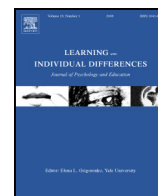




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Motivation for reading among struggling middle school readers: A mixed methods study

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ABSTRACT

Employing a mixed methods design, we explore motivation for reading comprehension (RC) among 112 struggling middle school readers at two sites, one semi-urban and one urban. Data sources included student self-reported reading motivation surveys, a standardized reading comprehension assessment, and a random sample of 44 1-on-1 student reading motivation interviews. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to model growth in reading comprehension and assess the contribution of three dimensions of reading motivation – self-efficacy, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation – to intercepts and slopes of reading comprehension. Student interviews were also coded for the presence or absence of these three motivation constructs. Although initial HLM and interview analyses were done concurrently, follow-up analyses were conducted using each data technique based on initial findings from the other. Three main findings emerged. First, quantitative results revealed 1) a significant main effect of self-efficacy on initial RC status; 2) paradoxical site differences such that the semi-urban site's students had significantly higher RC scores, while the urban site's students had significantly higher motivation scores. Explanatory qualitative analyses of interview data further revealed that 3) the quantitative effect of self-efficacy predicting RC can be better explained through qualitative findings that struggling readers hold different motivational beliefs (which impact them differently) depending on learning environment.

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1. Introduction

Motivation for reading is a complex construct, challenging to target as an object of both study and instruction. The majority of motivational research is cross-sectional and relies heavily on group-administered survey data and their covariances with reading achievement indicators (e.g. Mueherah & Herendeen, 2013; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). However illuminating, these studies often fail to use student voices to explore motivation (though see Guthrie et al., 2007 for an exception). Additionally, there has been an increasing call to further address reading motivation among populations such as students with special needs, and students more broadly categorized as “struggling” readers (Lau & Chan, 2003; Logan & Medford, 2011; Proctor, Daley, Louick, Leider, & Gardner, 2014).

The aim of this mixed methodological study, focused on struggling readers, was to triangulate standardized, longitudinal reading performance, reading motivation survey data, and semi-structured motivation interviews in order to: 1) explore the developmental relationship

between motivation and reading comprehension; and 2) characterize the nature of students' motivation to read.

1.1. Motivation theory

Under the expectancy-value model of motivation (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Tonks, 2002), “expectancy” refers to students' beliefs about how capable they consider themselves of completing a task successfully (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Wigfield & Tonks, 2002); while “value” refers to the reasons why students might be inclined to do a given task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Research has found that students' expectancy beliefs about their own abilities are closely related to academic achievement, and that the value students tend to place on learning better predicts their academic choices (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Following established conventions in the motivation literature, we operationalize the expectancy-value model using three core constructs: self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation.

Self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs about their capabilities to apply knowledge and skills to academic tasks at designated levels of difficulty (Bong, 2001; Schunk, 1989). Self-efficacious students demonstrate higher convictions for being able to successfully perform

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academic tasks (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), and are more likely to work hard, persist longer in the face of difficulty, and achieve academically (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Miller, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). While task value is multi-faceted (see: Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), we narrow to two traditionally studied aspects: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated readers are internally driven to engage with text, placing value on reading through: a) inherent curiosity about reading itself; b) a perception that reading is important for its own sake; and c) personal engagement with the topic of a given text (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009; Lee & Zentall, 2012; Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2011). Extrinsic motivation is “a focus on getting good grades and pleasing others” (Pintrich, 1999, p. 466). It involves completing tasks to comply with school rules/expectations, or (as critical in shaping perceived task value) because students believe task completion will be of future instrumental value.

These dimensions are analogous to (though not synonymous with) the perceived internalized value of a task, that is, enjoyment and subjective interest (i.e., intrinsic), as well as the utility value, specifically the perceived relationship between the task and progress towards one's goals (i.e., extrinsic). We focus on these dimensions in addition to self-efficacy because of the robustness of these constructs as operationalized indicators of motivation, and because of the developmental relationships between them (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Students' experiences of efficacy in reading likely shape their perceived values and related intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

