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Behavior Strategies and Progress Monitoring

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An Action Research Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education
Northwestern College, Orange City, IA

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Abstract

This action research was motivated by the researcher's desire to connect with students through PBIS while increasing their IEP reading progress monitoring scores. The researcher is a seventh-grade teacher in her third year of teaching. Participants were her own students in reading access class. Reading access class is a small group for students testing at least three grade levels below. During the nine-week research period, a specific procedure for PBIS and incentives was put in place and reading IEP goals were progress monitored. Results showed an increase in each student's reading progress monitoring scores. The research was designed with the potential for the researcher to assist other teachers with implementation of her procedures across all IEP goal areas and all grade levels to increase positive behavior and improve relationships with students, as well as see an increase in progress monitoring scores.

Keywords: Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Individualized Education Program, Reading, Progress Monitoring

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Behavior Strategies and Progress Monitoring

Many students who use an individual education program (IEP) dread the biweekly routine of reading progress monitoring. Whereas completing progress monitoring is a necessary activity, it is typically not a top priority for students. Some students are tired of doing it, some do not care about it as they do not understand how it affects them, and others are discouraged as they feel they can never reach their grade level in reading. No matter a student's attitude toward reading progress monitoring, the data gained from progress monitoring is the main source informing instructional decisions on the student's behalf (Reno et al., 2017). The need for students to extend the greatest effort possible in their reading progress monitoring is essential for their reading success. Whereas many reading strategies have been applied to assist students towards grade level success in reading, no research has been found that applies both the principles of positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) to small group reading intervention.

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) have a successful history of motivating students toward work completion as well as helping teachers build healthy, positive, and encouraging relationships with students (Lee & Gage, 2020). If teachers build positive, healthy relationships with students, students are more likely to increase their scores and increase their motivation on important testing teachers use for instructional decisions (Reno et al., 2017). PBIS combined with small group reading instruction for students performing under their grade level in reading has led to growth in reading comprehension (Braun & Hughes, 2020).

The purpose of this action research project is to study the effect of applying specific positive behavior strategies with specific small-group reading instruction on biweekly reading IEP monitoring scores.

Research for this paper was drawn from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool through DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar. Studies were chosen if they had been published within the last ten years in a peer-reviewed journal. Study topics included the effectiveness of PBIS, tools used to motivate students while using PBIS, various reading strategies, and using PBIS to build relationships. Studies were reviewed and used in this action research to understand the current use of PBIS in conjunction with reading strategies and what gaps exist in using PBIS in conjunction with reading strategies to move students towards grade level success

Students who are given instruction through PBIS strategies in conjunction with small group reading minutes should be able to understand the importance of their biweekly reading progress monitoring and how the monitoring results affect the student's education. This ultimately will help students to move closer to attaining grade level success in their reading. This action research is valuable as it will be applicable in other IEP goal areas such as math, writing, or executive functioning. Using the repetitive procedure of both PBIS and reading strategies together, students will be able to engage in the process alongside the teacher, gaining a positive relationship and being successful in moving towards grade level reading success.

This study began with the participants for what PBIS incentives the student would like to receive. PBIS-specific, procedural instruction in conjunction with specific, procedural reading instruction will occur during thirty-minute small group reading access classes, one time per

week–two students per thirty-minute session. All typical classroom and school wide PBIS topics will be covered; IEP data and why it is important to the students and beneficial for them to try their hardest and take their progress monitoring seriously. This research was conducted to see if using PBIS to build a relationship with students in conjunction with small group reading sessions will assist in increasing the student’s biweekly reading progress monitoring scores in moving them up a level in their IEP reading goal.

Review of the Literature

The Effectiveness of PBIS

In recent years, several studies have considered the effects of PBIS implementation in classrooms. According to a meta-analysis completed by Lee and Gage (2020), PBIS achievement. Their surveys of 8,781 schools showed statistically significant reductions in school discipline and increased levels of academic achievement (Lee & Gage, 2020). Moreover, their study included schools of various populations and socioeconomic statuses (Lee & Gage, 2020). This large study suggests that PBIS continues to remain an effective strategy for relationship building and increasing academic achievement.

