

Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E.

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Introduction

Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E. (Explicit And Systematic Essentials) is a comprehensive, research-based phonics instruction and word study program for children in grades K-4. For decades, the research on reading has emphasized phonics instruction as an essential and effective tool in the teaching of reading. The National Reading Panel (N.R.P.), convened by Congress in the late '90s, conducted quantitative meta-analyses on the impact of phonics instruction. The panel reviewed over 35 empirical studies involving treatment-control comparisons. The analyses revealed significant gains in outcomes for children who received phonics instruction, such as improved decoding, spelling, and reading comprehension (N.R.P., 2000). Subsequent meta-analyses have yielded similar findings, as Torgerson et al. (2006) reviewed and analyzed 14 randomized controlled designs with notable effect sizes. The effectiveness of phonics instruction as an intervention for poor or struggling readers has emerged through more recent meta-analyses (Galuschka et al., 2014; McArthur et al., 2012).

Machin and colleagues (2016) studied the reading outcomes of students in the U.K. that participated in a phonics instruction program. Significant causal effects emerged – students at ages 5 and 7 who were taught by teachers trained in the phonics program outperformed their control group peers on assessments measuring reading, language, and comprehension. Further, the researcher found that these effects continued for a longer term among children designated as struggling readers (Machin et al., 2016). Phonics instruction has also been associated with increased motivation to read, reading for pleasure, and academic self-esteem (Castles et al., 2018). Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E. is designed for teachers to lead early and young readers toward developing skills in phonological awareness, orthographic mapping, and decoding that will lead to improved reading, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills.



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The lessons and strategies of the program are grounded in the science of reading, an interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading, specifically early literacy. The supporting research on the following pages highlights the strategies and theoretical underpinnings foundational to the Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E program and the positive student outcomes linked to its successful implementation. Ultimately, readers build efficacy and confidence as they become skilled readers.

ORTHOGRAPHIC MAPPING

Orthographic mapping is the process successful readers engage in to become fluent readers. Through this process, students use the oral language part of their brain to map (or connect) the sounds of words they already know (the phonemes) to the letters in a word (the spellings). The connected sounds and letters of the words (along with their meaning) are then permanently stored as instantly recognizable words, often described as “sight words” (Sedita, 2020). In other words, the larger the number of words in an individual’s orthographic lexicon, the more quickly and fluently they are likely to read.

Another significant outcome of orthographic mapping is the influence on vocabulary learning and phonological memory (Ehri, 2014). Over the years, Ehri and colleagues conducted studies examining specific contributions of orthographic mapping for building pronunciations and meanings of new vocabulary words into memory. Specific findings included improved vocabulary learning through read-aloud (versus silent-reading) and exposure to the spellings as part of the vocabulary instruction. These practices were especially effective for weaker readers in comparison.



