Increasing Vocabulary and Comprehension Skills in Preschool Students With Disabilities Through Shared Reading

by
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Approval Page

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Abstract


This applied dissertation was designed to determine the effect of shared reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening-comprehension skills of preschool students with disabilities. Preschool students with disabilities are at risk for future reading difficulties. Vocabulary and comprehension development have been found to impact future reading abilities. The preschool special education program that was in place did not outline a specific style of reading that should be used to increase vocabulary and comprehension skills.

The writer utilized shared reading and scaffolding strategies before, during, and after reading storybooks. Shared reading sessions took place three times per week. Activities related to the stories were incorporated into various parts of the day. The teacher incorporated techniques using open-ended and probing questions, prompts, and explicit teaching in order to teach vocabulary and further listening comprehension before, during, and after reading a story. Each story was read three times during the week using the same techniques.

Shared reading resulted in a significant increase in receptive vocabulary scores. Expressive vocabulary and listening-comprehension skills increased for many participants. The increases in receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, and listening comprehension were determined by comparing group means from the pretests and posttests. Children showed an increase in attention and motivation during shared reading sessions as well. They were observed using new vocabulary in their daily conversations.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

With federal and state mandates driving educational practices, the obligation to provide meaningful, developmentally appropriate, and effective intervention to preschool students with disabilities is more apparent than ever before. As a result of recent research, reading difficulties may be prevented prior to even beginning formal education with appropriate identification and intervention (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHHD], 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Despite concerted efforts to increase the necessary language skills for reading and the numerous educational reform policies initiated, preschool students with disabilities continue to demonstrate weak vocabulary and listening-comprehension skills. The identified preschool students in this study exhibited weaknesses in vocabulary and comprehension, two critical components necessary for reading. Shared reading is one method found to be effective in previous studies to increase such skills (Burgess, 2002; Davie & Kemp, 2002; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Strickland & Stranahan, 2004).

Nature of the Problem

In a time when there exists immense determination to meet federal and state mandates regarding the ability to read by the third grade, increasing focus has shifted to the early years as the optimal time to address developing literacy skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). Snow et al. (1998) were charged with conducting a study on the effectiveness of interventions for young children at risk of learning to read. Their committee revealed that children at risk of future reading difficulties can be identified prior to formal education and require effective early intervention. In a separate study, the National Reading Panel (as cited in NICHHD, 2000) assessed research-based knowledge and various approaches to teaching children how to read and, as a result, identified five
core components to reading: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.

With the identification of the necessary components for successful reading and knowing that providing early intervention may prevent future reading difficulties, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was implemented, and the push for all children to acquire literacy skills by third grade now includes addressing the needs of special populations. As part of NCLB, Early Reading First was designed to prepare young children to enter kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early-reading skills to prevent reading difficulties and ensure continued school success (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). One of the goals in the Early Reading First initiative is to support the appropriate development of oral language (vocabulary, expressive language, and listening comprehension), phonological awareness (rhyming, blending, and segmenting), print awareness, and alphabetic knowledge through activities based on scientifically-based reading research.

The students in the preschool special-education classroom exhibited weak vocabulary and listening comprehension skills and, therefore, were considered at risk for future reading difficulties. The preschool special-education program provided for language development through a variety of developmentally appropriate activities; however, a specific literacy-based strategy to increase vocabulary and listening-comprehension skills was not a component of the program. For this reason, many students left the preschool program and continued to present with language difficulties accompanied by reading problems in the future. As a result of the current status regarding legislative policy and the recent research in reading, weak vocabulary and listening comprehension were selected as the focus of this study concerning preschool students.
with disabilities in the special-education program.

Children with weak vocabulary and comprehension skills are at a disadvantage with regard to possessing critical reading foundation skills from the start (Gillam & Johnston, 1985; Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004; Snow et al., 1998). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002b) and NICHD (2000), early childhood programs should specifically emphasize vocabulary and comprehension development in relation to literacy so that children will enter kindergarten with the necessary foundational skills for reading. Prior to the study, the story time component of the preschool special-education program emphasized reading aloud stories with limited language-based experiences to increase vocabulary and comprehension. Children in this particular classroom not only had delays in those skills but also were not provided with the necessary opportunities and experiences of shared reading activities that could possibly increase those skills.

The applied dissertation took place in one of the largest public school districts in the southeast, serving more than 275,000 students in over 250 schools. There is both an urban and suburban mix throughout the district. Students come from 159 countries, speaking 52 languages, making it a diverse, multicultural community. Over 28,000 students have special needs, and more than 2,000 students attend preschool special-education programs in the district.

The elementary school where the preschool special education classroom is located is predominantly of middle-class background. The writer had the opportunity to work with the principal, assistant principal, exceptional-student education specialist, guidance counselor, psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and reading-resource specialist. In addition, district personnel were available for speech and language, reading, writing, behavior, and exceptional-student needs beyond what the elementary school
The preschool special-education program is a publicly funded entity that is part of the district’s school system. The early-intervention program opened in 1989 to address the needs of preschool students with identified disabilities within a self-contained classroom setting. It began with three classrooms and expanded to 150 classrooms dispersed throughout the entire district. The program set out to address language, cognitive, social-emotional, and independent-functioning skills, critical to being successful in school. Since then, the push for including early reading skills has dramatically grown at the district, state, and national levels (NICHHD, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2002b, 2004). The program needed to address the current status of language development in relation to reading in the early childhood setting and make changes to its curricular approaches, especially with regard to preschool students with disabilities.

A preschool coordinator, two program specialists, the school-based principal, and an exceptional-student education specialist oversee the 150 preschool special education classrooms in the district. Each classroom is staffed with one teacher and one teacher’s aide. The language-based program emphasized problem-solving skills, social interactions, receptive and expressive language development, independent functioning, multisensory stimulation, emergent literacy skills, prewriting and math skills, social skills training, positive behavior support, and school readiness preparation. It also included family education, support, and assistance. The daily routine, similar to a developmentally appropriate preschool program, was individualized to meet the needs of each student. Included as part of the day were play centers, morning circle, story time, arts and crafts, playground time, lunch, rest time, and snacks. The school day is 6 hours long with 1 hour
of rest included. A theme-based curriculum was used to emphasize literacy, mathematics, and social skills. The story time component of the program included reading aloud and brief conversations, typically limited to asking and answering questions about the stories. The curriculum lacked effective reading experiences with a specific focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills.

The mission of the preschool special-education program in this school district is to provide students who have a disability with an appropriate individualized education plan, encourage participation of parents in the educational process, and provide appropriate educational services based on a student’s needs. The vision is to have every student successfully participate in the least restrictive environment in order to meet the educational needs of each student and adequately prepare them for elementary education.

The role and responsibility of the writer is that of a speech and language pathologist and special-education teacher providing therapeutic intervention services within a preschool special-education setting. The writer holds a Certificate of Clinical Competency in speech language pathology from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and is state licensed. She also holds Speech Language Impaired certification from her state’s department of education. She serves as chair of the Public School Issues Committee for the state’s Speech and Hearing Association, where a focus on speech and language disorders is the emphasis from birth through the university level. In addition, the writer represents the southern region for the state’s division of early childhood for exceptional children.

As a preschool special educator, the writer has worked with district personnel to review and select preschool literacy curriculum that encompasses a strong language base for future implementation in the preschool special-education classrooms. The writer also
served as the reading committee chair where the impact of language skills on the foundation of future reading was discovered through the review of first-, second-, and third-grade reading materials and work with the primary education teachers when addressing struggling readers. As a member of the leadership committee, the writer had the opportunity to work with administrators and support staff to ensure the inclusion of the preschool special-needs population at her previous elementary school in school-wide reading activities in order to expand language-learning opportunities.

**Purpose of the Study**

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was to determine the effect of shared storybook reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills of preschool students with disabilities.

**Background and Significance of the Problem**

One reason many preschool children enter formal education at risk of developing reading difficulties is because they have not been exposed to intervention strategies that effectively address deficiencies attributed to weak language skills. Waiting to initiate treatment until a child has been identified with a specific disability or deficiency is too late (Snow et al., 1998). Still, some children are being identified early, but successful interventions are not put in place to address the necessary skills. At the time of this study, practices in the preschool special-education program did not specifically emphasize increasing vocabulary and comprehension with a method that linked language with literacy.

Reading and language share similar knowledge and processes; therefore, breakdowns at any level of linguistic processing could be responsible for many developmental reading disorders (Catts & Kamhi, 1986). Children have impairments or
delays in language development for many reasons. Possible causes of language delays or impairments include biological, genetic, environmental, and undetermined etiologies. Cognitive deficits, hearing impairments, chronic otitis media, family history, socioeconomic status, limited verbal interactions, neurological conditions, and genetic disorders are some of the many influences of weak language skills.

Cognitive deficits can be acquired pre-, peri-, and postnatally. They may affect a child’s overall development or, often, certain aspects of development, such as language. Because language and cognition are closely related, when deficits appear cognitively, language is often affected as well. Language impairments or delays are often the first signs of neurological or genetic conditions. If a cognitive, neurological, or genetic deficit is evident, early identification of language impairments or delays greatly assists in remediation.

Another contributing factor to impaired language skills is otitis media. This condition refers to fluid in the middle ear. Accumulation of this fluid may negatively impact periods of language development when a child has difficulty hearing what is going on around him or her. Hearing impairments also impede language development, especially if specific intervention is not provided early. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing require substantial accommodations to acquire language skills.

Some children have a family history of language difficulties. Other children are not as fortunate to grow up in a satisfactory home environment. Environments must foster many verbal interactions between adults and children, but this does not always occur in every household. Parents may not know how to interact appropriately with their children or do not have the time to do so. Additionally, socioeconomic status has been linked to weak language skills. Still, there are children with weak language skills for which the
etiology is not known.

Possessing a reading problem in the future is one major issue related to weak vocabulary and comprehension skills. Language is the foundation for acquisition of literacy skills, and reading is a language-based skill; therefore, deficits in language development may negatively impact reading achievement (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002). Preschool students with delays or impairments in language development in the preschool special-education program demonstrated weak vocabulary and comprehension skills and, therefore, are considered at risk for future reading failure. Although studies indicate that some individuals with a specific language impairment in preschool do not experience reading problems in the future, a preponderance of research supports the reality that many preschool children with delays in development, specifically language skills, go on to have difficulties in reading (Aram, Ekelman, & Nation, 1984; Catts, 1985, 1991b, 1993; Larney, 2002; Stark et al., 1984; Van Kleeck & Schuele, 1987).

Studies indicated that more students are entering kindergarten without the foundational skills needed to acquire early reading skills (NICHHD, 2000; Snow et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). Works by the National Reading Panel (NICHHD) and Snow et al. further indicated that, in order for children to become successful readers, they must have adequate vocabulary and comprehension skills early. These skills are considered linguistic underpinnings to literacy. The preschool period has been identified as an important time for developing such skills prior to children entering formal education (Van Kleeck & Schuele, 1987).

