

Basic competences of successful readers

By

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Abstract

Reading is the key to building knowledge, and building knowledge in first grade is the key to creating a strong reader. Reading is an activity that engages many senses, gives the child information about the world around him, teaches him how to listen attentively, how to stay calm and how to focus on accomplishing a task. In most languages, reading is the basis of learning. The foundations of reading are built in early childhood. The aim of this study is to document the performance of early grade students in the field of reading. Aiming in the progress, improvement of teaching practice, as a methodology of this study I have used research in action. The research was carried out in five Primary and Lower Secondary Schools in Prizren, in the first, second and third grades, in coordination with the school principals, teachers and parents of the pupils involved in the research, where 200 students were tested during two different periods of time. Based on the results obtained from the conducted analysis of my research, I came to the conclusion that my research hypotheses were verified, since during the second test the students gave positive results and this showed that teachers are ready to seek more advanced practices that bring positive results to students.

Key words: Pupils, teachers, reading, competencies, school institutions

1. Introduction

Reading is a process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interplay between: (1) the reader's existing knowledge; (2) information suggested by the text being read; and (3) content of the reading situation (Wixson & Peters & Weber & Roeber, 1987:750). Reading is a means of learning the language, communication, and of sharing information and ideas (De Certeau, 1984:165). Reading is a process of placing new information in the mind. Meaning lies in the deep structure of language, in the writers' intentions, and in the interpretations made by the readers (Anisati, 2016:68). " We have proven that activity is the essence of good reading, and the more active is the reading, it is better " (Adler & Doren, 1972:17). Reading consists of two interrelated processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of understanding how written symbols correspond to spoken language (Kozak, 2011:7).

During reading, it is necessary to interpret visual symbols (e.g. letters, words), and to associate these symbols with words (lexical units) in the mental lexicon. This process is known as visual word recognition (Wilson & Carroll & Werno, 2014:12).

Students should be given enough homework and classwork to help them learn to read in their subjects. Being an active reader, students must be involved with the text both mentally as well as physically (Lei & Rhinehart & Howard & Cho, 2010:33). Reading is essential to every aspect of learning, and the purpose of reading is to construct meaning from the text

(comprehension). Without understanding, reading can be frustrating and sometimes painful. (Zygouris-Coe, 2009:2).

Good readers have strategies, are motivated, and set reading goals. They are selectively attentive, and integrate information across texts. They are activated and connected to prior knowledge, pay attention to the text structure, ask text questions, determine significance, critically evaluate while reading, retell information, summarize and synthesize while reading (Kennedy & Dunphy & Deyer & Hayes & McPhillips & Marsh & O'Connor & Shiel, 2012:92).

In contrary to recent predictions about the influence of television and other technologies, reading is the tool we increasingly rely on to in order to share information and through which we learn.

What are the most important skills that help children in the initial stages of reading?

Studies have identified two broad categories of skills that are important to the reading ability a child will later develop. The first category includes skills related to understanding sounds and codes such as: letters have names, sounds are associated with letters, and words are made of sounds. The second category summarizes spoken language skills – expressive vocabulary and receptive vocabulary – knowledge of syntax and the ability to understand and narrate an event (Dickinson et al., 2003; Storch & Whitehuerst, 2002).

Struggling readers must cross many bridges on their way to overcoming risk factors and achieving strong learning skills of reading (Biemiller & Siegel, 1997). A bridge helps them continue their journey from written language to learning to read. The alphabetic code and recognition of letter sounds are necessary skills to acquire word recognition skills, so in learning to read, some degree of instruction is useful in teaching students the alphabet and phonics (Woolfolk, 2011:473).

How are the foundations of reading skills built? Two are the most important activities: (1) conversations with adults that develop knowledge about language and (2) reading books together, using stories as a tool to talk about sounds, words, pictures and concepts (NICHD Early Childhood Research Network, 2005a). Especially in the early years, children's experiences in the family are very important in language and reading development (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan, 2002; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). In families where reading is valued, parents and other adults consider reading to be a source of pleasure.

In these families, books and other written materials are everywhere. Parents read to their children, take them to bookstores and libraries, limit their television viewing time, and encourage games related to reading, such as imitating the school environment or writing letters with children (Presley, 1996; Snow, 1993; Whitehurst et al., 1994). An important role is played by teachers and those who take care for children.

Teaching reading

The best time for children to start reading and writing is when they are very young, as they begin to develop positive behaviors and basic skills. Reading to children and talking to them about their ideas (even if those ideas don't make sense right away) helps them reach a higher level of understanding (Map & Henderson, 2014:4). For years, teachers have debated whether students should be taught to read through direct instruction, focused on skills, or through constructivist methods, focused more on the student. Sometimes these discussions have been heated and have been nicknamed the "wars for curriculum" (Barr, 2001; Carlisle, Stahl & Birdyshaw, 2004; Goodman, 1990; Smith 1994; Symons, Woloshyn, & Pressley,

1994).

