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The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Second Grade Reading Levels

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON SECOND GRADE READING
LEVELS

Thesis Submitted to
Marshall University
Graduate College

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist in
School Psychology

By

Amanda Jill Knight

Sandra S. Stroebe, Ph.D – Committee Chairperson
Peter N. Prewett, Ph.D
Edna M. Meisel, Ed.D
Marshall University
May 2011

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Sandra S. Stroebel and Dr. Peter N. Prewett for their continual support of this study and their continued comments and suggestions for making it better. I would also like to thank Dr. Edna M. Meisel for her guidance and expertise in working with and discussing data and its relevance. I would like to thank my father, who once asked me, “Are you ready to graduate yet?,” for the countless road-trips, late nights and selfless sacrifices spent all in pursuit of a daughter’s education – yes, dad. I’m finally ready to graduate. I would like to thank my mother who never once thought any of this was just a dream.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables	iv
Abstract.....	v
Chapter I: Literature Review	1
Statement of Hypothesis	6
Chapter II: Method.....	7
Participants.....	7
Instrument	7
Procedure	8
Chapter III: Results.....	10
Chapter IV: Discussion.....	15
References.....	19
Appendix A.....	22
Appendix B.....	23

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Group Fall Baseline	21
Table 2: Group Winter Benchmark.....	21
Table 3: Fall and Winter Mean Scores for Entire Group.....	21
Table 4: Non-Low-SES Group WRC – Fall and Winter Mean Scores	22
Table 5: Low-SES Group WRC – Fall and Winter Mean Scores.....	22

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine if low SES students respond differently to Tier I and Tier II interventions than Non-Low SES students. The study also seeks to determine the effect Tier I and Tier II interventions have on a group of second grade students. Forty-four Tier I and Tier II Caucasian second grade students from a rural Ohio elementary school were included in this study. No significant differences were found between the reading levels of low-SES and Non-Low-SES students prior to or after implementation of RTI. Significant differences were found between the AIMSweb fall and winter benchmarks as a result of Tier I and Tier II interventions.

CHAPTER I: Literature Review

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is of great interest to educators, researchers and school administrators when looking at child development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Many factors make up a family's socioeconomic status such as parental education level, family size, maternal occupation and family income. Such social factors can affect a child's achievement in school and much research indicates that children from lower SES backgrounds have lower achievement in school, than children from higher SES backgrounds. Hattie (2009) indicated that children from lower SES households tend to achieve at a lower level than same grade level peers from higher SES households. SES appears to have similar effects on different types of academic skills such as reading and math. It was also found that students whose families receive welfare benefits and qualify for free and reduced lunch show lower achievement in school. The effect size (where d is representative of the desired effect) was $d = -.10$ (an adverse affect, but not an extreme adverse effect) based on a study conducted of welfare policy in 2004.

Although many factors contribute to social differences, it is difficult to determine how one particular indicator affects a child's achievement. A study cited by Bradley and Corwyn (2002) conducted in 1982 examined the relationship between SES, maternal occupation, education level of parents, the number of children in the household and academic achievement. The researchers found that SES accounted for the most difference (only 5% for a single SES indicator) A greater difference occurred for more than one SES indicator (such as family income *and* parent education level) (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This same study indicated that income was correlated with higher academic achievement

whereas other factors such as maternal occupation, educational level or number of children in the home were less correlated with achievement (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Kishiyama, Boyce, Jimenez, Perry, & Knight, R. (2009), state that children from lower SES environments perform lower on standardized tests of intelligence and achievement than do children from high SES environments. This finding is especially a concern to educators when considering how a school's population will perform on state standardized assessments. A study conducted in Texas examined the effects of SES on standardized test achievement through the use of Free and Reduced Lunch participation. Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) is one of the most common ways a school system is able to determine the household income of its students, and consequently, a school system that has a higher participation in the FRL program, the more economically disadvantaged the school system (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey & Stecher, 2000). The study showed a negative correlation (-0.76) between the percentage of students at a school who were in the lunch program and the school's mean on the TAAS test (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. The TAAS is a similar measure to the Ohio Achievement Assessment [OAA] and the Ohio Graduation Test [OGT]). Schools with more affluent students tended to earn higher mean scores than did schools with less advantaged students (Klein, et. al., 2000).