McIntosh and Lane (2019) studied the effects PBIS has on students affected by special needs, as well as typical students with educators who follow a specific procedure while implementing PBIS. In the hundreds of schools that McIntosh and Lane evaluated, the schools that were found to have healthy, sustainable school climates were those that used specific PBIS procedures and incentives with their students (McIntosh & Lane, 2019). The impact of fidelity in PBIS is vast in that it assists in building relationships with students, provides a sense of sustainability and reliability for students, and in providing specific instruction it increases

students' academic achievement. Their study demonstrates that PBIS is sustainable at schools in which teachers implement their PBIS strategies with fidelity (McIntosh & Lane, 2019).

Chaffee et al. focused on using peer-to-peer support to encourage positive behavior (2020). In this qualitative and quantitative study, students focused on monitoring their other peers' behavior in a PBIS classroom setting. The researchers received feedback from the classroom teachers in the study that using positive peer correction and support helped to build a better classroom culture (Chaffee et al., 2020). In addition, the teachers reported that the study students gain a better understanding of what behavior was expected of them (Chaffee et al., 2020). Additionally, recording each other's behavior and then conferencing with their teacher about their results assisted in building a relationship with the classroom teacher (Chaffee et al., 2020).

In a mixed methods study, Krach et al. (2017) looked at the most effective way for an entire team of teachers to log their students' behavior while implementing and utilizing PBIS strategies. The researchers looked at behavior logs along with the implementation of PBIS behavior incentives (Krach et al., 2017). Their findings were surprising in that most of the schools did not have an efficient system to track PBIS and incentives (Krach et al., 2017). The researchers thought that using the same process and methods would better maximize PBIS (Krach et al., 2017). Also, they suggest that having a specific procedure that students could rely on would increase positive behavior scores and, in turn, academic scores (Krach et al., 2017).

While implementing PBIS procedures, teachers must also employ culturally appropriate responses. As teachers work with students from all cultures and backgrounds, having knowledge about culturally appropriate responses is essential to being universal in using PBIS strategies. In

2017, Parsons provided professional development in a school around six culturally appropriate responses to use with students of various backgrounds and ethnicity (Parsons, 2017). When teachers put Parsons' culturally appropriate responses into practice, behavior incidents with non-white students decreased (Parsons, 2017). In comparison, Taherkhani and Moradi studied the emotional effects that PBIS has on English Language Learners (2017). These researchers also showed the importance of culturally appropriate responses and how teachers can be successful with students of different backgrounds and ethnicity (Taherkhani & Moradi, 2017). They also explain that through PBIS strategies, students will become capable of self-regulation, gain emotional intelligence, and be more willing to communicate. and increase their reading comprehension when culturally appropriate responses are implemented by teachers with fidelity (Taherkhani & Moradi, 2017). When teachers use PBIS strategies in conjunction with other academically.

PBIS and Reading Comprehension Methods

Whereas each school culture is unique, the methods used to deliver PBIS will also be adapted in ways that work best for individual schools. In looking for effective ways to deliver PBIS, Gore and his research team found that using preference surveys prior to delivering PBIS expectations can be an effective strategy with students affected by special needs (2021). Through preference surveys, Gore et al. motivated each student, while also learning more about each individual student's likes and dislikes (2021). While delivering the preference survey, Gore and his research team also found that it became easier to communicate with students affected by special needs, as well as provided an opportunity for setting behavioral goals and expectations (Gore et al., 2021).

In attempts to build motivation for students to develop their reading abilities, Akyol and Sural followed a very specific action plan (Akyol & Sural, 2021). They built a framework to help their students become better readers and encouraged them to build motivation during the process (Akyol & Sural, 2021). Whereas their students' reading comprehension levels rose by 83%, Akyol & Sural noted that if they had better classroom management strategies in place, perhaps they could have raised their students' motivation and confidence in their reading skills (Akyol & Sural, 2021). PBIS, combined with their reading framework, may have been a successful combination for these researchers.