Children with language impairments, often in conjunction with other problems, continue to constitute a large proportion of students in early childhood special-education programs (Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson, & Cole, 1996). They arrive at school
with weaker oral-language skills than their typically developing peers, are more likely to experience difficulties in reading, and will have difficulty catching up without effective intervention (McCardle, Scarborough, & Catts, 2001; Torgesen, 1998). Children entering the preschool special-education program often have weak vocabulary and comprehension skills, as indicated from their test scores on various language and developmental tests given as part of the multidisciplinary assessment. Reading eventually becomes the primary means for learning in later grades; therefore, supporting children at risk for reading difficulties at an early age by providing them the necessary resources for language development is critical (Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1991a).

The problem of weak vocabulary and comprehension is significant because these language skills influence future reading abilities. Studies have indicated a link between weak language skills and reading difficulties as children progress through school (Aram & Nation, 1980; Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1993; Scarborough, 2002). The connection becomes very clear that deficits in language will be seen in literacy as well. Language learning problems often continue to persist in addition to literacy, social, and educational difficulties in the years following the preschool period (Aram & Nation; Aram et al., 1984; Bishop & Adams, 1990).

Longitudinal studies have contributed greatly to defining the connection between language and reading outcomes. Catts et al. (2002) found that children whose language skills improved by second or fourth grade had better reading outcomes than children whose language difficulties continued. Roth, Speece, and Cooper (2002) determined that semantics, in conjunction with print awareness, could be considered powerful predictors of reading comprehension in first and second grades. Boudreau and Hedberg (1999) found that preschool children with persistent language problems developed reading
difficulties and that language severity, family background, and developmental plateaus should be carefully considered.

Children between the ages of 3 and 5 years qualified for the preschool special-education program through initial testing and identification of areas of impairment or deficit. Language is one of the most common deficits identified during this testing with preschool children. From a review of the multidisciplinary reports, children’s language skills were found anywhere between 4 months and 2 1/2 years delayed at the time of assessment. Vocabulary and comprehension were two skills identified to increase from the report recommendations given after testing.

Furthermore, children in the preschool special-education program have eligibilities, such as a developmental delay, autism, or a combination of disabilities. In the classroom, the children were observed having difficulty identifying and naming objects and pictures in their environment as well as answering questions about auditory and visual information. Their use of vocabulary was limited in conversation, thus, they often resorted to using gestures or inappropriate behavior or not communicating at all. Based on the children’s initial testing, language score results, and informal observations, the need existed to increase receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills to strengthen the overall language foundation needed to develop early literacy skills in the future.

In addition to the information obtained from the tests given for the initial assessments, individualized education plans, and developmental assessments, each child was given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Third Edition (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997), the Expressive Vocabulary Test (EVT; Williams, 1997), and the listening comprehension scale of the Oral and Written Language Scales test (OWLS: LCS;
Carrow-Woolfolk, 1995) to determine vocabulary and comprehension skill levels prior to implementing the study. These particular tests indicated the amount of vocabulary that each student possessed, both receptively and expressively, and the extent to which each student comprehended listening materials. By implementing shared storybook reading in the preschool special-education program, the students had the opportunity to increase their vocabulary and comprehension through developmentally appropriate, literacy-based, theme-related experiences. As a result, their receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills were expected to increase.

Research Questions

In order to investigate what effect using shared storybook reading activities had on vocabulary and comprehension of children with disabilities, three research questions were developed:

1. What effect does shared storybook reading have on receptive vocabulary?
2. What effect does shared storybook reading have on expressive vocabulary?
3. What effect does shared storybook reading have on listening comprehension?

Although the questions did not purport to measure motivation, attention, and participation, these skills were also observed.

Research Hypothesis

The writer hypothesized that shared storybook reading would increase receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension of preschool students with disabilities. As applied to the study, social-development theory holds that the independent variable, shared storybook reading activities, which is a series of social interactions between adult and child based on language and literacy, would positively influence the dependent variables, receptive and expressive vocabulary, and listening comprehension.
Shared storybook reading activities have been shown in previous studies to increase language skills of preschool children (Burgess, 2002; Davie & Kemp, 2002; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000).

Furthermore, shared reading is a powerful strategy to use in increasing oral-language development and fosters interaction between adults and children, thereby increasing the use of language for communication and literacy (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). Shared storybook reading broadens the focus of preschool language intervention beyond what already was being used, especially with regard to a classroom setting versus one-on-one intervention.

Definition of Terms

It was necessary to define the following terms for the purpose of this study.

*Shared storybook reading.* This phrase refers to adult-child interaction before, during, and after the reading of a story.

*Receptive vocabulary.* This phrase refers to the understanding of spoken words.

*Expressive vocabulary.* This phrase refers to using word usage in spoken language.

*Listening comprehension.* This term refers to understanding information that is spoken or listened to.

*Oral language.* This term refers to receptive and expressive language, including vocabulary.

*Developmental delay.* This term refers to a delay in social, emotional, cognitive, independent functioning, and/or language development.

*Language impairment.* This term refers to a disorder affecting receptive and/or expressive language.
Disability. This term refers to delay(s) or impairment(s) in cognition, independent functioning, social development, emotional behavior, or language development.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This refers to the laws and regulations developed to ensure the free appropriate public education of all students with disabilities.

Self-contained classroom. This phrase refers to a classroom comprised only of students who have a disability.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). This is a legal document developed by a committee, including parents or guardians, that outlines the student’s education plan, providing the student’s present level of performance, how the disability impacts the student’s participation in the general education classroom, measurable annual goals and objectives aligned with state standards to document progress, related services, and accommodations to help the student meet his or her annual goals and objectives, as well as participation with typical peers.

Summary

As a result of current legislative policy and the growing concern for children at risk, educators are required to take a closer look at language as an important foundational skill necessary for reading. Based on research, vocabulary and comprehension were identified as two critical skills. Preschool students with disabilities demonstrating weaknesses in these areas are at risk for future reading difficulties without effective early intervention strategies in place. Shared storybook reading has been recognized as one way to increase vocabulary and comprehension. The literature review discusses how legislative policy is driving current early intervention strategies, how disabilities during preschool affect later reading outcomes, the relationship between language and literacy, a
narrowed breakdown of vocabulary and comprehension skills, shared reading, and the social developmental framework behind using shared reading as an intervention context.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The focus of the applied dissertation study was to determine the effect of shared storybook reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills of preschool students with disabilities. As a result of recent legislation, the push to provide meaningful and effective teaching strategies to increase skills in students who demonstrate weaknesses in any of the components related to the reading process, or underlying foundation skills, moved to the forefront of education. New policies evolved out of the need to address the specific needs in young children. Students with disabilities are included in the quest to leave no child behind in response to legislative policies and accountability. In the face of numerous reforms, preschool programs must provide students with research-based methods of instruction to adequately prepare them for formal education. Preschool students with disabilities continue to present weak vocabulary and comprehension skills, despite the numerous changes.

The literature review presents an overview of the evolution of NCLB; insight into preschool students with language impairments or delays and future reading performance, the relationship between language and literacy, the significance of vocabulary and comprehension to reading, shared storybook reading as an intervention context, and the supporting theoretical framework from which the basis of using shared storybook reading is derived. Discussion of possible causes of weak vocabulary and comprehension skills possessed by preschool students with disabilities is provided to give background about factors that may indicate the need for early intervention. The current story time setting in the preschool special-education program is reviewed and a solution to increase vocabulary and comprehension is presented.
Leaving No Child Behind

According to the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress on Reading (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b), only 32% of the nation’s fourth-grade students performed at or above the proficient achievement level. No significant differences were found among the reading scores from 2003, 2002, or 1992. This astounding data indicates the need for federal, state, and local governments to continuously strive to implement research-based instructional measures in order to raise that number in the future.

Historically, education has been a prominent function of our society. As early as the 18th century, the quality of education has typically been left up to the local and state governments (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Educational pushes through the public domain have been numerous and controversial. NCLB, which contains principles dating back to Brown v. Board of Education, is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that became law in 1965. Signed into legislation in early 2002, NCLB ensures greater accountability at the state and local levels, greater choice for parents and students, more flexibility for state and local education agencies in using federal dollars, and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). Identification of literacy needs as early as possible will allow educators and parents to provide children with interventions to prevent later reading difficulties.

Separate from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is Public Law 94-142, amended and renamed as IDEA in 1990. The first major revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 required all students with disabilities to have access to the general curriculum and introduced a measure of accountability for
their progress (McGill-Franzen & Goatley, 2003). Not only are all students with disabilities required to have an IEP, but they must also partake in state and district assessments reported in the same manner as their nondisabled peers. In addition, revisions to IDEA in 1997 included the expansion of the definition of developmentally delayed to include children between the ages of 3 and 9 years, thereby opening the door for early intervention services before failure occurs.

One of the initiatives developed to ensure that no child is left behind, reading by third grade, is in compliance with IDEA and focuses on reading, especially with regard to very young children. The Reading First initiative, formed out of the need to address precursors to literacy development, promotes supporting the development of early language, literacy, and prereading skills of preschool children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). Based on scientific research, schools must provide all children, including those with disabilities, strategies to develop phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Of these five core foundation skills to reading, the Reading First initiative specifically outlines the necessity to support development of oral language, including vocabulary, expressive language, and listening comprehension.

Preschool Students With Impairments or Delays in Language

As reported in the 24th Annual Report to Congress on the implementation of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a) in the 2000-2001 school year, states reported serving 599,678 children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities under IDEA, up from 589,134 in 1999-2000, and a 31.7% increase from the number of preschool children served in 1992-1993. Speech or language impairment was the most prevalent disability category, accounting for 55.2% of all preschool students served in 2000-2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). The astonishing number of preschool students
requiring early intervention to address language issues should serve as a warning to the possibility of future reading difficulties.

A child’s oral-language skills in preschool may be the best predictor of literacy outcomes (NICHHD, 2000). The presence of developmental language difficulties during the preschool years may indicate long-term deficits affecting the acquisition of reading skills, indicating the need for early identification. According to Roth (2000), early identification and intervention are critical for more children to become successful readers, since two thirds of the developmental disabilities identified in children involve problems with oral-language skills. Furthermore, Scarborough (2002) contended that reading comprehension deficits are essentially oral-language limitations.

Snow et al. (1998) conveyed that many reading difficulties can be prevented during the preschool years. They have reported that the risk of reading difficulties is strongly related to early language impairment (Snow et al., 1998). Additionally, Rice (2000) identified the need for continued studies focusing on 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old students, as these years are critical for identifying children at risk. Research indicated that children who do not develop strong oral-language skills in these early years will find it hard to keep pace with their peers (Roskos et al., 2004; Snow et al., 1998).

Students considered at risk require early intensive intervention (Hirsch, 2003). The Matthew Effect, a phenomenon best described as “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer,” illustrates why language skills of at-risk preschoolers must be more closely addressed with literacy in mind. Researchers indicated that children with preschool language impairments who arrive at school with weaknesses in verbal abilities and unfamiliarity with basic purposes of reading fall behind from the outset (Gillam & Johnston, 1985; Snow et al., 1998). Children with poor language skills who arrive at
school for formal instruction in reading with limited resources will only fall further behind their peers unless action is taken addressing both weak language skills and literacy during the preschool years. In contrast, children who have developed a strong foundation in language skills will typically continue to achieve well in reading.