The amount of students receiving Free and Reduced lunch assistance is a determining factor in how economically advantaged a school district is. In a study conducted by Rosenshine (2002), it was stated that in the United States since 1963 there have been little data to indicate substantial academic growth toward grade-level competencies within the FRL population. Rosenshine also talks about "the reading gap"

that widens as students move from first to third grade. This “gap” actually is believed to be “a vocabulary deficit that comes about because lower class children are not exposed to the broad knowledge and language that middle class children have” (Rosenshine, p.10, 2002).

It has been suggested that early childhood poverty has more detrimental effects on achievement than does poverty in adolescence because it is believed that early childhood poverty affects the rate of learning (cognitive ability) (Bhattacharya, 2010). Bhattacharya also found that student-reading achievement was lower in students coming from lower income homes than was the reading achievement levels of children coming from higher income homes.

Low Achievement as Measured by R-CBM's

The R-CBM is a curriculum-based measure of reading achievement. Tests like the R-CBM are a more accurate and less biased method of assessing reading skills than methods that use informal observations, informal oral reading and teacher ratings (Graney, 2008). Reading is the most critical skill students will learn and one of the best predictors of overall success in school and society (Hosp & Fuchs, 2005). According to research, primary grade teachers tend to overestimate reading competencies of lower achieving students and underestimate reading competencies of higher achieving students (Graney, 2008). For this reason, reading curriculum-based measures more accurately track students' skills.

An advantage of using R-CBMs to measure reading competencies is that often times teachers misjudge or misinterpret student progress over time. The R-CBM offers a

data-based approach to measure a student's rate of learning and responsiveness to both short and long term interventions (Graney, 2008). R-CBMs are designed to provide immediate feedback that teachers can use, and the principle behind their use is for teachers to identify and adjust their instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers (Stecker Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Therefore, R-CBMs would be useful in assessing the reading skills of students from different SES groups to determine if the students in these groups differ in reading levels.

In examining socioeconomic status and achievement, Noble, Farah, & McCandliss (2006) stated that SES is more strongly related to IQ and achievement in lower SES families than in higher SES families. Studies have found that children from low-SES homes perform lower on intelligence and achievement tests than children from higher SES homes (Kishiyama, et al., 2008). While many factors affect a student's primary-grade achievement, fewer studies isolate Free and Reduced lunch as a sole factor relating to achievement. Bradley and Corwyn, 2002, cited an earlier study that examined the link between family income and maternal education and found evidence in their connections to school achievement in children ages 6 to 9.

RTI and Reading

Response to Intervention (RTI) has become a powerful approach to the delivery of reading instruction in schools. Based on a tiered model, the purpose of RTI is to "act as a preventative measure to reduce the number of students who experience initial failure" (Brozo, 2010, p. 147). When properly implemented, RTI should identify struggling readers early in their academic careers. Teachers then are able to provide

appropriate interventions in order to assist struggling students to make similar gains as their non-struggling peers (Mohktari, Porter & Edwards, 2010).

Tier I RTI as defined by the National Center on Response to Intervention is universal high-quality, scientifically based, classroom instruction in which screening of students occurs to gather an academic baseline. Tier I involves all students in the general curriculum. Students who need extra supports are identified based on further screening. Tier II RTI includes interventions that target students who fall below the 25th percentile on district assessments and grade-level assessments. Students identified as Tier II receive, in addition to core curriculum, supports outside of the general curriculum (such as small group interventions) and are progressed monitored using R-CBM's every two weeks. Adjustments to interventions are made after six weeks of progress monitoring (American Institutes for Research, 2010).

