

**A Comparative Study of Student Engagement in Reading Foundational Skills When They
are Taught Using Sounds First Activities and When They are Not Taught Using Sounds
First Activities in 1st Grade Class**

By,

Deenia Graybeal

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Major Professor:

Dr. Patrick Kariuki

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons using Sounds First and student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons not using Sounds First. The sample was taken from students in a first grade classroom. There were 17 students, 9 of which were girls and 8 of which were boys. All 17 students were taught one half of a reading foundational skills unit using Sounds First as a warm up activity and then one half of a unit of a reading foundational skills unit not using Sounds First as a warm up activity. During each lesson with Sounds First and each lesson without Sounds First, the researcher noted on a researcher made test the number of times students were engaged and how often the students needed to be redirected. The data were analyzed using an independent samples T-test and paired samples T-test. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons using Sounds First and student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons not using Sounds First. Student engagement was significantly higher during lessons with Sounds First. However, there was no significant difference in the number of times the students needed to be redirected in lessons with Sounds First and lessons without Sounds First. The results also indicated that girls were more engaged in lessons with Sounds First and boys were more engaged in lessons without Sounds First. This study suggests that teachers should use Sounds First activities for a warm up to reading foundational skills lessons to help students stay engaged.

Keywords: Sounds First, phonemic awareness, student engagement in reading

Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine being a 1st grade teacher and having the opportunity of a lifetime to teach a classroom full of eager six and seven year old students to read. Then, one day you begin to notice that several of your students are looking away from the lesson or are playing rock, paper, scissors with a nearby friend. Research by Barber and Klauda (2020) states that “on average, 40% of students, sampled from 50 countries, reported being only “somewhat” or “less than” engaged in their reading lessons.” Teachers have a tremendous amount of responsibility to teach their students to read.

So, what are some strategies that teachers can use to keep students focused and engaged during reading instruction? There are many skills that are taught during reading foundational lessons in first grade. One skill is phonemic awareness. The Tennessee Foundational Skills Supplement, Sounds First will be facilitated in the first grade classroom to assist in promoting and sustaining student engagement. The skills supplement used will focus on phonological awareness with an emphasis on phonemic awareness activities. Phonemic awareness is a broad part of phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness means being aware of all the sounds made in human language. Phonological awareness is an idea that spoken words are made up of smaller parts of sound. These sounds can be pointed out or understood and moved around to make new words. Phonemic awareness concentrates on phonemes or the smallest sections of words (Sounds First, 2021). There are several different activities that teachers can use to teach phonemic awareness such as, blending and segmenting words, rhyming words, and breaking words into syllables. During the Sounds First lessons, students will take part in many of these activities mentioned. As a warm-up before the reading foundational skills lesson, the teacher will use

whole group instruction to teach the Sounds First activities. Sounds First manuals are available for the teacher to use during instruction. The lessons are teacher scripted. There are no extra materials needed to be collected by the teacher, the manual is all that is needed. The Sounds First Supplemental lessons are intended to be taught during whole group lessons or in a small group setting. The teacher has the choice of when the lessons will be taught depending on the time that is available for the lessons and the mood of the individual classroom environment (Sounds First, 2021). During this research, the Sounds First lessons will be taught at the beginning of the reading foundational skills lesson each day. The teacher will observe whether student engagement during the Sounds First lesson is high and continues throughout the entire reading lesson. The lessons are full of kinesthetics giving students many opportunities to get up and move their hands and bodies as they perform the motions that will go along with the phonemic awareness activities. These movements are done during the opening of the lessons. Teachers are encouraged not to leave out the hand signals and movement as part of the lessons. As students are practicing the concepts, the movement of their hands link the learned concepts to students' long term memory (Sounds First, 2021). Considering the learned concepts being linked to student long term memory, the student has a greater likelihood of retaining the concepts being taught.

For the most part, first grade students are happy to participate in movement activities. Teacher encouragement may be needed for students who are bashful when getting up in front of the class to do some of the Sounds First activities. With confidence, when introverted students watch their peers perform and notice what a fun and interesting time they are having, they too will feel more comfortable to take part.

This is an example of how a Sounds First lesson would be used in the classroom, the teacher will say a sentence with rhythm and ask students to repeat. The last word of the sentence, such as “lamp” will be the focus word. The teacher will tell students that that “lamp” is the “word on the curve” and a curve gesture will be made and the sounds in the word “lamp” will be stretched out for the students to repeat. Then, the teacher will tell the students to cut off the last sound of the word “lamp” by making hand gestures like scissors. Now the teacher will say, “The new word on the curve is lamb” (Sounds First, 2021). The exercises and activities are done in an exciting and animated way so that the students are having fun. The level of student engagement is high and is continued throughout the lesson.

Research has been done to support the phonemic awareness activities within the Sounds First Supplemental lessons. Studies have shown that basic phonemic awareness work is not adequate for most students. Students should be practicing more rigorous skills such as, deleting and substituting phonemes in words. If a student can perfect these activities and complete them in less than two seconds, the student will have a better chance at being a successful reader (Sounds First, 2021). The Sounds First Supplemental activities are appropriate for the problem of engaging students in the classroom. The activities target important reading skills, such as phonemic awareness. Students are practicing deleting and substituting sounds in words. The teacher can complete each Sounds First lesson in 15 minutes or less, so students are actively engaged for the entire lesson. The students are up and moving during the lesson. They are practicing in a fun way with rhythmic sentences and sounds. Students are using hand gestures and body movement that help link learned concepts to student long term memory.

