The advantages and challenge of fluency instruction

Jennifer Schroeder-Van Cleve
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This review examined the topic of fluency instruction as part of quality literacy instruction for children. Fluency is one of the five components of reading instruction recognized by the National Reading Panel, (2000). Fluency methods in reading curriculum should be given thoughtful attention. As the movement in education focuses on student assessment, meaningful literacy instruction is crucial to student success. This literature study focused on the benefits, and the challenges, associated with fluency instruction. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations were made for the implementation of fluency instruction in our schools.
THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGE
OF FLUENCY INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This review examined the topic of fluency instruction as part of quality literacy instruction for children. Fluency is one of the five components of reading instruction recognized by the National Reading Panel, (2000). Fluency methods in reading curriculum should be given thoughtful attention. As the movement in education focuses on student assessment, meaningful literacy instruction is crucial to student success. This literature study focused on the benefits, and the challenges, associated with fluency instruction. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations were made for the implementation of fluency instruction in our schools.
Introduction

Fluency is the ability to read material with expression and intonation at an appropriate rate. Fluency is one of the five components of reading instruction recognized by the National Reading Panel, (2000). Currently, there has been attention given to fluency scores in the district in which I teach. This attention is the result of No Child Left Behind legislation that uses timed test for measurement of reading achievement. Fluency methods in reading curriculum should be given thoughtful attention. This review is an attempt to create guidelines for implementing effective fluency strategies, what role fluency plays in a balanced literacy program and the challenges of fluency instruction.

Methodology

Background of Review

Fluent reading is a skill that students need to be successful. There are a multitude of reasons why being fluent is essential to reading. Fluency is important when reading text aloud for others in order to comprehend the text. Fluency leads to stronger comprehension when reading to oneself. Finishing Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), or Basic Reading Inventories (BRI) tests under the allotted time depends on students' ability to read fluently. Fluency has multiple definitions. “Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly,” (Put Reading First, 2001, p. 22). Timothy Rasinski defines fluency as, “Reading fluency refers to the reader’s ability to develop control over surface-level processsing so that he or she can focus on understanding the deeper levels of meaning embedded in the text,” (Rasinski, 2004, p. 46). Learning how to read fluently is an integral part of a meaningful literacy program. “Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural as if they are speaking. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word” (Put
Reading First, 2001, p.22). If a student is reading slowly, this can result in a lack of interest in reading, non-proficiency on tests, and low self esteem.

Development in reading fluency needs to be accomplished in classrooms. The demands of standardized tests mandated by federal initiatives such as No Child Left Behind forces attention on instructional methods for reading. Another reason fluency has gained much attention in education is due to the “Report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000). This report, “...identifies fluency as one of only five critical components needed for the acquisition and advancement of reading skills. That report has been particularly influential because it is viewed as the blueprint for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and Reading First legislation and funding,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 70). For example, if a student reads slowly they will not be able to complete ITBS tests, therefore scoring poorly.

Fluency practices in education have changed drastically over the course of historical education in the United States. In colonial times, fluency instruction was a major element of teaching reading. “This goal for proficiency in oral reading was tied directly to the social context for literacy uses of the period” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.5). In early American homes, multiple books were scarce. Therefore families spent time having one person read aloud from the text, while the others listened as a means of entertainment. “This development of ‘eloquent oral reading’ became the focus of reading instruction in this period and was represented in most of the published reading programs of the time” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 6).

Much time was spent in school classrooms during the 19th and beginning 20th centuries on fluency instruction. In the 19th century, “oral recitation” lessons consisted of a teacher reading a text aloud to students. The students would then practice the same passage on their own. Teachers provided assistance while students practiced their oral fluency. After students
had practiced their passages, they would read or recite the passage aloud to the teacher or to the entire class. "The students' readings were judged by the teacher on the quality of their oral reading and their recall of what they had read" (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 6). In the 20th century, this method of reading instruction became the "story method" of instruction, which focused on an entire text or story. In 1982, William James made the claim that teachers success in teaching reading consisted of an oral reading method. (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 6).