In another method to build motivation in readers, Savasci and Akyel looked at several factors to see what contributions they made to motivate students to read, as well as improve comprehension (2022). They used a framework that compared reading comprehension, silent reading rate, receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge, and intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation (Savasci & Akyel, 2022). They found that the best motivation for their readers was a small-group setting where students were reading aloud to their teacher (Savasci & Akyel, 2022). Through Savasci and Akyel's as well as motivation to continue putting forth effort in their reading (2022).

Other researchers have studied what motivation techniques are most effective when it comes to student reading. Wijekumar and his research team looked at a computer-based software program to build reading motivation for students in their school (2022). Whereas they did see an increase in reading comprehension skills while using the program, they noted that future research should look at any methods that specific teachers were using with students to provide motivation for completing their computer-based reading comprehension training (Wijekumar et al., 2022). They noted that whereas the computer-based software was an effective program, there is no

replacement for a human teacher providing positive encouragement and reinforcement for their students (Wijekumar et al., 2022).

Using positive praise has shown to be of the utmost importance when integrating PBIS into classrooms. The Groves research team used the good behavior game in a classroom that integrates students with special needs (2022). Using this good behavior game model, students' off-task and negative behavior decreased from 90% of their school day to 60% of their school day (Groves et al., 2022). Both students and teachers noted that they were able to accomplish more work academically due to decreased behaviors (Groves et al., 2022). Along with positive praise, applying PBIS in small groups has shown to be effective (Sembiring et al., 2018). students, the teachers not only improved reading comprehension but had dramatic increases in their students' Sembiring et al., 2018).

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Teachers use many different methods to increase their students' reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a core focus in schools as students from high school. For example, a student cannot fill out a job application if they do not know what the questions on the application are asking them. Roberts and his teaching team were frustrated that students could not read their science textbook (2020). They decided to break the textbook content into easier and smaller chunks that their students with special needs could comprehend (Roberts et al., 2020). Their team also developed a specific line of comprehension questions so that the teachers could be assured that the students were comprehending their science textbook (Roberts et al., 2020). After reviewing the students' answers to the comprehension questions this teaching team found that the

students' comprehension of their science textbook had increased using this method (Roberts et al., 2020).

Another research team investigated the correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension (Makebo et al., 2022). They focused on the measurements used to increase reading comprehension (Makebo et al., 2022). Through this study, they found that even when students are directed to read silently, they were able to answer comprehension questions accurately the more they were directed to read independently (Makebo et al., 2022). Braun and Tejero decided to look specifically at the instructional reading strategies that special education teachers used to enhance the reading comprehension of their students affected by autism (2020). This study found that teachers are using evidence-based practices and supports with their students to increase comprehension (Braun and Tejero, 2020). Braun and Tejero noted that future research should include more professional development to help teachers create reading comprehension strategies to reach the needs of students affected by special needs (2020). In a meta-analysis, Simmons et al. compared the value of teachers using their own specific reading strategies vs. students reading silently (2013). These researchers specifically noted that teachers who had a specific reading strategy, whatever strategy that was, saw an increase in their student's reading comprehension (Simmons et al., 2013). Both studies emphasized the importance of having a reading strategy that works best for the students should be used consistently in order to effectively improve student reading scores.

