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Effectiveness of metacognitive instruction on reading comprehension among intermediate phase learners : its link to the PASS theory.

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Abstract

Explicit metacognitive instruction is hypothesised to have positive consequences for the cognitive processing skills of learners, resulting in improved academic performance. Such instruction is likely to be beneficial across the curriculum, but particularly for reading, as low literacy levels are reported in South Africa. A paradigm shift in instruction appears necessary to enhance the current literacy levels in South African schools. This study examined the impact of a Cognitive Enrichment Advantage (CEA), metacognitive intervention on reading comprehension in 83 Grade six learners in two mainstream government schools in Gauteng. Its theoretical and conceptual basis was informed by Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and Feuerstein's theory of Structural Cognitive Modifiability. The study utilised a pre-and post-test, mixed methods, quasi-experimental and cross-lagged research design. The metacognitive intervention was presented to two groups within the experimental school, each with 28 learners, who received the intervention over two phases in the school year (Group one in Term 1 and Group 2 in Term 2). The control school received only regular classroom teaching and served as a comparison against which the experimental school could be measured. Standardised quantitative data was collected from the Cognitive Assessment System (CAS) and the Joint Education Trust (JET) reading comprehension test. Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews, sentence completion tasks, focus groups and feedback from the teacher and parents, pre- and post-intervention. The results indicated that the learners in the experimental school did not show any statistically significant differences in their reading comprehension or CAS scores following the intervention, when compared to the control school. However, the qualitative data revealed increased awareness of the effects of the metacognitive instruction on reading in particular and on learning in general. The intervention also provided opportunities for the learners to reflect on their thinking processes through group discussions, as well as individual tasks. Transfer of skills taught in the intervention could not be confirmed, as post-test results may reflect application when assessed immediately following the intervention, but may not necessarily indicate precise or sustained transfer. Nevertheless, increased learner, parent and teacher metacognitive awareness was evident in the qualitative responses following the intervention and this provides an indication for how educational pedagogy in South Africa could be adjusted. Metacognitive instruction promotes reflection, evaluation and monitoring of thinking and learning processes which may not be observed on the quantitative measures over the duration of this study, but may need a longer period to become consolidated and transfer to other areas. This study contributed to the knowledge base regarding cognitive education, by demonstrating the qualitative value of explicit metacognitive instruction in reading comprehension.