Results of studies suggest that the important linguistic components of literacy that must be coordinated in learning to read are in place prior to formal school instruction beginning; therefore, children who arrive at school with weaker language skills are more likely to experience difficulties in learning to read during the primary grades (Scarborough, 2002; Snow et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In addition, language difficulties continue to persist throughout the early grades, often in conjunction with additional academic concerns. Indeed, children who present preschool language disorders constitute a high-risk group that may experience later academic and language difficulties (Aram & Nation, 1980).

Many studies linking oral language and literacy address vocabulary and comprehension, specifically Dickinson and Smith (1994), Strickland and Shanahan (2004), and the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA; 1998). Much of the research focused on studies in the home environment and on low income children (Dickinson & Smith; Burgess, 2002). A great deal can be learned from these studies when considering populations with similar needs. Studies have also taken place that look at children with language delays to determine to what extent the deficits have on later reading skills. Chaney (1998) discovered that overall language development at age three is strongly correlated with reading scores at age seven. According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (2002), a strong continuity exists between the amount of language a child has when entering kindergarten and his or her later academic performance. Given that
language is the foundation for literacy, addressing language impairments or delays in preschoolers in order to provide them with effective strategies to learn language skills is necessary for early literacy development.

McCardle et al. (2001) found that children who arrive at school specifically with weaker verbal abilities and literacy knowledge are much more likely than their classmates to experience difficulties in reading in the primary grades. The key is to provide prevention rather than remediation (Searcy, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). According to Torgesen (1998) and Roskos et al. (2004), with a poor start in reading, children with language difficulties will have difficulty catching up without early intervention. Waiting until students are older, knowing that they are at risk to begin with, will require more funding and time to address their reading or language difficulties, therefore, it is critical to address language difficulties as early as possible.

Preschool students with language impairments are at considerable risk for developing reading disabilities at older ages (Aram & Nation, 1980; Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1991b, 1993; Scarborough, 2002). Preschool children with difficulties in language do not necessarily grow out of the problem but continue to present language difficulties in addition to literacy problems in the school years (Aram & Nation; Aram et al., 1984; Bishop & Adams, 1990). Language is a large component of literacy; therefore, when a deficit appears in language, it will be evident in literacy as well. A strong connection exists between the two.

In addition, some children continue to present language learning problems as well as educational and social consequences in the years following preschool (Aram et al., 1984). A recent review of Stanford Achievement Test scores of children who previously attended the preschool special-education program provides evidence that these children
are continuing to have difficulty in reading comprehension.

Boudreau and Hedberg (1999) provided additional support that preschool children with language impairments perform poorly on some early developing literacy skills that are strongly correlated with later reading achievement. Results of their study determined that deficits were not specific to one area of reading but crossed over to many aspects of early literacy knowledge and skills. Children with language impairments performed significantly more poorly on measures of metalinguistic abilities, letter-name knowledge, and rhyming tasks, all important for bottom-up processing (Boudreau & Hedberg). Poor performance was also noted on top-down processing skills, such as producing stories with less semantic diversity and reduced syntactic complexity, which suggest difficulty with linguistic structures. The children also had difficulty recalling information.

Several longitudinal investigations studied reading outcomes as a result of language impairments. Catts et al. (2002) found that students with language impairments in kindergarten were at risk of having reading disabilities in second and fourth grades. Children whose language skills improved by second and fourth grades had better reading outcomes than children whose language difficulties persisted.

Roth et al. (2002) established that oral language ability contributes to early reading skills, especially with regard to semantics, or word meanings. Semantic knowledge and print awareness skills together were found to be powerful predictors of reading comprehension in first and second grades. Furthermore, Scarborough and Dobrich (1990) explored the relationship between language development and reading achievement by following preschool children into second grade. The four children who were followed improved their language skills; however, three of the four developed reading difficulties. Possible contributing factors identified were language severity,
family background, and developmental plateaus.

Language-impaired children acquire receptive and expressive language at a slower-than-normal rate (Stark et al., 1984). A significant gap often remains between nonverbal abilities and linguistic abilities in children who “recover” from their language impairment. Stark et al. studied children with language impairments between the ages of 4 and 8 and again 3 1/2 to 4 years later to determine development of language skills and whether they developed reading difficulties. Stark et al. found that 90% of the language-impaired children showed some degree of reading disability at the time of follow-up and almost 80% of these children warranted remediation instruction in reading due to their disability. The correlation found between language ability and reading level indicated that language-impaired children are likely to have difficulty in learning to read in later school grades (Stark et al., 1984). Longitudinal studies such as this support the need to address language delays during the preschool years in relation to additional intervention methods to strengthen the necessary skills needed for literacy.

Bishop and Adams (1990) found that children who exhibited language difficulties at age 5 1/2 were found to be poor readers at age 8 1/2. The children exhibited widespread verbal deficits and poor nonverbal skills. They were able to read or decode fluently, but their comprehension was poor. Reading-impaired children who still exhibited oral language deficits were characterized by a history of language delays. As children get older, the focus shifts from oral language to reading; however, the oral-language disorder does not go away, but rather, it becomes apparent as part of the reading difficulty.

Snow et al. (1998) indicated that the risk for reading problems appeared lowest among those whose early language weaknesses were relatively mild and confined to one
area, such as speech production alone. In order to attend the preschool special-education program, the students must exhibit a greater delay or deficit in skills than merely a speech production delay or disorder alone; therefore, their weaknesses in language are deemed much greater and they are considered more at risk for reading problems in the future in comparison to typically developing peers. Strickland (2002) contended that reading problems are more likely to occur when children’s language impairments are severe in one area, broad in scope, and persist throughout the preschool years. Language deficits may serve as early indicators of a potential reading deficit and allow the identification of children at risk for reading difficulties prior to formal literacy instruction beginning. Menyuk et al. (1991) also asserted that the level of language knowledge may best predict reading problems in children with mild language disorders.

Larney (2002) clarified that the relationship between early language delays and later reading difficulties indicated the likelihood that preschoolers with language delays developing reading difficulties depended on the age at which the impairment persisted and the severity of the impairment. A correlational continuity can be distinguished between language delays and literacy difficulties. It was suggested that language delays could be viewed as risk factors to developing future reading difficulties.

Supporting children at risk for failure at an early stage may be critical because reading becomes the primary means of learning new information in later grades (Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1991a). Early language development appears to be a powerful predictor of later reading success; therefore, the urgency to identify specific language impairments as early as possible is apparent (Searcy, 2000).

The students in the preschool special-education program have deficits or delays in language development that warrant early intervention, although in many cases, the cause
of the deficit is not known. Based on multidisciplinary reports and assessment data from the prekindergarten assessment teams, the students exhibit significant delays in many areas of development, with language appearing most prominent. The focus of intervention in the program has been merely through interactions with peers and adults in a play-based setting. Although children advance their skills beyond assessment abilities in this setting, these children continue to exhibit difficulty in conceptualizing language in relation to literacy. The students present weak vocabulary and comprehension skills and, as a result, are unable to ask and answer content-related questions, retell parts of stories, identify main characters, predict what comes next sequentially, or identify and name pictures. These language-based reading skills are important to reading growth during formal instruction and, therefore, must be addressed if the current focus on accountability is not to leave a single child behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). Preventive measures within the classroom setting provide children with the necessary language skills for early literacy development. Through early identification, children receive appropriate interventions that can help develop the underlying language skills to increase their reading skills by the early grades (Searcy, 2000).

**Language and Literacy Relationship**

Language acquisition occurs on a continuum, with an intertwining relationship between oral and written language, and the acquisition of reading skills, beginning with the development of oral language (Diamont, 2002). Children begin experimenting with language as infants through crying and babbling and, eventually, with words as they are older. Exposure and practice together allow children to build their receptive and expressive vocabulary and comprehension. Young children are provided multiple opportunities to engage in successful communicative actions using language during the
critical period of rapid early development from birth through the preschool years to allow for expansion of vocabulary and comprehension skills. It has been recognized that reading-related development can start as early as the infancy and toddler years (Apel & Masterson, 2001; Snow et al., 1998).

Based on extant research in language and literacy development, views on reading instruction are continuously changing (Snow et al., 1998; CIERA, 1998; NICHHD, 2000). Educators and researchers in language and reading are beginning to look at literacy prior to formal instruction beginning. Research in the field of language and reading indicates that oral language skills can be considered predictors of reading achievement (Catts & Kamhi, 1986; Chaney, 1998; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Roth et al., 2002; Snow, 1991; Snow, Scarborough, & Burns, 1999; Van Kleeck & Schuele, 1987). During the preschool years, language development is enhanced by literacy-related activities, and literacy development is intertwined with language acquisition, even at very young ages (Catts, 1985; Snow, 1991; Snow et al., 1999).

Scarborough and Dobrich (1998) contended that language and literacy are constellations of related, but separable, processes and skills. Language and reading share many of the same skills, such as speaking and listening, especially with regard to asking and answering questions, retelling, and predicting events of a story. Furthermore, language provides the foundation for reading in the preschool years prior to formal reading instruction beginning and allows children to let us know, to what extent, if any, they understand what is being read to them (CIERA, 1998; Burgess, 2002).

Prior to beginning formal education, children develop language skills critical to the reading process. When reading a book to young children, adults point to the pictures and elaborate on the story, increasing print awareness, and at the same time, broadening
vocabulary knowledge. Asking the child questions not only checks to see if the child understands the story but also gives the child an opportunity to use the vocabulary that he or she is learning from listening to the book being read. Skills such as listening, understanding, and responding to questions are important skills in reading, especially as a child gets older and he or she is expected to read stories for content knowledge and interpretation (NICHHD, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). Prior knowledge is necessary to become successful readers as preschool children get older; therefore, building language skills, such as vocabulary and comprehension in children who are having difficulties at a young age will better prepare them for formal instruction in reading (Hirsch, 2003).

During the preschool period, children continue to increase their vocabulary repertoire and comprehend more complex language. According to CIERA (1998), preschool children are expected to understand the sequence of events in stories, understand and follow oral directions, connect information and events to life experiences when they are read a story, and know that print is what is being read in a story. They also need to attend to sounds in language, use new vocabulary in their own speech, ask questions, and comment on story meanings. The development of these precursor skills originate early in the life of a child and play an extensive role in the foundational development of reading (CIERA; NICHHD, 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Without the appropriate intervention for preschool students exhibiting weakness in this area, they will continue to have difficulty attaining language-based reading skills (Aram & Nation, 1980; Aram et al., 1984; Bishop & Adams, 1990; Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1991b, 1993; Scarborough, 2002). Furthermore, CIERA declared that children in kindergarten and first grade are expected to know even more language-based reading skills, such as listening and rereading text, switching from oral to written language
situations, increasing use of more formal language, and discussing features of the story, such as the main idea and details.

Dickinson and Sprague (2002) offered support to the idea that early emerging oral-language capacities and print-based knowledge are related and may mutually facilitate language and literacy development. Several researchers found correlations between language development at the preschool age and reading achievement in the primary grades (Aram & Nation, 1980; Aram et al., 1984; Bishop & Adams, 1990; Catts, 1993; Chaney, 1998; Larney, 2002; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 1990; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Young children’s use of oral language influences their attempts at early reading (CIERA, 1998). Children utilize an outside-in process to gather information from their surrounding environment that directly supports understanding of meaning of print. Meaningful comprehension of all but the simplest of writing depends on knowledge that cannot be found in the word or sentence itself, therefore, requiring prior knowledge (Whitehurst & Lonigan). Children need vocabulary and listening comprehension skills to determine semantic and conceptual context when reading, proving how critical it is to possess these skills. Because learning to read is affected by several skills, one being oral language, deficits in this area warrant early attention.