Using PBIS to build relationships and academic achievement

A teacher developing a relationship with a student is not a guarantee for a student's academic success; however, a good relationship If a student knows that someone at their school

cares about them, they are more likely to attend and work hard for their education. Developing classroom management strategies that include PBIS helps teachers develop relationships with students. Orr et al. applied class-wide PBIS strategies in a middle school inclusive special education setting, with a special focus on teacher positive praise rates (2020). This research showed that teachers who focused on positive praise and positive interactions with their students not only increased positive behavior but also increased students' academic scores (Orr et al., 2020). Other research has also seen positive results utilizing a framework to work towards positive relationships and improved academic scores. Pierce and Mueller established a PBIS framework with their special education students (2018). Their research also showed that establishing a PBIS framework not only increased the student and teacher relationship but also increased the academic level of their students (Pierce and Mueller, 2018).

Reno et al. focused their PBIS study on students with high-frequency behaviors (2017). This research team used PBIS to not only decrease the students' unwanted behavior but to increase the academic levels of students of various races and socioeconomic statuses (Reno et al., 2017). By specifically training their staff in PBIS strategies, they successfully implemented PBIS and showed an increase in their student's' math and reading scores (Reno et al., 2017). In comparison, Nocera et al. went to a low-performing middle school in Connecticut (2014). They took a small group of 75 students and their teachers and began to implement PBIS with this group (Nocera et al., 2014). They created an original PBIS framework to meet the needs of their middle school students that included high-quality instruction and differentiated instruction for English language learners and students with special needs (Nocera et al., 2014) Also, they progress monitored all students in the study, used early interventions for academic and behavioral needs, and used data to make all decisions for individual students (Nocera et al.,

2014). Overall, this research team saw a 40% decrease in negative behaviors in their student group (Nocera et al., 2014). These researchers also noted that the key component of success with their students was developing a relationship through PBIS strategies, thereby increasing their students' academic achievement (Nocera et al., 2014).

Summary

In examining these various research studies, it has been found that many teachers have successfully used PBIS and its many methods, strategies, and incentives. By teachers purposely working to build a relationship with their students, positive outcomes can be achieved. Beyond developing a positive relationship, PBIS has been found to assist students with increasing their academic scores. By creating a PBIS environment and establishing a framework, teachers can help students increase their reading comprehension skills. By incorporating PBIS and reading comprehension skills, students should be able to develop a relationship with their teachers as well as increase their reading scores.

Methods

Teachers are required to complete the biweekly progress monitoring as outlined in a student's IEP, but many students have become weary in giving their best efforts on all progress monitoring. If students are not putting forth their best effort on each biweekly data point, is progress monitoring an effective data tool? How will students know the importance of their progress monitoring if teachers do not explain it to them?

The researcher sought to learn if building a relationship through PBIS strategies can assist students in having a clearer understanding of how their progress monitoring affects their education and, combined with small group reading strategies, increase their progress monitoring scores. To test if there is a correlation between PBIS and raising a student's level of academic achievement, the researcher focused on one question: How does small-group reading access minutes combined with PBIS and its incentives increase biweekly progress monitoring scores? A dependent samples T-Test was conducted to see if students grew from their first progress monitoring data point to their final data point during the nine-week research period. By increasing progressing monitoring scores, students themselves and their grade level peers.

Participants

Study participants are students in the researcher's seventh grade reading access small group in a midwestern middle school in the United States. Special education students qualify for reading access class by testing more than two grade levels below their grade-level expectation in reading. Reading access class takes place for thirty minutes, one time per week. There are two students in each reading access class, allowing for small-group instruction. The school is one of three middle schools in this school midwestern district. The school has an overall population of 1,200 students. It is mainly composed of families in the middle-class range and 34% of students receive free or reduced lunches.

The six student participants varied in ethnicities as well as their level of special needs and services they received on their IEP. Various goals that the students were working on in their IEPs included reading, writing, math, adaptive behavior, communication, and hearing. The students were working on reading comprehension goals at the first-and third-grade levels. One student had a reading goal of first-grade fluency, and one student had a goal of reading first-grade sight words. Two students also received English Language Learner accommodations in addition to special education services. The teacher in the classroom has taught special education and monitored reading IEP goals for three years.