Tier I instruction includes ninety minutes of core curriculum delivered to all students. Groupings are flexible and 80-90% of students should make adequate, measureable progress without the presence of achievement gaps between groups. Tier II instruction includes small groups with a 1:3, 1:4 or 1:5 ratio. Students receive an additional thirty minutes of instruction, two to three times per week, in addition to the ninety-minute core. According to the national average, only 5-10% of students should need these extra supports (Winston, 2006).

According to a 2008 survey of literacy researchers, 75% were in support of RTI as a means of identifying struggling readers. RTI eliminates the reliance on an IQ/achievement discrepancy and "waiting to fail" approach to providing literacy supports (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). Using a RTI model also changes the perspective on such

influencing factors as opportunities to learn. Davis, Lindo & Compton (2007) stated that phonological skills and emergent print knowledge are the earliest predictors of reading success. Likewise, letter identification in early grades can be valuable within the RTI model to identify students who lack these basic skills earlier and therefore implement appropriate interventions. Students coming from a lower SES background enter school with a more limited vocabulary than higher SES peers (Cooper, 2008).

This study seeks to examine further if low SES is a factor in students benefiting from Tier I and Tier II interventions. This study also seeks to determine impact of Tier I and Tier II interventions in a group of second grade students.

Statement of Hypotheses

There are four hypotheses that will be considered for this study:

1. After receiving Tier I and Tier II interventions there will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb winter benchmark scores between low-SES students and non-low-SES students.
2. There will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC R-CBM fall baseline scores compared to the winter benchmark scores after receiving Tier I and Tier II intervention for all students.
3. There will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC R-CBM fall baseline scores compared to winter benchmark scores after receiving Tier I and Tier II interventions for Non-Low-SES students.

4. There will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC fall baseline scores compared to winter benchmark scores after receiving Tier I and Tier II intervention for Low-SES students.

CHAPTER II: Method

Participants

The subjects of this study were 44, second grade Caucasian students who attend school in a rural Midwest school district. Of the 44 students, twenty-three students are female and twenty-one are male. The average age of the sample is 8-years, 5-months old to 9-years, 7-months old. Students in the sample are part of a non-inclusion classroom, meaning that students receiving special education are learning in the regular education environment along with their non-learning disabled peers but also being pulled out of their regular classroom for more intensive instruction. Of the 44 student sample, 24 students receive free lunch assistance, three receive reduced lunch assistance, and 17 students do not receive any lunch assistance. Students with mental retardation and any student receiving Tier III interventions have been excluded in this sample.

Instrument

The AIMSweb R-CBM benchmarking system was used to obtain reading scores for the sample. AIMSweb is a benchmark and progress monitoring system based on direct, periodic student assessment. AIMSweb's data-driven model provides Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) assessments for benchmarking and progress monitoring, in

addition to web-based data management, charting, and reporting. Together, these components provide a system to benchmark and monitor students' acquisition of essential academic skills of reading.

The reading curriculum based measure (R-CBM) used to chart reading consists of three one-minute probes that measure words read correctly (WRC) and is administered three times in the academic school year: Fall Benchmark (administered in September), Winter Benchmark (administered in January) and Spring Benchmark (administered in May).

The AIMSweb R-CBM has a construct validity range of .60-.80 when compared with such standardized measures as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .75 using a 2nd grade sample. The Mean WRC for a white second grade sample in the state of Ohio is 64 and the Standard Deviation is 36 for the Fall Benchmark and the mean WRC for the Winter Benchmark is 95 with a standard deviation of 38.

Procedure

For the purpose of this study, students were divided into two groups based on socioeconomic status. The two categories were: Low-SES group and Non-Low-SES group. Students receiving free and reduced lunch were placed in the Low -SES group. In order for a child to qualify for free lunch in the state of Ohio, the income range must not exceed \$14,079 (for a family of one), \$18, 941 (for a family of two), \$23,803 (for a family of three), \$28,665 (for a family of four), \$33,389 (for a family of five), \$38,389 (for a family of six), \$43,251 (for a family of seven), and \$48,113 (for a family of eight).

