A COMPARISON OF NARRATIVE AND EXPOSITORY TEXT COMPREHENSION IN HISPANIC ELL STUDENTS

By

Shirley Brown

An Abstract
of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist
in the Department of Educational Foundations and Literacy
University of Central Missouri

November, 2011
This research study was designed to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text. The study was conducted in a Midwestern school district with 20 first through sixth grade ELLs from Spanish-Speaking backgrounds. The students’ reading achievement on narrative and expository text was evaluated during the second semester using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). The data were collected and analyzed using a T-test to determine statistical significance on the comprehension levels of narrative and expository texts. The findings indicate that the students’ mean independent levels were only slightly higher whereas their instructional and frustration levels were significantly higher for expository texts than narrative.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

English Language Learners (ELLs) are students whose English development has been greatly influenced by another language and who require support to be successful in mainstream classrooms. The population of ELLs continues to increase. Goldberg stated, “The number of ELLs in U.S. public schools has increased 150 percent since 1990, while the overall student population has grown only 20 percent” (as cited in Russakoff, 2011, p. 4). Although these students arrive on the school scene with less English language experience, they are expected to quickly learn and achieve at the same levels as English-only peers. Educators and researchers are continually striving for better teaching methods. Reading instruction is of particular importance.

Although reading is a vital skill for all students in the educational system, it is difficult to find a definition upon which all educators and researchers agree. The problem is that reading encompasses a multitude of smaller skills and types of knowledge. As students grow, these skills develop, change, and increase in number. Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1996) described reading development in stages beginning with reading environmental print and ending with strategic reading of expository text (as cited in Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 5). Rumelhart (1980) developed Schema Theory, which states that knowledge is organized in a systematic, specific way (as cited in Fitzgerald 1995, p. 150). Readers use this knowledge to make predictions, comprehend text, and recall material. In a later work, Rumelhart (1985) describes reading as an interactive process in which readers combine background knowledge with print to interpret the information on the page (as cited in Fitzgerald 1995, p. 150). Goodman (1970) describes reading as a “Psycholinguistic guessing game.” He believes that readers’ comprehension occurs when they use their own background knowledge about the material and language to sample texts and make predictions (as cited in Fitzgerald 1995, p. 150). Finally, Brown (1980) defined
metacognition as a group of strategies readers use to be aware of whether or not they comprehend what they are reading. This is essentially a synthesis of the previous theories of reading (as cited in Fitzgerald 1995, p. 150). The strategies include schema activation, use of background knowledge and text clues to make inferences, visualizing and inferring to understand information, and many others (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Although metacognitive strategies utilize aspects of other theories of reading, many strategies are introduced through use of various text structures and genres. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) recommend using a variety of text forms and lengths when explicitly teaching the metacognitive strategies, rather than simply progressing from narrative to expository text. Nonetheless, the educational system has developed communication arts standards which rely on narratives in early reading instruction.

Narrative text structure has been found to be more easily recalled and understood by elementary students (Berkowitz & Taylor, 1981; Leslie & Caldwell, 1989; Leslie & Cooper, 1993; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). Durkin (1981) stated, “Children are more likely to have been read narrative than expository texts” (as cited in Leslie & Caldwell 2006, p. 6). Primary grade instructional materials are predominantly narratives. Leslie and Caldwell (2006, p. 6) further state that, “If students know more about the topics discussed in narrative writings (as compared to those more usually presented in expository texts), then it is likely that they will recall and comprehend more of the narrative text.” Clearly, the research supporting these statements was conducted on English-only (EO) students in predominantly English-speaking schools.

What about children whose first language is not English? If no one in the home reads or speaks English, they will not begin school with background knowledge about the structure and topics of narrative texts. These students are expected to achieve levels similar to English-only students but they haven’t had the benefit of regular exposure to English books. Although they
might have had exposure to books in their first language, most schools do not teach these children to read in their first language. These children are taught to speak and read English at the same time. According to Hart and Risley (1995) children who had heard 45 million words by age three were most successful in reading at age ten, whereas students who had learned only 13 million words scored lower on reading tests (as cited in Neuman & Dwyer 2009, p. 384). What does this suggest about English Language Learners (ELLs) who may not know any English words by age three?

Usually, ELL teachers do not use a special or even modified method of reading instruction. These students are taught to read using the same scope and sequence charts as EOs. This typically involves the pre-reading skills of directionality, book handling, and using pictures to make meaning. Then, reading instruction focuses heavily on alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness. Indeed, research has shown that alphabetic knowledge and phonological skills are predictors of reading achievement (Betts et al. 2008). Typically, reading intervention focuses heavily on these two areas. It is naturally assumed that if students are excellent decoders they will be good readers.