According to Rasinski, "Near the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, the dominant role of oral reading as the primary mode of instruction in reading was challenged. (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 6). Scholars in Europe and the United States began evaluating the role of fluency instruction in schools. These scholars became concerned that instruction in fluency focused too much on the oral and mechanical aspects, and did not focus on teaching students how to read for understanding. Thus the push of silent reading became an emphasis in schools. In addition to this, in the early 20th century, there was an increase in accessible books, magazines, newspapers, and materials for both children and adults. Thus, more printed reading materials were available in homes and schools. "During this period, then, silent reading with a focus on comprehension began to replace oral reading with a focus on elocution not only as a goal for reading but also as the preferred mode of reading for instruction." (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.8). It was felt that, "Silent reading focused readers' attention on the apprehension of meaning-the goal of reading-while instruction in oral reading tended to focus attention on word-perfect, accurate, and expressive recitation of the text" (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.8).

In the 1920's, silent reading had gained tremendous popularity. The Ohio Department of Education conducted a "Course of Study" in 1923 that stated several reasons for using silent reading in schools. Along with that, silent reading was adopted in some Chicago schools as the
main focus of their reading instruction in the 1930's and 1940's. (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006).

The movement from reading orally to silently had taken place. “Group-administered reading
achievement tests in a silent reading format were being used to evaluate individual students as
well as school progress.” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.10). Even assessment was based on silent
reading, which continues to be the trend for standardized testing today.

Although oral reading was not a primary focus of instruction or assessment, students did
practice reading orally through the manner of round-robin reading. In this method of instruction,
students read aloud new material as other students wait to take their turn. This particular method
of working on reading to check for students’ word recognition has basically been used from the
1950's to present. “Despite its clear limitations, round-robin oral reading has continued for
decades (and continues) to play a significant role in reading instruction and is considered by
some practitioners a primary mode for developing reading fluency in students” (Samuels &
Farstrup, 2006, p.11).

In the 1970's, Jay Samuel began researching repeated reading with the thought that
practice in all areas of life is what develops improved skills. His investigations and ideas, along
with many other researchers have sparked a growing trend in promoting more instruction in
fluency. Like many other issues and instructional methods in education, fluency instruction has
been a part of the swinging pendulum. Perhaps the attention on fluency instruction has made its
way to the forefront in education because of researchers such as Timothy Rasinski. In the book,
What Research has to Say about Fluency Instruction, Rasinski writes, “Students who read orally
with greatest fluency tended to score highest in overall reading achievement, and those who read
with least fluency tended to manifest the lowest levels of reading achievement,” (Samuels &
Farstrup, 2006, p. 15). This movement back to the inclusion and importance of fluency
instruction leads to an important question: Is fluency an important component of meaningful and effective reading instruction?

Purpose of this Review

One of the two purposes of this study is to examine the literature concerning the effects of teaching fluency building strategies to students as part of reading instruction. The second purpose is to examine what is included in teaching fluency strategies to improve students’ fluency. In order to accomplish these purposes, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What has the attitude been concerning teaching fluency in the past?
2. What are the benefits of teaching fluency strategies?
3. What are the challenges of including fluency instruction methods?
4. What are the guidelines for implementing teaching fluency effectively?

Need for the Review

Since the NCLB Act of 2001, schools have been struggling to measure up to the law’s mandates in reading as well as math. Implications of this new law to school districts is that districts are now pressured to make sure that they are utilizing every measure possible to increase reading scores. The National Reading Panel report established the five critical components of reading in 2000. Many school districts and states are taking steps to ensure that they are including these components of reading instruction to improve and maintain reading scores. One of the components of reading that the National Reading Panel included in their report was reading fluency. The state of Iowa has included fluency as a major component of reading instruction and is taking many steps to instill fluency methods as part of teacher training. Teaching fluency procedures to teachers and having teachers utilize these methods as part of their reading instruction has become an integral part of many students’ learning. The focus on
fluency instruction has caused many educators to wonder if the emphasis on fluency is worthwhile and if it has positive effects on students reading abilities and test scores. All aspects concerning fluency instruction must be examined in order to provide an appropriate pathway for teachers to follow.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that the majority of the research examined focused on how fluency instruction is beneficial. There was very little research on how fluency instruction could be viewed negatively. Furthermore, most literature on fluency is based on action research and there is concern over the reliability of this research. There is no consistency in which fluency strategies were used.

Definitions

In order to enhance clarity and understanding, the following terms are defined for this literature review.

Repeated readings: “Students reread a short, meaningful passage of text typically four times. Alternatively, a criterion is set for speed, accuracy and comprehension and perhaps expression” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 29).