**Vocabulary and Comprehension**

The National Research Council (as cited in Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002) concluded that the majority of reading problems could be prevented by increasing children’s oral-language skills; similarly, the National Reading Panel concluded that vocabulary is critical to oral reading instruction. Vocabulary is the word knowledge an individual holds. It can be described in terms of oral or reading vocabulary. Oral vocabulary is broken down into two categories: receptive vocabulary, the words an
individual understands, and expressive vocabulary, the words an individual uses in language. Reading vocabulary contains the words an individual recognizes and uses in print. Vocabulary is very important to the reading process in that it becomes easier for a child to read words that are already a part of their repertoire. In addition, vocabulary assists in comprehension skills. If a child knows most of the words in a sentence, he or she can figure out the meaning, even not knowing the few words he or she has not yet encountered. This also assists in learning new vocabulary words.

The National Reading Panel (as cited in NICHHD, 2000) identified four types of vocabulary used in the literacy process: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary is learned both indirectly and directly in a variety of ways. Of importance is a focus on daily oral language, adult reading to children, and independent reading. Direct instruction should include repeated exposure to vocabulary, extended instruction that promotes active engagement, and explicit teaching of novel words prior to reading. Indirect instruction can take the form of conversation between adults and peers, print-rich environments, listening to stories, and experimenting with books by the children. Most vocabulary is learned indirectly through everyday experiences with oral and written language.

Vocabulary has a great impact on reading success. The size of a child’s vocabulary directly reflects the amount of language that he or she is exposed to (Hart & Risley, 1995). Language development during the preschool years, in particular, the development of a rich vocabulary and of some familiarity with the language forms used for communication and books, constitutes an important domain of preparation for formal reading instruction (Snow et al., 1998). According to the National Institute for Literacy (2003), vocabulary development is important because beginning readers use their oral
vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print, and readers must know what most of the words mean before they can understand what they are reading. Vocabulary is one component of oral language that can be linked to decoding skills and emergent phonological awareness. When children are learning to read words, it becomes easier to sound out and determine which words they are reading when the words have been heard before and are a part of their existing vocabulary. Children are more likely to experience literacy problems if they show early difficulties with vocabulary development (Pullen & Justice, 2003).

Vocabulary knowledge base also gives way to comprehension skills. Comprehension of oral language is the ability to listen and respond with understanding (Roskos et al., 2004). Reading comprehension entails active engagement through intentional interaction between the reader and the text (Invernizzi, 2002). As children build receptive and expressive vocabulary, they are strengthening their listening-comprehension skills. They are able to better understand the message intent when the meanings of words are known to them, hence, the importance of oral language to reading. Listening-comprehension abilities improve when children are read to, asked intriguing questions, given clear explanations, and encouraged to express ideas (Roskos et al.). Roth et al. (2002) found that semantic knowledge (oral definitions and word retrieval), in combination with print awareness in kindergarten, was most predictive of reading comprehension in the first and second grades.

Language development during the preschool years, in particular, the development of vocabulary and familiarity with language forms used for communication and books, constitutes an important domain in preparation for formal reading instruction (Snow et al., 1998). Deficits in early literacy development may contribute to subsequent difficulties
with attainment of higher level linguistic skills as well (Justice & Ezell, 2000).

Vocabulary and comprehension can be considered linguistic underpinnings to literacy. Early underpinnings of literacy were discussed by Van Kleeck and Schuele (1987) in relation to oral language and, later, developing less obvious language difficulties affecting reading. Van Kleeck and Schuele identified the preschool years as an important period to develop language and preliteracy skills in preparation for formal reading education. According to Pullen and Justice (2003), children who show early difficulties with the development of vocabulary knowledge and grammar skills are more likely to experience literacy problems. Dickinson and Sprague (2002) offered supporting data providing evidence that vocabulary is central to later literacy, growth in vocabulary is related to broader discourse skills, and engagement in extended discourse requiring decontextualized language skills fosters literacy development.

It has been determined through initial assessment that the students in the preschool special-education class did not learn vocabulary incidentally; therefore, a more direct approach was necessary. As a result of the National Reading Panel findings (NICHHD, 2000), the following was determined to be most effective in teaching individual words to students: (a) teaching specific words prior to reading helps increase vocabulary learning and reading comprehension; (b) extended instruction promotes active engagement with vocabulary, improving word learning; and (c) repeated exposures to vocabulary in many contexts aids word learning (Armbruster, 2002). Shared storybook reading provides an opportunity to accomplish vocabulary learning and comprehension, incorporating these three suggested strategies.

*Shared Reading as an Intervention Context*

The difference between oral language and reading is contextualization. Oral
language begins as a highly contextualized skill and gradually becomes decontextualized as an individual acquires language skills. Reading is a decontextualized language-based skill. During the preschool years, the transformation from using highly contextualized to decontextualized skills occurs. As language becomes more decontextualized, children may require direct teaching and practice of skills because the chance of reading failure increases (Snow, 1983). The children in the language-based special-education classroom possess highly contextualized language for the most part. They are considered at risk of having difficulty comprehending and producing decontextualized information. Snow (1991) indicated that the more experience children have with decontextualized language, the better chance they will have of understanding print when they get older.

Shared reading has been examined in relationship to oral language (receptive and expressive vocabulary) and has been associated with a variety of language outcomes, not just environmental print and letter knowledge (Burgess, 2002). This particular style of reading provides early exposure to literacy concepts for young children. Shared reading is highly repetitive, narrows the meanings of words with picture illustrations, reinforces recall, and introduces new words. During shared reading, the teacher models comprehension strategies, such as predicting, guessing words, connecting the story with background knowledge, and teaching vocabulary, which entails explaining, discussing, and verbalizing new words. This is different from reading aloud when the teacher reads a story out loud with limited participation from the students. Central to changes adults make in reading books to children is a shift in roles. The child must become an active participant rather than a passive listener. Studies of both typically developing children and children with language impairments have shown shared storybook reading to be an effective practice to facilitate vocabulary and comprehension development (Davie &
Findings by Roth et al. (2002), in a study designed to clarify the relationship between oral language and early reading acquisition in normally developing children, have advanced theoretical constructs of the relationship between oral language and early reading acquisition and provided information for early identification and effective instruction for children at risk. The researchers in that study sought to find which aspects of oral language were important at different points in development as well as to determine the relationship between oral language and early reading of children in first and second grades. The study began with 88 students in kindergarten, with 48 students available for follow-up testing in first grade and 49 students available for follow-up testing in second grade. Three domains of oral language were tested--structural language (semantics and syntax), metalinguistic skills (phonological awareness and metasemantics), and narrative discourse. Reading and background measures were also taken.

Results from the study revealed that phonological awareness skills measured in kindergarten predicted word and pseudoword reading in first and second grades but did not predict reading comprehension in the same grades (Roth et al., 2002). Semantic knowledge (oral definitions and word retrieval), in combination with print awareness, in kindergarten was most predictive of reading comprehension in first and second grades. Development played a role in this study as some variables were evident in first grade, but others were evident in second grade, supporting the authors’ hypothesis that certain aspects of oral language were important at different points in development.

McCathren and Allor (2002) provided an overview of the critical elements of emergent literacy and discuss specific strategies for using books with preschoolers to
facilitate language development and emergent literacy skills. The authors emphasized that preparation of children should include oral-language development as a critical element of emergent literacy. Suggested strategies to assist in facilitation of language and literacy skills in young children included previewing the story, reading the story aloud, and following up the story with related activities. Previewing the story allows the child to explore the parts of the book, label and talk about pictures, and build vocabulary. Expansions are used to increase the length of a child’s utterances in relation to vocabulary depicted in the story. This stage does not include reading written words on the pages; rather, it allows the children and the adult to make connections to personal experiences. For children whose language has not yet developed, objects can be used to illustrate the concepts in the story. For children with more developed language, questions about the pictures as well as comments and responses should be generated to prompt conversations.

Reading aloud books with repetitive phrases or rhyming words is suggested to help keep children’s attention. Props may also help children comprehend the story during this stage. Follow-up may be done in smaller groups, taking advantage of the opportunity to relate the pictures and the words in order to make meaning of the story. Such activities include cooking, arts and crafts, dramatic play, or science that extend learning and generalize to the children’s individual lives. McCathren and Allor (2002) suggested choosing motivating, meaningful activities for young children, allowing the children to relate the activities to the meaning of the story.

Storybook reading should be strategically used to develop language and literacy skills in preschoolers (McCathren & Allor, 2002). Children need to be engaged in the story and become active participants of the reading experience. Their individual needs
must be considered, and strategies should be implemented in age-appropriate ways to target oral language.

Critical components of emergent literacy, supported by trends in recent research and strategies for developing critical components in the preschool classroom, were provided by Pullen and Justice (2003). Through a review of the research, oral language was identified as one predictor of reading achievement that should be focused on during the preschool years. Oral language was discussed in terms of comprehension, semantics (vocabulary), and syntactics (grammar). According to Pullen and Justice, children who show early difficulties with the development of vocabulary knowledge and grammar skills are more likely to experience literacy problems.

Pullen and Justice (2003) also maintained that adults must provide children with quality inputs of oral-language labels, forms, and functions; encourage active participation; and scaffold children’s use of more sophisticated productions. Multiple oral language strategies that have an emphasis on quality and quantity of the input the children receive are of equal importance. Self-talk, talking about what they are doing, and parallel talk, talking about what another person is doing, provide models for children. Repetitions, where an adult repeats what the child says, and expansions, where an adult adds to what a child says, again provide better quality models of language for children to learn from.

The authors concluded with the notion that, by providing activities in the area of oral language during the preschool years, future reading difficulties may be avoided or prevented. A preschool teacher can incorporate such activities within existing schema to develop the skills. Story time was depicted as a prime opportunity to develop and increase oral language within the preschool classroom setting (Pullen & Justice, 2003).
Shared reading has been identified as a naturalistic intervention practice. Using shared reading as an intervention shows the importance of early literacy and the reciprocal relationship between oral language and early literacy. This brings attention to the role of early language intervention in later academic achievement (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). One study even found that a single reading of a storybook in a shared reading format can boost a young child’s receptive vocabulary (Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993).

Shared reading activities between adults and children facilitate language learning in several ways (DeBaryshe, 1993). During shared reading, a more sophisticated language model is used, intensive vocabulary teaching takes place, children’s abilities are taken into account, and adult reading behavior is modified. The frequency of reading aloud has been positively correlated with current oral language and reading readiness skills and later language and reading abilities in elementary school (as cited in DeBaryshe). DeBaryshe studied home story-reading practices and found they were more strongly related to receptive than expressive language abilities; the age of joint reading onset proved most predictive. Although the participants were very young (2 years old), it is important to recognize that the link between reading and oral language begins very early in life. The findings indicated why it is so important to engage young children in experiences, such as shared reading, to expand their current knowledge and experiences.