1.2. Associations between motivation and reading comprehension

Research using the expectancy-value model of motivation has found self-efficacy (or perceived competence) to be predictive of scores on standardized measures of reading comprehension in middle school (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008; Proctor et al., 2014), particularly among older students (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995). However, contradictory findings have also been published (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009; Mucherah & Herendeen, 2013). When considering intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as analogs for value, the extant literature converges on a generally positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension (e.g. Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; McGeown, Norgate, & Warhurst, 2012; Schaffner & Schiefele, 2013; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). With few exceptions (e.g. McGeown et al., 2012), research has suggested a negative association between extrinsic motivation and reading comprehension (Becker et al., 2010; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). However, these trends do not necessarily hold for diverse student backgrounds and profiles (Guthrie et al., 2009; Proctor et al., 2014; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Researchers have investigated possible differences in students' motivation depending on reading setting (i.e. in or outside of school; Neugebauer, 2013), as well as the possibility that motivation impacts comprehension differentially depending on student reading ability (Klauda & Guthrie, 2014; McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths, & Stothard, 2015; McGeown et al., 2012). Inconsistencies in findings across this relatively limited research base suggest a need for continued investigations.

1.3. Motivation and reading comprehension: means of data collection

Expectancy-value research on the relationship between motivation and reading comprehension tends to rely on a limited number of methodological approaches. In the most common practice, comprehension is operationalized by standardized reading test performance, and a quantitative assessment of motivation (typically a self-report questionnaire) serves as a predictor for comprehension, net other predictors in a regression model.

However, self-report quantitative measures are unlikely to sufficiently explore the complexities of the interrelationship between the three core constructs of interest. Even the Motivation for Reading

Questionnaire (MRQ; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), an instrument widely used to measure reading motivation (e.g. De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2005; Lau & Chan, 2003; Lee & Zentall, 2012; Mucherah & Herendeen, 2013; Mucherah & Yoder, 2008; Proctor et al., 2014; Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006; Wang & Guthrie, 2004), has been subject to inquiry. Watkins and Coffey (2004) found that the subscales proposed in previous research did not “adequately fit the MRQ data” (p. 112) in their studies, and raised construct validity questions about the measure. Wigfield, Guthrie, Tonks, and Perencevich (2004) acknowledged some of Watkins and Coffey's concerns, agreeing “that further work assessing the dimensionality of children's reading motivation needs to be done” (p. 301).

Others have expressed the need for more intricate measures of motivation (Becker et al., 2010; McGeown et al., 2012), calling for research into the relationship between motivation and reading comprehension to include reading log data (Neugebauer, 2013, 2014) as well as qualitative components (Guthrie et al., 2007; Nolen, 2007; Schiefele et al., 2012). Qualitative research has been useful in understanding the complexities of reading motivation among adolescents (e.g. Chandler, 1999; Love & Hamston, 2004), including those who struggle with reading (Ivey, 1999; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Guthrie et al. (2007) conducted a mixed-methods investigation of motivation and its relationship to reading comprehension among high, average and low-ability readers. In addition to a standardized indicator of reading comprehension (i.e., the Gates-MacGinitie, GM; MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria & Dreyer, 2002) and the MRQ (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), the authors gathered information from students' written responses to self-selected expository passages, and semi-structured student interviews and teacher reports of student engagement. While this study focused on situated motivation, it is worth noting that the statistical significance of different motivation constructs varied depending on data source. For example, MRQ constructs of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy were not predictive of comprehension growth. However, when using quantified (via coding procedures) motivation constructs gained from interview data (i.e., interest, involvement, efficacy, choice, and social), interest, involvement, and choice were statistically significant predictors for comprehension performance. They explained an additional 12%, 22%, and 12% of variance, respectively (all $ps < 0.01$), even after controlling for pre-test reading comprehension performance. These findings suggest the importance of mixed methodological approaches when studying the phenomenon of motivation and operationalizing its constructs.

1.4. The present study

Following Guthrie et al. (2007), but focusing solely on struggling readers, the present study uses a mixed methods approach to examine reading motivation and its relationship with reading comprehension. Multiple strands of data collection were intended to address related aspects of our research questions (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009):

- RQ1: To what extent are components of motivation, as measured by a self-report questionnaire, reflected in initial status and growth in reading comprehension among struggling middle school readers over a one-year academic period?
- RQ2: How are components of motivation (i.e., intrinsic, extrinsic, self-efficacy) reflected in student discussion of their own reading experiences?
- RQ3: What relationships emerge between students' responses to the self-report questionnaire, and their descriptions of their own reading motivation and reading experiences?

We employed parallel mixed data analysis techniques to integrate inferences from qualitative and quantitative data sources (Teddle &

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