There were several other variables in this action research. Some students missed reading access sessions as they were absent on the specific school day of their session. The students also used various types and levels of reading probes as outlined in the IEPs. The differences in the levels and types of reading probes did not inhibit the researcher from finding out if the students were able to increase their biweekly progress monitoring scores through the researcher utilizing PBIS in their instructional minutes.

Data Collection

The researcher completed a quantitative action research study to determine the effectiveness of PBIS strategies toward increasing progress monitoring scores. The research study took place during the first nine weeks of the school year. The first data point was taken during the first week of school. Also, during the first week of school, the preference assessment was given to students so that they could select the PBIS incentive toward which they would like to work. Past the first week of school, a progress monitoring data point was collected every other week for the first nine weeks of school, for a total of five data points. Data points were gathered following the procedures outlined in each student's individual IEP reading goal. Each reading access small group and progress monitoring session was completed by the researcher.

The procedure the researcher used for PBIS was specific and implemented in the reading access class during each thirty-minute instructional period. First, the researcher would greet students and ask students a specific question. For example, what did you do in P.E. this morning? The researcher ensured that it was a question students could not answer with a yes or no. Given that the researcher worked with the students in the middle of their school day, such questions demonstrate to students that the researcher knows them well enough to know their schedule. These types of greeting questions open the door to a friendly conversation about what the student has enjoyed thus far about their school day.

Second, the researcher provided students with reminders about why we are here (in reading access class). The teacher stated, “We are working together to become better readers. Reading is very important. You will use it for the rest of your life. You need to be able to understand what you read in order to fill out a job application, read instructions at your job, and pass your classes in order to graduate. It is important to put forth all your effort (try very hard and work to the best of your ability) in your reading access class and your reading progress monitoring so that I, your teacher, have the best data and can help you become a better reader and be successful in school as well as later in your life.”

Third, the teacher always used positive phrasing with rule reminders during instructional time. The researcher reminds students about how important reading is and that they need to take this thirty-minute class seriously. For example, instead of the teacher saying, “You better try hard, or you won’t make any progress in reading,” the teacher says, “We work together in this class to sound out letter combinations so that we can become better readers. This will help us in every aspect of life. Reading and understanding what we are reading is a very important life skill. Your teacher wants to help you become a better reader—I’m cheering you on—we can do this!”

Fourth, during reading instructional time, the researcher provided positive praise and feedback for students throughout their reading small group class. Statements such as “thanks for your effort, I appreciate the effort, thank you for sounding that word out,” etc. were used as positive corrective statements throughout reading instructional time. Last, tangible rewards, PBIS incentives, were given out at the end of each session based on each student’s preference survey. Incentive time was enjoyed for the last few minutes of the session, and the researcher used this time to continue providing positive praise and positive feedback to the students.

Reading progress monitoring took place every two weeks in the special education co-taught classroom. Students completed their reading probes based on their individual reading goals as outlined in their IEP. The researcher scored and logged the student's progress monitoring in the State of Iowa ACHIEVE system. All research and data points were kept on the researcher's password-protected computer to which only the researcher had access; the same was true for the ACHIEVE system, with its unique login and password. The researcher submitted a request for exemption to the Northwestern College Institutional Review Board given that this study was conducted in a normal education setting with normal educational practices. The students were not at risk for anything that would harm them beyond a typical day in their classroom. The Institutional Review Board confirmed this exemption as students were at no risk during this research study.

