overall reading abilities.

The final form of data that proves that sight word instruction increased the students’ overall reading abilities is the formal teacher interviews. Part of the data collection was a 10 question interview conducted by the researcher. Four teachers, the three classroom teachers and one reading specialist/department chair, were interviewed about the students who participated in this study. Mrs. Moses, Mrs. Pat, Mrs. Reed, and Mrs. Shear (all pseudonyms) responded to the questions with their specific student(s) in mind. The teachers were interviewed over the last three days of the study, so they were able to see how the sight word instruction was impacting the students in the classroom. When asked if the sight word instruction was affecting other areas of literacy in the classroom, Mrs. Moses responded:

It does boost their fluency and their comprehension but it’s not only that, it’s the idea of them becoming a reader and it helps them with going from the shift of learning to read, to reading to learn which is what they have to do in all areas of reading especially after first grade. (Teacher Interview, March 2016)

First grade is a very important year for students because this is when they are making the transition, as Mrs. Moses mentions, where they are reading to learn instead of learning to read. Students at this level must begin to read in order to comprehend what they are reading in order to learn new information from their books. Mrs. Moses states that in this short time she has been noticing a boost in her students’ (Betsy and Wyatt) fluency and comprehension while reading with them in the classroom. She also stated that:
Even after the first or second day I could tell the progression right along because they were reading better and getting those 2G words, I think that both Betsy and Wyatt will be ready for 1B by the end of this. (Teacher Interview, March 2016)

Not only was the progression evident in the data collection by the researcher, but the classroom teacher was seeing it in her students as well, enough that she was going to move both students from the 2G reading level to the 1B reading level (the next level up). The students moving up a reading level, based on the district’s curriculum, further proves that sight word instruction increases overall student reading abilities. When Mrs. Pat was asked if her student (Nathan) had benefited from this intervention she responded:

Yes, definitely because he does so well with one-on-one and this extra practice with his sight words has helped him to learn all of them which is the only piece that was holding him back from 1B, I was able to move him up yesterday because he was able to read all his words. (Teacher Interview, March 2016)

As a result of this study, Nathan was finally able to learn his sight words in isolation and in the context of a book, and was able to move to the next reading level (based on the district’s reading program). This is a huge success for Nathan as he has been trying all year to move up a level, but his sight words were holding him back. Because of this study, and the sight word instruction provided, Nathan was able to reach his goal. This information shows that sight word instruction does in fact increase students reading abilities and reading levels.

Overall, each student benefited from the sight word instruction. Each student showed tremendous improvement on their sight word reading in isolation, as well as their reading of the text which was recorded in the running records. The teachers’ responses that were obtained from
the interviews further proved that the sight word instruction was allowing students to make gains in other areas of literacy, such as fluency and comprehension, and that they were even moving up in their reading levels in the classroom. Therefore, sight word instruction does impact students’ overall reading abilities and reading levels.

**Sight Word Instruction Improved Students’ Confidence in Reading**

If a student does not feel confident in their reading ability, they will be less likely to read books as well as take risks while reading. Sight word instruction is crucial for students so that they feel motivated and confident about reading new books and learning new words. Throughout the course of this study, it was evident that students were gaining self-confidence in their reading abilities, while reading the sight words in both isolation and in context. The data collected that supports this theme is the comparison of the pre and post Garfield Reading Interest Surveys, the informal student interviews, and the formal teacher interviews.

The first form of data that supports this theme was the Garfield Reading Interest Survey. Each student was given the survey at the beginning and end of the study, and their responses to the questions were compared. The survey has 20 questions and it asks about certain aspects of recreational and academic reading and how each circumstance makes them feel. The figure below is an example of the format and one of the questions asked.

**Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.**

![Figure 1. Example of a question from the Garfield Reading Interest Survey. This survey was completed by each student on the first and last day of the study.](image)
The students answer the question by circling the Garfield that most accurately represents how they feel. The teacher explains that the one on the far left is the happiest Garfield, the next is slightly smiling Garfield, next is mildly upset Garfield, and finally the last is very upset Garfield. Question 18 on the survey asks “How do you feel when you read out loud in class?” On the pre-assessment survey all four students chose either mildly upset or very upset when asked this question (3 chose mildly upset and one chose very upset). When given the post assessment survey, all four of the students circled the slightly smiling Garfield, indicating that their confidence in reading has grown over the course of the study. Before learning these sight words, the students did not feel confident in their abilities to be able to read out loud in class, whereas after learning all of their sight words at the 2G level they all indicated they would feel more confident in their ability to do so. Another example from the Garfield Survey that shows an increase in their confidence was the question “How do you feel about starting a new book?” On the pre-assessment survey two of the students circled only the slightly smiling Garfield (while the other two circled the happiest Garfield). On the post-assessment survey all four of the students circled the happiest Garfield, indicating that they all had confidence in their abilities to pick up a new book and begin reading. According to the students’ beliefs and opinions that they showed through the survey, it was evident that all of the students’ self-confidence in reading had increased as a result of the study. In practicing their sight words daily over a three week period (15 days), the students had already began to feel more confident in their reading abilities. These findings are similar to, and can be supported by, that of Yaw et al. (2012) who states, “supplementing early literacy-skill instruction with sight-word reading instruction designed to teach students to read commonly used words may enhance students’ confidence in their reading abilities, and reduce frustration associated with learning to read and/or reading instruction” (p.
Because sight words are often difficult to learn, yet very prevalent in early literacy texts, it is critical that all students learn sight words at a young age in order to boost their confidence and allow them to become adequate readers. The information gained from the data collected in the Garfield Reading Interest Surveys helps to prove that the students’ confidence increased as a result of sight word instruction.

Another form of data that can be used to support this theme is the informal student interviews. At the beginning of the study I asked each student what they thought about reading 2G words. The responses varied between all students because although they were all working on 2G words, their reading abilities were not exactly the same. Overall, though, all of their responses throughout the study and at the end of the study indicated a much higher level of self-confidence than on the first day. On the first day Danny’s response to the question was:

What? I’m not a 2G reader, I can’t read them, I’ve never learned some of ‘em before so I don’t know ‘em. They’re hard, Mrs. Shear hasn’t taught me them yet and I haven’t changed the books in my book bin from 1G to 2G yet. (Student Interview, March 2016)

His response at this time was that he was surprised and almost unwilling to try out these words. It was clear that Danny was not feeling confident in his ability to read the 2G words because they were unfamiliar to him at the beginning of the study. By the end of the third week, Danny was making comments such as, “these are easy now, I know these words really well” (Student Interview, 2016). Every day that data was collected, Danny was excited and smiling when we would go through the words, and each day he realized he knew more words and he was capable of learning them. Danny’s confidence was growing and he knew that he was capable of learning them so he was much more willing to practice them each day. Once the third week of data collection started he knew that there was a few words that he hadn’t been able to read yet. One
day when he missed one of these words he repeated it after being told and said “man, tomorrow I’m going to get that one, I’m going to remember it” (Student Interview, 2016). Instead of getting discouraged he was motivating himself to read the word and remember it for the next day. Similar to Danny’s comments, Betsy experienced the same boost of self-motivation and self-confidence while learning to read the sight words. In the beginning her response was, “I thought I knew most of them but I just got them mixed up I think, sometimes, some are hard ‘cause I don’t know them and I tried to sound them out but I can’t” (Student Interview, 2016). In the beginning she was very unsure of herself, and it was evident by her tone of voice that she was discouraged and embarrassed that she didn’t know some of the words. By the last week, she was excited and happy to practice the words. She would make comments like “yes! I finally got ‘says’ and ‘these’, or wow I almost know all of them now, only a couple more!” (Student Interview, 2016). She was becoming aware that she was learning them and also the tougher ones that took her longer to remember. The student comments that were made daily were recorded and when re-read for the data analysis it was evident that all of the student were gaining confidence in their reading abilities, and were far more willing to read and learn.

The last form of data that this theme was found in was the teacher interviews. When interviewing the teachers, many of them made comments that they could already see their students’ confidence increase while reading their 2G books. Mrs. Shear discussed how she could see a real change in Danny’s motivation and confidence in reading since beginning the sight word intervention. Mrs. Shear stated:

I can see that Danny’s fluency has been getting better in his 2G books, he is also excited to look through the bins and pick out new books that interest him, and is willing to read them with me which before he was not” (Teacher Interview, March 2016).
Being excited and motivated to read and pick out books is a huge deal for struggling readers as often then are not motivated to read because they lack the confidence in their ability to do so. Based on Mrs. Shear’s response it was evident that Danny was transferring his self-confidence and motivation to the classroom setting, and it was not just apparent in his time with me. Musti-Rao et al. (2015) state that “instruction in sight words not only can result in a corresponding increase in reading fluency and comprehension but also can improve students’ confidence levels and reduce their frustration with reading” (p. 34). Mrs. Reed, the reading specialist and department chair, also stressed the importance of learning sight words in order for a student to become more confident in their reading. In the interview she was asked if she thought sight words played an important role in reading acquisition. Mrs. Reed’s response was:

Yes of course I do, sight words are the foundation of literacy. This is how they learn the differences between letters and words and it also helps them become more confident in their reading once they start to see the words in their stories. (Teacher Interview, March 2016)

Although sometimes the confidence piece is overlooked when students are learning to read, it is a crucial part of the success of a students’ reading acquisition. If a child is not confident in their reading abilities they will be unwilling and unmotivated to learn new words. Therefore, sight word instruction can be used as a tool to help students build their confidence in reading.