However, good reading also requires comprehension, which is much more relevant to reading than merely recognizing sound segments. Comprehension involves quickly recognizing words, making meaning of those words individually and contextually, and constructing meaning from groups of those words (Solari & Gerber, 2008). Meaning is constructed from the words on the page interacting with the reader’s background knowledge about the text structure and topic. There are studies that found that narrative is more effective for teaching English-only students. Leslie and Caldwell (2006) cite their own work as well as the work of Berkowitz and Taylor (1981) finding that “throughout the elementary years, narrative is easier for children to recall and
comprehend than expository text” (p. 6). Leslie and Caldwell (2006) go on to explain that children have heard more narrative than expository text, and since most of their literary experience is with narrative structures they are easier to recall and comprehend. Additionally, the topics of narrative texts tend to be more familiar. Research supports that readers with strong background knowledge consistent with the text have higher levels of comprehension, whereas expository texts have variable structures with which students may not be familiar. This is the reason that most early reading instruction relies on narratives.

However, ELLs have not been hearing the same stories as their English-only peers. The stories they have heard may be structurally different and, depending on how much time the student has spent in the U.S., the main characters are often different. For example, students new to the country may not have heard of Cinderella, so the story would be unfamiliar and probably difficult to comprehend. These same students are likely to have some background knowledge about dogs. They may have had pet dogs. They may have had friends with dogs, friends with whom they shared information. They may have gathered multiple facts and experiences with dogs in their native languages. Wouldn’t it seem likely that these students would have greater comprehension of an expository text about dogs than a narrative about Cinderella? In fact, Carrell (1981) discovered that students had better comprehension and recall of material that was most similar to content and structure of the native culture.

ELLs are at a great disadvantage in the U.S. educational system with the high stakes testing and high expectations for achievement. It is imperative that ELL teachers and researchers investigate best practices for instruction. These students need to acquire skills, language and content simultaneously. Simply relying on traditional instructional and remediation practices for
English-only students is not enough. We must search for more effective practices and prove viability.

*Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study was to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text. Hispanic English Language Learners are first through sixth grade students identified as ELL by the district personnel using the ACCESS for ELLs (WIDA, 2007). Reading achievement of expository and narrative texts was determined using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006).

*Hypothesis*

Hispanic English Language Learners’ reading comprehension of expository texts is higher than reading comprehension of narrative texts.

*Definition of Terms*

*English Language Learner*

Traditionally the designation of a student as an English Language Learner has been based on differing, often subjective criterion. School districts across the country seem to agree only that such students must have a language other than English influencing the child’s language development in some way and that their English is not typical of native speakers. This vague definition also seems to be shared by researchers in the field. Most researchers seem to accept that students are ELL based on school reporting. Since Solari and Gerber (2008) were unable to determine ELL eligibility based on state standards, they collected data from a home language survey administered to parents.
The World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium has developed English Language Proficiency standards which have been “augmented by TESOL as the national model” (Gottleib, Cranley, & Cammilleri, 2007, p. 5). TESOL is the world-wide professional organization for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. These standards were then used to “develop a K-12 English Language Proficiency test-ACCESS for ELLs” (Gottleib, et al., 2007, p. 5). A screening instrument for use in identification and placement of ELLs was also developed. The WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT, 2007) is used by all member states to determine ELL status. Each state has developed program eligibility criteria based on achievement levels using this screener.

For the purposes of this study, ELL status was determined based on norm referenced tests and criteria determined by the WIDA Consortium in concert with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. All participants have been administered the ACCESS (Gottleib, et al., 2007). The ACCESS was used to confirm appropriate placement in the ELL program. Students who have a language other than English spoken in the home and who were determined to be limited English proficient on the language assessments were classified as ELL.

**Narrative text**

Narrative texts typically follow a linear structure of related events. There are predictable story elements of setting, character, problem, and solution. Children are familiarized with this structure through story sharing and early literacy experiences. The narrative texts used in this research were taken from the QRI-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). The selections are similar to the structure and topics found in basal readers at each reading level (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006).
**Expository text**

In contrast to narrative text, expository text structure is more complex and variable. Additionally, the concepts and language are more abstract than that of narrative texts (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008). The passages used in this research were taken from the QRI-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). The selections are varied by level, but may be matched to content text books used in the classroom (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006).

**Reading achievement**

In the past, reading achievement was sometimes determined through a student’s ability to decode list of words at various levels of difficulty. However, today comprehension and fluency are considered important factors in overall reading achievement. The QRI-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006) evaluates students’ abilities to read leveled word lists with accuracy, speed, and automaticity. Students read the word lists to determine the best initial placement in the passages. There are narrative and expository reading passages which assess fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. For the purposes of this research, students were administered the narrative and expository text selections. For each selection students answered implicit and explicit comprehension questions. The comprehension assessment was the only variable analyzed to determine reading achievement on narrative and expository passages. A score of 90 percent or higher on the questions indicates that the student reads at an independent level. A student score of 67-89 percent is considered instructional. However, a score below 67 percent is frustrational. Student reading achievement of narrative and expository text was determined through the administration of this assessment.
Delimitations

Data was collected during the spring semester of the 2010-2011 academic year. All students were administered the ACCESS (WIDA, 2007) in February to determine ELL eligibility. All students were administered the Qualitative Reading Inventory informal reading assessment in May. The reading assessments administered were individualized for each student by reading level, but all assessments were identical at each readability level.