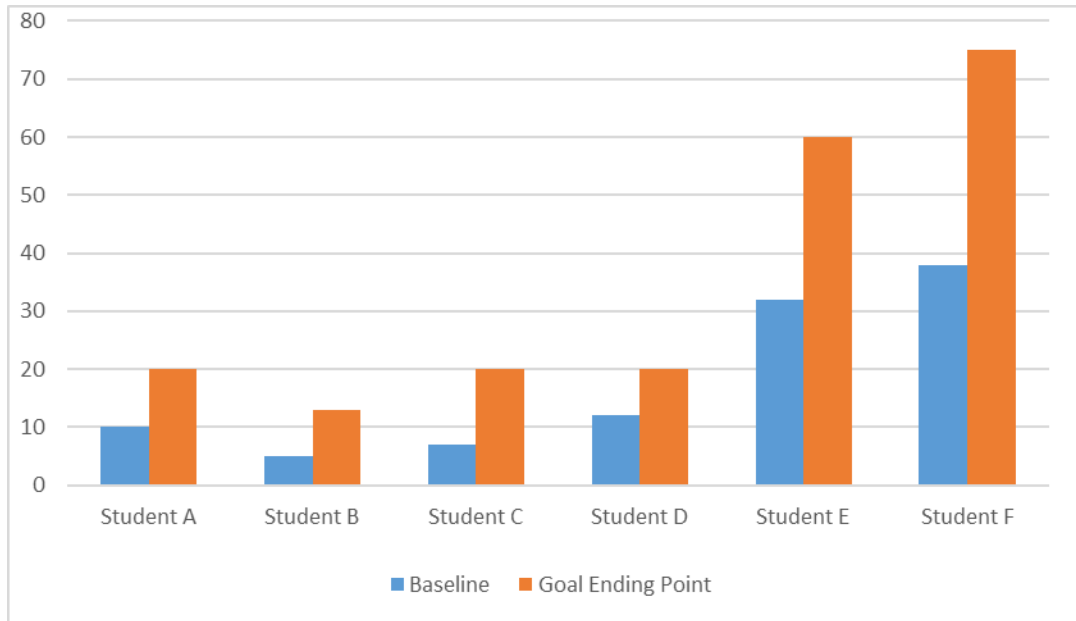
Findings

Data Analysis

The seventh-grade students were on various levels of reading comprehension IEP goals, so a *t*-test was used to analyze the students' data. The six student participants were on various IEP goals including the following: Third Grade Comprehension, First Grade Comprehension, First Grade Fluency, and First Grade Sight Words. Figure 1 displays the various baselines for students compared to their IEP reading goal end point. The end point for their IEP reading goal was established by their IEP team during the student's previous school year.

