THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF SUSTAINED SILENT READING IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

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Independent silent reading is an important reading practice that promotes and encourages the development of various reading skills. Sustained Silent Reading and other similar independent silent reading programs, strive to create a more natural and aesthetic reading environment that explicit, direct teaching does not always manage to do. As educators and administrators, it is important that we are aware of the current educational issues, topics, and strategies that are relevant to independent silent reading.

Through the use of survey research, this study discovered how first, second, and third grade teachers are implementing Sustained Silent Reading within their classrooms, and what they perceive the benefits and weaknesses of this independent silent reading program to be.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that “the best readers read the most and poor readers read the least” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHHD], 2000, p. 3). Literally hundreds of correlational studies have found that “the more you read the better your vocabulary, your knowledge of the world, and your ability to read” (NICHHD, p. 3) become. As they say, practice makes perfect. This commonly used expression can be applied to many aspects of daily life; surprisingly it is applicable to reading as well. Valuable reading practices can be encouraged as early as birth. Parents and other adults provide the necessary building blocks for emergent readers. Assisted reading leads to independent reading; independent readers require encouragement and practice just as early readers received. The simple practice of daily reading has been shown to make better readers. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is so often recommended and used by teachers.

This frequently recommended suggestion for improving low and insufficient reading skills is the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). Sustained Silent Reading is often recommended because it addresses a wide variety of reading skills. Comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, reading motivation, and even writing skills are often improved through the implementation of this reading strategy (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHHD, 2000). Numerous educators currently use this reading strategy because of Sustained Silent Reading’s widely accepted and well-known benefits.

However, due to the rather recent publication from the National Reading Panel (NICHHD, 2000), many educators have begun to question the effectiveness of SSR. The National Reading Panel’s report claimed that many of the educational research on silent reading
has not been able to sufficiently support the well-known benefits on students’ reading skills.

Their findings sparked a debate that had many educators questioning the effectiveness, benefits, and necessity of SSR. This supposed lack of correlational educational research, studies, and scientific data has prompted researchers and educational institutions to question its effectiveness and purpose. Consequently, many other researchers have begun investigations related to Sustained Silent Reading in response to this educational question. In addition, classroom teachers have made suggestions with adaptations to SSR so the intended student benefits and values are actually occurring.

Statement of the Problem

Due to recent educational reports and studies, such as the National Reading Panel’s (NICHHD, 2000) report on SSR and teachers’ personal experiences, many people have begun to question the perceived value and benefits of this reading strategy. Numerous studies have been conducted on this reading strategy to determine whether its supposed benefits are actually occurring. As a result, many educators have created adapted SSR programs such as Independent Reading (IR) (Trudel, 2007), ScSR (Ruetzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008), and Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R⁵) (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). These adapted silent reading programs add an additional component or components requiring the teacher to be more active during the reading activity, rather than remaining just a reading model. The problem that often plagues early childhood teachers is whether SSR is actually providing the reported benefits for their students.

Research Questions

Since it is clear that daily reading is vital for students’ overall reading improvement in comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency, reading motivation, a writing skills, why is this all-inclusive reading strategy even being questioned and debated by educators? Sustained
Silent Reading simply asks the students to silently read books of their choice, daily. Recent studies and reports have begun to question this strategy’s intended benefits because of its lack of reliability. Are teaching educators viewing SSR in this rather negative lens now? Do early childhood students believe their reading skills are improving, even slightly, with the daily implementation of this reading strategy? Consequently, the focus of this investigation was to answer two research questions: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills?

Rationale

To promote reading for early childhood students, and to continue the development of essential reading skills, teachers need to implement reading strategies that actually benefit and hold value for their students. If Sustained Silent Reading is not currently being implemented in a manner that works for early childhood students, then why are educators continuing to use it? SSR is a multi-faceted reading strategy that is well known for its wide-range of reading benefits. Discovering what aspects of SSR actually benefit and provide value for early readers is a crucial component of teachers’ instructional reflection.

Definition of Terms

It is essential that several key terms be clearly defined so that the audience is always reading from the same perception as the author. Defining consistent educational definitions helps eliminate confusion and misinterpretation throughout the analysis of the text.

*Sustained Silent Reading (SSR):* a reading strategy that is intended to improve students’ reading skills, such as, comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency, reading motivation, and writing skills, by asking students to “read self-selected materials
sliently without interruption for an extended period of time” (Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, 2007, p. 11). This reading strategy is also known by a variety of names with slightly unique variations. Commonly used Sustained Silent Reading strategies are: Self-Selected Reading, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Be Excited About Reading (BEAR), We Enjoy Books (WEB), Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Sustained Quiet Reading Time (SQUIRT), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), or High Intensity Practice (HIP) (Pilgreen, 2000). The official Sustained Silent Reading strategy is “a regularly scheduled activity where all students and the teacher silently read material of their choice for a predetermined amount of time” (Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, p. 12). Robert McCracken, the founder of the guidelines for SSR, sufficiently summarizes the intentions of this reading strategy, “SSR is the drill of silent reading; it is the drill or practice necessary in learning to read, not a total reading program” (1971, p. 521).

_Early childhood students:_ students whose grade placement ranges from kindergarten through grade three.