Participants were 20 first through sixth grade Spanish-speaking ELL students in an elementary school in a large Missouri school district. Approximately 80 percent of the students qualify for the Free/Reduced lunch program. All participants continued to receive regular classroom instruction and ELL pull-out instruction. The ELL instruction for all students included literacy instruction with incidental listening and speaking.

Limitations

The WIDA Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs) evaluates students’ English language proficiency of communicative and academic language. It includes test items in each of the four language areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The speaking and writing portions are scored using rubrics which can be somewhat subjective. Although test administrators have received training through web-based programs and a training session, some rubric items are limited in specificity. Two test administrators assessed all of the students. Both administrators were trained together, but there could be some variation in rubric interpretation. However, the WIDA Consortium did studies on the interrater reliability of the testing items and found the rubrics yielded consistent scores across raters. The overall reliability of the ACCESS for ELLs
composite scores is .930-.949 across the grade level clusters from kindergarten through sixth grade (Gottleib, et al. 2007).

The Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 is neither standardized nor norm-referenced. It is an “individualized reading inventory (IRI) designed to provide diagnostic information…” (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 1). Although it is not standardized, the use of this instrument with all of the subjects provided a standard means of evaluation across the study. Additionally, the evaluation of comprehension necessarily required students to answer questions verbally. It is possible that students fully comprehended the material, but were unable to adequately represent such understanding in English. Although the researcher could have followed up in the students’ first language to more effectively probe for comprehension, this could have skewed the results of the evaluation.

Finally, the number of subjects was too small for a truly representative sample. Any results need to be replicated through further study of a larger sample.

Significance of the Study

The number of ELL students in our schools continues to grow. From late 1970 to 2004 the percentage of ELL students in our public schools has grown 162% (Betts et al., 2008). However, the research on reading remediation for ELLs is scant especially as it relates to early reading instruction (Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scarcella, 2007, p. 16). Consequently, effective instructional strategies and interventions for teaching reading to ELL students are difficult to find or justify. The research on the comprehension of narrative texts in elementary school does not seem to have been expanded to the ELL population. Instead, teachers have just followed the assumptions that apply to English-only students when instructing ELLs.
Furthermore, English-only students have often been reported to reach what is called a fourth grade slump in reading. It is widely accepted that this is due to the shift in purposes for reading. Students at this grade and beyond are expected to read expository text to learn about content rather than reading narrative text for enjoyment and practice (Sanacore, 2009). Teachers are encouraged to instruct students about the differences in expository text to facilitate comprehension. But, if ELLs can already comprehend expository text to higher degrees in early elementary school, this ability should be embraced and encouraged. Therefore, additional study must be done to determine the best practices for teaching reading in a second language.
The debate over whole language versus phonics instruction has moderated over the years. Currently, most educators agree that reading instruction should be part of a balanced literacy program. When students struggle while learning to read they are often remediated through a Response to Intervention model, which generally focuses additional instruction in alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness. As students reach intermediate grade levels, remediation generally includes some vocabulary instruction, as well as strategies for activating schema and meta-cognition. A great deal of research has been done to support this remediation, and research available for English Language Learners has been constructed around these same premises (Fitzgerald, 1995).

**Stages of Reading Development**

Reading development has been described in stages by Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (as cited in Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 5). At the stage of “visual-cue reading” children recognize and interpret environmental print. They also use word shapes to attempt reading. At the stage of “phonetic-cue word recognition” students use phonetic knowledge, oral language skills, pictures, and knowledge of the purposes of reading. Over time, students reach the “controlled word recognition” phase where they rely more on alphabetic knowledge to sound out words. The next stage “automatic word recognition” occurs when students can read many words instantly without sounding them out. At this stage students continue to develop skill in reading for meaning, self-correcting miscues, and rapid word recognition. Additionally, they exhibit facility in reading narrative text with fluency and comprehension. Finally, students enter the “strategic reading stage.” At this time students apply strategies used while reading narrative text to the reading of expository text.
Narrative Comprehension

When students have acquired sufficient phonologic and vocabulary knowledge, they typically begin reading instruction through the use of narrative texts. Brennan, Bridge, and Winograd (1986), Stein (1979), and Mandler and Deforest (1979) found that students have better recall of narratives that follow the structure of fables (as cited in Leslie & Caldwell, 2006 p. 6). Mandler (1984) and Nelson (1986) have found that the main reasons for the ease in comprehending narratives is due to familiarity with story structures through hearing stories from family members as well as hearing fables and narratives read orally during early childhood (as cited in Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 6). Additionally the content of narrative texts is familiar to young children. Stories about bears and princesses are not new to most students. Paris and Paris (2003 p. 40) cite Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) stating, “Children use the semantic, conceptual, and narrative relations that they know to comprehend the text.” They go on to state, “Narrative is closely connected to many concurrent developmental accomplishments of young children in areas such as language, play, storytelling, television viewing, memory, listening, and reading (Paris & Paris, 2003, p. 40). Certainly, these statements are true of young children, but the question is, do these skills transfer across languages and cultures? Researchers have found that “Comprehenders must rely on their knowledge of narratives as well as their relevant background knowledge to make …inferences” (Lynch, Van Den Broek, Kremer, Kendeou, White, & Lorch, 2008, p. 330).

