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Defining Reading *Efficacy* From the Reader's Perspective: A Qualitative Approach to Understanding Reading Competence

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P20 Motivation &
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Introduction

Researchers have noted that investigations of student motivation may provide insights into why many students experience difficulties along the path to reading *efficacy*, or competencies (Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield et al., 2004).

Self-efficacy, which refers to the beliefs people have about their capabilities, is an important factor for predicting academic achievement and likely a strong predictor of success, persistence, and resilience in reading.

Reading self-efficacy measures have been fraught with conceptual problems, however. According to Bandura's (2006) guidelines for constructing self-efficacy measures, items should be phrased in terms of "can do" statements, be domain specific rather than general, and should adequately cover the skills required for the task.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to use a qualitative approach to gather information about what reading skills or qualities students think reflect reading efficacy. We also sought to examine whether the skills students identify differ as a function of students' reading achievement level and grade level. We hope to use results from this study to create new items to assess reading self-efficacy among early adolescents.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants in the study were 2,342 students in Grade 4 to 8 from seven schools in a city in Kentucky—three elementary schools and four middle schools. A computerized survey, lasting approximately 35 minutes, was administered in students' classrooms or in a computer lab during Winter 2012 using the Qualtrics survey software program. Students had the option of using headphones to listen to the survey items read aloud to them.



Fifth-grade students taking the reading survey.

Measures

This study focuses on students' responses to one open-ended survey item pertaining to reading efficacy: "What makes someone a good reader?" They were able to type responses without character limit. Students' scores on the 2011 Kentucky state standardized criterion-referenced reading test were obtained from school records.

Analyses

Qualitative data responses were initially imported and reviewed in Microsoft Excel. The data were then grouped into four categories corresponding to students' reading scores on the state standardized test (i.e., Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, Distinguished).

Data were analyzed using a coding system developed by the researchers. Three coders worked separately on a subset of the data collaboratively to reach a coding scheme that adequately represented the data. Discordant codes were discussed until 90% agreement was reached (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Researchers compared patterns in the coding distribution for students at varying performance levels and grade levels.

Results

Table 1

Codes and Sample Responses, by Theme

Code	n _{codes}	Example
READING SKILLS		
Comprehension	802	"If you can read and understand a text you are a good reader."
Oral Fluency	382	"A good reader can fluently read without stuttering and they take breaths at periods and commas."
Mental Fluency/Ease	48	"Someone who can read in their head without getting confused."
Speed/Pace	224	"They read at a good pace without rushing."
Meaning Making	45	"A good reader to me is also a person who tries to connect with the book- make world to book, or book to self, or book to book connections."
Writing	74	"I think if you write well and can spell well you are also a good reader because spelling and writing has to do with reading."
Grammar	56	"What makes someone a good reader is that they know what words mean and what part of speech it is."
Word Attack	98	"If they don't understand a word they study the words around them to find out the meaning."
Vocabulary	237	"When you can understand all or most of the vocabulary and if you can understand it well."
Listening	30	"A good reader listens in class when teacher is talking."
Reading Skills (vague)	106	"Their ability to read."
Reading Skills (specific)	167	"A good reader is able to infer different things from the book. They also can pick out different elements of the reading passage and understand and explain them."
WORK HABITS		
Practice	190	"When you take time out of your day to practice and work on your reading skills."
Homework/Classwork	28	"They complete all reading assignments."
Frequency (Time)	150	"You can be a good reader by reading everyday at least 20 minutes."
Quantity (Amount)	171	"I think the more books you read the better you are with reading and with life."
SELF-REGULATION		
Level/Difficulty	179	"A good reader is when they can read and understand a book that is higher or at the same reading level."
Persistence, Effort, Grit	229	"What makes me a good reader is rereading the sentence or chapter that I don't understand."
Attention and Focus	225	"Someone that is a good reader is someone that pays close attention to the book and can focus on the book and not get distracted by many things."
Help-Seeking	34	"You must not be afraid to ask questions when you are confused."
MOTIVATION/AFFECT		
Self-Efficacy and Self-Beliefs	75	"What makes someone a good reader is not how well they do in reading, it is how much they feel confident about themselves as a reader."
Enjoyment, Interest, Affect, Emotion	204	"They enjoy reading and do so often without being asked or told to."
ACHIEVEMENT/PERFORMANCE		
	84	"A good reader gets a high number on reading in the MAP test, gets distinguished or proficient in reading on the KCCT, and gets all A's and B's in language arts."
OTHER		
	184	"Someone who visualizes what is happening in the story."

Key Findings

Regardless of achievement level or grade level, the most coded categories were, in order of frequency, reading skills, work habits, and self-regulation.

Reading skills were mentioned more often as achievement level and grade level increased.

Work habits were coded less frequently as achievement level increased. The same pattern was shown as grade level increased.

Self-regulatory strategies was more often reported by younger students.

The "Other" category included responses related to, but not limited to, social persuasions, relative ability comparisons, mental imagery while reading, and genre awareness.

Table 2

Percentage of Total Codes Reflecting Themes by Achievement Level

	Full Sample (N = 2168)	Novice (n = 70)	Apprentice (n = 376)	Proficient (n = 1145)	Distinguished (n = 577)
Reading Skills	59	45	52	60	64
Work Habits	14	26	18	14	11
Self-Regulation	17	17	19	17	18
Intrinsic Motivation/Affect	7	5	6	7	9
Achievement/Performance	2	7	3	2	2
Other	5	4	5	6	3

Note. Percentages were calculated as the ratio of the number of codes in a given theme to total number of codes within a given achievement category.

Table 3

Percentage of Total Codes Reflecting Themes by Grade Level

	Grade 4 (n = 140)	Grade 5 (n = 129)	Grade 6 (n = 710)	Grade 7 (n = 742)	Grade 8 (n = 447)
Reading Skills	28	33	53	62	66
Work Habits	31	25	16	15	14
Self-Regulation	26	27	16	10	8
Intrinsic Motivation/Affect	5	5	8	7	6
Achievement/Performance	2	4	3	1	2
Other	9	5	8	7	6

Note. Percentages were calculated as the ratio of the number of codes in a given theme to total number of codes within a given grade level.

Discussion

Analyzing student responses about the skills needed to be a competent reader might help further an understanding of how best to assess reading self-efficacy.

We hope that this qualitative analysis can be used to develop theoretically sound measures of reading self-efficacy. Such measures should be sure to include items relating to students' reading skills, work habits, and self-regulation.

Better quantitative measures can help researchers investigate the relationship between reading self-efficacy, reading achievement, and motivation, in a variety of settings and with diverse learners.



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