If these activities are used as a warm-up to daily reading foundational skills lessons, can student engagement during reading foundational skills increase when Sounds First activities are taught?

Statement of the Problem

First grade students are just beginning to learn to read fluently and independently. Most first graders start the new school year eager and excited to learn. Nevertheless, as the school year progresses, some students may become less enthusiastic about learning. Students losing enthusiasm and becoming less engaged can be problematic. Students may miss out on learning new skills or negative behaviors can begin to happen when students are not engaging in the learning process. For academic success, it is essential that all students continue throughout the school year engaged in classroom lessons and learning activities. Research by Flippin et al.(2020) states “ it is estimated that children in elementary-education classrooms spend 10 to 50% of their time off-task” (p.137). With this in mind, teachers have the responsibility to discover ways to keep students motivated and engaged during reading foundational skills lessons. Engagement in literacy means students are lively participants in activities that promote skills in comprehension, reading texts orally, and writing (Ng & Graham, 2018). Teachers can see that students are actively engaged in learning when they are sitting up, their eyes are focused on the teacher, and are eager to answer questions and share ideas. Engaging students is one of the most important strategies for teachers to implement in the classroom. Engagement in the classroom increases academic achievement, so literacy engagement is critical for students who are beginning to read. “Engaged readers and writers are motivated, strategic and knowledgeable. Not surprisingly, they become skilled readers and writers.” (Ng & Graham, 2018, p.615). Teachers can foster and encourage the love of reading for students as they utilize engaging

literacy activities in the classroom, such as songs and dance, choral reading, sound and word games, rhyming and poetry. Another advantage of student literacy engagement is that students who have fallen behind can make improvements as well as close the gaps in literacy of students with low socioeconomic backgrounds (Ng & Graham, 2018). With many students having to quarantine, as well as possible loss of jobs within student families due to the Covid-19 epidemic, teachers who promote engagement in literacy activities can have a positive impact on student learning loss. As students are deeply participating, using their own time in literacy activities such as reading books with peers and using technology, it is the hope that they will feel confident about what they are doing and begin to try other approaches to reading (Ng & Graham, 2018). When student confidence in reading is strengthened through literacy activities that build engagement, student achievement in reading will increase. Therefore, the problem of this study is to compare student engagement in reading foundational skills when they are taught using Sounds First activities and when they are not taught using Sounds First activities in a 1st grade classroom.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons when using the Tennessee Foundational Skills, Sounds First activities and student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons when Sounds First are not used. The data from this investigation will compare student engagement during reading lessons with the Sounds First activities and student engagement during reading lessons without the Sounds First activities.

Significance of the Study

Lack of student engagement can mean that students are not learning to their full potential. The findings in this study will compare student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons using Sounds First activities and not using Sounds First activities. Research shows student engagement increases academic achievement. “Engaged readers and writers are motivated, strategic and knowledgeable. Not surprisingly, they become skilled readers and writers.” (Ng & Graham, 2018, p.615). However, research shows that a high percentage of students are off task and unengaged during the school day. Barber and Klauda (2020) states that “on average, 40% of students, sampled from 50 countries, reported being only “somewhat” or “less than” engaged in their reading lessons.” Teachers need proven strategies to help keep students engaged during reading foundational skills lessons. If the Sounds First activities are shown to engage students during reading lessons, the significance of this study will give 1st grade teachers a strategy to raise student engagement. Students will benefit from being more engaged when learning to read.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations will be experienced during this study:

1. The instrument used for this research was created by the researcher and was not tested for reliability and validity.
2. This study used only one 1st grade class and the results may not be generalized to other 1st grade classes.

Definition of Terms

Sounds First: referred to as Tennessee Foundational Skills Curriculum Supplement activities which focus on phonemic awareness (Sounds First, 2021).

Phonemic Awareness: referred to as being aware of all sounds in human language (Sounds First, 2021).

Student Engagement in Reading: referred to as the degree of attention, behavior, interest, that students show when they are reading (Barber & Clauda, 2020).

Organization of the Study

In order for students to be proficient in reading, student engagement is key.(Ng. & Graham, 2018) In this research study student engagement will be compared during reading foundational skills lessons taught using Sounds First and reading foundational skills not using Sounds First. Chapter one is made up of an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definitions of terms, limitations, and the organization of the study. Chapter two will consist of a thorough review of literature. Chapter three will discuss the methods used for the study. The findings of the study will be presented in Chapter four. The summary

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

First grade students begin the new school year with a basic understanding of letters and the sounds associated with letters. These basic reading skills are learned in Kindergarten. Most students come to first grade able to connect most letters to sounds and can blend those sounds into simple consonant vowel consonant words (Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2017). Some beginning first graders are already fluent readers. However, the first grade teacher has the responsibility to further students' understandings and abilities to learn more sounds, more sight words, and learn

how to read with fluency and comprehension. For students to be fluent readers and to be able to comprehend what they read, are two paramount objectives in first grade (Kikas et al., 2018).