Shared book reading also has been found to facilitate more language in young children with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities when compared to other types of intervention, such as facilitated play (Davie & Kemp, 2002). In a study conducted with 39 children ages 4 to 6 who all had cognitive deficits and delayed language development, shared book reading was investigated as a task that would possibly elicit more utterances,
more intelligible utterances, and more complex utterances than with facilitated play. The study also considered shared reading as a time-efficient, reliable, and valid means of collecting a speech sample from these young children. Shared reading facilitated more language, intelligible utterances, and complex utterances in young children with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities and delayed language development than in the facilitated play condition (Davie & Kemp).

Evidence exists that those children with poor vocabulary skills can learn new vocabulary from shared reading experiences and make greater gains in language than in regular reading conditions (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Thirty-six children between the ages of 3 and 5 with poor vocabulary skills were studied to determine if dialogic or shared reading would increase their vocabulary skills. Teachers were instructed in shared reading techniques in one of the group studies. The other group was given 10 books and instructed to read like they normally would. They served as the control group. Twenty-seven families also participated in the home portion of the study that mirrored the group participating at the school. Children with poor vocabulary skills learned new vocabulary in the shared reading group and increased language gains when compared to the control group. This study was conducted over a short time period (4 weeks), and as such, the results are an incentive to conduct similar experiences over longer periods of time.

Gambrell (2004) proposed that early literacy instruction should include vocabulary development as one of its focuses. Often, oral language is attributed to early literacy development while overlooking other variables. Although the direct link between oral language and reading achievement is still unclear, certain variables have been found to account for the growth of decoding and comprehension abilities. Findings by Roth et al. (2002) indicated that phonological awareness measured in kindergarten predicted first-
and second-grade word identification and pseudoword reading, whereas semantic abilities
and print awareness were most predictive of first- and second-grade reading
comprehension. This supports the notion that vocabulary development, along with other
variables such as oral language, should be included in early literacy instruction
(Gambrell).

Sénéchal and Cornell (1993) assessed whether or not children learned new
vocabulary from a single storybook reading episode and the contribution of specific
behaviors used when reading to children. The study focused on 80 four-year-old and 80
five-year-old children from local day-care places, nursery schools, and kindergartens with
middle- to upper middle-class status. The study indicated a difference between the
acquisition of receptive and expressive vocabulary during shared reading. Sénéchal and
Cornell found that a single reading of a storybook boosted young children’s receptive
vocabulary. In addition, reading the book verbatim was just as effective as using recasts
and asking questions, in contrast to many recent studies.

Brown, Cromer, and Weinberg (1986) investigated how participation in shared
book experiences in kindergarten impacted readiness for first-grade reading instruction.
Two hundred twenty-eight students who attended public school had the opportunity to
participate in 24 shared reading experiences, as well as follow-up activities, related to the
stories over the course of a 4-month period. The results indicated that the shared book
experience was a successful method for increasing the minimal performance of a rural
high-percentage Black, low-income population of children, as measured by a state-
mandated first-grade readiness assessment, as well as increasing the number of identified
top readers (Brown et al., 1986). Greatest achievement was noted in the areas of auditory
memory and listening skills.
The relationship between shared reading and oral language was examined in 115 4- and 5-year-old children from middle class homes (Burgess, 2002). A home literacy environment questionnaire was given to the parents to determine shared-reading patterns. As a result, shared reading was found to be related to language outcomes in preschool children. The shared-reading variables were significantly related to the oral language composite, receptive and expressive vocabulary, and phonological sensitivity scores administered earlier in the study (Burgess).

A review of common practices used with young children in intervention elaborated on the effect shared reading has had on language development and cautionary actions to take when using this strategy (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). With shared storybook reading, oral and written forms of language can be taken into account within a naturalistic setting. Children can make gains in vocabulary growth with shared reading. Motivation toward book reading must be considered in special population settings prior to using the shared-reading approach with regard to attention and other disability-related limitations. Although the use of extensive conversational discourse by adults and the behavior exhibited when reading books has been known to increase vocabulary in typically developing preschoolers, it is questionable with regard to its use with children’s language impairments. Adults must informally assess children when conducting shared-reading sessions to determine their effectiveness on the current population. Every child’s individuality must be taken into account and accommodations made.

The type of interaction used during storybook reading has had enduring effects on young children’s vocabulary and story-understanding skills (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). The manner in which a teacher reads a book will influence the learning of vocabulary and comprehension and can have lasting effects on overall language development (Whitehurst
et al., 1988). The quality and quantity of shared reading is crucial if it will be used as an intervention method (Hart & Risley, 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1990). Shared storybook reading must include active participation in the readings and follow-up activities. Use of expansions and repetitions of children’s utterances, open-ended questions, and praise have also been found to influence vocabulary development (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Interactive reading enhances oral language, especially vocabulary development. Story props can be used to illustrate characters, scenes, and vocabulary to promote comprehension. Using shared storybook reading as a naturalistic approach to learning vocabulary and comprehension and fostering communicative abilities allows for scaffolding strategies to be used.

The effect picture book reading has had on language acquisition of young children was investigated by Whitehurst et al. (1988). Thirty typically developing children and their families were studied with regard to use of evocative techniques, use of informative feedback, and a show of progressive change toward a child’s abilities when reading. Their study determined that, when reading to young children, variations in how one reads can positively affect language development. The children were retested 9 months poststudy, and their expressive scores were still 6 months ahead of their peers.

Shared reading entails multiple readings of the same story. Repeated readings are necessary to ensure ongoing exposure to new words because children are more likely to learn new words if they have heard them repeatedly (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Young children need to hear stories more than once in order to gather necessary information to formulate vocabulary and comprehension knowledge. Using books repeatedly increases attention and reduces the number of linguistic demands on a child (Waldowski, 2003). This notion formulates the basis for rereading the same storybook several times during
the week for shared reading. Vocabulary is gradually learned over many encounters with a new word again and again (Roskos et al., 2004). Repeated reading has been found to increase language use and understanding (Martinez & Roser, 1985). Research has shown that more gains in vocabulary are made after three readings of a story than after a single reading and that asking labeling questions during repeated readings proved powerful in acquisition of expressive vocabulary (Sénéchal, 1997).

Justice and Pullen (2003) described several evidence-based approaches to promote emergent literacy skills in young children. Of importance was their discussion on adult-child shared storybook reading. Justice and Pullen indicated that the shared-reading approach is powerful because it provides an interactive context that is contextualized, authentic, meaningful, interesting, and motivating to a preschool child. The ability to modify adult behavior and embed these behaviors within the shared context enhances and accelerates emergent literacy growth. Reading that utilizes a social context creates a type of environment where adults ask open-ended questions, follow up children’s responses, repeat and expand child utterances, praise and encourage participation, and follow the child’s lead.

Active, student-initiated analytic talk and participation increases vocabulary learning (NICHHD, 2000). Dickinson and Smith (1994) investigated the type of interaction between adult and child over a longer period of time. The 25 children in this study attended Head Start or another similar program. They were initially observed at age 4 and assessed at age 5. The school environments were set up in the same manner as was the daily schedule the students followed; however, the approach the teacher took to reading a book to the class was different in many cases. The different approaches were taken into account in determining the effect on long-term growth in literacy-related skills.
The researchers found distinctive patterns of book reading and that the type of interaction used as books that were read had a lasting effect on the 4-year-olds’ vocabulary skills (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Of particular importance was the need for children to be an active part of the story discussion, an integral part of shared reading. It was found that discussions prior to and after the story were beneficial to literacy growth. Waldowski (2003) agreed, stating that the child should pace the process and have some physical and verbal control of the book, with the adult offering encouragement and praise, accepting all forms of participation from the child without posing too many demands.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis for using shared storybook reading activities for this study was derived from social development theory by Vygotsky. Social development theory contends that connections between people in their environment are made based on how they act and interact in shared experiences. Vygotsky believed that functions appear in a child’s life first, between people, and then internally (McGee & Richgels, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978/1930, 1986/1934). Initially, children use language to communicate wants and needs and then they use it for higher order thinking skills, such as reading. Social development theory indicates the need for social interaction between adult and child in order for skills to be acquired.

Shared storybook reading is a social event where an adult facilitates learning between reading activities and the child. Oral-language development can be facilitated when children have many opportunities to use language in interactions with adults and with one another, both one-on-one and in small groups; when they frequently engage in extended conversations with adults; and when they listen and respond to stories read to
and told by them (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). Reading stories alone does not necessarily promote literacy, but the attitudes and interactive behaviors exhibited by adults enhance the potential for language development and growth, contributing to the literacy foundation. This type of interactive behavior by an adult is more commonly termed scaffolding.

Scaffolding has been isolated as one of the most important aspects of adult-child interactions during shared storybook reading and serves as a facilitator of language and literacy learning (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998). Scaffolding talk gives feedback, directs attention, alerts to the sequence of activities, and provides information for completing tasks successfully (McGee & Richgels, 2004). Using shared storybook reading as a naturalistic approach to learning vocabulary and comprehension allows for scaffolding strategies to be used. An adult can use responsive labels, cloze procedures, turn-taking cues, comprehension questions, and expand or extend the child’s utterances in order to achieve and increase the child’s vocabulary and comprehension knowledge. Essentially, children internalize the language and actions of others and use the information to direct and control their own actions (McGee & Richgels).

Social interaction between child and adult not only plays an important role in development but is also a key factor in the social development theory. Adults must provide children with quality inputs of oral-language labels, forms, and functions; encourage active participation; and scaffold children’s use of more sophisticated productions (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Verbal scaffolding refers to how an adult responds to what a child says and does in a way that keeps engagement and elicits cohesive language and behavior in response to the book and the adult’s language (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998). Shared reading offers both social and contextual support for the
development of language (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). A shift is needed in current practice from a high level of adult-directed instruction to the use of verbal mediation during reading.

Although most vocabulary is learned through reading or listening to others read, children with disabilities have difficulty with incidental learning of vocabulary this way. The use of scaffolding reduces the independence required to complete a task so that a child can concentrate on the skill that he or she is attempting to acquire (Snow, 1983). With regard to this study, scaffolding bridges the gap between contextualized and decontextualized language.

Summary

The process of learning to read does not begin when a child enters school but, instead, starts very early in the preschool period (McCardle et al., 2001). Furthermore, Catts (1991b) stated that a reading disability is an extensive disorder present well before children are confronted with formal reading instruction. The identification of children at risk for future reading disabilities is critical in the move to ensure that all children are reading by the third grade and that no child is left behind. Oral-language skills such as vocabulary and the ability to listen and comprehend oral information are vital to developing a strong foundation of skills necessary to become a successful reader. Identifying children who are weak in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension and implementing a naturalistic intervention approach is essential. Based on research, shared storybook reading is a developmentally appropriate practice that can be used to increase language skills within a preschool classroom setting. This method allows for scaffolding, repeated readings, questioning, predicting, building on prior knowledge, adding to personal experiences, and interactions between adult and child.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of shared storybook reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills of preschool students with disabilities. Shared storybook reading has been found to be an effective method of increasing language skills of preschool students (Davie & Kemp, 2002; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993). As a result of the research, this particular method was utilized with one book three times during the week within a classroom setting for 20 weeks. A different book was used every week. Scaffolding strategies were employed to assist students in participating in the shared storybook reading sessions. Pre- and posttesting were used to determine the effectiveness of shared storybook reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension.