Figure 1

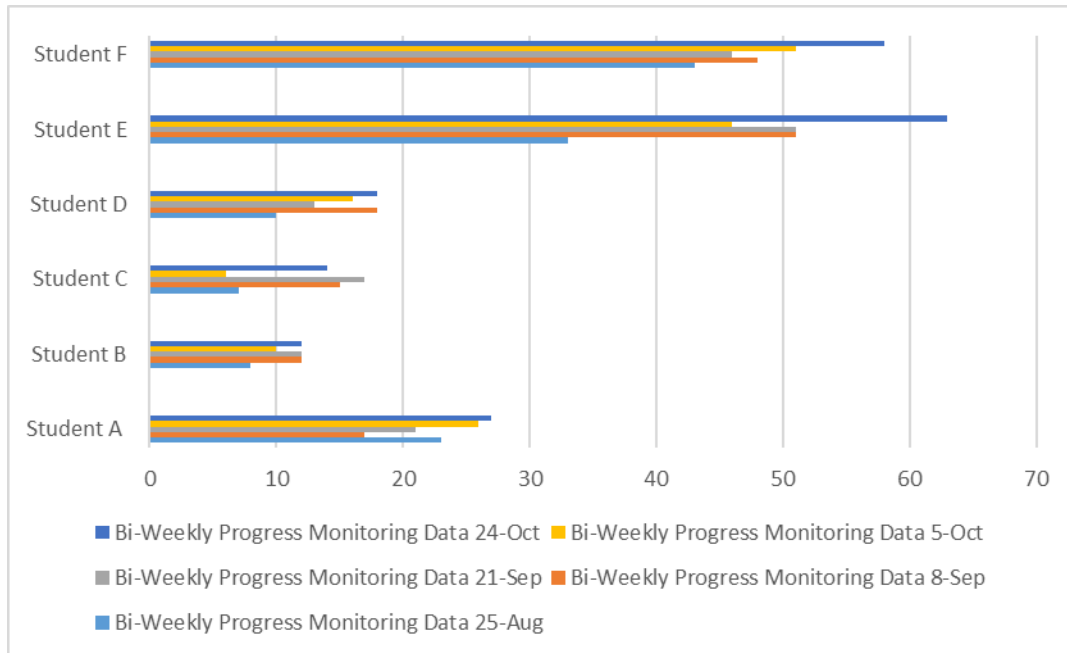
IEP Baseline Vs. IEP Goal



Whereas the students’ IEP reading goals were difficult to compare as IEPs are individualized for each student’s unique needs, Figure 2 displays the students’ overall progress monitoring scores during the nine-week research period. Figure 2 displays an almost consistent incremental increase in progress monitoring each week the students’ spent minutes in reading access class and participated in the researcher’s PBIS strategies and incentives.

Figure 2

Biweekly Progress Monitoring Data



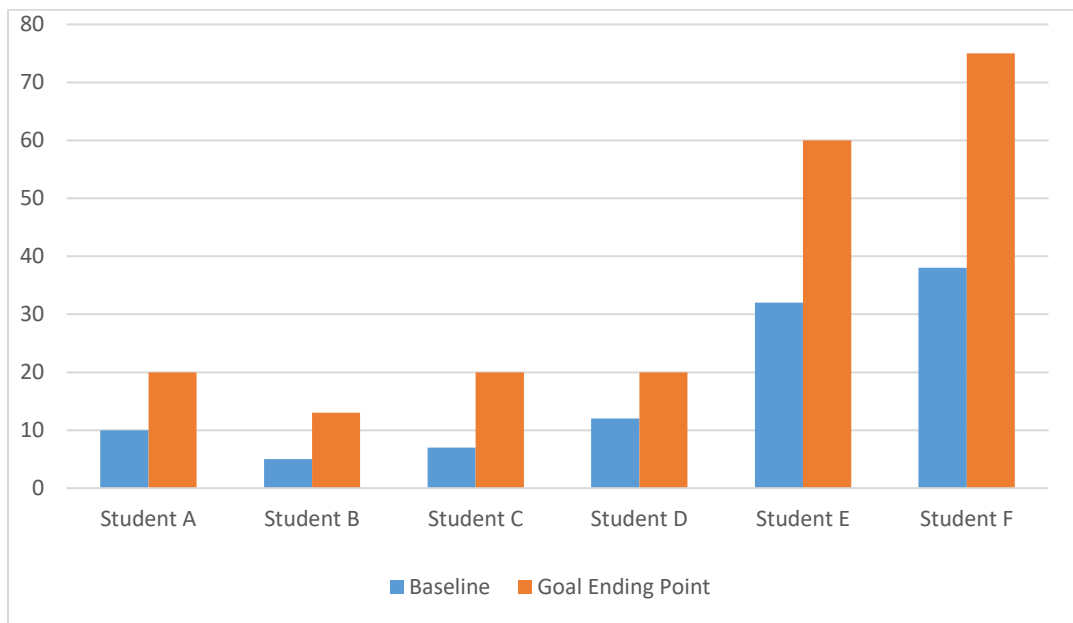
The dependent groups *t*-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in baseline progress monitoring scores ($M=20.7$, $SD=14.95$, $n=6$) vs. the ending progress monitoring scores in reading ($M=32$, $SD=22.72$, $n=6$) followed by time spent in reading access classes, $t(5) = -2.77$, $p > .001$. However, since the *p* value of 0.0389969715 is less than .05, the finding was significant. All six of the student participants increased their progress monitoring scores over the nine-week research period. As all goals are written differently to be individualized for students, the results are difficult to compare; the results documented in Figure 3 reveal that students increased their biweekly progress monitoring scores anywhere from four to thirty points. No students saw a decrease in their biweekly progress monitoring during the nine research weeks. In a typical school year, biweekly progress monitoring scores move up and down over a nine-week period.