When students are actively engaged in foundational skills lessons, the reading process is much more attainable for students. When students are interested in what and how they are learning, students have a better chance to accomplish their academic goals. Students who are engaged in learning are doing more than just being in the class, they are taking note of their own behaviors, setting high expectations for themselves and enjoying learning (Chen et al., 2020). Students need to be engaged when learning to read. Without being actively engaged, students are less likely to gain what is being taught during reading instruction (Lekwa et al., 2019). Student engagement is necessary for students to be successful in learning to read and to build skills in fluency, comprehension, and writing. If student motivation and engagement are not attained, students will be lacking in many areas of reading. Barber and Klauda (2020) states that, “Reading motivation and engagement contributes to reading achievement across grade levels and cultures—but many students hardly experience them.” With this in mind, students need to be interested and motivated in what they are being taught and teachers need to be selective when they are making instructional decisions when teaching reading. Teachers need to be able to connect with proficient readers as well as below level readers. This task can seem difficult for teachers. The good news is there are many ways to engage all students regardless of the many levels of reading abilities found in the first grade classroom.

Student engagement is essential for student success in reading. Engaging students during instruction time gives students a feeling of being joined with the teacher as well as feeling content when being taught and can exceed student performance (Kyoko, 2017). When there is a sense of connection between the student and the teacher, students are more engaged in what is

being taught. Students who are engaged during instruction are less likely than students not engaged during instruction to have negative behaviors and can have a higher level of achievement (Bhargave, 2021). During reading foundational skills lessons, students may become off-task or uninterested and become a distraction for the entire class. It may be that the student is talking to a nearby friend or possibly making silly sounds or just has a busy body. These behaviors can have a snowball effect that can soon have the entire class off-task. When students are not engaged during instruction, these students can fail to reach classroom expectations (Nelson et al., 2017). If these behaviors should occur, the teacher would need to stop the lesson to take care of the distracting student behavior, losing precious instruction time. As many as 40% of students surveyed in 50 countries have been found to be less motivated and engaged during reading instruction. Even though over the past ten years student motivation and engagement is growing higher, students are still not at the reading levels that they need to be at (Barber & Kluda, 2020). With this in mind, it is important for teachers to practice strategies in the classroom that will extend and sustain student engagement during reading foundational skills instruction. As students move through elementary school, student engagement in reading begins to lesson with each school year (Kim et al., 2021) . This is the age group at which students are learning to read, so this only adds more responsibility for teachers to find ways to motivate and engage students during reading foundational skills instruction. These years are the defining years for students to either become successful readers or continually fall behind.

Sounds First

The classroom teacher has the responsibility to encourage students to actively participate during reading instruction focusing on making connections with background knowledge and content that students can relate to in their daily lives. One strategy that teachers can use to

facilitate student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons is to use Sounds First activities. Sounds First activities are supplemental activities from the Tennessee Foundational Skills curriculum. The activities in Sounds First have a strong foundation in phonemic awareness and build word knowledge through making connections with prior knowledge of sounds and letters, rhyming, and deleting and substituting sounds in words. For each skill in the Sounds First activities there are stages or phases that the lesson goes through. The first phase of the skills is the Experiencing phase. In this phase students are practicing with words found in sentences by segmenting and deleting the ending consonant in a blend. These activities would be activities that would align with student knowledge of reading at the beginning of the school year. The next phase of the skills is the Knowing phase. Students are practicing with words that are standing alone. Students are working on fluency in this phase. The last phase is the Mastering phase. In this phase students continue to make gains with fluency and become more used to how the lessons are completed (Sounds First, 2021).

Student engagement can be attained when students are interested in the content of a lesson and how the lesson is being taught. Motivating students through connecting student interests with reading will help keep students engaged and further reading success (Lynch & Zwerling, 2020). To keep students engaged during reading instruction, young children especially need to be up moving and have other options for learning rather than seat work. The importance of students paying attention during lessons is enormous when it comes to student success. With this in mind, young children in the elementary grades spend an estimated 10 to 50 percent of their time off-task. Extended periods of sitting can have an impact on off-task behaviors. Children in the United States spend approximately 4.5 hours of the school day in their seats (Flippen et al., 2021). In order for teachers to keep the attention of first grade students, the lessons should last no

longer than approximately 15 minutes. The attention span of students in the first grade between the ages of 5-7 is 15 minutes (Altun et al.,2016). Teachers will spend around 12-15 minutes during each lesson on the Sounds First activities. These activities are quick and fun. The lessons help to develop language and perception with the main goal being sounds of whole words and breaking apart words, and then using those words in fun sentences. Students are encouraged to stand and move their arms, hands, and bodies as they make the gestures that go along with the sounds that are being practiced. Moving while learning is fun for young children and promotes retention of the content being taught. Instructional kinesthetic strategies get students up and moving, helping them to connect content and stay engaged during the lessons (Rawle, 2017). As students use movement such as hand gestures during learning, the learned content is bonded to their long term memory (Sounds First, 2021). When children are moving and having fun while learning, the level of student engagement is high.