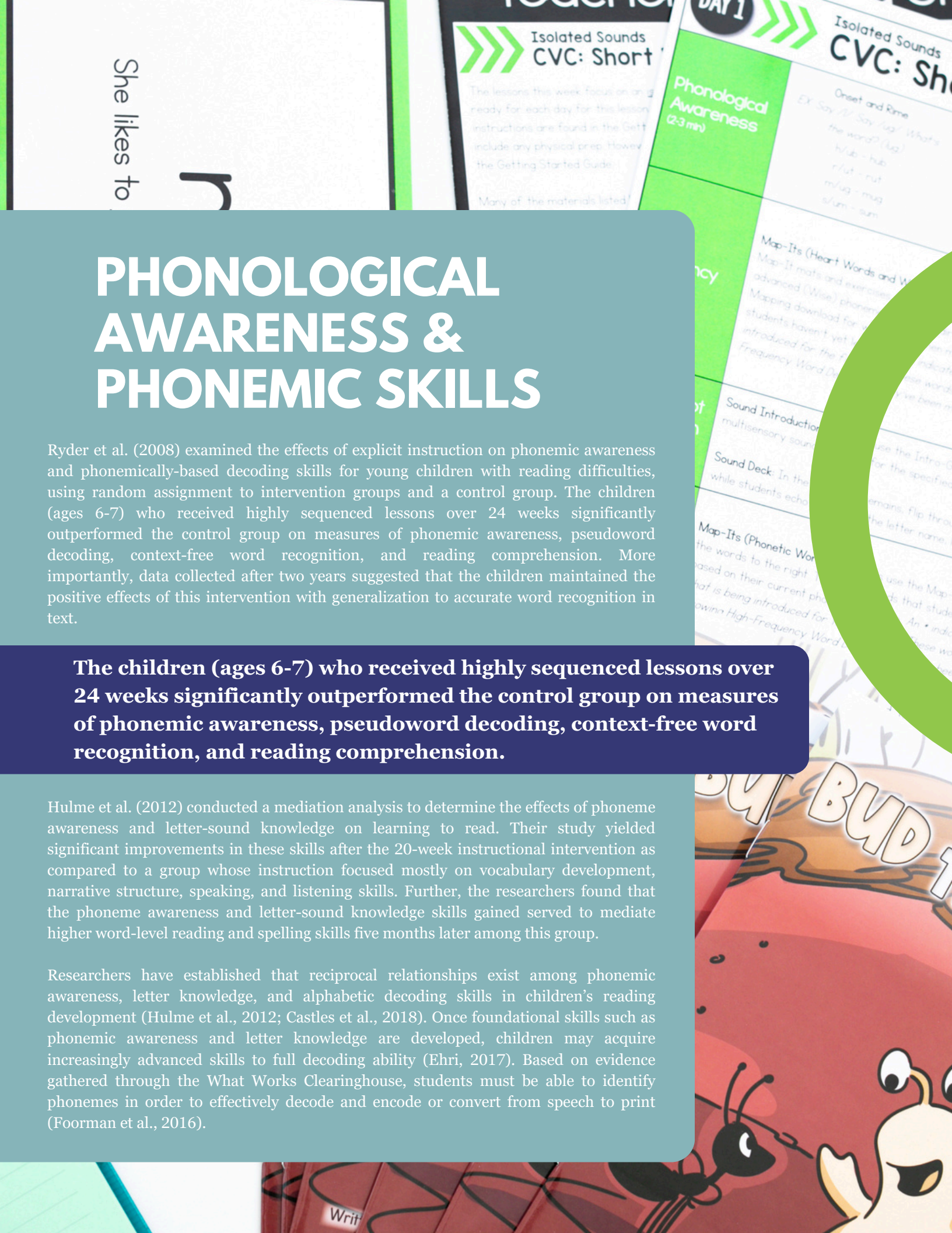
PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS & PHONEMIC SKILLS

Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E. emphasizes skill development in phonological awareness, phonemes, and grapheme connections in young readers as integral components of their phonics instruction program. As these skills develop and improve, young readers move toward expanding their reading abilities as well as in spelling and vocabulary.

Carson et al. (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study of phonological awareness (PA) instruction on 159 young children in their first year of school. Children received ten weeks of PA instruction, while a comparison group continued with the traditional phonics instruction. The findings revealed that the children in the PA group showed significantly higher improvements in PA as well as in reading and spelling development, as measured through formal literacy assessments. Further, the number of children who were initially identified as having difficulty with decoding skills decreased after PA instruction in comparison to the traditional group.

There is a long span of research supporting the effects of grapheme-phoneme connections to teaching reading successfully. Outcomes have included improvements in the ability to read new words, including sight words, high-frequency words, and irregularly spelled words. A preliminary study on the effects of grapheme-phoneme instruction with struggling kindergarten readers showed marked improvement in reading high-frequency words as opposed to whole-word reading approaches (Miles et al., 2018). Boyer and Ehri (2011) found that preschoolers who were taught to segment words into phonemes using letter tiles performed better than a control group on measures of reading and spelling.





PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS & PHONEMIC SKILLS

Ryder et al. (2008) examined the effects of explicit instruction on phonemic awareness and phonemically-based decoding skills for young children with reading difficulties, using random assignment to intervention groups and a control group. The children (ages 6-7) who received highly sequenced lessons over 24 weeks significantly outperformed the control group on measures of phonemic awareness, pseudoword decoding, context-free word recognition, and reading comprehension. More importantly, data collected after two years suggested that the children maintained the positive effects of this intervention with generalization to accurate word recognition in text.

