

AUDIOBOOKS' IMPACT ON STUDENTS' READING

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to determine what types of interventions improve the basic reading skills of children diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability, which is defined as having an IQ score of 70 or below. Often these students struggle to keep up with the academic rigor in the middle and high school setting. They lack the basic reading skills necessary to complete coursework and pass their end-of-course tests, which often leads to them dropping out of school. This study is a start to seeing if specific interventions have the capabilities to improve basic reading skills for students with a mild intellectual disability. Implementing audio books, along with other interventions, could improve the academic successes of students diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability.

Keywords: Reading skills, mild intellectual disability, foreign language (FL), literature, motivation, comprehension, listening.

Reading, one of the four main components of language learning, is of paramount importance for academic success in a foreign language (FL) learning context. However, it is also true that FL learners experience significant difficulties in comprehending texts, which consequently results in poor reading skills, and fosters a negative attitude toward reading practice. Children are falling further behind because of standardized testing and not being provided interventions proven to be successful. Teachers are so worried about teaching the content of the test that they lose sight of providing individualized instruction, especially to children with a diagnosed disability. When we do not provide individualized instruction and meet the child at his or her grade level, frustration occurs, specifically when it comes to reading. Some studies have looked to alleviate some of the frustration by examining audio books as an intervention that could assist in improving the fluency rate of children with a mild intellectual disability. Students are scored based on the number of words read correctly within a given time frame. Being two middle school special education teachers, our hope is that if we start to provide this and other interventions early enough, it will quell some of the frustration and improve academic success in middle and high school. Classroom teachers struggle everyday with students who come to school unprepared to meet the challenges of reading instruction. More and more children enter school without being read to regularly, causing a lack of exposure to written and oral language. When the necessary elements for reading are absent from a child's experience, it is the role of the educator to provide said elements. With an overcrowded curriculum and standardized testing, teachers are asked to do more with fewer resources. Many students struggle to keep up with the academic rigor.

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A student with a mild intellectual disability is defined as having an average IQ score between 50 and 70. These students exhibit characteristics of learning at a slower pace than most of their regular education peers because of cognitive deficits. They may have slower processing skills that can have an impact on learning in all academic classes if the proper accommodations are not provided. Some of these characteristics vary depending on the individual. Because the average IQ of a mild intellectually disabled student tends to decline over time, it is important for educators to utilize as many interventions as possible that will improve academic success. Similar to other studies discussed previously, conducted a case study with Luke, an eighth grader diagnosed with a mild intellectual disability. Luke was tutored for over a year because of his low reading skills, specifically his difficulties with fluency. Luke was reading at a third-grade level, so that was where the tutoring occurred. Luke would listen to books on tape, read the sections assigned silently or out loud, and then choose two or three passages to read to the teacher the next day. His teacher would score the words per minute read correctly. They also conducted guided readings, and repeated readings throughout the

tutoring sessions. This format occurred throughout the entire year. The findings of the study follow. Luke's reading rates remained the same when he was working with biographies; however, his reading rates increased when he read more narrative texts. Also, his reading rates improved when it was a text that Luke was interested in reading, which is why his rates increased with narrative texts. This study demonstrates how important it is for educators to find literature that interests the student. If the text is not of interest, then the student will not work as hard, and as a result, develop a lack of motivation, which will produce inaccurate testing results. Listening to stories recorded at a slower pace has been found to increase fluency, specifically through the use of audio books. Audio books provide a type of scaffolding that allows students to gain access to difficult material, which in turn allows them to focus on meaning. Not only does comprehension improve, but fluency develops at a faster pace as well. If audio books are to be effective, students must follow along with the text. Teaching strategies for how to follow along are important. A student can use his or her finger as a guide while listening, or they can use a ruler to follow the sentences down the page. These methods provide less confusion and keep the student from getting lost while listening. It is also important for a student with a mild intellectual disability to take breaks from reading when needed. Some are only able to focus for ten to fifteen minutes at a time before they become distracted.

In conclusion, given that reading longer passages, and reading for pleasure, was a new experience for the participants, it seems necessary to provide students with such experiences first, in order for them to develop the motivation to read. This line of reasoning was supported by two facts: first, several students, who were not in either group originally, expressed eagerness to join the reading sessions without being tested or added as participants. Second, students from both groups asked for more books to read when the end of the instruction was announced. These facts indicate that students specifically enjoyed reading whole books, not short extracts, and were motivated to continue and persist with reading books even after the experiment.

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