Partner readings: “Each child must read the passage aloud to his or her partner a number of times. Students may be given simple feedback forms for their partner” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 29).

Choral readings: “Teachers and class read material aloud in unison. May read entire selection, refrains (as in predictable texts), split the selection by group to read alternating lines, etc,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 29).
Readers theatre: “Involves repeated readings alone or in groups to reach acceptable reading for an ensemble performance; gives the students a “real-life” reason to do repeated readings” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 29).

Independent range: The independent reading level is the level at which readers read with 99% or higher word recognition and 90% or higher comprehension.

Instructional range: The instructional level is the level at which readers read with 85% or higher word recognition and 75% or higher comprehension.

Frustrational range: The frustration level indicates that students read below 85% word recognition or below 50% comprehension.

Review of the literature

The Benefits of Fluency Instruction

The literature reviewed in this study examines many different instructional tools for teaching fluency in reading, along with the effects these methods have on students. Fluency strategies such as repeated reading, partner reading, choral reading and readers theater are just a few of the these tools that can be implemented with students. Each of the above strategies has many different variations. It is essential to understand that many of these fluency building strategies are used in combination with comprehension and decoding strategies, as part of a whole reading program. Fluency instruction is not a students' only means of reading instruction.

Like all areas of the curriculum, instruction must take place according to a student’s needs. If a student is struggling with decoding, work in fluency would only be a minor component of their reading instruction, with the major focus being decoding. ‘Improving students' word recognition efficiency and helping readers to develop greater sensitivity to the syntactic nature of the text will result in more efficient reading and improved reading rate or...
fluency” (Rasinski, 2000, p.148). The same is true for comprehension. “...we assert that comprehension strategies should be taught to all readers from the beginning of reading instruction, even if they have not yet become fluent” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 47).

Timothy Rasinski, (2003) feels that fluency is the bridge between decoding and comprehension. “Speedy reading is an indication that students have freed their cognitive resources away from decoding. But they also have to use that cognitive capacity to make sense of the text. Thus, comprehension is an integral part of fluency, and is exhibited through appropriately phrased, expressive, and meaningful reading.” (Rasinski, 2003, p. 16). Based on these ideas, research on fluency strategies and their effects has become a major focus of debate. Schools are spending time inservicing their staff on fluency strategies and monitoring test scores with the hopes that Rasinski is right, and that fluency is the bridge between comprehension and decoding. According to Joseph K. Torgesen, a presenter at the December 2005 Iowa Reading First conference, “Reading fluency has been identified as one of the five major components of reading growth that should be the focus of instruction and assessment in grades K-3,” (Torgesen, 2005, p. 3). In Torgesen's power point, he also states that, “Many programs are currently being promoted and used for the specific purpose of increasing reading fluency” (Torgesen, 2005, p. 3).

In the article Creating Fluent Readers, (Rasinski, 2004), Rasinski identifies three dimensions of reading fluency; accuracy in word decoding, automatic processing, and prosodic reading. According to Rasinski, these three dimensions help build the bridge to comprehension. This is also reiterated by S. Jay Samuels when he states, “...at the beginning stage of reading, only one skill could be done at a time; first decoding, followed by comprehension. However, at
the skilled stage, both decoding and comprehension can be performed together," (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 40).

Perhaps one of the main reasons fluency has come to the forefront of education is because struggling readers are often low in the areas of both fluency and comprehension. "Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means. Less fluent readers, however, must focus their attention on figuring out the words, leaving them little attention for understanding the text," (Put Reading First, 2001, 22). Educators are looking for ways to improve students' comprehension. High-stakes testing has caused a major analysis of national, state, and local curriculums. With the No Child Left Behind initiative, student's test scores and understanding of the curriculum are being closely examined. Schools all over the nation are trying to meet the needs of their students based on published research. "Research dating back over 60 years suggests that faster readers tend to have better comprehension over what is read and tend to be overall, more proficient readers (Carver, 1990, Pinnel et, al., 1995 as cited by Rasinski, 2000, p. 147). In addition, Rasinski states, "Similarly, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Maxwell (1998) found a remarkably strong relationship (correlation coefficient = .91) between measures of reading fluency and students' performance on a standardized test of silent-reading comprehension," (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.15). With research stating positive effects for fluency instruction, educators are trying to find time within the school day to include effective and meaningful fluency instruction and practice that will improve students' reading skills.