Phonemic Awareness Connections

The Sounds First activities use a systematic phonics approach to reading instruction. Phonemic awareness is a large part of the Sounds First Curriculum Supplement. Phonemic awareness is being aware of sounds in the human language. A larger portion of basic phonemic awareness is usually taught in Kindergarten with some skills in Pre-K and some in 1st grade (Sounds First, 2021). By the end of Kindergarten, students have a higher level of phonemic awareness skills along with decoding that will only help with reading skills in first grade (Cameron et al., 2020). Students in first grade are learning to read and need to be aware of all the sounds that make up language. When students are taught using phonemic awareness activities, they are learning to blend sounds into words. As students practice blending sounds to

words, this allows them to be able to read unknown words and later be able to also spell the words (Ehri, 2020). Teachers using the Sounds First activities will be instructing students with ways to practice phonemic awareness. However, basic phonemic awareness skills are not adequate for most students. Students need to be practicing a higher form of phonemic awareness that includes skills in deleting and substituting sounds in words (Sounds First, 2021). Students participating in the Sounds First activities will be using these strategies for a heightened phonemic awareness reading instruction experience.

Student Engagement in Reading and Gender Differences

When it comes to student engagement in reading and gender the teacher needs to be aware of the differences in learning styles in boys and girls and how each gender responds to reading. It is important that both boys and girls are engaged during reading foundational lessons, because early elementary students are just beginning to learn to read. Teachers have a considerable task when it comes to planning lessons that will engage both boys and girls during reading lessons. Teachers need to be able to acquire texts that both boys and girls will be interested in and engaged while listening or reading independently.

When MRIs of men and women there were compared there were differences found in brain images when looking at oxygen levels during brain activity (Wingrave, 2018). If there is a difference in how the brain looks during brain activity in males and females it would be reasonable for teachers to understand which teaching strategies are best for boys and girls when learning to read. During play in the early elementary years, girls have been found to play more in imaginative ways and boys in activities where they are using movement and their bodies (Wingrave, 2018). Boys will require more lessons where they can be up moving around and girls will require lessons that will encourage their imaginations. When it comes to genre and gender,

the little research that has been shows that 1st grade boys choose informative books and girls choose narrative books (Deitcher et al., 2019). Considering that gender could play a role in preferences in genre, the teacher will need to make sure to include a variety of texts and writings such as poetry and even songs when planning reading lessons. Students in early elementary should be given many opportunities to listen to and read a wide array of texts. Both boys and girls will benefit when there is a large selection to choose from making reading more interesting and engaging for all students.

Best Practices for Student Engagement

Student engagement during reading foundational lessons is required for students to achieve proficiency in reading. Considering student engagement and finding ways to keep students motivated and engaged can be discouraging for some teachers. Students can be engaged and motivated during instruction when teachers choose meaningful activities. Sometimes it can be hard to motivate some students, especially if the students are uninterested with the content being taught (Kyoko et al., 2017). It is up to the teacher to discover fun and engaging activities for reading instruction. Students who are motivated and engaged during reading lessons have a higher level of comprehension and overall attain established reading skills (Barber & Klauda, 2020). There are some strategies that teachers can use to raise student engagement during reading lessons. Some of these lessons include giving students ownership of their learning, planning for rich text, choosing content that connects with students' lives, introducing reading strategies, and allowing students to work with partners or groups (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016). First grade students are practicing phonemic awareness, learning more sounds, gaining fluency and comprehension as the school year progresses.

The classroom teacher has the opportunity to raise student engagement and enable students to master first grade reading skills. With this in mind teachers should show a more positive and cheerful side to themselves. Most students in first grade generally look up to their teacher and want to please the teacher by showing interest in learning. When it comes to student engagement and learning, it is important that students feel good about being in the classroom. It is important that students see that the teacher is happy to be at school teaching. The teacher's positive attitude can certainly rub off on students. When students feel positive about their teacher and the learning environment, student engagement is high (Chen et al., 2020). However, when relationships between student and teacher are not positive and the student is made to feel ill at ease, it is likely that the student may become disengaged (Kearney et al., 2016). If student engagement is lost the student can suffer loss of learning.

Integrating rhyming or poetry into reading foundational skills instruction through Sounds first activities is a great way to engage students. Many students enter elementary school with the ability to recite and sing childhood nursery rhymes. Most students are familiar with nursery rhymes and can connect what they already know about rhyming to new content (Sounds First, 2021). Giving students opportunities to read poetry can help them learn how to pronounce sounds in words and can help to tell the difference in how words are spelled and then pronounced (Khan, 2020) Rhyming and poetry give students easy to understand text that teaches phonics and is motivational. Many songs that students are familiar with have rimes that can be practiced during reading foundational lessons. When students work with rimes as in word families and practice reading as they echo the teacher, fluency and decoding skills can be attained. Students practicing with letter-sound patterns found in rimes can strengthen the readers' ability to recognize words quickly which will increase fluency and comprehension (Nichols et al., 2018).

Practicing rimes through songs and in word families can encourage students to be better readers with being able to recognize words immediately without having to take the time to blend the sounds into words enabling the students to be more fluent and raise comprehension. There are many rhyming activities that are included in the warm ups during Sounds First. Students are also engaged in body movement and singing fun songs. Students have opportunities to get up, move around, and have fun.