**Sight Word Instruction Alone is not Beneficial without Other Literacy Instruction**

Although sight word instruction is extremely beneficial for students, sight word instruction is not the only literacy instruction that students should receive. In order for a student to become an adequate reader, they must also focus on other areas of literacy as well. In the data analyzed for this study, it became evident that sight word instruction was not the only literacy
instruction that the students needed or received during the study. The data that will be discussed in this theme is the teacher interviews and the student interviews.

While analyzing the teacher interviews, it became clear that all of the teachers thought that sight word instruction was important, but that other literacy instruction was necessary as well. All four teachers were asked if they thought that intervention on sight words alone is beneficial for students. Mrs. Reed responded:

It depends. Yes I feel like working on sight words with a student is beneficial for a short period of time, but as they get older they will also need some other type of intervention like focusing on comprehension, or reading books, phonics, and also seeing the words multiple times besides just on flashcards. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Mrs. Reed stressed the importance of learning sight words at an early age so that students will be able to receive instruction in other areas of literacy as well. Sight words are the foundation for other areas of literacy so before a student can begin to gain fluency and comprehension they must first learn their sight words. Mrs. Shear responded to the question similarly:

No, I think that sight words are just one component because if they are just reading them in isolation then it doesn’t always transfer in context. I think that you have to include the five elements all together in order for them to be able to actually read fluently. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Mrs. Shear also stressed the importance of incorporating multiple areas of literacy in instruction and not just focusing on sight words solely. Although sight words are a huge component of reading, there also needs to be emphasis on the other elements such as fluency, comprehension, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Similar to the findings of this study, Volpe et al. (2011)
discuss the importance of sight words as the core of all other areas of literacy. In the interview with Mrs. Moses she responded:

Yeah, I think that sight word instruction is important because it helps them to remember the words better but they also need them in order to help them with their fluency. Once they learn their sight words it is easier to work with them on comprehension strategies because they aren’t spending as much time trying to figure out the words, so we can work on developing their meaning of a text. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

In the classroom she is trying to teach comprehension strategies to her students, so in them getting additional practice outside of the classroom with their sight words it helps her to focus on comprehension strategies and not always sight words. Mrs. Pat also discussed how sight word intervention was important, but not the only component that she was working on with her students. She responded by saying:

Yes I think sight words are important because it helps them become a more fluent reading and they won’t have to stop every word to try and sound them out. Learning them will help with their comprehension because they can’t learn the comprehension strategies if they aren’t reading fluently. (Teacher Interview, 2016)

Similar to the other teachers’ response to this question, Mrs. Pat mentioned fluency and comprehension as other important areas of literacy that needed to be worked on with students in addition to sight word instruction. However, she, as well as the other teachers, also mention that students must learn their sight words before they can start to work on their fluency and comprehension skills. After analyzing the teacher interviews it was clear that instruction on sight words alone is not the only factor that contributes to an increase in students’ reading abilities. Although the sight word instruction that was implemented during this study was beneficial for all
students, they were receiving additional literacy instruction that contributes to their reading growth.