Insufficient reading reflects negatively on children minds.

Most children have the same approach in learning the vocabulary. According to Quandt (1977), there are four sources of words available to children, they are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The fund through listening normally develops early as the child begins to relate what he hears to existing experiences. It continues to expand until the child begins to speak. The second source is the speech that comes by being perfected. Later, the third and fourth types of vocabulary, reading and writing, develop simultaneously (Achmand, 2014:5).

According to Ivan Furlan, the student at the end of the first grade and at the beginning of the second grade should read 50-70 words per minute (Pozhegu-Kumnova & Nixha, 2011:6).

New teaching forms and methods

In our modern and constantly globalized society, the educational objectives of different societies and countries are constantly becoming more similar: the list of competences includes the competence of speaking and reading, which must be acquired in schools.

These objectives are presented in good order for different types of schools in the national curricula: from the easiest to the most difficult, from the simplest to the most complicated. The task of school teachers is to teach step by step these competencies to children.

If the teachers apply the new teaching forms and methods in the lesson, they are separated from the traditional form of teaching. They are no longer instructors or lecturers, but learning assistants - for students with good success, but also for those with poorer success.

If you work with new teaching forms and methods, teaching materials almost take the role of teachers. The engagement of children through these well-crafted materials leads to learning to read because they stimulate learning without the need for a teacher.

Reading becomes attractive! Children freely and willingly practice reading with such learning materials, these materials if we look at them from the outside, the form of games, which children know - they look to them like a domino, or a card game.

Individualization of learning

The second reason is much more important: through these teaching materials, which are made on the basis of the children's prior knowledge (easy or harder, simple or more complex), every child succeeds every time! Each child, sometimes slower, sometimes faster, is able to solve a certain learning task. Children want nothing more than to be successful. Only success encourages them for further work and makes them even more successful. During this form of learning to read there are no losers, only winners. Successful students become even more successful, but even the weakest students always succeed.

Self-control

The third and very decisive reason why children want to learn reading in this form is whether the tasks have been solved correctly from the performed activity, whether they have learned successfully and the students do not learn this from the teacher. All teaching materials that teachers use should have the simple form of self-monitoring added, so that each child can immediately monitor the activity itself that is related to the acquisition of reading skills. If there are mistakes, the children will not be scolded by the teacher, they will not be embarrassed in front of the class.

Each child that works with such teaching materials, learns after the end of each task whether it was correct, or if there was any mistake that should be corrected.

Cooperation

There is another reason why children work willingly and successfully cooperating with each other, while applying contemporary teaching methods and models by the teacher, to make reading easier for them.

The New Role of the Teacher

Teachers must know their students very well. They know exactly what requirements they can place on individual students and can then equip individual students with the appropriate learning materials.

Teachers who work with new forms and teaching methods, during the lesson have a lot of time to take care of individual students or small groups of students. They already sit next to the students and explain the activity to them once again, also in a low voice, so as not to disturb others during their work. They make sure that the classroom has the necessary discipline, because even during this form of learning, discipline is needed, which means that no student dares to hinder another student during work.

Teachers who work with new teaching methods and forms must, of course, prepare and prepare the necessary teaching materials. Working with new forms and methods only works when more teachers work together on such materials and each one gives their materials to others for use. For this reason, working with new teaching forms and methods is teamwork (Siegfried Winkler, 2011:11).

Basic competencies of successful readers

Competencies are defined as broad abilities to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes, routines, values and emotions in an independent, practical and meaningful way.

Reading is a multi-component skill that is developed through extensive practice (Berisha & Jashari, 2015:5).

Reading is a complex skill with five interlinked components:

Listening - comprehension

Students should be able to identify sounds (i.e., phonemes), break words down into their component sounds and put the sounds together in words.

Words, like letters, can be directly identified by the distinguishing features that are printed visual information. Immediate word identification occurs when feature analysis assigns a visual configuration to the function list of a word category in the cognitive structure, without the intermediate step of letter identification. Clusters of criteria within functionally equivalent lists allow word identification with minimal information, for example, when the reader can engage prior knowledge of orthographic redundancy within words (Smith, 2004:150).

Sound awareness

Children, before they learn to read written letters, must be aware that most words consist of more than one sound unit, or phoneme, and that they affect the meaning of a word. Sound awareness is the ability to listen, identify and manipulate phonemes or individual sounds that make up spoken words and can distinguish meaning (Carroll & Xhaferi, 2013:39).

