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To cite this version:
Cynthia Boggio, Adeline Leclercq-Samson, Marie-Line Bosse. Decodable texts: low or high proportion of phonically decodable words to enhance early reading acquisition?. Society for the Scientific Study of Reading, Jul 2024, Copenhague, Denmark. . hal-04659756

HAL Id: hal-04659756
https://hal.science/hal-04659756
Submitted on 23 Jul 2024

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DECODABLE TEXTS: LOW OR HIGH PROPORTION OF PHONICALLY DECODABLE WORDS TO ENHANCE EARLY READING ACQUISITION?

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INTRODUCTION

Specialists recommend the use of solely decodable texts in initial reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; HMSO, 2005).

BUT meta-analyses have a more nuanced opinion:

- Pugh et al. (2023) Children with reading difficulty
- Murphy Odo (2024) Children without reading disabilities

Same conclusion: Proposing both decodable and non-decodable texts may be the most effective.

OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how do the decodability rates of text evolve at the really beginning of the school year.
2. Study whether the decodability rate and its range, in terms of intercept and slope over the first weeks of learning to read, impact the pupils' progress in reading and comprehension.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Linear regression of decodability rate by class cluster

- **High rate** Evolution: stable
- **Low rate** Evolution: increase
- **Medium rate** Evolution: increase

By Kmeans and hierarchical classification methods.

**Question 2: Decodability rate impact**

- Reading - More decodable = Less decodable

  Teacher variability across classrooms, but 3 patterns emerged

  - No effect of intercept (β = 0.008; p = .258) or slope (β = 0.007; p = .886).
  - Comprehension - More decodable < Less decodable

    The higher the initial decodability rate (intercept: β = -0.017; p = .004), and the higher the evolution of decodability (slope: β = -0.13; p = .001), the less progress is made in comprehension.

**Question 1: Description**

- High variability across classrooms, but 3 patterns emerged
- After 6 weeks, the gap reduces and the rate concentrates between 70 and 90%

**Question 2: Decodability range impact**

- Reading - More variability = Less variability

  No effect of intercept (β = -0.004; p = .641) or slope (β = 0.008; p = .786).

- Comprehension - More variability > Less variability

  The greater the initial range in decodability, the better the progress made in comprehension (β = 0.02; p = .01).

No effect of the evolution in the decodability range on reading acquisition (β = 0.046; p = .12).

CONCLUSIONS

- **Teacher practices**: Observations show that none of the 14 teachers used solely decodable texts, despite recommendations.
- **Reading performance**: Providing only decodable texts does not impact students’ reading abilities.
- **Comprehension performance**:
  - Less decodability rates are more effective.
  - Decodability rates should not increase too quickly over weeks.
  - A mix of decodable and non-decodable texts is beneficial.
- **Consistency with Research**: Findings align with Pugh’s meta-analysis and Murphy’s conclusions.

REFERENCES


Acknowledgments:
The authors are grateful to the French government (France 2030) for its financial support, managed by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), reference ANR-22-FRAN-0008. Funding for this project was also provided by Les Editions Hatier and we thank them for their support. Finally, we are very grateful to all the teachers and students who agreed to participate in this study. We would also like to thank the Academy of Grenoble for agreeing to support us in this project.

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