Slow readers, or students that are not fluent, read less text than their peers and are often more frustrated. Many researchers feel that by building students' reading fluency, they are helping students to increase the volume of what they read, thus students will accomplish more.
If students can increase their reading rate, students will be able to read a much vaster expanse of materials, and become more efficient readers. Efficient readers will be able to cover more ground when completing assessments, such as ITBS, that have time allocations. When students are able to read through the material more efficiently, they are spending less time expending mental energy on decoding and making meaning of the text. Fluency practice has been known to impact a students' ability to decode and comprehend. “The ability to read a text fluently has been shown to predict comprehension better than direct measures of reading comprehension such as questioning, retelling, and cloze. (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001, as cited by Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, p. 156). Jay Samuels believes that “Comprehension may be poor with the first reading of the text, but with each additional rereading, the student is better able to comprehend because the decoding barrier to comprehension is gradually overcome. As less attention is required for decoding, more attention becomes available for comprehension. Thus rereading both builds fluency and enhances comprehension,” (Samuels, 1997, p. 378).

Four main fluency building methods of instruction that have demonstrated improvement in fluency, decoding, and comprehension are; repeated reading, partner reading, choral reading and readers theater. Much of the research in this study has been found on the effects of repeated reading and partner reading. In the article, Repeated reading: Research into practice, (Iowa Deptartment of Education, 2003,) it is stated that researchers have learned, “Rereading the same passage using either the assisted or unassisted RR procedure significantly increases reading rate (number of words per minute) and accuracy (number of words read correctly),” (Carver and Hoffman 1981; Chomsky, 1976; Dahl, 1974; Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Neill, 1980; Rashotte and Torgeson, 1985; Samuels, 1979 as cited by the Iowa Department of Education, 2003, p. 121). Repeated reading is an easy and effective tool to use with students in classrooms.
It is a strategy that can be incorporated into small group reading, whole group reading, or at home. Repeated reading also takes minimal time. The benefits of using this method appear to be powerful. “Research indicates that repeated readings lead not only to improvement in reading the passage but also to improvement in decoding, reading rate, prosodic reading, and comprehension of passages that the reader has not previously seen, “Dowhower, 1994: Koskinen & Blum, 1986; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000 as cited by Rasinski, 2004, p. 48).

Researcher, Jay Samuels writes in his article, The Method of Repeated Readings, (1997) about a study done on repeated readings with poor reading students of average intelligence. He summarizes that, “When repeated readings were used as an adjunct to regular instruction, significant gains were made over the control group in both comprehension and speed,” (Samuels, 1997, p. 380). Similar findings are quoted by Raskinski. It seems that through his research and review of many studies on fluency, he also found that repeated reading is an effective tool for building students' fluency in reading. “In reviews of research related to repeated readings, Dowhower (1989, 1994) reported that studies of the repeated-reading method have demonstrated improvements in students' reading rates and word-recognition accuracy, better comprehension of both literal and higher level information, and its use as an effective study strategy,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 15).

In a study done by Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, and Evans, (2006), peer-mediated repeated readings also proved to be beneficial. In this approach, student dyads read a passage to one another until a fluency criterion is met. In this study, “all of the students in these experiments increased their oral reading rate and accuracy over SSR (silent sustained reading),” (Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, & Evans, 2006, p. 497). The authors also stated that, “even
though the students' oral reading rates were steeply increasing, the accuracy of the reading did not suffer. In fact, accuracy even improved with the faster reading," (Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, & Evans, 2006, p. 501). Another occurrence these authors noted was that students were able to answer more comprehension questions. It was stated that, "This phenomenon occurs because less student attention focuses on decoding and more attention is available for extracting meaning from the text," (Yurick, Robinson, Cartledge, Lo, & Evans, 2006, p. 501).

Reader's Theatre is another method of fluency instruction that research has identified as improving students' reading rate. When students participated in a ten week implementation of Reader's Theatre in a second grade study, "students made an average gain of 17 words per minute, about the gain that could be expected in an entire year, while students engaged in more traditional reading activities made less than half the gain the Readers Theatre students experienced" (Rasinski, 1999, p. 149).