Participants

The participants in this study were ten 3- and 4-year-old preschool children enrolled in a language-based special-education preschool program for children with a variety of disabilities at a public elementary school. Background and demographic information was obtained from school records. The study population consisted of eight males and two females. Backgrounds included five Caucasian students, three African American students, and two Hispanic students. Students came from low- to middle-class socioeconomic status. The extent to which each student possessed a developmental or language delay was statistically controlled in the study. It was anticipated that the vocabulary and comprehension skills of both males and females in the study would increase as a result of implementing shared storybook reading activities. The sampling was representative of 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities throughout the district in
regard to meeting eligibility criteria for the special-education preschool program.

The district seeks to provide a language-based program for preschool students with disabilities in order to address learning, independent functioning, social-emotional behavior, and language development. Preschool students enter the special-education preschool program in this district three ways. The Florida Diagnostic Learning Resource Services provides parents and guardians with a referral to the school district’s Child Find services. The service is for individuals between the ages of 0 through 21 who may be exceptional in some way but who are not receiving special-education and related services. Child Find then assists in screening children to determine if needs exist beyond that which the school would normally provide. Child Find’s goal is to ensure that preschool children who need special-education and related services receive free, appropriate education. It is the entry level for exceptional-student education services in the school district. If a child is between birth and 3 years of age, he or she is referred for Part C services that are meant for infants and toddlers who have disabilities or delays. Prior to the child’s third birthday, his or her needs are readdressed and recommendations are made. One recommendation is to continue services in a self-contained preschool setting. This is the first way that a student enters the special-education preschool program in the district.

Child Find also provides screenings for children ages 3 through 5 who may have disabilities or delays in development. The screenings are coordinated with the four area preschool assessment teams who conduct testing with the children and parents. After the testing is completed, a committee meeting is held to discuss the results and determine how the child’s needs could best be met. A self-contained special-education preschool setting is one option to addressing these needs. This is the second way that a student
enters the special-education program in the district.

The third way that a student can attend the special-education preschool program is if he or she transfers from another school where his or her needs are being met in a specialized self-contained setting. That student will attend the program, and the current IEP will be followed in the most appropriately matched setting.

Preschool students with disabilities attend the school within their boundaries, which is the school that the student would normally attend if they did not have a disability. If the school within their boundaries cannot provide the necessary services as identified by the committee on the IEP, another school is selected. Services are then provided based on the identified needs on the IEP in the appropriate setting at the selected school. The special-education preschool classroom at the public elementary school that the study took place at accepts students from within their boundaries in addition to a few neighboring school boundaries.

The IEP provides the present level of the child’s abilities in five domains: curriculum and learning, independent functioning, adaptive physical education, social and emotional behavior, and communication. Each area has identified goals and objectives that the student will work on for 1 year, at which point the plan, goals, and objectives are reviewed. At this time, new goals and objectives are written if the need continues. On the IEP, language is addressed in the area of communication. In this area, a child’s deficit or delay in language is described and goals are written. Goals and objectives often address vocabulary and comprehension as identified areas of weakness to increase.

Prior to the study, consent was obtained from the parents of the students in the special-education preschool class. Parents were given 1 week to return the consent form. A follow-up letter followed 3 days after the initial consent form went home as a reminder
to those parents who had not yet returned the consent form. If a parent decided that he or she did not want the child to participate in the study, none of the tests would have been administered to the child, nor would any data have been collected. The child would have been able to partake in the activities as part of their daily classroom routine. The 10 students invited to participate in the study received consent to do so.

Due to the nature of the classroom environment, staffing procedures, and class size, all preschool students in the researcher’s class whose parents gave consent for them to participate were administered the pretests. The PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS were administered to determine current vocabulary and comprehension levels prior to implementing the study. These particular tests indicated the amount of vocabulary each student knew both receptively and expressively and the extent that each student comprehended listening materials.

**Procedures**

Following the administration of the PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS, students took part in shared storybook reading with the teacher three times per week. Shared storybook reading was chosen based on the favorable research supporting its role in increasing language skills in young children (Davie & Kemp, 2002; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). This particular method of reading employs interaction between adult and child, provides social and contextual support, and requires active participation from students. It also allows for scaffolding of verbal productions and multiple readings, both necessary components of reading sessions for children with weak language skills (DeBaryshe, 1993; Pullen & Justice, 2003). Shared storybook reading facilitates vocabulary and comprehension development through predicting story outcomes, reinforcing and recalling new words, and connecting the story with background
knowledge (McCathren & Allor, 2002). It is a developmentally appropriate practice and feasible method to implement in the classroom setting in order to answer the outlined research questions.

Shared storybook readings took place as a whole group activity, whereas the follow-up activities consisted of smaller groups of 4 to 5 children. Activities occurred prior to or following the story to provide the children with background information and additional experiences. The teacher was responsible for reading the story and implementing the shared-reading activities. The teacher’s aides assisted the students with attending to the stories and participating in the daily classroom activities related to the stories.

The type of book used in this study is called a Big Book. Big Books are larger designs of regular-sized books that utilize larger print for children to follow as the teacher reads. They also have large, vivid pictures that assist the teacher in illustrating vocabulary in the story. Appendix A provides an inclusive list of the Big Books used in this study.

The shared storybook reading lesson was broken into three stages: before, during, and after. Prior to reading the story, the teacher began the lesson by discussing the title, author, and illustrator, indicating the picture on the cover, and having children predict what the book is about or what they think is going to happen in the story. Listening to student responses and building on them assisted with connecting the story to personal life experiences. Vocabulary words were highlighted in each story.

The teacher proceeded to read the story related to the classroom theme to all of the children, utilizing strategies that encouraged interaction between the teacher and students, while connecting the story to background knowledge. Questioning techniques using who, what, where, when, why, and how were asked to prompt the students to talk
about the book. Students were asked to make predictions periodically throughout the story. Words and pictures were explicitly indicated in order to teach vocabulary and further listening comprehension. Open-ended and probing questions were also used to encourage listening comprehension.

Immediately following each reading, the teacher discussed the story with the children to strengthen vocabulary and listening comprehension skills as well as to teach new words introduced in the story to the children. Props were used for sequential story retelling. This occurred after the reading of a story. Students continued to participate in activities related to the story content throughout the day and remainder of the week. The activities included writing, art projects, plays, center activities, and cooking activities.

The same story was read two additional times during the week. Each time the story was read, the same shared-reading techniques were used. Scaffolding was utilized to assist the students in responding to the teacher’s questions. The teacher allowed time for student responses, gave appropriate feedback, and expanded each child’s response (Kadlic & Lesiak, 2003).

The PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS tests were administered at the conclusion of the study. Pre- and posttest results were then analyzed to determine if shared storybook reading had an effect on vocabulary and comprehension skills in the participating preschool students. Increases in receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension were the anticipated outcomes.

**Instruments**

Statistical tests such as the PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS are often used with individuals with special needs to measure vocabulary and comprehension skills. The PPVT-III and EVT are conormed. Reliability and validity information obtained on all
three norm-referenced tests are reported here. Reliability for the purposes of testing reports the amount of measurement error in the scores yielded by a test, and validity describes the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of specific inferences made from test scores (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). By using these three assessments, valid and reliable information on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension were acquired.

The PPVT-III was used to assess receptive vocabulary. This particular assessment utilizes two test versions for reliable testing and retesting. The PPVT-III has internal consistency with an alpha median score of .95 and a split-half median score of .94. Alternate-forms reliability coefficients were derived with a mean value of .95. The test-retest reliability is between .91 and .94. Regarding validity, the PPVT-III has an average correlation of .69 with the OWLS: LCS. The PPVT-III has been found to measure what it is intended to measure (receptive vocabulary), constituting content validity. Test Form A was used for testing prior to implementation of the study, and Test Form B was used at the conclusion of the study. Due to the high reliability, validity, and strong scientific base, the PPVT-III is often used to meet assessment guidelines for federally funded programs.

The EVT was administered to assess expressive vocabulary. The EVT has internal consistency with an alpha median score of .95 and a split-half median score of .91. The test-retest reliability is between .77 and .90. Regarding validity, the EVT has a correlation between .47 and .76 with the OWLS: LCS. Due to the high reliability and strong scientific base, the EVT is also often used to meet assessment guidelines for federally funded programs.

The OWLS: LCS was administered to assess listening comprehension skills of
The OWLS: LCS has an internal consistency of .84 and test-retest reliability of .76. The OWLS: LCS has been deemed valid in that it measures what it purports to measure.

Types of Data Collected

The research design was quantitative in nature. Scores from the three tests administered pre- and poststudy revealed data regarding receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills. The PPVT-III scores from the pre- and posttests were used to determine receptive vocabulary knowledge prior to and at the conclusion of the study. During the tests, students were asked to indicate, by pointing, the correct picture of the word spoken by the administrator. The EVT scores from the pre- and posttests were used to determine expressive vocabulary knowledge prior to and at the conclusion of the study. During the tests, students were asked to label items presented to them in picture form by the administrator.

The OWLS: LCS was used to measure understanding of spoken language pre- and poststudy. During this test, students were asked to point to or say the number of the picture (from among four numbered black-and-white drawings) that best depicts the verbal stimulus presented by the test administrator. Tasks addressed vocabulary, grammar, and higher order thinking skills (American Guidance Service, 2004).

Analysis and Presentation of Results

In order to determine study outcomes with regard to the study sample, results from the PPVT-III, the EVT, and the OWLS: LCS were interpreted and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Raw scores were converted to standard scores to provide a measure of each student's performance in relation to a group's performance. Age and percentile equivalents were reported; however, standard scores were used for
data analyses. Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) were determined. The mean and confidence intervals were established based on the outcomes of the test scores. Standard deviation, a measure of variability, was reported in order to compute other statistics, such as the standard error of measurement and product-moment correlations.

Using statistical inference, attempts to make inferences about population parameters from sample statistics were conducted. Tests of statistical significance were performed to determine if the null hypothesis could be rejected. To determine significance, an alpha level was set at .05 to estimate the probability that shared storybook reading activities affected vocabulary and comprehension skills in each student and that the occurrence did not happen by chance. The null hypothesis, shared storybook reading activities will not have an effect on vocabulary and comprehension skills in preschool students with disabilities, is rejected if the \( t \) value reaches \( p < .05 \). Several one-tailed \( t \) tests were used to compare the means of the pre- and posttest scores and to determine if they were significantly different.

Confidence limits were determined, but effect sizes were not. The effect size would specifically aid in determining practical significance for the research. Inferential statistical data must be used with caution, considering the small size of the study population. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention strategy and whether growth between pre- and posttesting was significant, the scores from the PPVT-III, the EVT, and the OWLS: LCS were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (2003), Version 12.0, a statistical software program used to analyze quantitative data. Data are presented visually in the form of graphic representations, such as tables and figures.
**Limitations and Delimitations**

The method of sampling, as well as the small size of the sample, limited this study. Results of the study may only be applied in general and not specifically to the special-needs population as a whole due to the sampling procedures and size. Sampling was done this way because the school system does not permit providing services to one group of students and not the other. Only one group of students existed at the particular school where implementation took place.

