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The Relationship of the Language-Based
Characteristics of a Selected Group of
Post-Secondary ESL Students to Pass Rates on
the New Jersey Basic Skills Reading Test

by
Tina Previtiera

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
April 16, 2001

Approved by _____
Dr/ Stanley Urban

Date Approved May 3, 2001

ABSTRACT

Tina Previtiera

The Relationship of the Language-Based
Characteristics of a Selected Group of
Post-Secondary ESL Students to Pass Rates
on the New Jersey Basic Skills Reading Test

April 16, 2001

Advised by Dr. Stanley Urban

Learning Disabilities graduate program

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between selected language-based predictors of reading competence and the reading performance of a group of college-level ESL students receiving Basic Skills instruction. It appeared that a language barrier was preventing this group of students from passing their Basic Skills Reading requirement. It was hypothesized that this resulted in a lack of necessary skills for comprehending standard English. Based on theoretical perspectives obtained from a review of the literature, the language-based characteristics needed to obtain a passing score on the Basic Skills Reading are vocabulary, short-term verbal memory, and broad linguistic skills, including grammatical fluency.

Each of the three variables- vocabulary, verbal memory, and linguistic skills-

were measured individually for each student using subtests from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Third Edition- Form A (PPVT-III-A), the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude-Third Edition (DTLA-3), and the Test of Language Development-Intermediate: Third Edition (TOLD-I:3), respectively. These results were then interpreted and compared to the students' scores on the Basic Skills Reading test for any existing patterns and relationships. An examination of the data showed that the predicted relationships did not emerge. Further study is necessary to determine the basis for reading failure among this population in order to formulate effective remedial procedures.

MINI-ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between selected language-based predictors of reading achievement and the reading performance of a group of college-level ESL students who were receiving Basic Skills instruction. After testing, it was found that there was no relationship between performance on the Basic Skills Reading test and the hypothesized predictors of reading achievement.

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Background

The influx of students with diverse cultural backgrounds has increased dramatically at all levels of the educational system. These demographic shifts reflect population growth among African Americans, people of Hispanic descent and recent immigrants including individuals of Asian, African, and European descent. The United States Census Bureau estimates that from elementary through post-secondary levels, 37% of students (1998) are from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Thus, professors and other personnel at the post-secondary level also deal with the issues and problems that this diversity creates. As an instructor of basic skills for Reading at the post-secondary level, I have observed language skills that appear to be the most likely barrier that prevents success in a personalized four-year university setting. Study skills, intelligence, and motivation appear to be adequate in these students. On the surface, many of my basic skills students from diverse cultural backgrounds appear to have learning disabilities since they demonstrate uneven performance standards in different academic areas. This paradox frequently occurs between mathematics and reading where the non-English speaking student, often referred to as an "ESL" student, succeeds in high-order mathematics, such as Calculus III, yet cannot read standard English. These students do not respond positively to remedial assistance in spite of continued effort.

Theory

Inherent in this problem is the need to understand the nature of the reading process. First, it is complex and not completely understood. Nevertheless, reading has been extensively researched by various disciplines. As a basic underpinning, all theoretical perspectives agree that reading is the process of decoding a "visual symbol system superimposed on auditory language" (Johnson & Myklebust, 1967, p. 148). Therefore, the lack of a proficient auditory language will most likely affect a person's ability to "break the code," or read. The most fundamental intent of reading is formulating meaning from the text, "language represented by graphic forms that are systematically arranged" (Bryant & Wiederholt, 1991, p. 1) into words, sentences, and paragraphs. In other words, the importance of a reader's prior experiential knowledge AND language cannot be overestimated. The current thinking in reading research acknowledges the crucial importance of components within the reader such as grammatical sense, vocabulary and semantic memory as determining reading comprehension skills (Moats, 1999).

Value of Study

The correlation between language proficiency and success with reading is of extreme importance, especially in dealing with ESL students. An understanding of the broad language skills processed by these students would have significant implications for methods to be employed in basic skills instruction. With appropriate remediation, the necessary pre-requisites to normal reading achievement could be taught.

If Rowan University seeks to internationalize its student body, an understanding of the relationship between English usage and the ability to pass reading intensive and writing-based courses needs further explication. The results of this study will aid in determining the most efficient approach to remediate students who experience difficulty with passing Basic Skills Testing.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between selected language-based predictors of reading achievement and the performance in reading of a selected group of college-level ESL students.