In addition to the research proving that fluency strategies are beneficial, another positive factor of fluency instruction is that methods such as partner reading, rereading, and choral reading take little instructional time. Teachers are able to fit these practices into their reading instruction time, even with the constraints they feel in teaching all curricular skills and meeting the needs of their students. Partner reading is a method that students can participate in while the teacher is working with a small guided reading group. Choral reading only takes a few minutes and can be incorporated with short poems. Rereading is a strategy students can do independently after instruction when they have finished work, as independent work, or at home with a parent.
**Challenges of Fluency Instruction**

When examining research on fluency, it seems that general statements are made about its effectiveness, but specific examples of statistics claiming the benefits are somewhat hard to come by. Like most research, studies have also found that fluency may not be that bridge to comprehension after all. “The dramatic improvements in reading fluency obtained through repeated reading, now, have not always translated into gains in reading comprehension. A recent meta-analysis indicates that repeated reading has, at best, a moderate impact on students' comprehension” (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006, p. 89). In addition to the above statement that repeated reading has a moderate impact on comprehension, author Richard Allington reiterates that, “Other studies have shown that training struggling readers to recognize words faster had little positive effect on reading fluency or overall reading achievement,” (Dahl & Samuels, 1977; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003 as cited by Samuels and Farstrup, 2006, p. 97).

Previous discussion of fluency impacting comprehension is sometimes called into question. “If a student's failure to comprehend stems from problems with a higher-order skill (e.g. Integration of passage information) or from problems in both lower- and higher-order thinking skills, repeated reading may have little to no impact on comprehension,” (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006, p. 90). Fluency instruction probably would not be the method of instruction for low achieving readers if the problem is truly a comprehension issue. “Repeated reading directly remediates lower-order skill difficulties only, by providing students multiple opportunities to resolve difficulties they may have reading in a fluent manner,” (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006, p. 90). This is further supported when Allington writes, “In addition, Kuhn (2005a, 2005b) found that extensive independent-reading activity produced comprehension
gains that the repeated reading technique did not. She notes that though fluency is important, fluent reading does not automatically ensure comprehension,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 99).

In addition, in a study that specifically focused on fluency as well as comprehension, “significant time effects were realized for rate of reading and correct words read per minute. Neither the CSR (pairs that use four strategies; preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap up) nor the PR (partner reading) group made significant gains on either the reading accuracy measure or the comprehension measure,” (Vaughn, 2000, p. 6). The impact fluency has on student achievement can be confusing at times. Some action research finds that fluency can be successful, but may not provide the answer to improving students’ comprehension. “Results for repeated reading and question generation interventions have been positive but far from conclusive. Repeated reading consistently improved students' reading fluency on reread passages, but these gains did not always translate to new readings nor did they consistently result in improvements in comprehension,” (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006, p. 90).

Based on the Nation Reading Panel's 2000 report, “Kuhn and Stahl also noted no difference in fluency or other reading outcomes between repeated reading of same text and the same amount of time spent reading a variety of texts,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 55).

But much remains to learn about the role of reading fluency in reading acquisition, how to best foster reading fluency, and how to ensure that fostering reading fluency also enhances reading comprehension, motivation, and proficiency. We also need to better understand how our instructional interactions might undermine self-regulation and agency and create readers who read dysfluently, with little understanding and little motivation to read voluntarily. We know a little about fluency, but a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.102-103).

An action research project was undertaken to find out how teachers within a district that mandates fluency work in reading feel about fluency instruction (Schroeder-Van Cleve, 2006). In
one school building, all general education and special education teachers were asked to participate in a fluency study project. Of the 23 teachers that were asked to participate, 16 responded to a survey. To ensure confidentiality, names of the school and teachers are not included in this paper. The responses to each question are indicated below.

1. Do you have a hard time fitting fluency instruction into your instructional day?

The five special education teachers responded that they did not struggle with finding time to include fluency work. Eleven general education teachers had the opposite response, and felt that finding the time to include fluency instruction was very difficult.

2. If you had more freedom and choice in what you taught, and/or were not required to fit so many things in, would you choose to incorporate these strategies into your day?

Fourteen teachers stated that they would in fact include instructional methods in fluency even if they were not mandated. Two teachers stated that they would not include fluency strategies within their classrooms.

3. If you would include fluency instruction in your day, which strategies would you include? How much time would you devote to that?