Student engagement can be raised during instruction by thoughtfully planning and adding on to prior reading lessons so that students have opportunities for more challenging activities (Zeegers & Elliot, 2019). During reading foundational skills lessons, teachers can raise student engagement by adding supplemental activities that give students moments to move around and have fun, such as dancing and singing. Instruction with more rigor can include phonemic awareness activities in which students are deleting and substituting sounds in words. When students are having fun and the instruction is rigorous, student engagement can be raised and maintained throughout reading lessons (Sounds First, 2021). Many of these lessons and activities are found within the supplemental activities in Sounds First.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to compare student engagement in reading foundational skills when they are taught using Sounds First activities and when they are not taught using Sounds First activities in a first grade classroom. Student engagement is extremely important for students learning to read. When classroom teachers develop strategies and encourage engagement, students have greater chances of being successful in reading (Ng & Graham, 2018).

Teachers need to know the learning styles of the students in the classroom and be selective when making decisions regarding how to plan reading lessons in order to help students

sustain engagement throughout lessons. When students are not engaged during instruction, these students can fail to reach classroom expectations (Nelson et al., 2017). Students will have the opportunities to meet and exceed reading goals when they are engaged with reading .

Teachers should make every effort to make connections with all students and form positive relationships with students. When students feel positive about their teacher and the learning environment, student engagement is high (Chen et al., 2020). When students feel happy and safe within their classroom, students are more likely to enjoy what they are learning and be engaged during instructional times.

Both boys and girls can share the love of reading even though there are differences in the way they learn to read. During play in the early elementary years, girls have been found to play more in imaginative ways and boys in activities where they are using movement and their bodies (Wingrave, 2018). With this in mind, there should be many opportunities to practice reading in lessons that contain ways to use imagination and lessons that contain movement, such as dancing. Students will be able to sustain engagement when they are motivated and are having fun as they participate in these activities.

Sounds First activities should be used as a warm up activity during reading foundational skills lessons. Students need to be up and moving during reading lessons. Moving while learning is fun for young children and promotes retention of the content being taught. Instructional kinesthetic strategies get students up and moving, helping them to connect content and stay engaged during the lessons (Rawle, 2017). The activities found in Sounds First require students to get up and move around while having fun and learning to read.

Teachers should keep reading lessons short. The attention span of students in the first grade between the ages of 5-7 is 15 minutes (Altun et al.,2016). The lessons found in Sounds

first are planned to last around 15 minutes. During the short lessons, students are moving around and using hand gestures that promote memory of the content taught and sustained student engagement (Sounds First, 2021). Phonemic awareness is heavily integrated into the activities within the Sounds First lessons. Letter-sound skills or phonemic awareness play a major role in the reading achievement of students in early literacy grades (Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2017). As students practice phonemic awareness activities through the Sounds First lessons, students are engaged in the learning process and are on their way to become successful readers.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to compare student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons using the Tennessee Foundational Skills Supplement, Sounds First and then not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. Student engagement was studied as students were taught foundational reading skills using Sounds First activities as a warm up and then when students were not taught reading skills using Sounds First activities as a warm up. During each lesson, student engagement was assessed using a test created by the researcher. The findings determined how student engagement compared during the lessons when the lessons were taught using Sounds First activities and then when the lessons were taught not using Sounds First activities. This chapter contains the population, sample, data collection instrument, procedures and research questions.

Population

This study was conducted in a rural East Tennessee elementary school. The school contained grade levels, Pre-K-5. The school was a Title I school, so the poverty rate was at least 40%. Records from the Enrollment Summary for the school year 2021-2022 stated that there were 627 students with 322 being male students and 305 being female students. Regarding ethnicity, there was one Asian student, two African American students, five Hispanic or Lantino students, two Native American or Alaskan Native students, and one Pacific Islander. The school employs approximately 60 full time teachers.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of students in a self-contained first grade classroom. There were seventeen students who participated in the study, consisting of eight female students and nine male students. The students' ages ranged from six to seven years old. Three of the students had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and received special education services, while eight of the students were in a Tier II Response to Intervention (RTI) group. Of the eighteen students, seventeen were Caucasian and one student was African American. This sample was not randomly selected. All participants were students within the first grade class.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used for this research was a created test used to measure student engagement. This test was administered after half a unit of reading foundational skills was taught using Sounds First activities and then again when the second half of a unit of reading foundational skills was taught not using Sounds First activities. The researcher noted on the test the number of times students, boys versus girls needed to be redirected during the lesson and observations were made by the researcher on student engagement. Student engagement was

studied on how the students were watching attentively and listening to the teacher as well as how well directions were followed.

Procedures

Before beginning data collection procedures, permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted. Then, permission from the school district was obtained before data collection was conducted. Each student was given permission from their parent/guardian to participate in the study.

The researcher began by teaching one half of a Core Knowledge Reading Foundational Skills unit using Sounds First activities as a warm up to the lesson. There were six lessons in the first half of the unit. The lessons consisted of learning new letter sounds, grammar, reading decodable readers, and writing a book report. During each lesson, the researcher administered a created test to determine the number of times the students, boys versus girls needed to be redirected and to evaluate student engagement. The participants were observed by the researcher to determine if students were looking at the teacher attentively and how well directions were followed during the lesson. Then, the second half of a Core Knowledge Reading Foundational Skills unit was taught not using Sounds First activities as a warm up to the lessons. There were six lessons in the second half of the unit. The lessons consisted of learning new letter sounds, grammar, reading decodable readers, and writing a book report. The created test was again administered after each lesson to measure student engagement. After the two half units were taught and assessed, the researcher observed and organized all data and presented the findings.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #1: There is a difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities.