Research Questions

The data obtained will be used to answer the following overall research question:

- What are the language-based characteristics of a group of Rowan University students that is unable to obtain a passing score on the Basic Skills Test in Reading (NJBST-R)?

In order to answer this broad question, the following subquestions will be answered:

Question 1- What is the relationship between receptive vocabulary skills as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Third Edition- Form A (PPVT III-A) and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

Question 2- What is the relationship between short-term verbal memory as measured by the Word Sequencing and Sentence Imitation subtests of the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition (DTLA-3) and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

Question 3- What is the relationship between broad linguistic skills as measured by the following subtests of the Test of Language Development- Intermediate, Third Edition (TOLD-I:3) and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

- Sentence Combining
- Generals
- Grammatical Comprehension
- Malapropisms

Definition of Terms

The following terms have the following operational definitions within the context of this study.

- **Language competence-** the communication of ideas through an arbitrary system of symbols used according to certain rules that determine meaning and measured by the composite subtests contained on the TOLD-I:3.
- **Vocabulary-** the ability to associate a word with a unit of meaning on a receptive basis as measured by the PPVT III-A.
- **Syntax-** the system of governing the order and combination of words to form sentences and the relationships among the elements within a sentence (Hallahan, 1997, p. 263). Syntax will be measured by the TOLD:I-3.
- **Verbal memory-** the ability to recall a series of related or unrelated words as measured by the DTLA-3.
- **Reading comprehension-** a strategic process whereby readers actively generate the fabric that relates words and sentences to each other and the larger text by monitoring their understanding of words, sentences and paragraphs (Bryant, 1991, p. 1).
- **Basic Skills Testing-** a test of silent reading administered over a period of 60 minutes containing approximately 47-50 questions. The passing score is determined according to a formula established by each college or university. It is usually administered to all newly matriculated undergraduate students except transfer students.

- **ESL-** English as a Second Language. This term applies to students within the educational system who do not use English as their primary language, thereby creating barriers to academic success.

Limitations

There are several limitations that need to be considered when generalizing the findings of this study. The sample for the study was composed of a convenience group of remedial students assigned to the researcher as a result of her graduate assistantship position. The size of the sample is small and the results should be interpreted cautiously. Finally, while the theoretical perspective is sound and has empirical support, other theoretical underpinnings are possible.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Reading, which is the comprehension of written language, has been the focus of vast amounts of study and research. Many aspects of reading are still not fully understood but scientific findings have resulted in a consensus that the act of reading is the convergence of various discrete language skills. In the case of the language-deficient, post-secondary student, the core of the problem lies in the lack of ability to identify and associate meaning with words. Because "reading is very much a language activity, ultimately our ability to read is limited by our language skills (Gunning, 2000, p. 2)." Stated another way, varied experiences and practice with language would be the most beneficial help for a reader that has a language deficiency at the basis of their difficulty.

Reading Comprehension

Despite the numerous definitions that have been formulated as the result of different studies regarding reading, for this project, reading is best viewed as "the process of constructing meaning through the interaction among the reader, the text, and the instructional variables of the reading situation. The degree of interaction varies as a function of factors such as the reader's prior knowledge, skills and strategies, motivation and interests, the type of text, the task demands, and contextual factors (Brozo & Simpson, 1991, p. 3)." Vellutino and his team of researchers found that the ability to identify words in isolation is a basic prerequisite for developing meaning from written

text. This was supported by combined data sets from their research. Adequate reading comprehension is also dependent upon a "reader's ability to recall familiar words and to identify others through spelling, structural, and contextual cues (Durkin, 1974, p. 399)." These prerequisites provide clues as to the reason that language-deficient students experience difficulty with reading. Often, like students who are learning disabled, their background knowledge is not consistent, and thereby creates extremely diverse levels of performance within each individual.

In other words, "because vocabulary words represent the structure and key ideas of a subject matter," deficiencies in word identification are particularly detrimental to accurate reading comprehension. Such a deficiency in skills will prohibit a reader's ability to "understand the meanings of the vocabulary at an elaborate, conceptual level," and as a result becomes an "outsider to the learning process" as described by Moore, Readence and Rickelman (Brozo & Simpson, 1991, p. 120)." In research done by Vellutino, Scanlon and Tanzman (1994) where the characteristics and subskills of poor, normal, and good readers were measured, the poor readers were found to be generally less proficient than the normal readers on tests of semantic and syntactic development (Vellutino et al.)."

