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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

- **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 rate impact**
  - **Reading** – More decodable = Less decodable
    - 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.

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


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