All participants in the survey answered this question. Teachers included all four strategies that have been the primary focus of district and school-based inservices. These strategies include partner reading, repeated reading, choral reading, and reader's theatre. Many of the teachers listed more than one strategy that they incorporated during various portions of their reading instruction. The amount of time teachers spent working on these strategies ranged from 5-45 minutes, with the majority of the responses consisting of 10-15 minutes spent working on these strategies in their classrooms each day. Repeated reading elicited eleven responses,
choral reading and reader's theatre both elicited eight responses, and partner reading was included by seven teachers.

4. What do you believe are the benefits of fluency instruction?

Teachers participating in this survey had many thoughts on this. Several teachers stated that fluency instruction can boost student confidence, especially for struggling readers. Three respondents stated that students become much more aware of their expression and rate. Four teachers wrote that if students improve their fluency, then they can focus more on comprehension. Two teachers believe that fluency helps students increase their word recognition.

5. What do you believe are the negatives of fluency instruction?

This question elicited a plethora of responses. Many teachers wrote down more than one response to this question. Of the responses to this survey, a few teachers stated frustration with the amount of time spent at inservices discussing fluency instruction. A few teachers also responded that sometimes there is too much focus on fluency instruction, and that we are not always looking at the whole child or the whole picture. Six respondents felt that a strong focus on fluency reduces the amount of time spent on other reading skills. Four teachers felt that many of the strategies are boring for kids, or too repetitive. Five teachers also stated that when using the partner reading method, teachers have to devote an extraordinary amount of time to modeling this strategy. One teacher made the comment that our district has not provided teachers with proof that fluency methods are effective.

6. Do you feel that fluency work can/improve student comprehension?
Fifteen out of sixteen teachers affirmed that yes, comprehension is improved through fluency practice. Only one teacher felt that fluency practice does not improve comprehension.

7. Do you feel that fluency work can/does improve student decoding/accuracy? Ten respondents felt that fluency instruction improved student decoding and accuracy. Four teachers stated that it did not help students with decoding and accuracy. Two teachers were unsure.

8. Is there a particular fluency strategy that you feel works best? Why?

Teachers in this survey felt that repeated reading was the strongest method for improving fluency. Eight teachers put repeated reading as the most effective strategy. Choral reading elicited four responses, reader's theatre elicited three, while partner reading only had one. Not all teachers answered this question on the survey, and the ten teachers that did respond put down more than one strategy. Repeated reading was selected by many teachers as the method they felt worked best due to the many ways it could be implemented. Many teachers felt that this was a beneficial strategy because their students could see improvements when they timed the readings and made graphs of their progress. Others stated that this strategy worked well because it could be done during whole group instruction, small group instruction, individual practice, or even at home. Choral reading and reader's theatre were chosen because many teachers felt that these strategies were also easy to include in reading instruction, students enjoyed these methods, and these methods included many students at once.

9. Is there a particular strategy that you feel works the least? Why?

Eight teachers felt that partner reading was the least effective strategy to implement in their classroom. Two teachers felt that choral reading was the least effective, while reader's theatre and repeated reading each had one response. Many of the respondents stated that
partner reading was ineffective because no matter how much modeling is done with this strategy, children still have a difficult time giving honest and critical feedback to their peers. The time spent on modeling and giving corrective feedback to partners was time-consuming and thus impacts instructional time that could be utilized in other more meaningful ways. Choral reading, repeated reading, and reader's theatre were viewed as being ineffective due to the repetitiveness of the strategies.

*Guidelines for Implementing Fluency Effectively*

It is important to teach fluency methods that have great impacts to children in meaningful ways. Researchers and educators have identified important pieces of fluency instruction that help make fluency instruction most beneficial. The following guidelines will aid in developing quality fluency instruction.

1. Teachers should model what constitutes fluent reading for their students.

   Perhaps one of the most effective components of teaching fluency instruction is modeling fluent reading. Students need to hear and understand what fluent reading is. A student must observe proficient fluent reading and have those skills specifically pointed out to them. It is not okay to assume that just by consistently reading aloud, students will understand what proficient reading is. Teachers need to demonstrate fluent reading by reading aloud, listening to stories or poems on tape, and reading passages that are meant to be performances such as poetry and scripts. When teaching students what fluent reading is, teachers can give them specific ideas of oral interpretation to look for such as providing examples of reading like a person talks and then reading choppy. Teachers also need to demonstrate how to read using an appropriate volume, reading with smoothness, phrasing, and a steady pace. Next, the teacher would provide examples of reading with a loud or soft tone that is without phrasing and has an uneven pace.
Modeling how to read with expression versus with a dull expression that uses little voice and character should also be included when instructing students on fluent reading. Working with individual student pairs as they give corrective feedback helps ensure that the student understands what fluent reading is and what it should sound like. Teachers can also read individually, or one on one with a student and provide them with explicit feedback on their oral reading. Modeling fluency expectations should occur periodically through student or teacher demonstrations, with the teacher specifically pointing out what makes their reading fluent.