Vocabulary is also a critical component that contributes to comprehension during reading. When only the language and language-based measures were included in the analysis [in this experiment], the measure of vocabulary was consistently the strongest predictor (Vellutino et al., 1994, p. 285)." According to Vacca, Vacca, and Gode (1995), Anderson and Freebody documented that the connection between vocabulary and

comprehension can be described with three hypotheses: aptitude, knowledge, and instrumental (Vacca et al.).

The aptitude hypothesis states the "the more intellectually able the student, the more she or he will know the meanings of words and, therefore, comprehend better while reading... A child's environment and experiences, including those in the classroom are crucial in learning concepts and words (Vacca et al., 1995, p. 228)." This principle can be applied to ESL students in that their "verbal intellectual abilities" need to be assessed using the language in which they must perform or function. With this premise, it is implied that vocabulary is most effectively acquired through an immersion in written language and wide reading experiences.

The knowledge hypothesis believes that "students with large vocabularies related to a given topic also have more knowledge about the topic, which in turn produces better comprehension... Vocabulary words, therefore, must be taught within a larger framework of concept development (Vacca et al., 1995, p. 228)." This is because of the relationship between words, concepts and experiences wherein words are verbal abstract representations of these concepts. ESL students often have difficulty in this area though they have participated in thousands of experiences and apparently think about concepts, they may not label these experiences and concepts with English words, therefore inhibiting their communication and perhaps, further cognitive processing about the concept. This perspective is referred to as mental imagery which allows for thinking to occur without the use of words (Sternberg, 1996).

The instrumental hypothesis "establishes a causal chain between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension (Vacca et al., 1995, p. 228)." As a direct result then,

vocabulary instruction should influence comprehension. For educators, this promotes the importance of teaching students the full robust meanings of words.

Extensive research conducted by Beck and McKeown developed four major modes through which students acquire vocabulary:

1. Students develop vocabulary knowledge through wide reading (Fielding, Wilson & Anderson, 1986; Nagy & Herman, 1987).
2. Students learn vocabulary from context but need instruction about context to use it effectively (Jenkins, Stein & Wysocki, 1984; Sternberg, 1987).
3. Students are often hindered as much as they are helped by context. Therefore, they should be encouraged to use the dictionary as an aid in acquiring word meanings (Schate & Baldwin, 1986).
4. Students can also profit from direct instruction in vocabulary (Beck, McKeown & Omanson, 1987; Graves, 1986, 1987; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986)...

All of these proposals are viable ways for students to acquire vocabulary (Cooper, 1997, pp. 231-232)." Ideally, a balance between all four of these approaches would be the most ideal for ESL, or language-deficient students.

Perspectives

Over time, there has been the development of diverse approaches, or theories to reading. There is research that predicts that listening comprehension, a "surrogate measure of language comprehension would be a better predictor of performance on a reading comprehension test than would performance on a test of word identification (Vellutino et al., 1994, p. 282)." This is regardless of age, grade level, or reading ability. This "contextualist" perspective believes that reading is the process of using linguistic context to formulate meaning from printed text. So, "word identification and reading comprehension are both context-driven skills that depend primarily on adequate language comprehension ability and relevant knowledge (Vellutino et al., 1994, p. 280),"

Contrasting research, or the "interactive skills" view predicts that word identification ability is the best indicator of reading comprehension for beginning and less skilled readers, whereas a test of listening comprehension is more appropriate to estimate comprehension skills in more proficient readers.

A lack of English proficiency is a widespread problem among ESL students. Recently, the New York Times (2000) reported that at Princeton University, 67% of 122 incoming graduate students failed an exam of English oral proficiency and 57% failed again after an intensive language program. One wonders about the reading comprehension and writing ability of these students (p. B-11).

Summary

Converging research evidence supports the conclusion that the process of reading is composed of two fundamental components; first, the ability to decode words. This includes the ability to sound out and identify words correctly- and second, the ability to integrate the meaning of each word and use grammatical and syntactical cues to obtain the overall meaning from these linguistic units. Also, reading comprehension requires the retention of this syntactical material and this memory is in turn facilitated by grammatical ability. A reasonable conclusion is that a lack of knowledge of the English language structure can inhibit the development of reading comprehension skills in ESL students.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Sample

This study will examine the language-based characteristics and skills of eight ESL students who have not been able to pass the reading component of the Rowan University Basic Skills examination in Reading. It is hypothesized that deficient language knowledge and application is the most substantial barrier to each individual's success. These students range in age from 21 to 33 years old and have various non-English speaking backgrounds.

