

Contribution of Word Decoding and Reading Fluency on Reading Comprehension in Young Typical Readers of Kannada Language

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Abstract : Introduction and Need: During early years of schooling, the instruction in the schools mainly focus on children's word decoding abilities. However, the skilled readers should master all the components of reading such as word decoding, reading fluency and comprehension. Nevertheless, the relationship between each component during the process of learning to read is less clear. The studies conducted in alphabetical languages have mixed opinion on relative contribution of word decoding and reading fluency on reading comprehension. However, the scenarios in alphasyllabary languages are unexplored. Aim and Objectives: The aim of the study was to explore the role of word decoding, reading fluency on reading comprehension abilities in children learning to read Kannada between the age ranges of 5.6 to 8.6 years. Method: In this cross sectional study, a total of 60 typically developing children, 20 each from Grade I, Grade II, Grade III maintaining equal gender ratio between the age range of 5.6 to 6.6 years, 6.7 to 7.6 years and 7.7 to 8.6 years respectively were selected from Kannada medium schools. The reading fluency and reading comprehension abilities of the children were assessed using Grade level passages selected from the Kannada text book of children core curriculum. All the passages consist of five questions to assess reading comprehension. The pseudoword decoding skills were assessed using 40 pseudowords with varying syllable length and their Akshara composition. Pseudowords are formed by interchanging the syllables within the meaningful word while maintaining the phonotactic constraints of Kannada language. The assessment material was subjected to content validation and reliability measures before collecting the data on the study samples. The data were collected individually, and reading fluency was assessed for words correctly read per minute. Pseudoword decoding was scored for the accuracy of reading. Results: The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean pseudoword reading, reading comprehension, words accurately read per minute increased with the Grades. The performance of Grade III children found to be higher, Grade I lower and Grade II remained intermediate of Grade III and Grade I. The trend indicated that reading skills gradually improve with the Grades. Pearson's correlation co-efficient showed moderate and highly significant ($p=0.00$) positive co-relation between the variables, indicating the interdependency of all the three components required for reading. The hierarchical regression analysis revealed 37% variance in reading comprehension was explained by pseudoword decoding and was highly significant. Subsequent entry of reading fluency measure, there was no significant change in R-square and was only change 3%. Therefore, pseudoword-decoding evolved as a single most significant predictor of reading comprehension during early Grades of reading acquisition. Conclusion: The present study concludes that the pseudoword decoding skills contribute significantly to reading comprehension than reading fluency during initial years of schooling in children learning to read Kannada language.

Keywords : alphasyllabary, pseudo-word decoding, reading comprehension, reading fluency

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