2. Choose texts and reading passages that are at a students reading level.

Another key to improving students’ fluency is to correctly choose texts that are in the students' independent or instructional range. “Texts that are too difficult, overly dense with unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts, can make any otherwise fluent reader disfluent....Thus, it is important that we find texts that are well within the reader's independent-instructional range in order to promote fluency,” (Rasinski, 2000, p. 146). Students that are participating in fluency building strategies need access to high-interest, easy text. These are the students that are often surrounded by text that is above grade level, thus making it exceptionally hard to be fluent and understand what they are reading. Researchers have noted the importance of using texts that are within the students’ reading ability. “Their randomized field experiment demonstrated that providing daily intervention lessons using those grade-level texts was not nearly as successful as providing daily lessons using texts matched to the reading level of the struggling readers... I wonder also and likewise routinely observe support personnel attempt to drag some struggling reader through a text he or she should never have been given in the first place,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p. 100). Allington also refers to adults and their reading preferences. “ Adults prefer easy, high-success, reading. No adult had ever decided not to read the new John Grisham
novel because the last one was 'too easy'-with too few hard words or with too few passages that required several readings to comprehend,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.101). This demonstrates that adults often read within their range of abilities. Quality instruction in fluency has to include books and texts at independent or instructional levels for all students, or the time spent working on fluency will not be meaningful.

3. Provide corrective feedback and support as students practice fluency.

Most importantly, students must also receive corrective feedback or support as they read. One of the reasons teachers in the survey given felt that partner reading was the least effective was because even with lots of modeling, students still failed to give appropriate feedback to their peers. Teachers must understand that without appropriate feedback, this method is not as effective. “Kuhn and Stahl concluded that adult assistance was quite important with respect to increasing fluency, with simple repeated reading by the child much less certain to produce a positive outcome as repeated reading with adult assistance, “ (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.55). Providing specific feedback and support to students as they work on building their fluency is crucial to their success. “Feedback on word errors and reading speed needs to be communicated to students” (Therrien & Kubina, 2006, p.158). Without feedback, children working on specific skills are unaware of the necessary changes that need to take place in order for them to make adjustments with rate and expression. “Error correction should be provided after the passage has been read but prior to having the tutee reread the passage,” (Therrien & Kubina, 2006, p. 158). This makes sense in that students see their errors, and how they can improve. Performance feedback such as giving students a positive compliment and then telling them their words per minute or improvements helps to motivate the students. An example of performance feedback is, “Great job, Sarah, You made the goal! You read 118 words and only made 1 mistake. That was
11 more words and 3 fewer errors that the last time you read it!” (Therrien & Kubina, 2006, p. 158). By making statements such as the one above, students get to see their progress, as well as receive positive encouragement that will motivate them. “Kuhn and Stahl concluded that adult assistance was quite important with respect to increasing fluency, with simple repeated reading by the child much less certain to produce a positive outcome as repeated reading with adult assistance,” (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006, p.55).

4. Set a criterion for students to work towards.

Lastly, “...students need to reread passages until a performance criterion is reached,” (Therrien & Kubina, 2006, p. 158). By setting up a goal based on the student's reading level, a student’s progress can be monitored. In addition, passages can be selected that are at the students' instructional reading level based on their performance of rereading passages. Students have goals that they know they are working towards. When students see the progress they are making, they know that their practicing and hard work is worthwhile. Teachers can make visuals of this information by using tools such as graphs to demonstrate a student’s words per minute. Providing students with this information is also a way of providing direct feedback. Students can easily understand what they need to do achieve their goal.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The two purposes of this literature study were to examine the literature concerning the effects of how beneficial fluency instruction is for student achievement and to examine what is included in effective fluency instruction. This paper addressed the following four questions to accomplish these purposes.