The study also confined itself to 3- and 4-year-old preschool students with a variety of special needs placed in a preschool language-based program. The students were initially assessed by the school district’s preschool assessment teams and placed in this particular program according to their areas of need and severity. Placement at this site was based on whether their street address fell within this school’s boundaries, their home-school program was capped, or their home school did not have a program to meet their needs. The researcher had no control over the size and makeup of the class. This may affect external validity, or the extent to which the results of this research can be applied to settings and individuals beyond those that were studied (Gall et al., 2003).

**Expected Outcomes**

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was to determine the effect of shared storybook reading on receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills of preschool students with disabilities.

The following outcomes were projected for this applied dissertation:

1. Increase in receptive vocabulary.
2. Increase in expressive vocabulary.
3. Increase in listening comprehension skills.
Chapter 4: Results

Methodology

Ten students from the language-based special-education preschool program participated in the study. Eight students returned from the previous school year, and two students met criteria for the program prior to the school year beginning. All students were initially assessed by a preschool assessment team who determined eligibilities and placement. Language deficits were identified for each student.

The language-based special-education preschool program conducted the day as it typically would, with the exception of the story-time reading block. During this time, shared-reading techniques were utilized before, during, and after the reading of a story. In addition, activities related to the story were conducted during the week the story was being read. These included art, music, and language-based, age-appropriate activities that could be incorporated into the typical daily schedule.

The expected outcomes of using shared reading for 30 minutes, three times per week, in addition to story-related activities, were an increase in receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, and listening comprehension.

Procedures

After obtaining parent consent, each student was given the PPVT-III, Form A, the EVT, and the OWLS: LCS individually. After the 10 students completed all measures, shared reading sessions were initiated. Shared reading was implemented during the story time block. Thirty minutes of shared reading were conducted three times per week. Before reading the story, the teacher introduced the book and discussion took place about the cover. Students had the opportunity to predict what the story was about. Pictures on the cover of the book were introduced and discussed. Additional prereading activities
included picture walks, shared writing, character identification, sequencing of events, and retelling by the students with teacher facilitation. Novel words were paired with referents, pictures, or objects that represented pictures in the story if they were readily available (e.g., plastic farm animals, fruit, vegetables, and so forth).

During each reading of the story, questioning techniques were used to prompt the students to talk about the book as well as to make sure the students had an understanding of the story. Each student in the study had an opportunity to participate during the story reading if he or she was present at school that day. Students were asked to make predictions periodically throughout the story. Words and pictures were explicitly taught. Available objects or visuals were used in explicit teaching of vocabulary. Open-ended and probing questions were used to encourage listening comprehension. Teacher aides assisted the children with redirecting attention to the stories and in completing the follow-up classroom activities related to the stories.

Following each reading of the story, the teacher discussed the story with the children to strengthen vocabulary and listening comprehension skills as well as to teach and reteach new and previous words introduced in the story to the children. Props were used by the students to sequence, reenact, or retell the story. The students participated in creating graphs, naming characters, and describing objects and people.

In addition to shared reading, activities related to the stories and themes were conducted through art, music, and language. Smaller versions of the Big Book stories were placed in the library center. Three art projects related to the story being read were conducted during the week. Students also had the opportunity to sing songs and read poems related to the story themes. Receptive and expressive language activities that targeted story vocabulary, such as sorting, naming, labeling, and structured play, were
encouraged throughout the day.

Twenty stories were utilized for shared reading. At the conclusion of the last book, the PPVT-III, Form B, EVT, and OWLS: LCS were administered again. Raw scores were converted to derived scores. Pre- and posttest results were then compared to answer the proposed research questions. Pre- and posttest standard score means for the three tests are shown in the figure. Data should be considered cautiously, given the small sample size of the study population. Individual participant pretest and posttest standard scores for the PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS are listed in Appendix B.

![Figure](image)

*Figure.* Pre- and posttest standard score means. PPVT-III = Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Third Edition; EVT = Expressive Vocabulary Test; OWLS: LCS = Oral and Written Language Scales: Listening Comprehension Scale.

*Research Question 1.* What effect does shared storybook reading have on receptive vocabulary? The PPVT-III pretest and posttest scores were compared to determine an increase in receptive vocabulary skills. Raw scores were converted to standard scores. The PPVT-III pretest group mean was 86.6, and the posttest mean was 91.6. The difference between group means was 5.3. Age-equivalencies ranged from < 1-9 to 5-0 on the pretest to < 1-9 to 5-5 on the posttest. The median and mode scores for the pretest were 87.5 and 89 and 90.5 and 88 for the posttest respectively.

A *t* test was used to determine the statistical significance between PPVT-III pre-
and posttest standard scores. To determine significance, \( p \) was set at .05. The degree of freedom was 9 and \( p < .048 \). The results of the paired samples test for the PPVT-III are shown in Appendix C.

Raw scores were converted to percentile rankings. The PPVT-III pretest scores indicate that one child scored at or above the 50th percentile. Nine children scored at or below the 39th percentile. According to the posttest scores, four children scored at or above the 50th percentile and six children scored at or below the 49th percentile. Table 1 shows the results of the percentile rankings for receptive vocabulary.

**Table 1**

| Percentile Rankings for Receptive Vocabulary Scores |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Test                            | < 10    | 10-19   | 20-29   | 30-39   | 40-49   | ≥ 50%   |
| Receptive vocabulary pretest    | 3       | 2       | 3       | 1       | 0       | 1       |
| Receptive vocabulary posttest   | 2       | 1       | 2       | 1       | 2       | 4       |

**Research Question 2.** What effect does shared storybook reading have on expressive vocabulary? The EVT pretest and posttest scores were compared to determine an increase in expressive vocabulary skills. Raw scores were converted to standard scores. The EVT pretest group mean was 94.6 and the posttest mean was 96.2. The difference between group means was 1.6. Age-equivalencies ranged from 1-9 to 4-5 on the pretest and 3-8 to 4-10 on the posttest. The median and mode scores for the pretest were 95 and 95, and 94.5 and 93 for the posttest.

A \( t \) test was used to determine the statistical significance between the EVT pretest
and posttest standard scores. To determine significance, $p$ was set at .05. The degree of freedom was 9 and $p < .24$. The results of the paired samples test for the EVT are shown in Appendix C.

Raw scores were converted to percentile rankings. The EVT pretest scores indicate that three children scored at or above the 50th percentile. Seven children scored at or below the 39th percentile. Posttest scores indicate two children scored at or above the 50th percentile, and eight children scored at or below the 49th percentile. Table 2 shows the results of the percentile rankings for expressive vocabulary.

Table 2

Percentile Rankings for Expressive Vocabulary Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile range</th>
<th>&lt;10</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>≥50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressive vocabulary pretest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive vocabulary posttest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3. What effect does shared storybook reading have on listening comprehension? The OWLS: LCS pretest and posttest scores were compared to determine an increase in listening comprehension skills. Raw scores were converted to standard scores. The OWLS: LCS pretest group mean was 80.0 and the posttest mean was 84.4. The difference between group means was 4.4. Age equivalencies ranged from 1-9 to 3-1 on the pretest and 1-9 to 4-6 on the posttest. The median and mode scores for the pretest were 79.5 and 77, with 86.5 and 88 for the posttest.

A $t$ test was used to determine the statistical significance between the OWLS:
LCS pretest and posttest standard scores. To determine significance, \( p \) was set at .05. The degree of freedom was 9 and \( p < .062 \). The results of the paired samples test for the OWLS: LCS are shown in Appendix C.

Raw scores were converted to percentile rankings. The OWLS: LCS pretest scores show all 10 children scored at or below the 29th percentile. One child scored between the 40th and 49th percentile on the posttest. Nine children scored at or below the 29th percentile. Table 3 shows the results of the percentile rankings for listening comprehension.

Table 3

**Percentile Rankings for Listening Comprehension Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile range</th>
<th>&lt;10</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>≥50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening compre</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hension pretest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcomes**

The following outcomes were projected for this study. A discussion of each outcome is provided.

1. Increase in receptive vocabulary. This outcome was met. Receptive vocabulary was measured using the PPVT-III, Form A, and Form B. Results from the PPVT-III pre- and posttests were analyzed to determine if there was an increase in receptive vocabulary. The paired samples \( t \)-test results indicated that there was statistical significance between pre- and posttest means.
2. Increase in expressive vocabulary. This outcome was not met. Expressive vocabulary was measured using the EVT. Results from the EVT pre- and posttests were analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant increase in expressive vocabulary. Although the outcome for expressive vocabulary was achieved by 5 of the 10 participants, the improvement in the expressive vocabulary scores for the group from pre- to posttest was not found to be significant.

3. Increase in listening comprehension. This outcome was not met. Listening comprehension was measured using the OWLS: LCS. Results from the OWLS: LCS pre- and posttests were analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant increase in listening comprehension. Although the outcome for listening comprehension was achieved by 7 of the 10 participants, the improvement in the listening comprehension scores for the group from pre- to posttest was not found to be significant.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Students from the language-based special-education preschool program participated in shared reading for 30 minutes, three times per week, along with related small-group activities. Shared-reading strategies were implemented prior to, during, and after reading to the group of students. Scaffolding was used to provide feedback, direct attention, and provide information to students as well as extend and shape student responses. Follow-up activities to the shared reading included art, music, language, and cooking. The implementation of shared reading was designed to increase receptive language, expressive language, and listening comprehension skills.

Students scored significantly higher on the PPVT-III posttest, indicating that the intervention was successful in increasing receptive vocabulary. Based on the analysis of results, student scores approached, but did not reach, significance on the EVT and the OWLS: LCS. Overall, a majority of students increased their receptive language, expressive language, and listening comprehension skills after the implementation of shared reading. Due to the small sample size ($N = 10$), caution should be given to data analyses.

Interpretation of Results

The first research question asked if shared reading had an effect on receptive vocabulary. Statistical analyses indicated that the PPVT-III standard score means from the pretest and posttest were statistically significant. From the analysis of results, seven of 10 students showed an increase in receptive vocabulary scores. Three students showed an increase of more than 10 points between pre- and posttest scores. Two students showed a decrease in receptive vocabulary standard scores, and one remained the same.
Lack of attention during posttest administration could explain the decrease in scores.

Percentile rankings between 16 and 84 are considered in the average range. Eight of 10 of the receptive vocabulary scores fell between the 1st and 29th percentiles after the pretest. Posttest results revealed a shift in scores toward the 50th percentile, with two students scoring over the 50th percentile. Posttest results also revealed that only two students scored in the below-average range as compared to four students at the onset of the study. Based on the results, shared reading had a positive effect on receptive vocabulary skills.

The second research question asked if shared reading had an effect on expressive vocabulary. Five out of 10 students showed an increase in their expressive vocabulary standard scores from pretest to posttest. One student increased his score more than 15 points from pretest to posttest. The remaining five students showed a decrease in standard scores; however, the decrease for four students was minimal, consisting of two or three points.