In order for a child to qualify for Reduced Lunch, the income range must not exceed \$20,036 (for a family of one), \$26,955 (for a family of two), \$33,874 (for a family of three), \$40,793 (for a family of four), \$47,712 (for a family of five), \$54,631 (for a family of six), \$61,550 (for a family of seven), \$68,469 (for a family of eight).

The achievement data for this study were gathered from the AIMSweb computerized criterion referenced R-CBM using both fall and winter benchmarks. The measure is a one-minute reading probe that counts number of words read correctly (WRC). Intervention specialists administered the test to all second grade students within the sample.

Second grade students use the Scott Foresman Reading series, which exposes students to, and gives them strategies to build, early literacy skills. The Scott Foresman Reading series provides several differentiated activities for teachers to facilitate literacy within their classrooms. Students are engaged in whole-group and independent reading activities on a universal level. Tier I students receive reading instruction as a group for a minimum of ninety minutes daily and are encouraged to practice independent reading skills while other groups of students are working with their teacher.

Students receiving Tier II interventions are exposed to the Houghton-Mifflin EARLY SUCCESS, which includes an additional thirty minutes of reading instruction at least three days a week (in many cases students are receiving the additional exposure every day). Along with Tier I activities, Tier II students work on reading skills in small groups with their teacher. Students take part in activities such as echo reading and identifying letter sounds in parts of words.

Using a t-test, all students' AIMSweb WRC data were recorded in order to determine their growth between the fall and winter benchmarks. The fall benchmark (September) is representative of the reading fluency of the entire group who have been in school for approximately four weeks. The fall benchmark acts as a baseline in order to determine the reading similarities of all students. The winter benchmark (January) is representative of the group's progress based on school attendance of approximately five months. The results of the t-test should indicate the effectiveness of interventions on Tier I and Tier II students over the duration of interventions implemented between the fall baseline and winter benchmarks and whether socioeconomic status has an effect on reading fluency.

Permission for this study was granted by the IRB Approval Board and was also obtained through the district to use the existing data on student socioeconomic level as well as student achievement data.

CHAPTER III: Results

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were examined using either a t-test for independent groups or a t-test for dependent groups. The first hypothesis stated: there would be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb winter benchmark scores between low-SES students and non-low-SES students. Prior to testing this hypothesis, the means between the two groups were compared using the fall baseline scores. These results showed there were no significant differences between the groups in the fall (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Group Fall Baseline*

Fall Baseline	SES	N	Mean WRC	SD	t obtained value	p
	Low-SES	29	45.34	22.080	1.445	.156
	Non-Low- SES	14	57.21	30.974		

A *t*-test was used to assess these data. The *p* values are set at a significance level of 0.05. Table 1 shows the *t*-test results for the group in order to determine if there was a difference in reading levels prior to RTI interventions. The *t* score of 1.445 was used for comparison in assessing the Low-SES group and Non-Low SES group's pre-intervention reading levels. A significance level of $p = .156$ was found meaning that there was not a difference in student reading levels, based on SES, prior to RTI interventions.

Because there was no significant difference in reading levels of all students at the fall baseline, it was then appropriate to look at the results of the AIMSweb R-CBM winter benchmark in order to determine if a difference in reading levels exists after Tier I and Tier II reading interventions. Hypothesis one states that there would be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb winter benchmark scores between low-SES students and non-low-SES students after receiving Tier I and Tier II interventions (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Group Winter Benchmark*

Winter Benchmark	SES	N	Mean WRC	SD	t obtained value	p
	Low-SES	29	67.28	24.141	.772	.444
	Non-Low-SES	14	74.14	33.136		

The t score of .772 was used for comparison in assessing the Low-SES group and Non-Low SES group's post-intervention reading levels. Table 2 indicates a level of $p = .444$ meaning that there was not a difference in student reading levels after implementing RTI interventions.

