

Northwest Practitioner Knowledge Institute
Practitioner Knowledge Documentation

Sustained Silent Reading
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What the Research Said

Most of the research for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has been done with regular school students and the findings have shown conflicting results. However, with English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students the results are more positive. Pilgreen & Krashen's study showed greater gains in both comprehension and vocabulary in the target group. Keep in mind that these are school-age children. The research done at NCSALL showed no difference in progress between the control and target groups of adults. It did not harm their progress either.

Why I Decided to Use This Particular Research

Circumstances warranted a change from my original project of pair work. SSR or modified SSR (mSSR) was another area of interest to me. I like giving students control over their learning. By choosing their own books to read, their chances of completion are much higher than by using assigned reading. Giving them time in class to read allowed for uninterrupted personal time, which is something they may not get a lot of at home. I was also interested in the level of books they would choose. Would they choose something challenging or relatively easy?

How I Applied These Findings

I started the SSR approach in March with two ESL students, one from Ukraine and one from Indonesia. Both tested at Level Four and were well-educated in their own languages. I held class twice a week in Buffalo, Wyoming, on Mondays and Wednesdays at the Johnson County Library and once a week in Kaycee, Wyoming, on Tuesdays at the branch library. Two more students from Mexico started in April. One was Level One and the other was Level Three. Three more students from Indonesia started later on. Two of them were Level Three and one was Level Four. I introduced them to SSR and they were very receptive to the plan.

I conducted an informal interest survey with each of my students to determine the type and amount of reading they had done in their language as well as reading in English. One of the librarians took them on a tour of the library and discussed the rules for using the computers and checking out books. Each student then received a library card. Students were given 10 to 15 minutes of class time to read. After a short time we added a few minutes for book discussions. This allowed a great opportunity for students to use their English skills and develop better skills. It also gave me a source for future lessons. I allowed students to take their books home and read as well.

How I Knew How Well This New Strategy or Approach Worked

During our book discussions I was able to determine how much reading they were doing at home and what problems they were having. Their jobs were their main obstacle. I checked their comprehension and asked questions that led to some predicting. One sign of success was when my students went to the library on their own time to return books and check out others. SSR also helped my lower level students by leading them to read children's books to their own children. Most of my students enjoyed telling me about their book. Another measure was seen in the improved language skills they used when reporting about their stories.

What I Learned About This Strategy or Approach

SSR gave students the opportunity to use and develop their language skills in a relaxed and safe environment. The response to reading was all positive. Students learned to preview their book choices more carefully. They found that some authors use more "flowery" words that are hard to understand for some readers. New topics of interest for lessons, such as Wyoming history, were suggested. Many students chose books at or above their reading level. I found that one hour was not enough time to cover SSR and other instruction. I tried to allow for one and a half hours so my students did not feel rushed to share their story with me. After a month or so, students were self correcting before I could say anything, and making fewer mistakes. Increased vocabulary was also noted as they asked and searched for the right words to describe the story.

Supports and Challenges I Faced When I Used This Research

The local library was a great support. All of my classes were held at the library. My students and I had access to computers and all of the reference material we needed. Other support came from NCSALL. They encouraged me to change my area of research when things were not working out. A challenge throughout was student attendance. Each of my seven ESL students had two or three jobs, which made scheduling for a group class impossible. So I met with them one-on-one or in pairs.

What I Recommend to Other Teachers

Allow for uninterrupted reading time. Occasionally introduce a fun reading activity. Perhaps a play or an excerpt, a fairy tale, or poetry could be used to introduce other forms of writing. I have used the "and the story goes..." series that tells a story about famous people, inventions, or even historic events with little-known facts. The story does not mention the event, person's name or invention until the end. We try to guess who or what the story is referring to before we get to the end.

Encourage students to take their books home and read. Provide small children with coloring books or other quiet activities so they do not interrupt adult reading time.

What I Plan To Do Next

I will continue using SSR in my ESL classroom. I will include a simple log in each student file to keep track of books read. At my next staff meeting I will report on the SSR approach and encourage other instructors to try it in their classes.

Pilgreen, J. & Krashen, S. (1993). "Sustained Silent Reading with English as a Second Language High School Students: Impact on Reading Comprehension, Reading Frequency, and Reading Enjoyment." *School Library Media Quarterly* 22 (1), 21-23.