Decoding is the ability to apply knowledge of letter-sound relationships, including knowledge of written letters, to correctly pronounce familiar words more quickly and to understand words we have not seen before.

Phonetics

Phonetics is the relationship between letter (letter symbol) and sound (small units of sounds). Phonics is fundamental to reading because understanding the correspondence between letters and sounds provides the reader with tools to discover new written words. The word and its written form are conventional and must be learned in order to communicate. In order to master phonics, a person must master the letters of the alphabet and associate them with their corresponding sounds (Carroll & Xhaferi, 2013:42).

Fluency in reading

Fluency is the ability to decode words in text quickly and accurately. But it is possible to decode words without actually understanding their meaning. A fluent reader can read with ease, expression, and comprehension. A fluent reader does not read word for word, but can process more than one word at a time. Fluent readers understand what they read, and can correct themselves or go back to revise the text when something does not make sense (Carroll & Xhaferi, 2013:45).

There are some children who learn to read on their own before they start school. However, these children have likely been surrounded by books and their parents have dealt with them a lot. It should not be assumed that all children grow up in the same circumstances (Steinberg, 2005).

In order to read fluently, pupils must first hear and understand what reading fluency sounds like. From this reading, they will be more likely to transfer those experiences to their reading (Gashi-Belegu, 2014:4).

While action in the preschool years is particularly effective, what happens outside of school continues to worry as children grow older. An analysis of 11 researchers in the US shows that children living in poverty slip back in terms of reading fluency during the summer vacation period, while those living in better conditions continue to make progress (Dombey, 2010:9).

The real development of fluent reading skills from the early grades is among the main components, which affects the achievements and development of pupils' critical thinking, not only in the subject of the Albanian language but also in other subjects in general (Fazlija & Dervishi, 2014:4).

A person who is fluent in one type of text is not necessarily fluent in reading all types. A reader of a motorcycle repair manual may understand the instructions that may be difficult for a professor of English literature, but not be able to understand his son's chemistry text. The chemistry teacher may feel completely insecure when trying to understand some of the original history source material from a peer's reading list (Schoenbach & Greenleaf & Cziko & Hurwitz, 1999:39).

What differences are observed in learning monitoring between the reading processes of fluent and less fluent readers?

When the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence is understood "correctly" by the readers, then the lesson monitoring has fulfilled its task. Texts are constructed, at least unconsciously, with this in mind. The presentation of lexical and syntactical learning standards simply depends on the lexical and syntactical learning of the text. The need for high standards of learning monitoring follows the learning of much of the text at the lexical and syntactic levels. The reader must have sufficient sources, i.e., language knowledge, so that learning monitoring operates at high standards of text learning. This differentiates the fluent reader from the less fluent reader in terms of displaying learning monitoring at higher levels (Yang, 2002:35).

Album of Photo words

Photo words are those words that the reader can recognize as soon as he sees them and thus does not need to decode them. Decoding is a complex and time-consuming task; therefore, since fluency depends on the reader's ability to read quickly and accurately, good picture vocabulary increases fluency.

Children read more fluently when they can recognize whole words. Therefore, the instruction of picture words should start at the preschool level and continue during the first and second grade (Carroll & Xhaferi, 2013:47).

Reading comprehension

Close reading is more than development of advanced reading; it is a mechanism to teach students with logical arguments, criticizing the reasoning of others, to gather evidence from the text (Rruka, 2016:14).

The ultimate goal of reading is to understand what is read - not only to understand the factual information in the text, but also to infer things about the text based on prior knowledge and experience.

These five key components of reading must not only be learned successfully; but they should work well together.

Potential reading difficulties are seen in each component. Within the word, the reader may have difficulty processing the letter or selecting the required meaning of a word. The reader may have problems in phonological processes, which limit word identification and memory for words (Perfetti, 2001:12801).

2. Research Methodology

As the methodology of this study, I used action research. "Action research is the systematic examination of professional situations, which is undertaken by the teachers themselves, with the aim of improving their practices" (Elliott, 1991:69). While Lawrence Stenhouse defines action research as "The capacity for independent professional development through the systematic study of teachers' work, by studying the work of other teachers, and through the examination of pedagogical ideas through classroom research" (Stenhouse, 1985:126).

Action research interlinks the theory with practice, it is about action and research. The action to bring change and the research to understand the problem and find its possible solutions.

3. Research objectives

Implementation of this research problem has the following objectives:

- To verify the main difficulties of students during reading.
- To eliminate difficulties encountered by students in reading-comprehension.
- To improve teaching practices.
- To develop meaningful and critical reading skills.