A study relating narrative comprehension to early reading skills found that there was a strong correlation between vocabulary, phonological awareness, word identification and answers to comprehension questions in four-year-old children. However, this correlation was not found for older children. Lynch et al. (2008) found that “…narrative comprehension is a conceptually
complex skill involving inference making and encoding connections, rather than just understanding individual words or phrases” (p. 351). The authors go on to encourage further study of early reading development due to its “dynamic nature.” Indeed, they explain that there is evidence that various aspects of reading develop interdependently and a better understanding of this development will aid in improving reading instruction.

*Expository Comprehension*

Certainly the structure of expository text differs significantly from that of narratives. This is apparent through the simple examination and comparisons of such texts, as well as the purposes of each. In a study of think-aloud data during reading of expository texts, researchers found a significant difference in the kinds of statements readers produced. They cited several studies which found that verbal protocols of narrative texts consisted mainly of inferences from 65%-80%, whereas 68%-74% of statements in the verbal protocols conducted for expository text consisted of paraphrases (Gillam, Fargo, & Robertson, 2009). They encourage educators to provide differentiated comprehension instruction based on the text structure being studied.

The effects on comprehension of the organization of texts were studied by Sharp (2004) and referred to as “rhetorical organization.” He cited Armbruster (1984) as identifying five groups of rhetorical expository text: Listing, Comparison/Contrast, Temporal sequence, Cause-effect, Problem-solution. He discussed research conducted by others that showed improved comprehension of materials when the reader is either familiar with or instructed in particular structures. He went on to explain that such research has only been conducted with English-only students. Sharp’s research was conducted with Chinese subjects, and he found that the subjects were most successful in comprehending the comparison/contrast texts which were actually the
most incoherent for EO. This appears to be evidence that traditional views of the types of texts that are easiest for learners to comprehend may not be accurately applied to ELLs.

**Background Knowledge**

Numerous studies have been conducted to show that readers with higher prior knowledge, consistent with the content in the text, recall and comprehend better than those with less such knowledge (Alvermann, Smith, & Readance, 1985; Lipson, 1983; as cited in Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 7). Leslie and Caldwell further elaborate by citing Recht and Leslie’s (1988) research which found that “good and poor readers ability to recall and summarize did not differ significantly if the groups were similar in their levels of knowledge” (2006, p.8). They summarize these findings to state:

A student with high knowledge of a particular content that is consistent with the information presented in text will be able to recall more and answer more questions correctly about that content than would be possible on material of the same readability about which the student had less or inconsistent knowledge (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 8).

These findings led to the development of the QRI-4 with background knowledge screenings prior to reading, retells, comprehension questions, and both narrative and expository texts at each level of readability. In fact, Leslie and Caldwell compared comprehension scores and word list scores of students on the QRI-4. They found that:

Comprehension scores of good word identifiers with second and third grade instructional levels were predicted by text type (narrative vs. expository). The comprehension scores of good word identifiers with fourth through sixth grade instructional levels were predicted by prior-knowledge scores. Therefore, there appears to be developmental and
individual differences in the factors that influence students’ comprehension scores (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 30).

It seems logical that if background knowledge enables students to comprehend texts at higher levels of readability, that ELLs might have better comprehension of expository texts about which they have more background knowledge than narrative texts with unfamiliar text structures and characters.

Summary of the Literature

The study of second language acquisition has developed over the past 40 years (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. xvi) Since the field is relatively new, there is only limited research available for educators to make definitive decisions about best practices. Studies of narrative and expository text structures, as well as background knowledge as it relates to ELLs, show that what is typical of EO students may not indeed be true of ELLs.

With the enormous increases in ELL populations in our schools and the legislated requirement that second language learners achieve the same level as English-only students, it becomes ever more imperative to find effective strategies. The contradictory findings from the previous research on ELL readers indicates that this is an area that needs continued studies to confirm hypotheses about how to help ELL students meet the highest expectations.
CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 20 first through sixth grade ELL students. All students were from the same elementary school in a large, suburban school district in Missouri. Students were from various Spanish-speaking cultures and backgrounds. Some students were born in the United States, while others recently immigrated. Approximately 80 percent of the students participated in the Free/Reduced lunch program.