Method of Sample Selection

The sample of eight students included in this study was drawn from a group of eleven ESL students attending Rowan University that were being tutored by the author of this study. They were all individually identified as being at risk for failure in their Basic Skills Reading course that is named "Improving Personal Reading Skills" because of their apparent bilingual backgrounds and degree of difficulty observed by the instructor. They were, therefore, instructed in one-on-one or small group tutoring sessions for this particular course, rather than as part of an average class of about 20 to 25 students. These students did not constitute a random sample but represented a convenience group that was accessible to this researcher.

Instrumentation

In order to evaluate the language-based characteristics of the sample, the following measures were utilized due to their relationship with theory-based prerequisites for reading comprehension proficiency. The measures used are standardized and have acceptable reliability and validity.

- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Third Edition- Form A (PPVT III-A):** This is a "measure of listening comprehension for spoken words in standard English and a screening test of verbal ability (AGS, 2000 p. 38)," or, in other words, receptive vocabulary.
- **Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition (DTLA-3):** This entire battery of tests "measures both general intelligence and discrete ability areas (Pro-Ed, 2001, p. 10)." For the primary purpose of this study, though, only two subtests of the 12 possible were used solely to assess the subjects' levels of short-term verbal memory.
- **Test of Language Development- Intermediate: Third Edition (TOLD-I:3):** This complete test includes six "subtests that measure different components of spoken language," or broad linguistic skills. "Generals and Malapropisms (and Picture Vocabulary that was not used) assess the understanding and meaningful use of spoken words. Sentence Combining and Grammatical Comprehension (and Word Ordering that was not used) assess differing aspects of grammar (Pro-Ed, 2001, p. 54)."
- **New Jersey Basic Skills Test in Reading (NJBST-R):** This test provides "an overall indication of proficiency in the following competencies:
 1. the ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and to summarize the ideas in one's own words;

2. the ability to recognize different purposes and methods of writing, to identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally;
3. the ability to separate one's personal opinions and assumptions from a writer's;
4. the ability to define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary;
5. the ability to recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning, and to recognize fallacies in reasoning;
6. the ability to comprehend, develop, and use concepts and generalizations;
7. the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion (see Appendix A for source)."

This test was administered after each student's completion of the course,

"Improving Personal Reading Skills."

Though not formal, and therefore non-standardized, much of the background and details regarding the students were obtained through observations that occurred during instruction.

Collection of Data

The eight subjects of this study were administered the following norm-referenced tests: The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Third Edition- Form A, the Sentence Imitation and Word Sequencing subtests of the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition, and the Sentence Combining, Generals, Grammatic Comprehension, and Malapropisms subtests of the Test of Language Development- Intermediate: Third Edition. These measures assessed the subjects' skills in receptive vocabulary, auditory memory, and American English linguistic skills, respectively.

The students were scheduled and tested individually over a two-week period beginning October 11, 2000. The results from each student's battery of tests were scored, compared to the norms, and analyzed to determine if a pattern or relationship existed with the passing of the Basic Skills test. All raw scores were converted to their corresponding age equivalents using the established norms from each test's manual. The Basic Skills tests were administered to the students on November 1 and 2, 2000. Upon the completion of testing, progress was made in the area of researching related literature. A wide variety of studies, theories, and practices regarding characteristics for success in reading, English as a second language, and the acquisition and importance of vocabulary were reviewed.

Research Design/ Analysis of Data

It is suspected that there will be a positive relationship between each subject's collective levels of receptive vocabulary, auditory memory and syntactic development to the ability to pass a college level basic skills course in reading. In order to compare different types of scores, each score will be converted to its age equivalent as determined in each test's manual. Comparisons will then be drawn between each subject's scores from the standardized tests, and their basic skills' test score. Any patterns or tendencies will be evaluated and reported.

Chapter 4

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Introduction

The data obtained were used to determine the language-based characteristics of a group of Rowan University students who are unable to obtain passing scores on the Basic Skills Test in Reading. The results did not support the hypothesized relationship to basic skills performance. Many of the students who scored at a basal level of the measures were still able to successfully pass the basic skills test for reading.