2.2 Research hypotheses

- H.1** Pupils with whom contemporary teaching strategies are implemented show higher results in reading proficiency.
- H.2** Regular exercises on a daily basis through parent-teacher-school cooperation develop reading with rhythm, stress and intonation that reflects natural speech.
- H.3** Planning questions of different levels during reading improves reading comprehension in early grade pupils.

2.3. Sample

As a sample, I have selected the pupils of grades I, II and III. My sample consisted of a total of 200 students from five Primary and Lower Secondary Schools in Prizren (which is 10% of the total number of students in these schools).

The selection of these schools and classes was made because in these schools the teachers involved in the research have completed the EGRA training, as well as many other trainings related to the recognition of contemporary strategies, therefore our cooperation was successful.

2.4. Research instruments

For data collection, I used qualitative techniques: *Observation* - Through this technique, I observed the pupils, their behaviors, emotions, actions, as well as their progress during the research. *Personal notes and diaries* - Used to record ideas and observations about actions. Active note-taking usually leads not only to a useful set of notes, but also to a good recall of the event itself (Matthews & Ross, 2010:194). *Student papers* - Examples of student papers are also very good resources for providing concrete and visual information. We also used quantitative techniques. *Standardized tests* - EGRA is a reading test for grades I-III. It is an individual test. Testing a child takes about 10-12 minutes. The teacher can administer different combinations of subtests, depending on his judgment of the needs of the students.

2.6. Scientific research methods

Methods: *Literature review* – Through this method I have tried to review various scientific – professional papers in the field of reading. *Combined methods* – They are combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the manner which is best suited to the study.

2.7. Data analysis

In order to efficiently analyze the collected data, in order to maximize the value of the information, I used the software: Social Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) created by the well-known information technology company IBM. Its main advantage is its ability to enable finding any type of relationship between the elements of a questionnaire, which is very difficult to achieve in other forms, which for this research is of great importance considering that an

attempt is made to determine the factors that influence students' results in the factors included in the EGRA test.

4. Research Results

Descriptive statistics

3.1. Demographic profile of respondents and descriptive statistics

As part of the questions of the questionnaire, some demographic questions such as gender, class, age, school are summarized, which are reported in the following tables and will be used to group and see their impact on the analyzed factors of EGRA in this study.

Table 1. Pupils according to schools and classes

		Class			Total
		I	II	III	
School	Emin Duraku	10	15	15	40
	Loyola	10	15	15	40
	Abdyl Frashëri	10	15	15	40
	Mati Logoreci	10	15	15	40
	Lekë Dukagjini	10	15	15	40
	Total	50	75	75	200

From the table above we see the sample used for this study, in the rows of this table you can read the data of the students involved in the research, the division into rows is made according to the class of the students. The table presents the frequency for each school grouped according to the class of students included in the research. From each school, 40 students were tested, of which 15 second and third grade students and 10 first grade students. Such a division was made for the reason that the first graders have just learned the letters, at the same time the EGRA test experts have foreseen that the first graders will be tested only in the first four subtests of the test (the first page of the test), second and third grade students to be tested on all subtests of the EGRA test.

Errors made at the both testing times for all EGRA factors

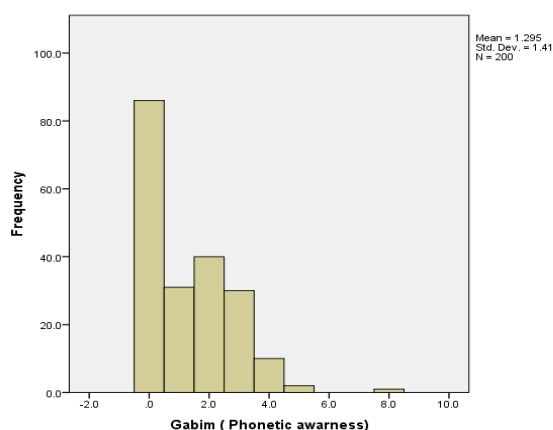


Chart 1a.

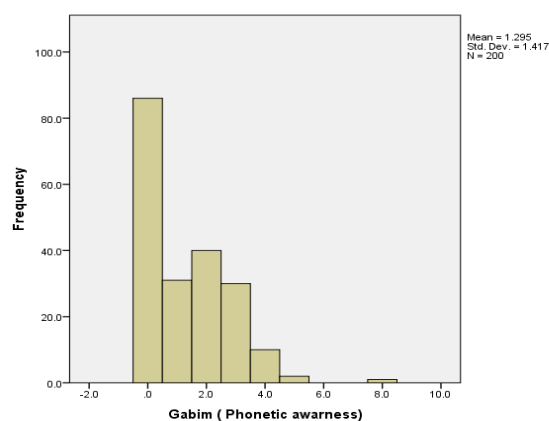


Chart 1b.

