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Developing Reading Comprehension for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through
Concrete Representations

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Abstract

The ability to comprehend written text is an essential skill for all students, leading to their increased engagement at school, and the development of communication and cognitive skills. Recent research has found that a significant number of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may have fluent word reading skills, but often experience difficulties with reading comprehension. Research is limited on this topic, and there are few studies that have identified strategies that enhance comprehension for learners with ASD.

In the present study, the researcher investigated whether it was possible for students with ASD to improve their reading comprehension through a multimodal, researcher developed intervention, “Show Me’. Concrete figures and objects representing text features were manipulated by the students in accordance with the text they read, as a scaffold to assist their understanding. A single subject multiple baseline design was utilised to assess the effect of the intervention on the reading comprehension ability of three participants (aged 7-10 years old) with ASD. The results established a functional relationship between the independent variable, the ‘Show Me’ intervention, and participants’ ability to respond to comprehension questions during and after a reading session. A smaller relationship was established between the intervention and the verbal output of the students. Staff responses to the intervention were positive and indicated high social validity. The findings suggest that the manipulation of concrete representations may support students with ASD develop their reading comprehension abilities.

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