Results

Question 1- What is the relationship between receptive vocabulary skills as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Third Edition- Form A and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

Each of the eight subjects' vocabulary level was assessed using the third edition of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Form A (PPVT III-A). The age equivalents converted from the raw scores did not consistently predict whether a student would pass the Basic Skills Test in Reading. Table 1 contains the participants' chronological ages, vocabulary levels expressed in age equivalents, and Basic Skills test scores.

**Table 1: Results of PPVT III-A
and Basic Skills Testing**

Subject	CA_a	DA_b	BS_c
1	21-2	5-3	111
2	22-5	13-10	114
3	33-4	6-1	107 _d
4	29-1	4-5	110
5	22-3	2-10	117
6	22-11	2-10	114
7	22-5	2-10	116
8	27-10	2-10	102 _d

<p>a= chronological age, expressed in years and months; e.g. 21-2 refers to 21 years, 2 months</p> <p>b= vocabulary level expressed in developmental age in years and months</p> <p>c= basic skills score</p> <p>d= indicates failure</p>

The minimum passing score for the Basic Skills test is a 110, from a possible range of 101 to 125. Three of the eight subjects were able to pass this Basic Skills test in Reading even though their individual vocabulary levels were far below their chronological ages. For example, Subject 5 manifested a vocabulary score at the basal of the PPVT III-A, but nevertheless obtained the highest score of the entire group on the Basic Skills test. However, this pattern of a low vocabulary and a passing Basic Skills test score did not hold true for Subjects 1 through 4 and Subject 8. These subjects did not pass the Basic Skills test despite varying vocabulary levels. Subjects 1, 2, and 4, however, passed the Basic Skills test with more appropriate vocabulary levels, though still far below

chronological ages. From these results, in other words, a truly perfect relationship between vocabulary, as measured by the PPVT III-A and the Basic Skills test that purports to measure reading comprehension is unlikely. Vocabulary is a skill that contributes to success with reading at a college level, but this relationship was not present in these cases.

Question 2- What is the relationship between short-term verbal memory as measured by the Word Sequencing and Sentence Imitation subtests of the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

Verbal memory skills of the subjects were evaluated using the Sentence Imitation and Word Sequencing subtests of the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition (DTLA-3) and are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of DTLA-3 Sentence Imitation and Word

Sequencing subtests and Basic Skills Testing

<u>Subject</u>	<u>CA</u> ^a	<u>SI</u> ^b	<u>WS</u> ^c	<u>BS</u> ^d
1	21-2	below basal of 6	11-5	111
2	22-5	9-6	below basal of 6	114
3	33-4	below basal of 6	below basal of 6	107 ^e
4	29-1	below basal of 6	below basal of 6	110
5	22-3	below basal of 6	6	117
6	22-11	below basal of 6	below basal of 6	114
7	22-5	below basal of 6	below basal of 6	116
8	27-10	below basal of 6	6	102 ^e

a= chronological age, expressed in years and months; e.g. 21-2 refers to 21 years, 2 months
b= sentence imitation, expressed in years and months
c= word sequencing, expressed in years and months
d= basic skills
e= indicates failure

Remarkably all of the scores when converted to their age equivalents ranked at the basal of below six years old. Since the distribution of scores on the DTLA-3 was consistently poor and all subjects scored near the floor of the test, no relationship could be determined between short term verbal memory and Basic Skills test scores. However, Subjects 1, 2, and 5 all scored above the basal on one of the two subtests and passed the Basic Skills test in Reading. This pattern could be an indication that the ability to process and remember verbal information, or verbal memory, does play a role in compensation or alternative strategies that may be present within this group of students.

Question 3- What is the relationship between broad linguistic skills as measured by the following subtests of the Test of Language Development-Intermediate: Third Edition (TOLD-I:3) and ability to pass the NJBST-R?

- Sentence Combining
- Generals
- Grammatic Comprehension
- Malapropisms

The evaluation of broad linguistic skills was included in the series of measures administered to each of the subjects. Four subtests of the third edition of the intermediate Test of Language Development were used. Those scores are contained in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Results of the TOLD:I-3 Sentence Combining and Generals

subtests and Basic Skills Testing

<u>Subject</u>	<u>CA</u> _a	<u>SC</u> _b	<u>GL</u> _c	<u>BS</u> _d
1	21-2	13	below basal of 7	111
2	22-5	8	below basal of 7	114
3	33-4	8	below basal of 7	107 _e
4	29-1	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	110
5	22-3	9	below basal of 7	117
6	22-11	10-6	below basal of 7	114
7	22-5	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	116
8	27-10	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	102 _e