Percentile rankings for expressive vocabulary between 16 and 84 are considered in the average range. Two expressive vocabulary scores fell between the 1st and 29th percentiles after the pretest. Posttest results revealed a distribution of scores between the 30th and 50th percentiles. All 10 students fell within the average range. Although statistical significance was not reached, an increase in expressive vocabulary scores from pretest to posttest was noted with half of the sample. Attention could have been a factor in the lower scores.

The third question asked if shared reading had an effect on listening comprehension skills. The scores on the OWLS: LCS mean neared the $p$ value, but did not reach it. Seven of the 10 students showed an increase in listening comprehension
skills, according to the results of the posttests. Two students increased their standard score by more than 10 points. Again, attention during administration could have been a factor in the decrease in some participants’ scores.

The average range for Listening Comprehension Scale percentile rankings is between 16 and 84. All 10 of the listening comprehension scores fell between the 1st and 29th percentiles after the pretest. Only one student moved up to the 47th percentile on the posttest. Three students scored in the below average range on the posttest as compared to seven on the pretest. Although statistical significance was not reached, an increase in listening comprehension scores from pretest to posttest was noted with a majority of the participants’ scores.

Attention and severity of language delay or impairment may have had an affect on the acquisition of new vocabulary and comprehension skills as well as on how a student responded during the administration of the tests. Poor vocabulary gain may have been due to insufficient focus on word meanings and the selection of words (Biemiller, 2006). In addition, a behavioral crisis occurred during the final week of the intervention and continued throughout the testing period. Student schedules and routines were disrupted, changed, or discontinued for periods of time, which may have had an impact on the posttest results.

Discussion of Conclusions

The results of the PPVT-III, EVT, and OWLS: LCS are practically significant. Seventy percent of students increased their scores in receptive language and listening comprehension, and 50% increased their expressive language scores. Students exhibited increased participation and motivation in storybook reading and classroom activities. Attention to teacher and task increased for some students.
Children with language impairments acquire receptive and expressive language skills at a slower than normal rate (Stark et al., 1984). This may account for not seeing the dramatic improvement in receptive, expressive, and listening comprehension scores as originally anticipated. The intervention was implemented for 20 weeks with two interruptions, a 2-week break after the 8th week and a 2-week break after the 14th week. Children did not have the consistency needed to learn and may not have had enough time to acquire the additional skills needed to perform at a higher level on the tests.

Level of significance only assists in rejecting the null hypothesis and cannot be used to predict the results of future studies. It does not indicate that the research hypothesis is incorrect. Using statistical power analysis, a combination of sample size, level of significance, directionality, and effect size would have been used for studying the likelihood that a particular test of statistical significance will be sufficient to reject a false null hypothesis (Gall et al., 2003). Effect size, as defined by Gall et al., is an estimate of the magnitude of a difference, a relationship, or other effect in the population represented by the sample. Given the demand for evidence-based research in education, using power or meta-analyses may have been useful in determining the effects or benefits of an intervention strategy such as shared reading.

Preschool students who possess language impairments, deficits, or delays are at considerable risk for developing future reading difficulties (Aram & Nation, 1980; Boudreau & Hedberg, 1999; Catts, 1991b, 1993; Scarborough, 2002). Results of the study show significant increases in receptive vocabulary, one major component related to future reading comprehension. The significance of vocabulary at an early age cannot be underestimated. The number of word meanings acquired increases 14% to 29% when utilizing a combination of multiple readings of the same story and use of referents
Extensive literature provided several examples of shared storybook reading utilized as a method of increasing oral language skills of typically developing students and students with disabilities (Davie & Kemp, 2002; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; McCathren & Allor, 2002; Roth et al., 2002). Students readily came to the circle area where shared reading took place. They actively participated in the activities preceding, during, and after the reading session. Students made comments that related to the story throughout the day and weeks to follow. This was observed even weeks after the conclusion of a story. One student exclaimed as a bat was mentioned in class, “Just like Stellaluna,” in reference to that particular story well after the conclusion of reading *Stellaluna* (Cannon, 1993). When sequencing events of a story read around the winter holidays, another student referenced the events in *The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and The Big Hungry Bear* (Wood, 1996). While on a field trip to the farm, several students identified the farm animals by name and associated them with the story *Inside a Barn in the Country* (Capucilli, 1995). “Look at the chickens in the barn,” “Where are all the eggs?” and “The cow doesn’t have any spots” were comments made by students.

Students were observed making comparisons during structured play activities as well. The following comparison comments were acknowledged. “This horse has four legs like a zebra.” “The flamingo has two legs like me.” Students were also able to identify how two animals were different. “Birds eat worms.” “Bats eat fruit.” “Birds fly around in the day.” “Bats fly during the nighttime.”

Scaffolding was a technique identified as an appropriate way to facilitate vocabulary and comprehension skills during shared storybook reading (Kaderavek &
Sulzby, 1998; McGee & Richgel, 2004; Snow, 1983). Student participation and responses were scaffolded in order to increase receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills. Comments, questions, and responses were expanded by the teacher. Prompts were provided to assist students in elaborating their responses. Attention to the teacher and task was redirected when necessary.

Observations revealed an increase in verbal communication between students and adults in the classroom. Students increased the number of words used in sentences to communicate. They were able to follow more complex directions, answer questions correctly, identify objects and pictures in the environment, and complete small-group activities with a lesser amount of adult assistance. The ability not only to answer questions but to answer a variety of questions correctly was noted. Students who participated in the study were reportedly more likely to volunteer information and expressed eagerness in their attempt to verbally participate in a variety of activities in the classroom. They asked questions related to story content as well as to the classroom environment. Positive peer interactions increased from the onset of the study to the conclusion. Evidence of such observations was documented by students mastering or making progress toward goals identified in their IEPs.

Students who presented weak vocabulary and comprehension skills became able to ask and answer content-related questions, retell stories, sequence story events, identify characters in a story, and identify and name pictures. Listening, understanding, and responding to questions are necessary skills for story knowledge and interpretation in the early grades (NICHHD, 2000; Snow et al., 1998).

Implications of Findings

When looking at state or federally funded programs, policymakers must consider
how the curriculum will be presented to the children and ensure that it is delivered in a
developmentally appropriate manner. NCLB specifically addresses accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works best based on scientific research, expanding parental options, and expanding local control and flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). The first two components relate directly to the instructional position in the school. NCLB puts a special emphasis on implementing high quality educational programs and practices that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research. The programs should emphasize a child’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development. Teachers will be held accountable for producing results and they will be required to improve instructional effectiveness through continued learning based on current research.

The need to reflect on instructional knowledge and skills in order to maintain effectiveness in the classroom is ongoing. According to NCLB, research stresses the importance of early reading skills, including vocabulary development, and programs must be grounded in scientifically-based research with their success continually evaluated (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). The more research that is conducted in the areas of language and literacy development supporting such components as receptive and expressive language and listening comprehension skills, the more teachers should feel compelled to incorporate new findings into their present-day curriculum as well as share their knowledge with parents, given the children’s best interests at hand.

Findings from this study indicate that shared reading is an effective method of instruction used to increase receptive and expressive vocabulary and listening comprehension skills in preschool students with disabilities. Utilizing an approach such as shared reading that encourages social interactions and language development is a
feasible and effective way of providing language intervention to preschool students with identified needs. Strategies used in this applied dissertation will continue to be utilized during the next school year.

Limitations

Due to sampling procedures and the small sample size, results of the study cannot be applied to the special needs population as a whole. Students were assessed by the school district’s preschool assessment teams and placed in this particular program according to their areas of need, severity of disability, and address location in relation to the school. Sample size was limited due to the need to maintain a low ratio of adults to students in the language-based preschool special-education classroom. In addition, some students were returning to the program for a 2nd year. Although these students received language intervention as participants in the language-based preschool special-education program, they remained in the program based on their developmental needs. A larger sample size may have had a different effect on significance levels.

Factors related to the disability may have had an impact on the results. Lack of attention, unidentified behavioral issues, severity of the disability, and variety of specific language deficits may have impacted student performance during the study as well as during the testing sessions.

Results of the study may have been affected by 2 weeks without school due to a weather-related school closing. This unexpected interruption occurred in the middle of the study’s implementation. Upon returning to school, students may have been negatively impacted by the events that took place, which, in turn, could have impacted performance or progress up to that point. Two weeks without school due to winter break occurred three quarters of the way through the study. Only 6 weeks of shared reading
implementation took place after this second break. The study did not flow continuously through the school year because the two breaks were encountered.

It still is not known if the results of the study can be attributed solely to the shared-reading intervention because the program the participants attended is language based. Students had the opportunity to learn language throughout the day in a variety of scheduled activities. It is not known whether these activities, the shared reading, or a combination of both contributed to the increase in vocabulary and comprehension scores.

**Recommendations**

The researcher makes several recommendations based on the results of the study. First, future studies using shared reading as an intervention context should be conducted with special-needs populations during the preschool years. At this time, few studies can provide support for shared reading for this population and at this age.

Second, studies should attempt to use larger and more heterogeneous samples. This study was limited due to the sampling procedures. If class size deters the use of larger samples, it is suggested that multiple classes be used. Classes located in a variety of populations should also be considered.

Third, because children with language impairments acquire receptive and expressive language skills at a slower pace than their typically developing peers, a longer implementation process may be necessary. With a longer implementation process, children with language delays or impairments will have the necessary supports provided to acquire and increase receptive and expressive language and listening comprehension skills.

Fourth, longitudinal studies will determine if increasing receptive language, expressive language, and listening comprehension skills through the use of shared
reading has an effect on reading abilities in the primary grades. Because lack of oral-language skills has been repeatedly linked to later reading difficulties, studies such as these will contribute to the literature in favor of supporting early language development.

Finally, training should be conducted with current and future preschool special-education teachers as well as preschool general-education teachers to teach them how shared reading can be utilized effectively in the preschool classroom setting. Strategies, such as repeated readings, questioning techniques, and encouraging the child to become an active participant, should be stressed.

Educators, districts, and states are obligated to provide meaningful, developmentally appropriate, and effective intervention to preschool students, including those with disabilities. Lack of early language skills has been linked to reading difficulties as children continue through school. Children with language deficits not only arrive at school with weaker oral language skills, but they are also more likely to have difficulty in the reading processes and often have difficulty catching up with their peers without being exposed to effective interventions (McCardle et al., 2001; Torgesen, 1998). For these reasons, it is critical to provide young children with effective instruction that will facilitate language development at an early age if educators are to leave no child behind.
References


Pullen, P., & Justice, L. (2003). Enhancing phonological awareness, print awareness, and


March 30, 2004, from ProQuest database.


work published 1934)


Appendix A

Book List
Book List

A Pair of Socks
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
Celebrations
Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too?
Growing Vegetable Soup
Guess How Much I Love You
I Am an Apple
Inside a Barn in the Country
It’s Pumpkin Time
Mouse Paint
My Five Senses
Polar Bear, Polar Bear
Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf
Stellaluna
The Hat
The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry, and The Big Hungry Bear
The Little Red Hen
The Mitten
The Snowy Day
We Are All Alike, We Are All Different
Appendix B

Individual Pre- and Posttest Standard Scores
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Appendix C

Paired Samples Test Results
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