In analyzing the informal student interviews it was apparent that they were using the learned sight words to aide them in other areas of literacy instruction. Nathan was one of the first students to read all 60 of his sight words correctly with me. He would often tell me that “Mrs. Pat has been working on reading the books with me in class to help me move up too” (Student interview, 2016). In order to move to the next reading level Nathan had to also be able read a passage fluently and answer comprehension questions correctly as well. Since he was already working on his sight words, it allowed his classroom teacher to focus on other important aspects of reading such as fluency and comprehension. In the final week of the study, Nathan was very happy to share that “Mrs. Pat moved me up to 1B today because now I know all my 2G words” (Student Interview, 2016). Wyatt also shared with me that he and Mrs. Moses were working on other reading strategies in the classroom. “Mrs. Moses had me read to her and is trying to tell me how to slow down when I read so I can answer the questions because sometimes I can’t” (Student interview, 2016). Wyatt’s classroom teacher was able to spend time teaching him self-monitoring strategies in order to aide in his comprehension because she did not have to focus on sight word instruction. Wyatt was able to read all 60 of his sight words at the end of the study and just had to complete the fluency and comprehension piece with his teacher in order to move up to the next reading level. Danny also often discussed how he would work on his fluency and comprehension with his classroom teacher. At the beginning of this study Danny was still a 1G reader but was very close to moving to 2G and he needed practice with the sight words. After learning the minimum entry requirement he shared that he was able to start reading 2G books. Danny told me, “Mrs. Shear finally had me read to her and she told me I could pick out new 2G
books” (Student Interview, 2016). During the course of the study Danny was actually able to move to 2G and begin working on his fluency and comprehension with his classroom teacher. All of the components of reading go hand in hand with each other, and mastering one area will not make you a proficient reader that is why sight word instruction must be supplemented with other areas of literacy instruction as well.

Overall, sight word instruction benefited all of the students in this study. However, sight word instruction was not the only area of literacy instruction they were receiving. Sight word instruction is necessary in order for students to become proficient readers, but instruction in areas of fluency and comprehension are necessary as well. All of the students receiving sight word instruction were also receiving instruction from their classroom teachers in other areas of literacy, which ultimately allowed them to move up to the next reading level.

Implications

The findings of this research present several implications for elementary education teachers. The first implication from the findings is that all elementary teachers need to incorporate sight word instruction into their classroom schedules. The second implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to incorporate daily practice of sight words into their schedule through the use of independent or small group literacy centers and activities. The final implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to provide students with a literacy rich environment in order for students to have multiple opportunities to read sight words in context and not just in isolation. All of these implications for teachers became apparent from the findings of this research study.
When students are provided with sight word instruction their overall reading abilities as well as their self-confidence improves. According to Musti-Rao et al. (2015), “instruction in sight words not only can result in a corresponding increase in reading fluency and comprehension but also can improve students’ confidence levels and reduce their frustration with reading” (p. 34). The findings from this research study as well as that of Musti-Rao et al. provide a clear implication that all elementary teachers should incorporate sight word instruction into their classroom schedule. Since sight word acquisition has such a large impact on a student’s ability to become an adequate reader, teachers should take the time to model (teach) the appropriate sight words to all students. As seen in this study, daily sight word instruction can be completed in as little as five minutes. Teachers have the option to do whole group instruction on grade level sight words by using a model such as “I do, we do, you do”. Teachers can choose 5-10 words to introduce each day and simply write the word, model pronunciation for students, say it with students, and then have the students say it independently. This is just one method that could be used. Teachers can also incorporate sight word instruction into small group lessons based on reading levels, or even individual instruction when needed. Blackwell and Laman (2013) discuss some other examples of effective and efficient sight word instruction such as the traditional flashcard method, picture-based methods, technology-based methods, and game-based methods. Because all students learn differently, and may be at various reading levels, teachers need to incorporate many different methods and techniques while teaching sight words. With so much research describing the benefits of sight word instruction in relation to reading acquisition and confidence, teachers should see the imminent need to spend time each day on sight word instruction.
Since sight word acquisition is so important to student success in reading, daily independent and small group practice should be incorporated into the classroom in addition to direct instruction. With many classrooms already incorporating literacy centers into their daily routine, teachers should incorporate independent or small group centers focused on sight words. According to Arquette (2007), “centers are developmentally appropriate and are a type of activity suggested by both the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children” (p. 3). Literacy centers allow students to work independently or in small groups on targeted areas of literacy, while the teacher works with other students in small or individualized instruction. Literacy centers are an ideal way for students to learn and practice sight words in numerous different ways, as there is a plethora of activities that can be used during center time. Some activities that could be used for sight word centers are rainbow writing, stamp words, using a magnetic board and letters to create the words, flashcards, sight word jenga, sight word tic-tac-toe, sight word writing in the sand, sight word writing with playdough, and sight word word-searches. These are just a few examples of activities that can be used during literacy centers. Teachers can easily create these centers for students using supplies they already have available in the classroom. There are also a number of free printable worksheets and activities that can be found online. With technology so readily available, teachers should not have any problems locating sight word center activities. If computers and/or ipads are available in the classroom, there are many apps and online games that aide in sight word acquisition as well. Based on the findings of this study, sight word instruction is necessary for all students in order to increase their overall reading abilities and their confidence in reading. Therefore, teachers should dedicate time each day for students to learn and practice their sight words, and literacy centers are one example of how to do so.
The last implication for teachers based on the findings of this study, is to create a literacy-rich classroom environment so that students have multiple opportunities to engage in sight word reading. Much of this paper has described ways for students to learn and practice sight words in isolation. However, while analyzing the data I found that students needed to engage in other forms of literacy, in addition to sight word instruction, in order to become adequate readers. According to Axelrod, Hall, and McNair (2015), “high-quality literacy programs require a literacy-rich environment with many materials to support children’s learning” (p. 17). In order for students to stay engaged in learning, teachers need to create an inviting classroom environment through the use of different kinds of print around the room. Axelrod et al. (2015) provide examples of the different kinds of print that should be seen such as books, magazines, writing materials, lists, charts, labels, signs, and writing samples from children and adults” (p. 17). All of these kinds of prints are readily available to teachers, and therefore should be displayed around the room in order to provide support to students. Many times, sight words are displayed around the room on word walls, labels, and charts, and are accessible to the students throughout the day. Another critical aspect of a literacy-rich environment is a classroom library. Here, students should be able to access books at their reading level, which in turn will have the appropriate sight words they need to be practicing. Many reading programs provide books specifically catered to each level that specifically include sight words that the student should know. Being able to read sight words in isolation is an important foundational skill, but the ultimate goal is to build fluency and transfer the knowledge of the words into the context of a book. Teachers should make sure that each student in their classroom has appropriate leveled books that they will be able to read independently in order to build fluency and comprehension skills. In giving students multiple opportunities to engage in different forms of literacy, it will
further help them to increase their reading abilities. Other aspects of a literacy-rich environment, as described by Axelrod et al. (2015) include, functional print in the classroom, classroom libraries, sociodramatic play centers, writing centers, and content area centers. Teachers are responsible for providing all of these opportunities to their students on a daily basis. If students are immersed in literacy-rich environments daily, their overall reading abilities will improve.