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills?

Research Hypothesis #2: There is a difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills.

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #3: There is a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Research Question #4: Is there a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #4: There is a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare student engagement during reading foundational skills when students were taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons and when they were taught not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. Sounds First is a Tennessee Foundational Skills supplemental reading curriculum that connects phonemic awareness, phonics, rhyming, and movement to each daily warm up. The term engaged for students can be defined as sitting up and listening intently

to the teacher, raising hands to ask and answer questions, and completing all tasks productively. The study was conducted in a 1st grade classroom at an elementary school in Blountville, Tennessee.

Data Collection

This study was conducted in an East Tennessee elementary school. The school contained grade levels, Pre-K-5. Records from the Enrollment Summary for the school year 2021-2022 stated that there were 627 students with 322 being male students and 305 being female students. The sample for this study was gathered from students in a self-contained first grade classroom. The researcher began each lesson from a half of a unit's foundational skills with a Sounds First activity for a warm up. During each lesson, the researcher assessed student engagement with a test made by the researcher. The researcher observed students as the lesson was taught, taking note of the number of times that students were either engaged or needed redirecting. There were seventeen students in the 1st grade classroom. Of the seventeen students, sixteen were Caucasian and one student was African American. This sample was not randomly selected. All participants were students within the first-grade class. The demographics of this class of students can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Participants

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Male	9	51
Female	8	49
Total	17	100
<i>Race</i>		
Caucasion	16	99
African American	1	1
Total	17	100

Research Questions and Related Hypotheses

There were four research questions used to guide the study. The statistical package used was SPSS. The first research question was analyzed using a paired samples t-test. There were four research hypotheses that followed each research question. The data were analyzed using a 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #1: There is a difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in student engagement when students are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities and when students are taught reading foundational skills not using Sounds First activities.

To answer the first research question, students were taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills for one half of a unit and one half of a unit not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. The researcher observed student engagement during each lesson, making note on the researcher's test for the number of times students were actively engaged in each lesson. A paired samples T-Test was used to analyze the data.

Paired samples t-test comparing the mean scores of the number of times students were engaged during the reading foundational skills lessons using Sounds First and the number of times students were engaged during the reading foundational skills lessons not using Sounds First was conducted. A significant difference between the means of the number of times students were engaged with Sounds First and the number of times students were engaged without Sounds First ($t(16)=5.84, p<.05$) was found. The mean for students engaged in lessons without Sounds First was significantly lower ($M=5.9, sd=.928$) than the mean for students engaged in lessons with Sounds First ($M=9.7, sd=2.23$). The calculated effect size was 1.41. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Paired Samples t-test for Students Engaged with Sounds First and Students Engaged without Sounds First

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
Engaged with						
Sounds First	9.7	2.23	16	5.84	.001	1.41
Engaged without						
Sounds First	5.9	.928				

Note. $p < .05$

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills?

Research Hypothesis #2: There is a difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills.

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in the number of times the teacher needs to redirect students when using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills and when Sounds First activities are not used during reading foundational skills.

To answer the second research question, students were taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills for one half of a unit and one half of a unit not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. The researcher observed the number of times students were redirected during each lesson, making note on the researcher's test for the number of times students were redirected during each lesson. A paired samples T-Test was used to analyze the data.

Paired samples t-test comparing the mean scores of the number of times students were redirected during reading foundational lessons with Sounds First activities and the number of times students were redirected during reading foundational lessons without Sounds First activities was conducted. There was no difference between the means of the number of times students were redirected with Sounds First and the the number of times students were redirected without Sounds First ($t(16) = .000, p > .05$) was found. The means for the number of times students were redirected with Sounds First equal to ($M = 1.00, sd = 1.34$) to the mean for the number of times students were redirected without Sounds First ($M = 1.00, sd = 1.62$). The calculated effect size was .000. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Paired Samples t-test for the Number of Times Students were Redirected with Sounds First and without Sounds First

Variable	Mean	SD	df	t	p	ES
Redirected with Sounds First	1.00	1.34	16	.000	.100	.000
Redirected without Sounds First	1.00	1.62				

Note. $p < .05$

Research Question #3: Is there a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #3: There is a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

To answer the third research question, students were taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills for one half of a unit and one half of a unit not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. The researcher observed student

engagement during each lesson, making notes on the researcher made test for the number of times students were actively engaged in each lesson. An independent samples t-test was used to analyze the data.

An independent samples t-test comparing the mean scores of males and females on being engaged in reading foundational lessons with Sounds First activities was conducted. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that variances were not assumed equal ($p=.027$). A significant difference in the means of the two groups ($t(15)=2.45, p<.05$) was found. The mean for females was significantly higher ($M=10.88, sd=1.73$) than the mean for the males ($M=8.6, sd=2.13$). An effect size of 1.19 was realized. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-test on Male and Female Engagement in Lessons with Sounds First

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
Males	8.6	2.13	15	2.45	.027	1.19
Females	10.88	1.73				

Note. $p<.05$

Research Question #4: Is there a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities?

Research Hypothesis #4: There is a difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference between male engagement and female engagement when they are not taught reading foundational skills using Sounds First activities.