a= chronological age, expressed in years and months; e.g. 21-2 refers to 21 years, 2 months

b= sentence combining, expressed in years and months

c= generals, expressed in years and months

d= basic skills

e= indicates failure

Table 4: Results of the TOLD-I:3 Grammatical

Comprehension and Malapropisms subtests and Basic

Skills Testing

<u>Subject</u>	<u>CA</u> ^a	<u>GC</u> ^b	<u>MP</u> ^c	<u>BS</u> ^d
1	21-2	13-3	below basal of 7	111
2	22-5	9-6	below basal of 7	114
3	33-4	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	107 ^e
4	29-1	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	110
5	22-3	11	below basal of 7	117
6	22-11	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	114
7	22-5	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	116
8	27-10	below basal of 7	below basal of 7	102 ^e

a= chronological age, expressed in years and months; e.g. 21-2 refers to 21 years, 2 months

b= grammatical comprehension, expressed in years and months

c= malapropisms, expressed in years and months

d= basic skills

e= indicates failure

Developmental age equivalents below the basal of seven years were obtained by all subjects for two of the four subtests, the Generals subtest shown in Table 3 and the Malapropisms subtest shown in Table 4. For the other two subtests- Sentence Combining and Grammatical Comprehension- most of the subjects ranked above the basal. Subjects 1, 2, and 5 scored above the basal on two of those subtests. But, of the other five subjects who ranked below the basal on at least three of the four subtests, three were among the low scorers on the basic skills' test as well. These tendencies demonstrate that linguistic

skills are helpful to acquiring accurate reading comprehension- measured by the Basic Skills exam- but not the determinant of success on the test.

Summary

In conclusion, this battery of tests and the results indicate that the usual language-based characteristics related to successful reading skill development are not operant in this group of students. In other words, students who consistently shared extremely low levels of vocabulary, verbal memory and syntactical skills were, in some cases, able to successfully complete the Basic Skills Reading test.

Chapter 5

Summary, Findings, and Conclusions

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between selected language-based predictors of reading competence and the reading performance of a group of college-level ESL students receiving Basic Skills instruction. It appeared that a language barrier was preventing this group of students from passing their Basic Skills Reading requirement. It was hypothesized that this resulted in a lack of necessary skills for comprehending standard English. Based on theoretical perspectives obtained from a review of the literature, the language-based characteristics needed to obtain a passing score on the Basic Skills Reading are vocabulary, short-term verbal memory, and broad linguistic skills, including grammatical fluency.

Each of the three variables- vocabulary, verbal memory, and linguistic skills-were measured individually for each student using subtests from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test- Third Edition- Form A (PPVT III-A), the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude- Third Edition (DTLA-3), and the Test of Language Development- Intermediate: Third Edition (TOLD-I:3), respectively. These results were then interpreted and compared to the students' scores on the Basic Skills Reading test for any existing patterns and relationships. An examination of the data showed that the predicted relationships did not emerge. Further study is necessary to determine the basis for reading failure among this population in order to formulate effective remedial procedures.

Findings

It was found that the hypothesized relationship between performance on the Basic Skills Reading test and proficiency in vocabulary, verbal memory, and broad linguistic skills, as measured in this particular study was not present. In other words, there was a lack of an overriding pattern among the subjects, as well as within each subject. Therefore, these three variables are not accurate predictors of reading success in this sample of students. This was demonstrated through the fact that some subjects passed the Basic Skills test despite levels of vocabulary, verbal memory and linguistic skills that were below a basal level of performance; yet, other subjects did not obtain passing scores even with these levels above the basal.

Discussion & Implications

There are some considerations to keep in mind, though, when generalizing the findings of this study. Though there were no evident relationships among the variables measured, it could simply be due to the fact that the types of vocabulary, verbal memory, and linguistic skills used during proficient reading cannot be appropriately measured using the three standardized batteries of tests utilized in this study.

Also, all of the individuals who participated in this study possess practical intelligence for everyday living activities and have succeeded in various college courses. It can, therefore, be assumed that they have cognitive ability within the normal range. However, the results clearly show a lack of proficiency in standard English. This discrepancy may be due to the language barrier itself. In other words, the students' area of weakness- English- was the mode of communication through which the testing was

administered. It is possible that if these same measures were given to each of the subjects in her primary language, the results would reflect a positive relationship between the variables and pass rates on the New Jersey Basic Skills Reading Test.