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Hulme et al. (2012) conducted a mediation analysis to determine the effects of phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge on learning to read. Their study yielded significant improvements in these skills after the 20-week instructional intervention as compared to a group whose instruction focused mostly on vocabulary development, narrative structure, speaking, and listening skills. Further, the researchers found that the phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge skills gained served to mediate higher word-level reading and spelling skills five months later among this group.

Researchers have established that reciprocal relationships exist among phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, and alphabetic decoding skills in children's reading development (Hulme et al., 2012; Castles et al., 2018). Once foundational skills such as phonemic awareness and letter knowledge are developed, children may acquire increasingly advanced skills to full decoding ability (Ehri, 2017). Based on evidence gathered through the What Works Clearinghouse, students must be able to identify phonemes in order to effectively decode and encode or convert from speech to print (Foorman et al., 2016).

DECODING

The comprehensive phonics curriculum in Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E. uses phonological and phonemic strategies to help young readers explicitly and systematically decode words, a practice that the research has long supported as an effective tool for reading instruction.

Through an extensive review of 18 studies that examined the effects of teaching decoding skills, researchers concluded that the more words students read and the more they learned phonemes, graphemes, and word parts, the more able they were to recognize words in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Further, teaching students high-frequency word recognition positively impacted reading fluency. By increasing word recognition, reading comprehension was supported as students were able to focus more on word meaning. Of these 18 studies, 13 met the What Works Clearinghouse criteria for solid evidence (Foorman et al., 2016).

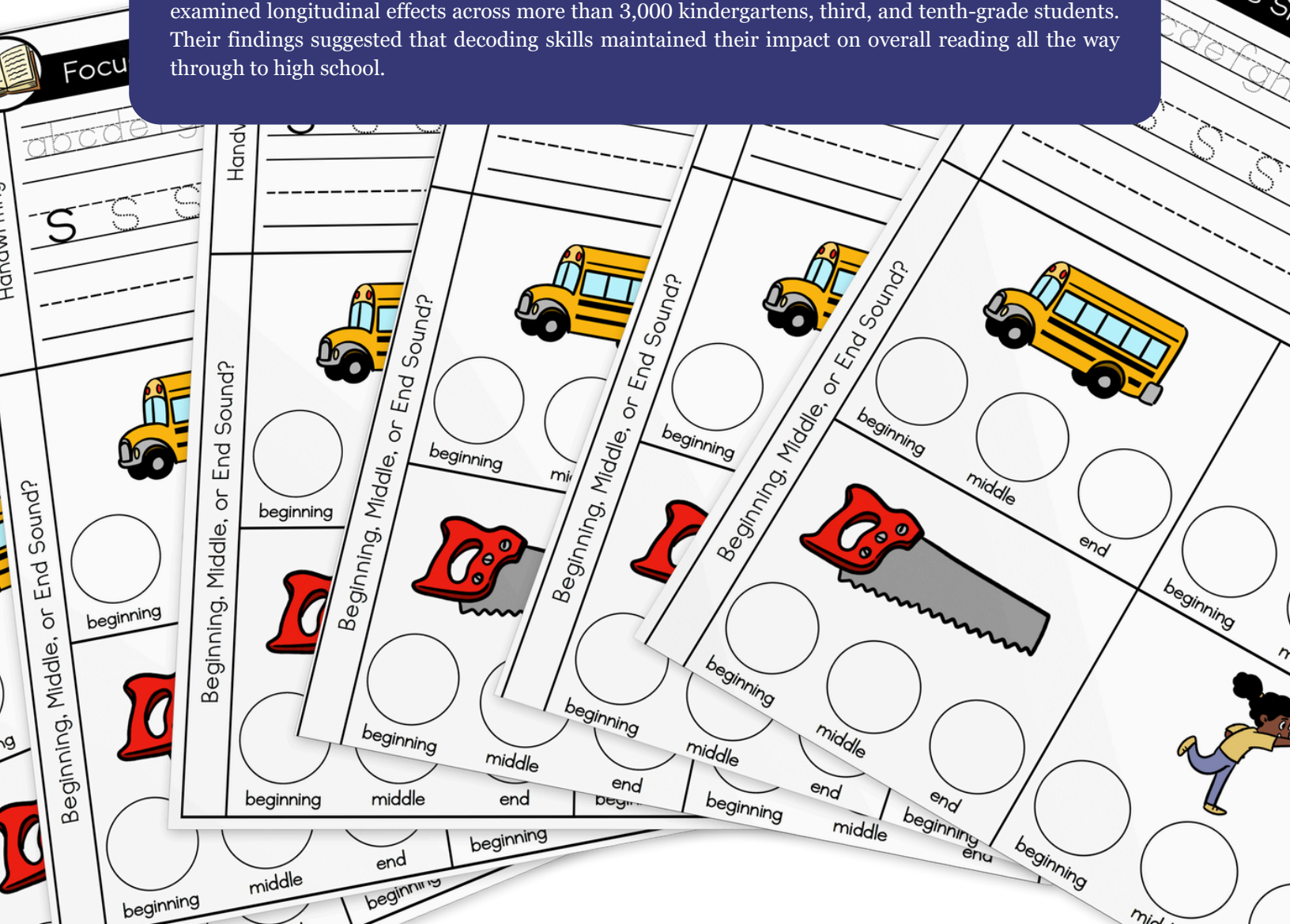
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DECODING