Chart 1a and 1b. Frequency of mistakes in both testing times in *Sound awareness*. We see the frequency of errors in the two testing times in terms of the *Sound Awareness* factor above. Each column presents the frequency of the appearance of a certain error, that is, the error is shown on the X axis, while the frequency of its appearance is shown on the Y axis. Visual inspection shows us that the errors during the second test are significantly lower than during the first test, so in the graph it can be seen that the number of students who made 0 errors is more than 150 during the second test, in contrast to something more than 80 the first

time, this is easily seen from a quick glance at the graph.

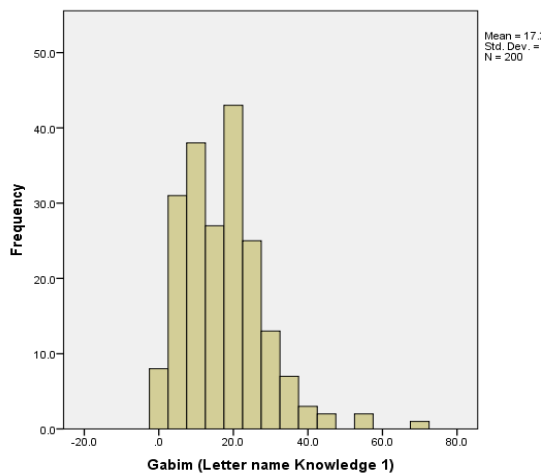


Chart 2a.

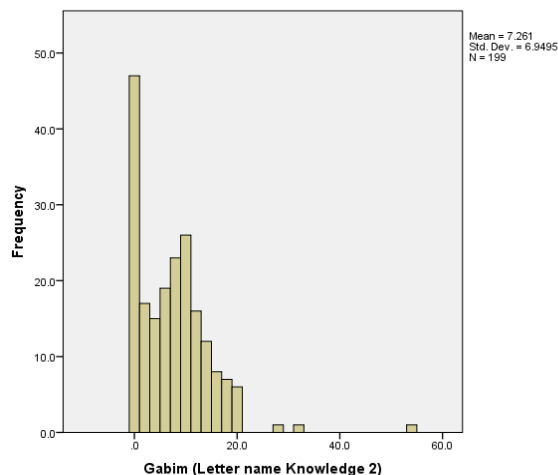


Chart 2b

knowledge and sound of letter

Chart 2a. and Chart 2b. Frequency of errors in both times of testing in *Letter name* In the graph it can be seen that the number of errors is significantly lower, therefore the columns of the graph are aligned more to the left, which means that the absolute majority of students made 0-20 errors, unlike the first test period when most students made about 20-40 mistakes.

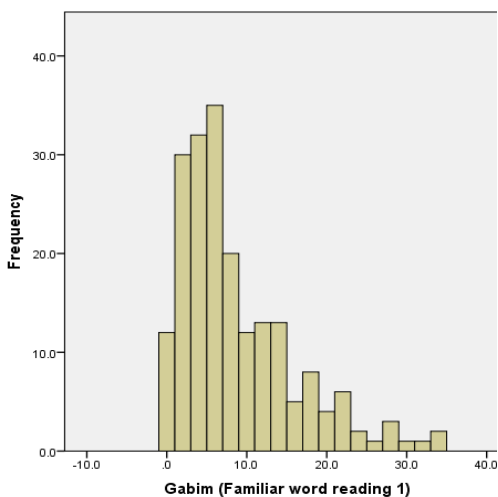


Chart 3a.

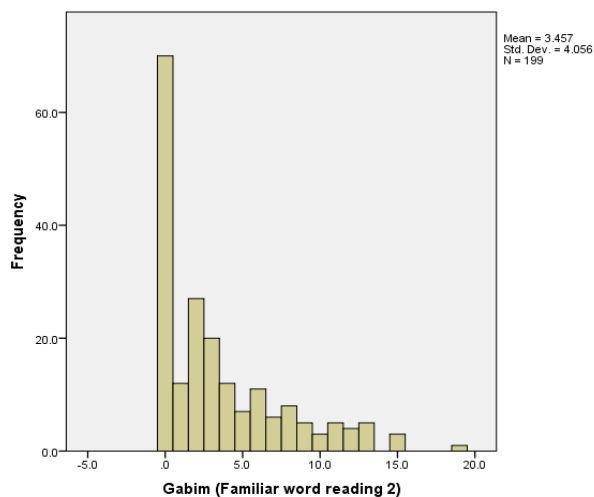


Chart 3b.