The second hypothesis stated: there will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC R-CBM fall baseline scores compared to the winter benchmark scores after receiving Tier I and Tier II intervention for all students. Table 3 shows the statistics for the entire group, comparing fall and winter mean scores.

Table 3: *Fall and Winter Mean Scores for Entire Group*

N	Fall Mean scores	Winter Mean scores	t value obtained	p
43	49.21	69.51	11.435	.000

The t score of 11.435 was used for comparison in assessing the pre and post-intervention reading levels. Table 2 indicates a level of $p = .000$ meaning that there was a significant difference in student reading levels for all students after implementing RTI interventions.

The third hypothesis stated: there will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC R-CBM fall baseline scores compared to the winter benchmark scores as a result of receiving Tier I and Teir II interventions for the Non-Low SES students. Table 4 shows the mean AIMSweb WRC on the fall and winter benchmark for the Non-Low SES group.

Table 4: *Non-Low-SES Group WRC – Fall and Winter Mean Scores*

Non-Low-SES Group	Mean	N	SD	t value obtained	p
Fall Baseline	57.2143	14	30.97437	6.308	.000
Winter Benchmark	74.1429	14	33.13575		

In a paired sample *t*-test there was an obtained value of $t = 6.308$. This value is significant as indicated by the *t*-test results of $p = .000$ (where $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that the differences between the fall and winter benchmark scores are likely affected by RTI interventions.

The fourth hypothesis tested stated: there will be a significant difference in the mean AIMSweb WRC fall baseline scores compared to winter benchmark scores after receiving Tier I and Tier II interventions for Low-SES students. Results indicate that interventions affect the Low-SES group in the same manner as the Non-Low-SES group. Table 5 shows the fall and winter benchmark WRC for the Low-SES group.

Table 5: *Low-SES Group WRC – Fall and Winter Mean Scores*

Low-SES Group	Mean	N	SD	t value obtained	p
Fall Baseline	45.3448	29	22.07985	9.706	.000
Winter Benchmark	67.2759	29	24.14080		

In a paired sample *t*-test there was an obtained value of $t = 9.706$. This value is significant as indicated by the *t*-test results of $p = .000$ (where $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that the differences between the fall and winter benchmark scores are likely affected by appropriate classroom instruction.

CHAPTER IV: Discussion

This study examined student SES and Tier I and Tier II interventions on second grade reading achievement. It was hypothesized that students coming from a lower SES background would show less reading achievement than their higher SES peers. This study also sought to determine if appropriate interventions affected all students evenly regardless of their socioeconomic classification. The use of AIMSweb R-CBM WRC benchmarking data was assessed using a *t*-test in both independent and paired samples. According to the data, which was analyzed, it was found that students make gains in reading regardless of their socioeconomic status. Students achieve reading growth as a result of appropriate instruction rather than their SES. The effects of SES were lessened as a result

of appropriate instruction. Lower SES students are not necessarily poor readers due to their socioeconomic status.

In a group of second grade students from a rural, Midwest school district, it was found that students make gains in reading regardless of their socioeconomic status. Students achieve reading growth as a result of appropriate instruction. The effects of SES appear to be lessened as a result of appropriate instruction. As indicated by the data, student-reading levels are not significant as a result of SES alone before or after the implementation of interventions. This finding may only apply to similar homogeneous schools. These data do indicate reading level differences as a result of appropriate Tier I and Tier II interventions for both the Low-SES group and Non-Low-SES group.

Bhattacharya found that student-reading achievement was lower in students coming from lower income homes than was the reading achievement levels of children coming from higher income homes (2010). Contrary to what the research has indicated, this study found that all students made similar reading gains regardless of their socioeconomic status. The difference could be due to the sample of students in the study or the manner in which reading was measured.