Research Design

This research study attempted to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text. All subjects were administered the ACCESS for ELLs English Language Proficiency Test (WIDA, 2007) in February to confirm appropriate placement of students in the ELL program. Students were administered the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (QRI-4, 2006) in May of the same academic year. All subjects were tested to determine reading levels in narrative and expository texts. All subjects continued to participate in regular classroom instruction as well as supplemental ELL instruction. Results of the QRI-4 reading levels on narrative and expository texts were analyzed using a T-test to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners have higher levels of comprehension for narrative or expository texts.

Instrumentation

All students were administered the WIDA-ACCESS English Language Proficiency test in February of the 2010-2011 academic year.

The ACCESS (WIDA, 2007) is a language proficiency exam designed to assess ELLs level of social and academic English Language acquisition in relation to the English Language
Proficiency Standards developed by the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium and augmented by the international organization of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This instrument was used to determine appropriate placement of all students in the ELL program. The subjects’ reading comprehension scores were determined by their performance on the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 which consists of word lists and passages, followed by questions assessing reader comprehension. There are ten word lists of twenty words each which have been selected from passages at the same readability level. The word lists are designed to assess accuracy, speed and automaticity of word identification, and to determine the starting points for initial passages during assessment. The passages can be read orally or silently, and there are at least one expository and two narrative passages. Beginning with the third grade passages, the expository texts are related to the grade level curricula.

The QRI-4 is designed to find independent, instructional, and frustrational reading levels for individual students on expository and narrative texts. It also is used to determine reader strengths and needs and to document growth and change over time. Interrater reliability of the QRI-4 was found to be between 98%-99% (Leslie & Caldwell, 1989). Alternate form reliability was found to be over 70%.

 Procedures

To determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text, subjects were administered the QRI-4 in May. Each student was administered the word lists on the QRI-4 to determine initial placement for passage administration. The examiner then determined each student’s independent, instructional and frustrational levels of reading on narrative and expository texts. The researcher
administering the QRI-4 was trained by a university professor to administer, score and evaluate the results.

Statistical Analysis

To determine if Hispanic English Language Learners have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text, the reading levels on narrative and expository texts were compared using a T-test model of statistical analysis to determine statistical significance.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

This research study attempted to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text. The study was conducted in a Midwestern school district with 20 first through sixth grade ELLs from Spanish-Speaking backgrounds. The students’ reading achievement on narrative and expository text was evaluated at the end of the second semester using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). Appropriate placement in the ELL program was determined through the use of the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) for ELLs English Language Proficiency Test (WIDA, 2007). The data was collected and analyzed using a T-test to determine statistical significance on the comprehension levels of narrative and expository texts. The study was descriptive and quantitative in nature.

Reading Assessment

To determine if Hispanic English Language Learners (ELLs) have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text students were administered the QRI-4 in May. The Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 consists of word lists and passages. There are ten word lists of twenty words each which have been selected from passages at the same readability level. The word lists are designed to assess accuracy, speed and automaticity of word identification, and to determine the starting points for initial passages during assessment. The passages can be read orally or silently, and there are at least one expository and two narrative passages. Beginning with the third grade passages, the expository texts are related to the grade level curricula. Each student was administered the word lists on the QRI-4 to determine initial
placement for passage administration. Students read narrative and expository passages orally.
The examiner then determined each student’s independent, instructional and frustrational levels of reading on narrative and expository texts.

**Narrative Comprehension**

Narrative texts typically follow a linear structure of related events. There are predictable story elements of setting, character, problem, and solution. Children are typically familiarized with this structure through story sharing and early literacy experiences. The narrative texts used in this research were taken from the QRI-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). The selections are similar to the structure and topics found in basal readers at each reading level (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006).

The passage levels of the QRI-4 are pre-primer, primer, and levels 1-12 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). To facilitate data analysis the researcher labeled each level numerically changing the pre-primer to level 1, primer to level 2, and adding two numbers to each of the subsequent levels. The number 0 was used to indicate that the student did not achieve the given level.

Table 1 shows the students independent (INDEP), instructional (INSTR) and frustrational (FRUST) reading levels of narrative texts as well as the group means of each level.
Compared to narrative text, expository text structure is more complex and variable. Additionally, the concepts and language are more abstract than that of narrative texts (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008). Numerous research studies have supported the assumption that students struggle more with comprehending expository text. The passages used in this research were taken from the QRI-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). As with the narrative passages, to facilitate data analysis the researcher labeled each level numerically changing the pre-primer to level 1, primer to level 2, and adding two numbers to each of the subsequent levels. The number 0 was used to indicate that the student did not achieve the given level. Table 2 shows the

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Table 1

Student Reading Levels of Narrative Text
students’ independent (INDEP), instructional (INSTR) and frustational (FRUST) reading levels of expository texts as well as the group means of each level.