Chart 3a. and Chart 3b. Frequency of errors in both testing times in *Familiar word reading*

Absolute majority of students made between 0-5 errors, in comparison with the first time of testing, when majority of students were making between 5-15 errors.

Chart 4a. and Chart 4b Frequency of errors in both testing times in *Unknown word reading*

Errors during the second test are lower than during the first test in the *Unknown word reading*, the number of errors is lower, which means that 0-20 errors were made, in contrast to the first period, when most students made between 10 -30 errors.

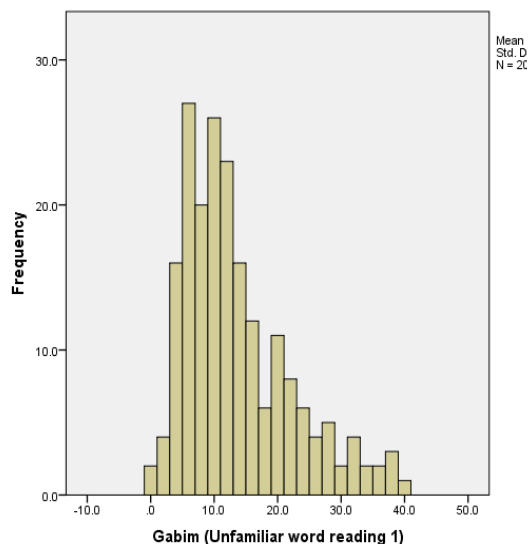


Chart 4a

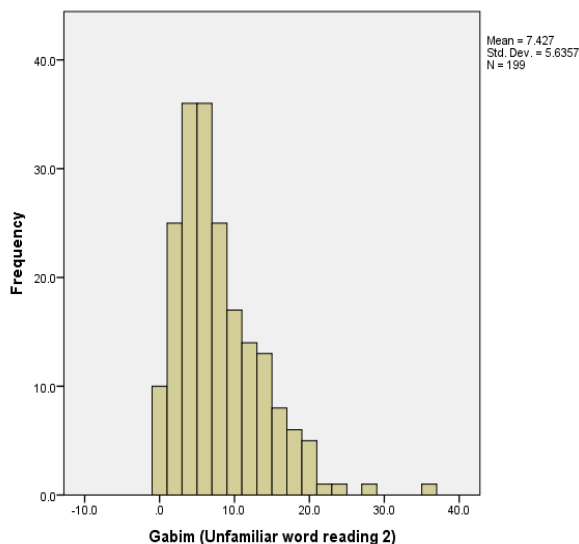


Chart 4b.

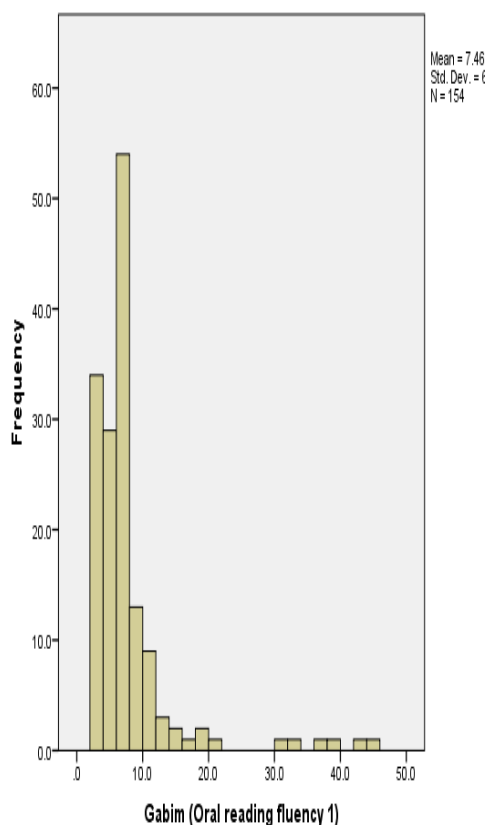


Chart 5a.

