

International Conference on

Speech Language Pathology

May 22-23, 2017 Las Vegas, USA

Speech and language program for the development of literacy: Reading comprehension efficacy in school children

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Background: The expected end product as formal elementary education completed is primarily a satisfactory level of reading comprehension skills, which is required to mediate text-based learning in other school subjects. However, statistics show that a large number of students finish elementary school with substantial deficits in reading comprehension.

Objective: To investigate the effectiveness of a Speech and Language Program for the Development of Literacy (PFPL) in improving the reading comprehension skills of schoolchildren in the fourth grade of elementary school in a Belo Horizonte Municipal School.

Methods: A convenience sample of two classes of fourth grade elementary school students was selected. The students in the class that participated in the PFPL constituted the case group while the students in the non-PFPL class comprised the control group. The PFPL included activities of shared reading, scaffolding strategies and collective discursive construction, in addition to phonological and spelling processing tasks. The reading comprehension skills of the schoolchildren in both groups was assessed using PROLEC subtest 10 (Reading Comprehension) before and after the program.

Results: The performance of the groups was comparable on initial assessment, with high prevalence of children with reading comprehension difficulties. Following the PFPL, the reading comprehension performance of the case group children improved significantly whereas the performance of the control group was unchanged.

Conclusion: The PFPL was effective in improving the schoolchildren's reading comprehension skills.

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