Table 2

Student Reading Levels of Expository Text

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Comparison of Expository and Narrative Reading Levels

A simple comparison of each student’s levels of narrative and expository texts show that in general they comprehend expository texts at higher levels than narrative. Figures 1-3 illustrate the comparison of narrative and expository reading levels.
Figure 1

Expository and Narrative Independent Reading Levels

![Bar chart showing QRI-4 Levels for Students]

Figure 2

Expository and Narrative Instructional Reading Levels

![Bar chart showing QRI-4 Levels for Students]
The students mean comprehension of narrative text at the independent level of 1.2 was slightly lower than their comprehension of expository text at 1.45. The mean comprehension of narrative text at the instructional level was also lower at 2.3 as compared to their comprehension of expository text at 3.75. Also, students frustrated at a lower level of narrative text with a mean of 3.6 whereas the expository mean was 4.95.

A T-test was run comparing expository to narrative comprehension at each of the three reading levels assessed. These tables are in Appendices D-F. At the independent level the T equals 1.228 and the P equals 0.234. At the instructional level the T equals 2.786 and P equals 0.012. The frustrational level results show the T equal to 3.499 and P equal to 0.002.

These results indicate that at the independent level students’ results are positively correlated however not significantly different. At both the instructional and frustrational levels the results are also positively correlated and significantly different. This indicates that at least for the instructional and frustrational levels, this group of ELLs exhibited significantly higher levels
of comprehension on the expository text. However, the sample size makes it difficult to attribute these results to the wider population of Hispanic ELLs. Further, broader research is indicated.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Summary

Students’ reading instruction generally begins with narrative text, progressing to expository as skills develop. Numerous research studies indicate that young students are more familiar with narrative structures and content, thus better able to comprehend this type of text. Reading instruction for ELLs largely follows the same structure as that of English-only students. However, some research has shown that there may be a difference in familiarity and comprehension of various text structures between EO students and ELLs.

This research study attempted to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if Hispanic English Language Learners have higher levels of comprehension when reading expository text than narrative text. English Language learners are first through sixth grade students identified as ELL by the district personnel using the ACCESS for ELLs (WIDA, 2007). Reading achievement of expository and narrative texts was determined using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (QRI-4)(Leslie & Caldwell, 2006).

Methodology

This study was conducted with 20 first through sixth grade ELLs from Spanish-Speaking backgrounds. The students’ reading achievement on narrative and expository text was evaluated at the end of the second semester using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). Appropriate placement in the ELL program was determined through the use of the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Assessing Comprehension and
Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) for ELLs English Language Proficiency Test (WIDA, 2007). The data was collected and analyzed using a T-test to determine statistical significance on the comprehension levels of narrative and expository texts. The study was descriptive and quantitative in nature.

Conclusions

A mean level of students’ achievement was calculated at the independent, instructional and frustration levels. However, students often read independently or instructionally at more than one level. For example, student D was able to read level one through three at the instructional level. To facilitate statistical analyses only the student’s highest levels of reading for independent, instructional and frustational levels was reported. Additionally a T-test was run comparing expository to narrative comprehension at each of the three reading levels assessed. These tables are in Appendices D-F.

At the independent level students can read without assistance and answer 90% of comprehension questions correctly (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 25). The students’ mean comprehension of expository text at the independent level of 1.45 was slightly higher than their comprehension of narrative text at 1.2 with a t-Stat of 1.228 and P equaled 0.234. These statistics indicate that although the students’ mean comprehension of expository text was slightly higher at the independent level, the difference was not significant.

At the instructional level students can read with assistance and answer 70% of comprehension questions correctly (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 25). The mean comprehension of expository text was higher at 3.75 than that of the narrative at 2.3. There was a t-Stat of 2.786 and P equal to 0.012. These statistics indicate that students were able to comprehend at the instructional level with a higher mean and a statistically significant difference.
At the frustration level the student is unable to read the material and less than 70% of comprehension questions are answered correctly (Leslie & Caldwell, 2006, p. 25). Students frustrated at a higher level of expository text with a mean of 4.95 whereas they frustrated on narrative text with a mean of 3.6. The t-Test data show the t-Stat is 3.499 and P equals 0.002. These statistics indicate that students reached the frustration level of expository material with a higher mean and a significant difference.

The findings for this study support the hypothesis that Hispanic English Language Learners’ reading comprehension of expository texts is higher than reading comprehension of narrative texts when reading at their instructional and frustrational reading levels. One reason that these students’ comprehension of expository texts is higher could be that they had more background knowledge of the subject matter in the expository passages. Research has shown that comprehension and recall is positively correlated with background knowledge. Another possibility is that the students were more familiar with the text structures of the expository text. As in Sharp’s (2008) study with Chinese-speaking subjects, these students seem to have better comprehension of text structures that are typically more difficult for English-only students.

The number of students in this study was quite small, only twenty students. Thus, these findings cannot readily be applied to the wider population without further study and replication. Additionally, the students were all from one school and had all received ELL instruction from the same two teachers. It is possible that the difference in comprehension of the text types was influenced by instructional practices of the teachers.