1. What has the attitude been concerning teaching fluency in the past?

Fluency has played an important role in the history of education in the United States.
Fluency was integral in the education of students in colonial times. Students spent much of their time working to recite readings orally from books. Educators had students practice reading their lessons by rereading the text again and again to improve their oral reading and expression. This stemmed from the fact that there were few books for students to use and social expectations were for readers to read aloud from the few books that were available within school and the home. This method was the practice exercised for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was in the 20th century that educators began to think that the emphasis on being able to read aloud with fluency focused too much on word errors and expression. Thus, the focus in reading instruction turned towards silent reading. It was determined that silent reading helped students to understand and comprehend what they were reading. Therefore, with the weight of reading instruction on silent reading, assessments were used to determine how much students understood by reading to themselves. However, the pendulum swung back, and around 1970, researcher Jay Samuels began investigating the role fluency had in classrooms where reading instruction took place.

2. What are the benefits of teaching fluency strategies?

Studies have shown that fluency has an important role in reading instruction. When implemented effectively, fluency strategies can improve students’ reading comprehension and word accuracy. “Existing scientific research on reading fluency indicates that it is an important factor in reading education and thus should be part of any comprehensive and effective reading curriculum” (Rasinski, 2004, p. 50). There is substantial evidence that fluency instruction can improve students’ reading. With the demands placed on educators from federal legislation, incorporating fluency strategies within reading instruction is critical. According to the National Reading Panel, (2000) fluency is one of the five essential components of sound reading.
instruction. Students are having to perform at exceptional levels on national standardized tests as well as state, district, and school assessments. Improving students' fluency is just one way to try and meet the demands of today's push for higher test scores. Students that can read and understand more quickly will be able to complete more questions on timed assessments. In addition, students that benefit from quality reading instruction will become life-long learners.

3. What are the negatives of including fluency instruction methods?

Many educators are worried that the push for instruction in fluency, has left other reading skills behind. Some educators and researchers do not fully believe that fluency actually improves comprehension and decoding skills. The research done on fluency has been fairly subjective. Meaning, much action research has been done, but each experiment researched for this paper was implemented, taught, and measured differently. With so many of the variables being different, the actual findings may not be accurate. "While we were researching this method at University of Minnesota, unknown to us Carol Chomsky at Harvard University was using similar techniques with poor readers and was getting similar good results," (Samuels, 1997, p. 377). Many researchers make statements that they believe fluency instruction works, but the statistics to back up their beliefs are often lacking.

4. What are the guidelines for implementing fluency instruction effectively?

Guidelines are necessary when attempting to implement fluency instruction effectively. The first step is to model fluent reading. Modeling what fluent reading sounds like is critical for students to make improvements. Without an understanding of what students should sound like when reading, students will be unaware of what they are striving to change. When teaching students to read with more fluency, teachers need to be explicit with their directions and model fluency on more than one occasion. Modeling expected behavior can be time consuming, but is
the first step in implementing effective fluency strategies. The next step of this process is to select books for fluency work that are at the students' independent or instructional reading level. If a student does not have his/her text at their reading level, their attention will be focused more on decoding or comprehension, which defeats the purpose of working on fluency. The third step is to provide corrective feedback and support to readers as they work on fluency. Without praise or corrective feedback, students would be unaware of changes that need to occur or where they have improved. Fluency instruction needs to allow for information to be delivered to the learner in a way that will help them improve their reading. Finally, a criterion or goal must be set for students to work towards. Imagine an adult working towards something, but having no idea what they are trying to achieve. This would lead to confusion, frustration, and a lack of follow through. If students have a visual or an idea that demonstrates what they need to do, they can monitor what they have achieved, any improvements they have made, or what they have left to accomplish. In doing this, they will be more motivated to continue working and achieve their goal.

The following conclusions were drawn from this review of the literature.

1. If teachers and school leaders are truly committed to leaving no child behind in reading, then they must actively pursue the goal of reading fluency in all classrooms.

2. Fluency instruction must only be one portion of a quality and meaningful reading curriculum.

3. Quality fluency instruction can be accomplished with different methods such as partner reading, repeated reading, choral reading, and reader's theatre.

4. Instructional needs in fluency vary, depending on students' needs.

5. Fluency strategies should be implemented according to the guidelines for developing
effective fluency instruction in reading.

After the review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Educators should include fluency strategies as part of a whole reading program.

2. Teachers should implement fluency strategies and vary instructional fluency methods based on evaluations of student needs.

3. The guidelines listed above are necessary in including fluency strategies as part of reading instruction.
References