To answer the fourth research question, students were taught with Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills for one half a unit and one half a unit not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. The researcher observed student engagement during each lesson, making notes on the researcher made test for the number of times students were actively engaged in each lesson. An independent samples T-Test was used to analyze the data.

An independent samples t-test comparing the mean scores of males and females on being engaged in reading foundational lessons without Sounds First activities was conducted. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated that variances were not assumed equal ($p=.028$). A significant difference between the means of the two groups ($t(15)=2.43, p<.05$) was found. The mean for the males was significantly higher ($M=6.33, sd=.707$) than the mean for the females ($M=5.38, sd=.916$). An effect size of 1.18 was realized. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-test on Male and Female Engagement in Lessons without Sounds First

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
Males	6.33	.707	15	2.43	.028	1.18
Females	5.38	.916				

Note. $p < .05$

Chapter 5

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the study of comparing student engagement when the teacher used Sounds First activities as a warm up to reading skills lessons and when not using sounds First activities for a first grade class. This chapter includes the findings for comparing student engagement for males and females when the teacher used Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. There were four research questions that were addressed in this study.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to compare student engagement when students were taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons and when they were not taught using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. This study also

compared student engagement of males and females when they were taught using Sounds First activities and when they were taught not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons.

The first research question compared student engagement when students were taught using Sounds First activities and when they were taught not using Sounds First activities during reading foundational skills lessons. A significant difference was found for students being engaged during reading lessons with Sounds First activities. These findings were consistent with the literature review. Sounds First is a phonics based supplemental curriculum that uses rhyme and movement to help students learn to read. When students are using movements such as hand gestures during learning activities, the learned content is bonded to their long term memory (Sounds First, 2021). If student engagement is high and supported through engaging activities, student learning success is raised. Instructional movement strategies get students up and moving, helping them to connect content and stay engaged during the lessons (Rawle, 2017). The students were moving and connecting content through rhyming and echoing the teacher along with standing and moving around.

During the study, students were taught using Sounds First activities during one half of a reading skills unit and one half of the unit was taught not using Sounds First. The second research question examined if there was a difference in the number of times students were redirected during reading foundational skills lessons using Sounds First activities and the number of times students were redirected during reading lessons not using Sounds First activities. The analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the number of times students were redirected during reading lessons with Sounds First activities and lessons without Sounds First activities. The results were not consistent with the literature review. Students who are engaged

during instruction are less likely than students not engaged during instruction to have negative behaviors and can have a higher level of achievement (Bhargava, 2021). The numbers of times students needed to be redirected did not change during lessons using Sounds First and with lessons not using Sounds First. This could be explained by the same students that were redirected in during this study have been the same students who have needed redirected throughout this school year. Perhaps a new classroom management plan would help these students stay on task and engaged during lessons.

The students in this study were taught whole group during each half unit of the reading skills lessons. The third research question was analyzed to determine if there was a difference in student engagement between boys and girls being taught reading foundational lessons using Sounds First. There was a significant difference in boy and girl engagement during the lessons taught using Sounds First activities. The girl population was found to be significantly more engaged than the male population with lessons being taught using Sounds First activities. These findings were in line with research found in the literature review. The ability to connect sounds with letters and then to words can sometimes come more slowly for boys than girls in early years (Rvachew et al., 2020). The Sounds First activities are packed with phonemic awareness tasks possibly making these lessons more appealing to female students especially if there had been some deficiencies in connecting sounds with letters for the male students. However, when it comes to learning styles of male and female students, boys generally learn through play with movement and games over girls who learn through creative play (Wingrave, 2018). When boys were compared with girls when they were taught without Sounds First activities, boys were significantly more engaged than girls. This suggests that girls are less challenged during reading lessons that contain activities that have to do with phonemic awareness. Boys may need to spend

more time practicing with the Sounds First activities to be able to be proficient with phonemic awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was designed to compare student engagement when students in a first grade classroom were taught reading skills lessons using Sounds First supplemental activities and when they were not taught Sounds First during reading skills lessons. When student engagement is high, students are more likely to master goals in reading. The results of this study found that there was a significant difference when students were taught reading skills lessons using Sounds First compared to lessons taught not using Sounds First. There was no significant difference in students who needed to be redirected in lessons with Sounds First and lessons without Sounds First. When comparing student engagement in boys and girls during lessons with Sounds First and lessons without Sounds Firsts, girls were significantly more engaged in lessons with Sounds First and boys were significantly engaged in lessons without Sounds First. When thinking of what is best for all students, Sounds First activities are a great way to help all students sustain engagement during reading lessons.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study should be examined over a longer period of time to see if student engagement would remain the same when using Sounds First lessons or to see if students would become less engaged in Sounds First lessons.
2. This study should be examined over a longer period of time to see if engagement in boys would raise with more practice in the phonemic awareness activities.
3. The test used for this study was made by the researcher. The data could have possibly shown other results if a more accurate test was used.

4. A larger population of students could be used to add more data to see if the findings would change or stay the same. Students from different classes within the same grade level could be studied.

