The Implementation of E-books to Increase Language and Literacy Levels In Young ELLs

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Background

The primary aim of this project is to develop a language and literacy intervention program for Spanish-speaking ELLs (English Language Learners). The project is being conducted in schools in Gadsden County where it is reported that 48% of children speak primarily Spanish at home. The lack of Spanish speaking teachers in these schools negatively affects the academic performance of ELLs. The grant project is called “Bridging for Language Outcomes in Classrooms” (BLOOM), and it is run by Dr. Carla Wood. Over a span of three years, project BLOOM has been developing electronic books that use Spanish bridging and technology to provide intensive vocabulary lessons. Before intervention occurs, each child is pre-tested using standardized tests that measure receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, overall language skills in Spanish and English, and conceptual definitions of words targeted in the intervention. During intervention, kindergarten and first grade students whose first language is Spanish receive vocabulary lessons through recorded e-book reading experiences. The e-books contain narrated and interactive stories that teach key vocabulary words, followed by an immediate evaluation of the words learned. Each child reads assigned e-books three times. After the intervention phase, the children are reevaluated using the same standardized tests to measure gains. Ultimately, the purpose of project BLOOM is to produce an intervention that improves these young ELLs’ language and literacy skills to improve their academic future.

Methods

This study is being conducted in elementary schools located in North Florida, with a sample of 75 kindergarten and first grade ELLs. The participants are evaluated in the fall of each school year using standardized tests to obtain baseline data regarding their vocabulary and literacy levels. The researchers used the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Second Edition (English literacy skills test), PPVT (English receptive vocabulary test), TVIP (Spanish receptive vocabulary), PTONI (English receptive vocabulary), and BESA (English and Spanish semantics and morphosyntax) to test the ELLs. After the scores were recorded, vocabulary probes were administered. The probes tested key vocabulary words that the participant would be exposed to in each e-book. The probes are set up in a power point presentation with each slide displaying four pictures. The researcher would then ask the child to point to the picture that represents the target word. If a child knew less than 75% of the vocabulary words that pertained to certain book, then they would be assigned that book to read during the intervention. Therefore, each child was assigned a certain set of books specific to their current vocabulary skills. During the intervention phase with the e-books, each child reads each assigned e-book three times and takes a quiz after each administration to review key vocabulary words. After intervention, the participants are tested again using the same standardized tests to measure change.

Results

Data collection and e-book intervention conducted by project BLOOM are still in progress. However, many positive observations have been noted by the researchers and participants involved in the project. Some of these observations include the self-confidence and enthusiasm seen in the children participating in the project. According to Alison Dahl, an FSU senior student and research assistant, “It is a great way for the children to step outside of their classrooms and I know they enjoy coming to read the books. They feel special when they get to read and it makes them more excited to learn.” The children’s motivation has also resulted in an improved academic performance according to Ali Dahl, “I know that they have acquired knowledge because when I’m administering the probes for my thesis project, they point out words that they know they have seen earlier from a book they read.” The teachers at the schools where the BLOOM project is being conducted are also impressed by the positive influence that the project is having on the academic success of their students. Ms. Sandra Allen, kindergarten teacher at Greensboro Elementary said, “I think that it is a great project that FSU is conducting. I can see my students’ progress in my classroom when we do assignments in class. The children love to tell me about the books after they’re done and I know they are using new vocabulary words that they did not know before. The e-books are effective and the children enjoy reading them too, which is the most important part.” A kindergartener at Greensboro Elementary also added that, “the books are fun and I know I’m learning too.” Therefore, even though Project BLOOM is still in progress it has already made an impact on its participants.

In addition to observations, preliminary results indicate the children have been achieving higher scores on proximal measures of target vocabulary words in repeated administrations of e-books. This suggests the e-books are effective in teaching the target words.

Test Name | Skills Examined | Language
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Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (WRMT) | Literacy Skills | English
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) | Receptive Vocabulary | English
Test de Vocabulario en Imágenes Peabody (TVIP) | Receptive Vocabulary | Spanish
Primary Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (PTONI) | Receptive Vocabulary | English
Bilingual English Spanish Assessment (BESA) | Semantics and Morphosyntax | English and Spanish

Implications

This study will demonstrate the effectiveness of e-books as an intervention tool to improve vocabulary and literacy skills in young ELL students. The results of this study could have many implications for the educational system. If the e-books appear to be an effective tool to teach new vocabulary words and increase literacy skills, they could be recommended in schools to improve vocabulary of ELLs, and potentially for monolingual students in general. The effectiveness of this method could also be tested in the future to improve the vocabulary of children in other grade levels.

Future Directions

1. Continued exploration of intervention methods and which are most effective.
   - Number of readings
   - Spanish-English bridging
   - Animations/videos
2. Exploration of new strategies to increase language and literacy levels in ELLs.
3. Expand e-book intervention to other groups.
   - Other ELLs
   - Monolinguals