The R-CBM is a curriculum-based measure of reading achievement. Tests like the R-CBM are a more accurate and less biased method of assessing reading skills than methods that use informal observations, informal oral reading and teacher ratings (Graney, 2008). The R-CBM allows classrooms to effectively identify students and provide appropriate interventions before the student struggles.

This study provided information on the use of classroom interventions as a result of AIMSweb reading fluency data. AIMSweb reading probes are currently being used in

several Ohio school systems. However, little data are available regarding how, specifically second grade students, are performing. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of this method. AIMSweb data is helpful in identifying and addressing reading problems in students, thus allowing teachers to better adjust their instruction to suit student needs. The results of this study reinforce the necessity to use data-based measures to track student progress. As the literature by Graney, 2008 suggests, CBMs lessen assessment bias and provide more accurate representations to student skills.

The findings of this study can be used as evidence for teachers to set high expectations for all students regardless of their economic background. It can also serve as evidence that effective delivery of instruction works for all students and such instruction minimizes the influence of a child's socioeconomic status. Schools can use the data to see the importance of early intervention in addressing reading needs and using a data based measure to chart reading skills.

Limitations

There are many factors that contribute to one's SES such as maternal education level, family size, family income, and paternal occupation. This study does not examine all those facets of SES; it looks only at the child's lunch assistance status. Another limitation of the study is that the spring AIMSweb R-CBM benchmark is not included to assess further growth of reading fluency among the SES groups. A larger number would have enabled the researcher to divide the groups into three; free lunch, reduced lunch and no assistance. Finally, the sample size is small and lacks student diversity.

It can be concluded by the results that the effects of SES are lessened through appropriate classroom instruction. As indicated by the data, student-reading levels are not significant as a result of SES alone before or after the implementation of interventions. These data do indicate reading level differences as a result of appropriate RTI interventions for both the Low-SES group and Non-Low-SES group. Classroom data effectively identified students and struggling readers did not fall behind as a result of appropriate instruction.

Further research is needed to examine AIMSweb data using three benchmark WRC scores throughout the academic school year. It would be helpful to see the reading growth of all students for an entire academic school year. A replicated study in an urban school district using a larger student sample could also yield valuable information regarding SES and instruction. Further research involving students' movement between tiers could also be useful in determining how the types and intensities of interventions affect reading fluency.

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Amanda Jill Knight**Objective**

To be considered a candidate to fulfill the responsibilities and related duties as School Psychologist

Experience**Clay Local Schools 07/2006-05/2009**

Band Director, grades 6-12. General Music Teacher grades K-3. Activities included public performances and band recruitment. Principal: Todd Warnock

Valley Local Schools 08/2010-05/2011

Intern School Psychologist, grades K-12. Worked with Special Education Coordinator to participate in the school psychologist role. Duties included student evaluations, grade-level team meetings, consultations, data analysis, and intervention strategies. Supervisor: Ken Smith

Education**Marshall University**

B.A., Music Education K-12

08/2001-12/2005**Morehead State University**

M.A., School Counseling K-12

01/2006-05/2008**Marshall University Graduate College**

Ed.S., School Psychology – Pending Graduation May 5, 2011

08/2008-05/2011**Skills**

Self-motivated

Flexible and Adaptable

Takes Direction

Driven

Communicates with Varied Audiences

Efficient

Procedure Oriented

Technologically Literate



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FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
 IRB2 #00003206

March 17, 2011

Sandra Stroebel, Ph.D
 Psychology Department, MUGC

RE: IRBNet ID# 225708-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Stroebel:

Protocol Title: [225708-1] Second Grade Reading Achievement and Socioeconomic Status

Expiration Date: March 17, 2012

Site Location: MUGC

Type of Change: New Project

APPROVED

Review Type: Exempt Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(1), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Vice Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire March 17, 2012. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Amanda Knight.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.