Recommendations

Although this study was limited in scope and breadth, the results could be important to ELL teachers, curriculum planners, administrators, and researchers.
Teachers of English Language Learners should conduct action research within their own classrooms to verify results for their own students. If they find that ELLs do indeed comprehend expository texts at higher levels, reading instruction should be modified to focus on such texts. This will facilitate the students’ transitions from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Strategy instruction could be more valuable when developed around expository texts. Additionally, the nature of expository text more easily facilitates vocabulary development and content area learning. Narrative reading could be simply developed during independent practice.

Curriculum planners should consider the requirements of all students’ instruction following one scope and sequence. Past research supports the flow of reading instruction from narrative to expository, particularly for English Only students. However, this research provides support for beginning reading instruction with expository text, at least for Hispanic ELLs.

District administrators should consider assessment and evaluation practices of English Language Learners based on these test results. Current practice in this district is to assess students’ reading achievement using only narrative text at most instructional levels. Expository text is only assessed as students approach third grade and beyond. Based on the results of this research, many ELLs would have reached higher levels of achievement if expository text had been assessed.

Researchers have traditionally conducted studies to determine how well literacy instruction for English-only students applies to English Language Learners. However, few studies have been conducted to determine whether ELLs might be more successful comprehending expository texts than narrative. If further research is done supporting these findings there could be a significant impact on the instructional trends and overall achievement of English Language Learners.
Clearly, these results could be significant if further research is conducted and these results are replicated. None of the above recommendations could be supported on the evidence from this research study alone. However, the possible positive effects for ELLs learning should inspire researchers, educators, and administrators to consider utilizing expository texts more fully in their work with students.
References


gained from think-aloud data. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 18, 82-94.


Perspectives from cognitive psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and education (pp. 453-481). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.


APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

5/4/2011

Shirley Brown
914 SW Georgetown
Lee’s Summit, MO 64082

Dear Shirley Brown,

Your research project, ‘The Effect of Learning English as a Second Language on the Comprehension of Narrative and Expository Test’, was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee on 5/4/2011. This approval is valid through 5/4/2012. Your informed consent is also approved until 5/4/2012.

Please note that you are required to notify the committee in writing of any changes in your research project and that you may not implement changes without prior approval of the committee. You must also notify the committee in writing of any change in the nature or the status of the risks of participating in this research project.

Should any adverse events occur in the course of your research (such as harm to a research participant), you must notify the committee in writing immediately. In the case of any adverse event, you are required to stop the research immediately unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participants than continuing with it.

At the conclusion of your project, you will need to submit a completed Project Status Form to this office. You must also submit the Project Status Form if you wish to continue your research project beyond its initial expiration date.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the number above.

Sincerely,

Janice Putnam Ph.D., RN
Associate Dean of the Graduate School
Putnam@ucmo.edu

cc: Ann Powell-Brown
Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Shirley Brown, a graduate student with the Literacy Education Department at the University of Central Missouri and teacher of English Language Learners at Prairie View Elementary School.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to find out if Elementary English Language Learners are better at comprehending fiction or nonfiction books.

Request for Participation: I am asking for permission for your child to participate in this study. It is up to you whether you would like your child to participate. If you decide not to grant permission for your child to participate, he or she will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide for your child to stop at any time without penalty. You may withdraw your child’s data at the end of the study. If you wish to do this, please tell me before the end of the study.

Exclusions: You must be the legal parent or guardian to grant permission for your child to participate.

Description of Research Method: This study involves completion of a reading assessment called the Qualitative Reading Inventory- IV. This test will take about 30 minutes to finish.

Privacy: All of the information collected will be confidential. The researcher will not record names, student numbers, or any information that could be used to identify the child.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: Your child’s teachers will have more knowledge about his or her reading strengths and be better able to provide effective instruction.

Accommodations: The researcher will meet with parents to provide oral translation of this document as needed.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Shirley Brown. She can be reached at sab95820@ucmo.edu or at (816) 529-7124. If you have any questions about your rights as the parent of a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.

If you would like your child to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and grant permission for my child to participate.

Child’s name: ____________________________________________________________
Parent or Guardian Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: ______________________________
ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN CONSENTIMIENTO

La identificación de Investigadores: Esta investigación es hecha por Shirley Brown, un estudiante de posgrado con el Departamento de la Educación de capacidad de leer y escribir en la Universidad de Missouri y el maestro Centrales de Estudiantes ingleses de Idioma en Prairie View Elementary.

El propósito del Estudio: El propósito de este estudio es de averiguar si Estudiantes ingleses Elementales de Idioma son mejores en comprender ficción o libros de literatura seria.

Solicite para la Participación: Pido permiso para su niño para tomar parte en este estudio. Como quiera usted si querría que su niño participe. Si decide no participar, su hijo o hija no será penalizado en ninguna manera. Usted también puede decidir parar en tiempo sin pena. Puede retirar los datos de su niño a fines del estudio. Si desea hacer esto, por favor me dice antes del fin del estudio.

Exclusiones: Usted debe ser el padre o el guarda legal para conceder el permiso para que su niño participe.

Descripción del método de la investigación: Este estudio implica la terminación de un gravamen de la lectura llamado el inventario cualitativo IV. de la lectura. Esta prueba llevará cerca de 30 minutos el final.