Parker et al. (2020) conducted a study on a reading program focused on decoding that incorporated multiple components; in other words, multiple opportunities for children to construct, deconstruct, write, and read from various word families that were representative of advanced phonics skills. Positive changes in decoding skills were demonstrated longitudinally across the participating first graders.

In a study of reading comprehension with over 800 young students in Title 1 schools, Foorman et al. (2015) found decoding skills to be a significant predictor of comprehension among first and second-graders after a series of literacy assessments. These findings were consistent with García and Cain's (2014) meta-analyses of 100 studies conducted with over 42,000 subjects, from early to adult readers. Moreover, their findings confirmed the relationships between decoding and comprehension, with particularly robust correlations among younger elementary school readers. Stanley et al. (2018) examined longitudinal effects across more than 3,000 kindergartens, third, and tenth-grade students. Their findings suggested that decoding skills maintained their impact on overall reading all the way through to high school.





Decodable Texts

Over the years, opinions about the use and effectiveness of decodable texts have varied. Nevertheless, the research continues to support the use and benefits of decodable books in early reading instruction for young learners. Mixed findings emerge, however, once children become more developed in their grapheme-phoneme skills, as the case for moving toward other reading books becomes more prominent in the literature (Castles et al., 2016).

Multiple positive outcomes were noted across the studies, such as improvements in fluency, accuracy, reading rate, and prosody.

In Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E., decodable texts are used to provide opportunities for the practice and improvement of decoding skills at early levels, which is consistent with reading development theories that view deliberate decoding as critical to early stages of reading. Cheatham and Allor (2012) examined seven peer-reviewed studies on the use of decodable texts. Multiple positive outcomes were noted across the studies, such as improvements in fluency, accuracy, reading rate, and prosody.





DECODABLE TEXTS

A study examining the effects of reading decodable texts among at-risk early readers in a tutoring program found significant improvements in decoding, word and passage reading, and comprehension when compared to a control group. First graders were randomly assigned to two intervention groups, differing by the level of decoding, and a control group. The findings showed that while the intervention groups outperformed the control group, there was no difference in post-test scores between the two intervention groups. This suggests that the use of decodable texts positively contributes to reading development among children who may be struggling with reading (Jenkins et al., 2004).

Price-Mohr and Mohr (2020) investigated the effects of phonically-decodable texts on young children learning to read. The young readers were randomly assigned to groups using either high or low proportions of phonically-decodable words. Both groups were introduced to new vocabulary through associated groups prior to reading the books. The findings revealed that the proportion of phonically decodable words made a difference in reading comprehension. Children in the intervention group using lower proportions of decodable words outperformed the group using higher proportions of decodable words on comprehension outcomes, supporting previous studies suggesting that as children become more skillful readers, decodable texts are less effective.

STRUCTURED LITERACY WITH E.A.S.E.

Structured Literacy with E.A.S.E. integrates research-based curricular strategies and theories of reading development into its comprehensive phonics and word study instructional program.

This brief review of the underlying empirical literature supports the logic behind how the program's resources and activities can lead children to achieve an array of positive foundational and developmental literacy outcomes and, ultimately, become skilled readers.



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