



Etiology of teacher knowledge and instructional skills for literacy at the upper elementary grades

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the etiology of teacher knowledge about and factors that influence implementation of evidence-based reading and writing interventions at the upper elementary grade levels. Five data sources are used in this study: first, we used teacher surveys about their pre-service preparation on reading comprehension and literacy practices gathered during a recent cluster randomized control trial on a reading comprehension intervention conducted with 280 fourth and fifth-grade teachers and their classroom students. We also conducted focus group interviews with 43% of the teachers and observed 90% of the teachers once during the implementation years. For writing, we used data collected from 32 teachers during a 3-year design project for a teacher-led computer-supported writing intervention. We also collected data from groups of school administrators using structured interviews during both studies. Finally, we conducted an artifact review of school curricula and posted professional development (PD) plans. Our results show that in both reading comprehension and writing, all teachers reported not receiving sound evidence-based pre-service preparation and they were not currently employing any evidence-based approaches. Most teachers reported using the basal reading series with very little variation from the lesson scope and sequence. Teachers and administrators frequently reported that skills were being taught in isolation (e.g., skill of the week is summarizing) and that writing was neglected. The interviews showed very interesting patterns of curricula decision-making by school administrators and these findings were further confirmed through the artifact reviews. Based on these results, we recommend that any review of teacher practices focus also on administrator decision-making and school level factors that are driving what happens in the classrooms. The review showed that the teachers themselves do not feel empowered to learn and deliver evidence-based literacy practices and feel constrained by the system.

Keywords Elementary literacy · Instruction · Reading · Teacher knowledge · Writing

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