Aislamiento: Toda la información recogida será confidencial. El investigador no va a registrar los nombres ni los números del estudiante, o cualquier información que se podría utilizar para identificar al niño.

Explicación de riesgos: Los riesgos asociados a participar en este estudio son similares a los riesgos de vida cotidiana.

Explicación de ventajas: Sus profesores del tendrán más conocimiento sobre sus fuerzas de la lectura y podrían mejor proporcionar la instrucción eficaz.

Comodidades: El investigador hará frente con a padres para proporcionar la traducción oral de este documento según lo necesitado.

Preguntas: Si usted tiene cualesquiera preguntas sobre este estudio, entre en contacto con por favor Shirley Brown. Ella puede ser alcanzada en sab95820@ucmo.edu o en (816) 529-7124. Si usted tiene cualesquiera preguntas sobre las sus derechas como el padre de un participante de la investigación, entre en contacto con el programa de la protección de los temas humanos en (660) 543-4621.

Si usted quisiera que participara su niño, satisfacer firme una copia de esta letra y vuélvamela. La otra copia está para que usted guarde.
He leído esta letra y concedo el permiso para que mi niño participe.

Nombre del estudiante________________________________________

Firma del padre o del guarda: __________________________

Fecha:________________
APPENDIX C

RESEARCH STUDY ASSENT FORM

Identification of Researchers: This research is being done by Shirley Brown, a graduate student with the Literacy Education Department at the University of Central Missouri and teacher of English Language Learners at Prairie View Elementary School.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to find out if Elementary English Language Learners are better at understanding fiction or nonfiction books.

Request for Participation: It is up to you whether you want to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can also decide to stop at any time without penalty.

Exclusions: You must be in the ELL program to participate.

Description of Research Method: You will be given a reading test called the Qualitative Reading Inventory-IV. This test will take about 30 minutes to finish. You will have a chance to ask questions.

Privacy: All of the information collected will be confidential. Your name and student number will not be used.

Explanation of Risks: The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Explanation of Benefits: Your teachers will know more about your reading strengths and be better able to teach reading.

Accommodations: The researcher will meet with parents to provide oral translation of this document as needed.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Shirley Brown. She can be reached at sab95820@ucmo.edu or at (816) 529-7124. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (660) 543-4621.

If you would like to participate, please sign a copy of this letter and return it to me. The other copy is for you to keep.

I have read this letter and I agree to participate.

Child’s name: ______________________________________________________
Signature: ____________________________________________________________________
Date: ________________________________
ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN ASENTIMIENTO

La identificación de Investigadores: Esta investigación es hecha por Shirley Brown, un estudiante de posgrado con el Departamento de la Educación de capacidad de leer y escribir en la Universidad de Missouri y el maestro Centrales de Estudiantes ingleses de Idioma en Prairie View Elementary.

El propósito del Estudio: El propósito de este estudio es de averiguar si Estudiantes ingleses Elementales de Idioma son mejores en comprender ficción o libros de literatura seria.

Solicite para la Participación: Como quiera usted si querría participe. Si decide no participar, no será penalizado en ninguna manera. Usted también puede decidir parar en tiempo sin pena.

Exclusiones: Usted debe ser un estudiante en el programa de ELL.

Descripción del método de la investigación: Este estudio implica la terminación de un gravamen de la lectura llamado el inventario cualitativo IV de la lectura. Esta prueba llevará cerca de 30 minutos el final. Se puede dar unas preguntas.

Aislamiento: Toda la información recogida será confidencial. El investigador no va a registrar los nombres ni los números del estudiante, o cualquier información que se podría utilizar para identificarse.

Explicación de riesgos: Los riesgos asociados a participar en este estudio son similares a los riesgos de vida cotidiana.

Explicación de ventajas: Sus profesores del tendrán más conocimiento sobre sus fuerzas de la lectura y podrían mejor proporcionar la instrucción eficaz.

Comodidades: El investigador hará frente con los padres y estudiantes para proporcionar la traducción oral de este documento según lo necesitado.

Preguntas: Si usted tiene cualesquiera preguntas sobre este estudio, entre en contacto con por favor Shirley Brown. Ella puede ser alcanzada en sab95820@ucmo.edu o en (816) 529-7124. Si usted tiene cualesquiera preguntas sobre las sus derechos como el padre de un participante de la investigación, entre en contacto con el programa de la protección de los temas humanos en (660) 543-4621.

Si usted quisiera que participara, satisfacer firme una copia de esta letra y vuélvamela. La otra copia está para que usted guarde.

He leído esta letra y concedo participar.
Nombre del estudiante_________________________________________

Firma del estudiante: _________________________________________

Fecha:________________
APPENDIX D
T-TEST OF INDEPENDENT LEVELS

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## T-TEST OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEVELS

### t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

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APPENDIX F
T-TEST OF FRUSTRATIONAL LEVELS

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