In order for these eight and other ESL students to smoothly transition into the educational system at Rowan University, a further understanding of the relationship between English usage and the ability to succeed in a college environment needs to be developed. Apparently greater specialization in instructional programs established to support these students will be necessary. These programs will be labor-intensive and require a fuller understanding of the basis of the students' inability to pass Basic Skills testing. One possibility is that intensive English language courses should be provided. These accommodations should be arranged as a service provided to the students via their admission into the University, not as a courtesy bestowed upon them. Above all, they should meet the standards of any other upper-level college course, and support the students throughout their college careers.

As a result of this study, it can also be implied that further research needs to be done in the area of language characteristics related to reading. From a broad viewpoint, this field is still relatively new, and therefore, the possibility of contributing factors and relationships among them yet to be determined is highly likely.

Appendix A

New Jersey Basic Skills Test citation source

This particular citation occurs in Chapter 3 on pages 16-17.

Scoring Your Answer Sheet

This test is designed to assess your proficiency in Basic Academic Competencies in reading comprehension.

These Basic Academic Competencies are:

1. the ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and to summarize the ideas in one's own words;
2. the ability to recognize different purposes and methods of writing, to identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally;
3. the ability to separate one's personal opinions and assumptions from a writer's;
4. the ability to define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary;
5. the ability to recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning, and to recognize fallacies in reasoning;
6. the ability to comprehend, develop, and use concepts and generalizations;
7. the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion.

These are competencies in reading comprehension that a national panel of high school and college educators has identified in the College Board's publication, *Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do*, as being essential to effective college work.

Your total score on the test gives an overall indication of your proficiency in these competencies.

The questions in the test are also grouped into clusters (or subcategories). Each of the clusters relates to one or more of the Basic Academic Competencies. These clusters and the Basic Academic Competencies to which they relate are indicated below:

- Identifying Word and/or Phrase Meaning Through Context (relates to Basic Academic Competency 4)
- Understanding Literal and Interpretive Meaning (relates to Basic Academic Competencies 1, 2, 6)
- Understanding Writers' Assumptions, Opinions, and Tone (relates to Basic Academic Competencies 2, 3, 5, 7)

Your cluster scores further describe your performance by indicating your strengths and weaknesses in these specific areas.

Determining Your Total Score

The correct answer to each test question is indicated by one of the symbols (, ,) on the self-scoring answer sheet. Count the number of X's inside all the symbols and enter the total number in the box below.

	Number of correct answers	Number of questions
Reading Comprehension	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="45"/>

Look up your total number of correct answers in the appropriate column of Table 1, below, to find your scaled score and percentile rank.

Table 1: Total Score

Number Correct	Scaled Score	Percentile Rank*	Number Correct	Scaled Score	Percentile Rank*
45	125	99+	27	112	48
44-43	124	99	26-25	111	42
42	123	98	24	110	37
41	122	97	23-22	109	31
40-39	121	94	21	108	26
38	120	91	20-19	107	21
37-36	119	87	18	106	16
35	118	82	17	105	12
34	117	77	16-15	104	9
33-32	116	71	14	103	6
31	115	66	13-12	102	4
30-29	114	60	11-0	101	3
28	113	54			

*Your percentile rank shows how your score on the Reading Comprehension test compares with the scores of a comparison, or reference, group of 1,100 students at 26 two-year and four-year colleges who took the test in the spring of 1988. For example, a percentile rank of 80 indicates you scored higher than 80 percent of the 1,100 students in the comparison group.

Determining Your Cluster Scores

The different symbols (, ,) on the answer sheet indicate the clusters to which the questions belong. To find your score for the first cluster (Identifying Word and/or Phrase Meaning Through Context), count the X's in the squares. Enter this score in the first box in Table 2 below. Similarly, count the number of X's within the particular symbols for each of the other clusters in the test and enter the numbers in the appropriate boxes.

Table 2: Cluster Scores

	Number Correct	Number of Questions
Identifying Word and/or Phrase Meaning Through Context	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="11"/>
Understanding Literal and Interpretive Meaning	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="19"/>
Understanding Writers' Assumptions, Opinions, and Tone	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="15"/>

How Your Scores Will Be Used

Your total score together with your score on each cluster will provide useful information about your skills in reading comprehension. This information will help place you in the appropriate college courses.

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