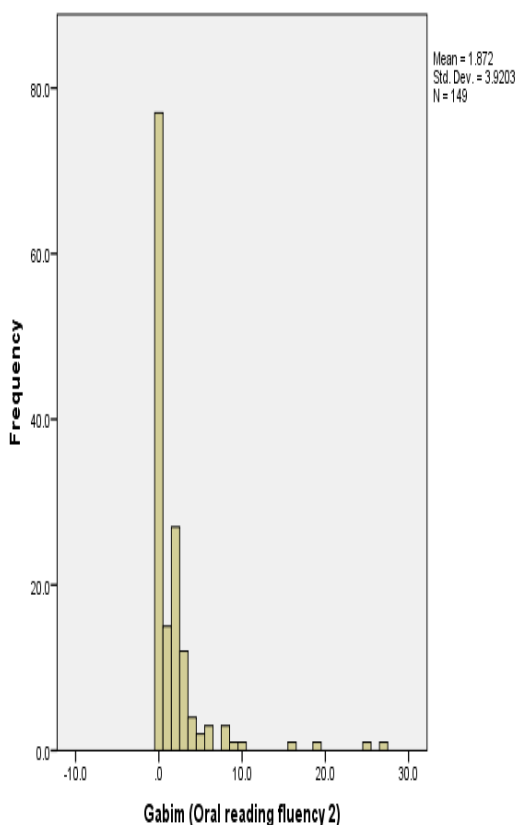


Chart 5b.

Chart 5a. and Chart 5b. Frequency of errors in both testing times in *Fluency in reading aloud*

Fluency in reading aloud shows the frequency of errors in both testing periods. Most of the students made 0-3 errors, in contrast to the first test period, when they made about 0-10 errors.

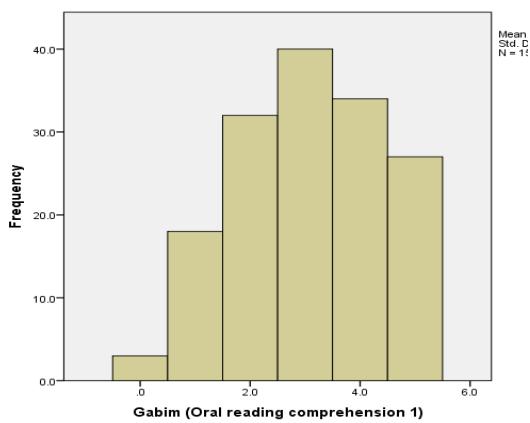


Chart 6a.

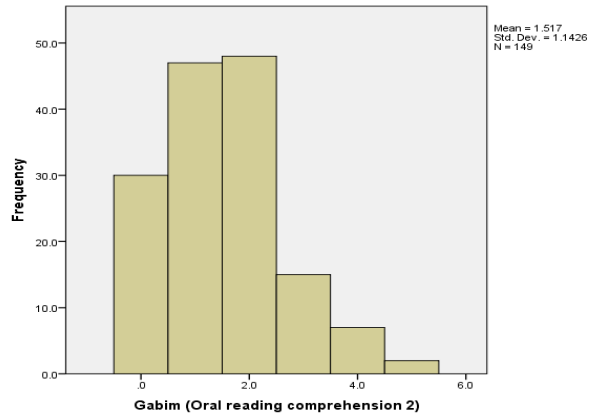


Chart 6b.

Chart 6a. and Chart 6b. Frequency of errors in both times of testing in *Understanding*

Errors during the second test in the *Comprehension* are significantly lower than during the first test, where the absolute majority of students made between 0 and 2 errors, in contrast to the first testing period, when most students made between 2 and 5 errors.

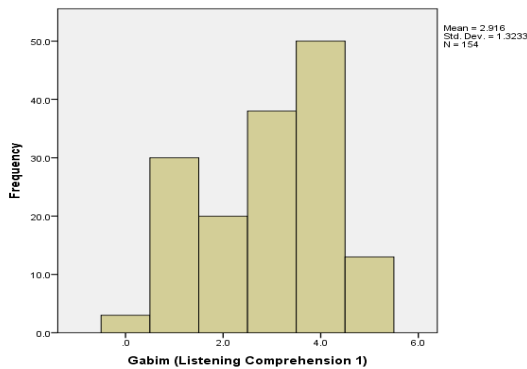


Chart 7a.

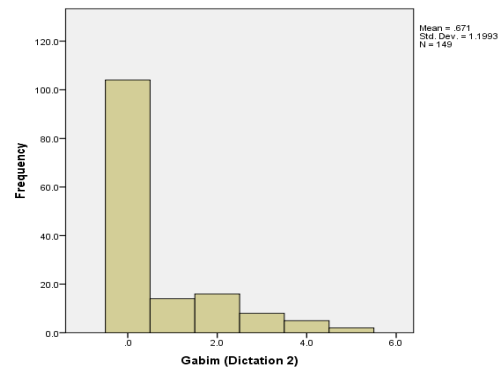


Chart 7b.

Chart 7a and 7b. Frequency of errors in both testings *Comprehension (understanding) through listening*

In the second test, most students made between 0 and 3 errors, unlike the first time when most students made between 2 and 4 errors.