Recommendations for Practice

1. There was a significant difference in student engagement when students were taught reading foundational skills with Sounds First. Teachers should continue to use Sounds First activities as a supplemental warm up to reading lessons.
2. There was no significant difference in the number of times students needed to be redirected during the reading lessons taught using Sounds First and lesson taught not using Sounds First, so there is not much time lost for redirecting using Sounds First.
3. There was a significant difference in gender with student engagement during reading lessons with girls being more engaged in lessons with Sounds First and boys being more engaged in lessons without Sounds First. The teacher may want to take into consideration that it may take boys a little longer to be proficient in phonemic awareness activities which are embedded in the Sounds First activities.

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Date: December 31, 2021

Principal Investigator: **Deenia Graybeal**, Graduate Student, Milligan University
From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University
Project: *A Comparative Study of Student Engagement in Reading Foundational Skills When They are Taught Using Sounds First Activities and When They are Not Taught Using Sounds First Activities*
IRB Tracking Number: **2021-22**
IRB Approval Number: **Exp2112311108**
Subject: **Final Approval**

On behalf of the Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB), we are writing to inform you that the above-mentioned study has been approved as expedited. This approval also indicates that you have fulfilled the IRB requirements for Milligan University.

All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission, meaning that you will follow the research plan you have outlined here, use approved materials, and follow university policies.

Take special note of the following important aspects of your approval:

- Any changes made to your study require approval from the IRB Committee before they can be implemented as part of your study. Contact the IRB Committee at IRB@milligan.edu with your questions and/or proposed modifications;
- If there are any unanticipated problems or complaints from participants during your data collection, you must notify the Milligan University IRB Office within 24 hours of the data collection problem or complaint;
- Milligan University requires specific formatting when collecting demographic data on gender; please contact me if you need assistance with this formatting.

The Milligan University IRB Committee is pleased to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. Best wishes as you conduct your research! If you have any questions about your IRB Approval, please contact the IRB Office and copy your faculty advisor if appropriate on the communication.

On behalf of the IRB Committee,

Trini Rangel, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Milligan University



Appendix A

Consent Form

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY **Research Participant Informed Consent Form**

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in a Milligan University sponsored research study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether or not to participate.

This research study is recruiting 1st grade students who are emergent readers. The time frame to collect data for the study will be four weeks.

This study is being conducted by researcher Deenia Graybeal. Deenia Graybeal is associated with Milligan as a graduate student. You may already know the researcher as a teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

Research Objective/Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons when using the Tennessee Foundational Skills, Sounds First activities and student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons when Sounds First are not used. The data from this investigation will compare student engagement during reading lessons with the Sounds First activities and student engagement during reading lessons without the Sounds First activities.

Procedures:

- The researcher will begin the research by teaching one half of a reading foundational skills unit using Sounds First activities to the 1st grade students. This will take approximately two weeks.
- After teaching one half of a reading foundational skills unit, the created test will be administered to measure student engagement.
- Then, the second half of the reading foundational skills unit will be taught not using Sounds First activities. This will take approximately two weeks.
- After teaching the second half of a reading foundational skills unit not using Sounds First activities, the created test will be administered again to measure student engagement.
- The researcher will observe and organize all data and present the findings.

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Any decision to not participate in this study will have no penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise be entitled to if you were not invited to participate. Additionally, you may discontinue participation in this study at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise be entitled to if you were not invited to participate.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Risks:

There is no obligation to participate in this study. Students/parents who do not wish to participate will not be penalized in any way.

Benefits: The benefits associated with this research are that students will benefit from possible increase of student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons. Teachers will also benefit from the research with a proven strategy to facilitate student engagement during reading foundational skills lessons.

Compensation:

This research study:
Does not involve any compensation.

Privacy:

By participating in this research study:

Your personal identifying information will be **maintained confidentially** and will not be used in association with any other research project. Your study-related research data will be used and reported as an aggregate only and will not be individually identifiable.

Research data for this study will be maintained securely by the Milligan Investigator (or Milligan designee) for a period of 3 years, at which time it will be securely discarded.

Secondary Research: N/A

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Participant's Rights and Responsibilities

As a research participant the following rights and responsibilities apply:

- If applicable, significant new findings developed during the course of this research, which may relate to your willingness to continue participation in the study will be provided to you during the course of the study by Deenia Graybeal.
- To withdraw from the research study while it is still in-progress, contact Deenia Graybeal to ensure orderly termination of your participation.
- For a summary of the findings or conclusions from this research study, you may contact Deenia Graybeal.
- For questions about this research study, your rights and responsibilities, or a research-related injury, you may contact Deenia Graybeal and/or Milligan's Institutional Review Board.

Contacts:

Principal Investigator:

Deenia Graybeal
dsgraybeal@my.milligan.edu
Phone (423) 383-1871

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Patrick N. Kariuki
pnkariuki@milligan.edu
Phone number (423) 461-8744

Milligan Institutional Review Board:

IRB@Milligan.edu

Office of IRE:

Brenda Bourn
bsbourn@milligan.edu
423-461-8414

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the Informed Consent information presented for participation in this research study.

- This study **does not** require written consent. As applicable to the study:
 - By clicking the provided **link or “I consent” button**, I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate in this research study.
 - By **replying “I consent” via email** to the Investigator, I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate in this research study.

- This study **requires** written consent. By **signing below**, I (or my minor child) agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian (Printed): _____

MILLIGAN UNIVERSITY
Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____