**Conclusion**

This research was conducted to see if sight word instruction had any impact on students’ overall reading abilities. The main research question for this study is how does effective sight word instruction impact students’ reading abilities? The data for this study was collected through daily observation of students and recorded notes, formal and informal interviews, and student work samples. After analyzing the data, three major themes were found. My findings were that sight word instruction improved students’ overall reading abilities, sight word instruction improved students’ confidence in reading, and sight word instruction alone is not beneficial without other literacy instruction. This information indicates that effective sight word instruction did, in fact, increase students’ overall reading abilities. The findings of this research present several implications for elementary education teachers. The first implication from the findings is that all elementary teachers need to incorporate sight word instruction into their classroom schedules. The second implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to incorporate daily practice of sight words into their schedule through the use of independent or small group literacy centers and activities. The final implication from the findings is that elementary teachers need to provide students with a literacy rich environment in order for students to have multiple opportunities to read sight words in context and not just in isolation.
If I were to conduct this research again, there would be some changes that I would make to the study. First, I would like to incorporate more practice reading the appropriate leveled books that include the sight words. Because the study was only three weeks long, I only had the students read a book on the first and last day. After collecting data I realized that it would be more beneficial to have them practice the words in context more often, rather than just practicing the sight words each day. Although I was still able to see a significant increase in each student’s reading abilities over this time, I think practicing the words in context would have been even more beneficial. Another thing I would change is the amount of time I spent with the students each day. Because I was pulling the students each day, I only worked with them for five to 10 minutes as they would read through the flashcards with the sight words on them. If I was able to spend more time with them, they would have been able to run through the words in isolation and then also have time to read a book independently, therefore immediately transferring the knowledge of the words from isolation to in context. In practicing sight words, it was also impossible for me to work in small groups, as each student had to come one-on-one in order to ensure they were not being influenced by the other students’ responses. If I were somehow able to conduct similar research in small groups, I would be able to work with a larger population of students. Therefore, a final limitation to the study was that it only focused on four students, which is a small sample size, and it does not account for the majority of the students at the grade level.