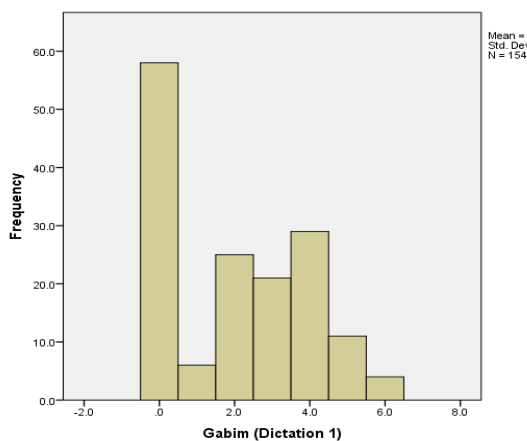


Chart 8a.

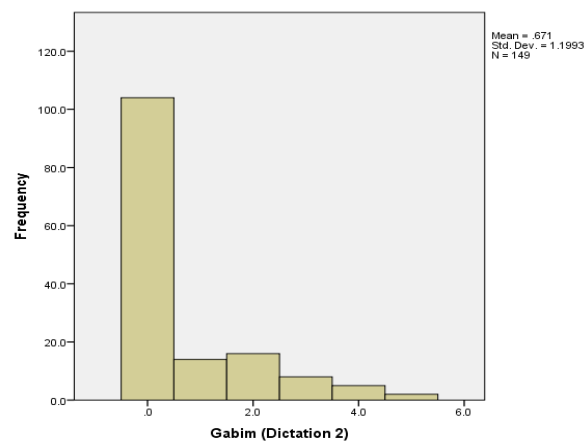


Chart 8b.

Chart 8a. and 8b. Frequency of errors in both testing times in *Dictation*

The frequency of errors in both periods of testing in Dictation shows that the errors during the second test are significantly lower than during the first test, so in the graph it can be seen that the number of errors is significantly lower, which means that more than 90% of the students tested during the second test made between 0 and 2 errors, while those of the first chart are lined up on the right, here half made 0 errors but the other half made 1-4 errors.

From each section we note the success of the students who have shown during the second test. The first test oriented us around the frequent mistakes made by the students, at the same time it helped us to design, in cooperation with the teachers, the action plan, which was implemented immediately after the first test. The use of diverse techniques brought positive results to students during the second test.

5. Discussion

The results show that there are almost no non-readers in the sample, *Sound Awareness* (three-quarters scored 8 or above, out of a maximum of 10) and *Letter Recognition* are good (no pupils were categorized as 'at risk'), *Known Words* and *Decoding skills* are generally acceptable, *Dictation* results were very good. This means that all students have some *decoding* skills; but almost one in four needs more exercise.

Based on the results obtained from the developed analysis, we conclude that our research hypotheses were verified.

This was proven as the students were tested twice with the EGRA test. The first test reflected the current state of how the students were doing in relation to reading, while the second test showed the improved results, namely the positive impact that the teaching strategies had.

Our continuous cooperation had a positive effect on the improvement of students' reading skills. Most of the schools included in the research were built in recent years, they have a different standard, good lighting, large space, they are equipped with a laptop, projector, with many means of concretization, modern school which facilitated our work during the of research and gave us positive results.

6. Conclusions And Recommendations

7. Conclusions

The research in action that was carried out has given the expected results and has increased the interest first of parents to be more engaged with their children, then of teachers to know well the process of reading as well as an effective teaching to enable students to become good, active readers throughout their lives, make them capable of independently engaging in reading activity.

As long as the second test showed a positive result in each subtest of EGRA, we come to conclusion that the use of techniques, adequate activities, the dedication of the teacher, cooperation, and the management of special interventions in the Albanian language classes, contributed to the development and strengthening of reading skills.

This research showed that teachers are willing to seek more advanced practices that bring positive results to students. With the use of a series of methods and strategies, we have managed to have positive changes in the success of students.

8. 5.2. Recommendations

Findings of this paper have their practical implications, therefore below I will place some concrete recommendations:

Recommendations for school directorates:

- Ensure that all teachers participate in training to have access to adequate techniques that improve reading skills.

Recommendations for teachers

- To better understand the reading process and its components;
- To plan as many questions as possible that encourage and develop critical thinking;
- To be more aware of the requirements for a pleasant environment for reading both at school and at students' homes;
- To create practices of cooperation between parents and teachers on a regular basis, in which meetings are discussed, information is shared, materials and instructions are offered to facilitate the joint work of parents and teachers in facilitating children's learning;
- To always present reading in positive manner;
- To create possibilities for students to discuss what they have read.

Recommendations for parents:

- To have many books around and allow children to see them reading and enjoying themselves while reading;
- To take their children more often to book shop / library, allow them to search and choose books for themselves;
- To read their children aloud and to allow them to choose books;
- To discuss books and stories they read, either together or alone.

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