Lastly, of note, the two students who saw a significant increase in their biweekly progress monitoring scores were students E and F. These students saw an increase of 30 points and 15

points. These two students have been enrolled in American school for only four years and are enrolled in ELL services. Both students initially had difficulty developing a relationship with the researcher through PBIS strategies and incentives, but once the relationship was developed, both students experienced significant growth in reading skills.

Figure 3

Student Minutes Spent in Reading Access Class vs. the increase in their Progress Monitoring



Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The results of this action research study provides valuable information to teachers, administrators, strategists, and other stakeholders. Using PBIS strategies and incentives is a successful method for increasing biweekly progress monitoring scores. In this study there was a 100% success rate in students increasing their biweekly progress monitoring scores over the nine-week research period. The researcher found that the students' increase in their progress monitoring scores correlated to spending more time in reading access classes and the teacher purposely building a positive working relationship with the researcher through the use of PBIS strategies.

The researcher was able to find success for the students' using PBIS strategies and the researcher's established procedures with fidelity. Through the researcher carefully following the established PBIS procedures and making every reading access class the same, the students were able to find stability and trust in the researcher. The relationship established with the students through PBIS strategies and procedures opened the door for students to try their best in reading access class and to gain confidence in their reading skills. Throughout the nine weeks, the students were held accountable for their biweekly progress monitoring through conferencing with the researcher. During this one-on-one conference, the student would review their progress with the teacher. The one-on-one conference times provided the researcher with yet another opportunity to use regarding the students' progress monitoring scores.

Although this was a small sampling of students' biweekly progress monitoring data over a short period of time, the study did show a significant finding in the effects of PBIS used in reading access class to gain an increase in biweekly progress monitoring scores. PBIS, combined

with reading access minutes, is successful for students by following a specific procedure, delivering positive and useful feedback, and conferencing one on one with students regarding their biweekly progress monitoring scores. Finally, the extra time spent with students builds a positive relationship, providing students the opportunity to score higher on their IEP goals and thereby closing the gap with their grade-level peers.

Limitations of the Study

As this research was completed during the first nine weeks of the school year, it is fair to say that the researcher had to work very hard to establish a relationship with a new group of students. The research could bear different results if it was completed during a different nine-week period as the researcher would already have a pre-established relationship with the students. Overall, there were 270 reading access minutes available to this group of students during these nine weeks. All six students missed reading access class one or more times during the research period. If all students were present for every session, they may have been able to raise their progress monitoring points to an even higher score.

Further Study

Other researchers have demonstrated the success of PBIS strategies in particular classrooms, as well as school wide. Research also supports the use of PBIS incentives for the individual teacher's formation of their classroom management strategies. However, this researcher has not been able to access much research regarding providing motivation for students in their progress monitoring. This action research will prompt special education teachers to see if providing PBIS instruction and incentives could help motivate their students to put forth their best efforts during their progress monitoring.

Further research could include an entire school year as an extended research period would give a fuller picture as to the effects of PBIS and student capabilities. Also needed is further research in different IEP goal areas, such as math, writing, behavior, and social skills. A qualitative study could also be completed to show a more complete picture of the data gained through developing the PBIS procedures and student relationships. This research study could be the groundwork for other teachers creating a plan around how to use PBIS more effectively in order to motivate students in their progress monitoring.

Conclusion

This study provides support by using positive behavior strategies combined with reading access minutes to aid in increasing students' IEP reading progress monitoring scores. The six students participating in this action research study saw improvements through the nine weeks of combining PBIS strategies and incentives with reading access minutes to increase their biweekly progress monitoring scores. Using positive behavior support strategies and reading access minutes correlated with an increase in biweekly progress monitoring scores. The results of this study demonstrate that this type of strategy can increase biweekly progress monitoring scores with a small group reading access class.

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