After finishing the research and reflecting on how the study went, there are some questions that come to mind. The first question is, how can daily sight word instruction and/or practice be included into the school day? Many teachers complain that they do not have enough time in their days to get through all of the materials they need to cover. However, as found from
this study, daily sight word practice (using flashcards) takes only 5-10 minutes. Teachers can easily incorporate this into their schedule, even if they are having students read them to a partner, or if they can only work on half the amount of words. In my opinion, there are many ways that daily practice can be incorporated, and teachers just need to create the time and eliminate lengthy transitions and down time in between other activities. Another question I am left with is, would all students benefit from sight word instruction and practice? Although I want to think the answer is yes, at some point all students need some sort of instruction in order to learn the words, but some students learn and remember them quicker and easier than others. In this study I worked with four struggling readers who were two reading levels behind where they should be at this point in the year. Sight word instruction was necessary for them because their lack of sight word knowledge was what was holding them back from being able to read fluently and comprehend what they were reading. However, some students in first grade already know all their sight words and are many reading levels above the students in this study. With that being said, I feel that struggling readers should absolutely receive daily sight word instruction, whereas students who do not need that much support can only receive it once or twice a week. In order for the struggling readers to catch up to their peers, they need daily intensive and explicit instruction, which in some cases is not happening. Sight words are an important foundation that affect higher levels of reading, and they must be learned at an early age.

Sight word instruction significantly impacts students’ overall reading abilities. Learning sight words is the foundation that leads to fluency and comprehension while reading. Sight word instruction can also raise students’ self-confidence and motivation while reading. Although sight word instruction is extremely beneficial for students, other literacy instruction is necessary as well. The findings from this study show that teachers should incorporate sight word instruction
and activities into the classroom in order to raise student confidence, reading levels, and overall reading ability. I believe that sight word instruction is the gateway to becoming a fluent, confident, and adequate reader.
References


Appendix A: Pre/Post and Daily Sight Word Checklist

<p>| Sight words |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| About       |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Animal      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| As          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Boy         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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Appendix B: Pre/Post Running Reading Record Form

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Polar Bear Babies</th>
<th>By: Gina Cline and Traci Dibble</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is snow here. There is ice here. It is cold.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The polar bear lives here.</td>
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<tr>
<td>She has lots of fur. She will not be cold.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Her fur looks white. It looks white like the snow.</td>
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<td>She will sleep.</td>
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<tr>
<td>She will have her baby in a snow house.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The baby is so little.</td>
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<td>Many polar bears have two babies.</td>
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<td>Some have one, three, or four babies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This mother had one baby.</td>
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<td>She and her baby will be in the snow house for many, many days.</td>
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<td>The mother will not eat. She will give the baby milk.</td>
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<td>They come out of the snow house.</td>
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<td>Now, the baby is not so little.</td>
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<td>The mom has to eat. The baby has to go with her.</td>
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<td>She will look for seals to eat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>To get big, the bay has to have lots of seals to eat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Her mother gets seals for her.</td>
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<td>Then, she shows her baby how to get seals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When the baby is three, the baby will have to get seals for herself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where are the Seals? Will they get to eat?</td>
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Appendix C: Garfield Reading Interest Survey

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School ____________________ Grade ______ Name ____________________

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?

2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?

3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?

4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?

Page 1

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Survey designed by Dennis J. Kear, Wichita State University
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5. How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?

6. How do you feel about starting a new book?

7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?

10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?

11. How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?

12. How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?
<table>
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<th>How do you feel about reading in school?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image2" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image3" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image4" alt="Garfield" /></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>How do you feel about reading your school books?</th>
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<td>14</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image2" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image3" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image4" alt="Garfield" /></td>
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<th>How do you feel about learning from a book?</th>
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<td><img src="image1" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image2" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image3" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image4" alt="Garfield" /></td>
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<th>How do you feel when it’s time for reading in class?</th>
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<td>16</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image2" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image3" alt="Garfield" /> <img src="image4" alt="Garfield" /></td>
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Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

17. How do you feel about stories you read in reading class?

18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?

19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?

20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?
Appendix D: Teacher Interview

Formal Interview Questions for Classroom Teachers and Reading Department Chair

1. In your own words, can you describe the process of literacy acquisition?

2. What are your thoughts/beliefs on early reading intervention?

3. Do you think that sight words are an important part of reading acquisition? Explain

4. Do you think that intervention on sight words alone is beneficial for students?

5. How does sight word acquisition affect other areas of literacy?

6. Do you think that flashcard drill and practice is an effective method to use? Do you have any other strategies or activities you would suggest or think are more beneficial?

7. What are your students’ biggest strengths?

8. What are your students’ biggest needs/areas of concern?

9. Do you think that your student will benefit from this intervention? Why or why not?

10. If there was time in the day, do you think that daily sight word practice would be beneficial for all students in your class? (would it increase their reading abilities)