**Limitations**

There are aspects of this particular study on Sustained Silent Reading that limit the ability of researchers to replicate the study and obtain similar results. The first, second, and third grade teacher samples taken for this study are imperative to this investigation’s analysis. Survey results taken from others grades, or schools, may, in fact, yield different results due to the unique beliefs of early childhood teachers.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this investigation was to answer two research questions: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills? This chapter presents a review of literature related to SSR. To understand why the suggested benefits of independent silent reading programs like SSR are being questioned, a review of literature based upon the theories associated with basic reading skills should be conducted. The first section of this review will do that. It is widely-accepted that SSR, and other similar independent silent reading programs, improve the basic reading skills of comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, motivation to read, and even writing skills (Anderson et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHHD, 2000).

Though the creation of SSR is based solely on the desire to encourage students to read through self-selection and aesthetic reading, the all-encompassing reading skill addressed is comprehension. Many times reading comprehension is positively or negatively affected by the previously mentioned reading skills. If vocabulary development increases, fluency increases, and reading motivation increases then overall comprehension of the text will more than likely increase as well. Conversely, the opposite negative effects can be seen as well where a decrease in reading skills can result in a decrease in reading comprehension (Loh, 2009).

Overall, it is important to understand how independent silent reading programs like SSR can benefit reading skills. It is astonishing that the simple reading practice of SSR can provide students with such a wide opportunity for improving their reading skills. SSR provides students with a positive and comfortable reading environment where self-selection and pleasurable reading is encouraged. This environment encourages daily reading practice, and as one knows,
the more one practices a task the more one improves at the practiced task. The second aspect that needs to addressed is the historical research on Sustained Silent Reading. To properly analyze SSR, it is vital to become familiar with the method’s original guidelines. The shift in SSR’s identity throughout history also needs to be discussed to clearly understand the positive, or even negative, aspects of this reading strategy. Often, adaptations to reading strategies are made for a reason; thus, the analysis of these adapted programs may reveal possible concerns with SSR. In addition, the widely popular report by the National Reading Panel (NICHHD, 2000) is a vital component of research concerning independent silent reading programs. Careful analysis of this report is a necessary review of literature because it also brings forth both positive aspects of SSR, or possible concerns of SSR.

Significant Historical Research

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a relatively new reading strategy that was only just begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Dr. Lyman C. Hunt Jr. Similar self-selected reading programs existed earlier, but most included teacher conferences where students’ accountability was more crucial and reading tended to be more efferent than aesthetic. It was not until 1967 that Hunt Jr. established Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) where book selection and reading became a strictly independent activity for the students (Bylut Ermitage & VanSluys, 2007; McCracken, 1971; Pilgreen, 2000).

The most commonly known SSR program is based largely on Robert McCracken’s (1971) six guidelines for initiating Sustained Silent Reading within a classroom. In fact, when teachers use the unaltered and original version of this strategy, these six guidelines are used:

1. The students read self-selected materials silently.
2. The teacher models by reading silently at the same time.
3. Students select one book, magazine, or newspaper to read for the entire time period.

4. A timer is set for a prescribed, uninterrupted time period.

5. No reports or records are kept.

6. The whole class, department, or school participates. (McCracken)

According to McCracken (1971), the overall intent of SSR is to develop each student’s ability to read silently without interruption for a long period of time. Though similar reading programs existed earlier, this self-selected, silent reading strategy asked the students to be highly accountable for their own reading. Teachers, principals, secretaries, and even custodians were asked to participate in this daily, scheduled, silent reading activity. The reasoning behind this school-wide reading activity is actually quite simple, but incredibly logical. To become a good reader, one must practice reading. Unfortunately reading is not always an activity that many young, developing readers want to practice every day. Therefore, modeling and self-selection, two of the key motivators to read, were applied to this new reading strategy. McCracken’s second and last guidelines focus on the importance of good reading models. The first and third guidelines focus on self-selection, another key motivator to read.

One of the main features in the original SSR reading strategy is the implementation of teaching modeling (McCracken, 1971). Using teacher modeling in its truest form requires the educator to entirely stop what he/she is doing and read silently along with the students. This method of modeling asks the teacher to step back, and ask the students to be accountable for their own reading. Monitoring of student progress is left to the individual students; at no point, should comprehension questions over the text be asked. Reading activities, writing prompts, or even sharing of opinions are not asked of the students either (McCracken). This SSR guideline is
usually enforced no matter the alteration of the strategy because the intention of this reading strategy is to get students to look at reading in an aesthetic rather than efferent manner. With daily, uninterrupted silent reading, a routine is established, a scheduled quiet reading time is provided, and an opportunity for continued practice with reading is created (McCracken).

*Theoretical Perspective for Practice*

The Matthew Effect is an educational term that was discovered and labeled during the 1980s by Walberg and Tsai, two educational researchers. To many educators, the Matthew Effect is an often-heard and well-understood educational term. However, it is necessary to clearly define this term so that the audience is always reading from the same perspective as the author. According to Loh’s (2009) concise summary, the Matthew Effect is best explained through the following analysis: “If little or no reading is done prior to and during third grade, the child is disadvantaged. This is what then came to be known as the Matthew Effect” (p. 99). Here Loh refers to the underlying basis of the Matthew Effect and its correlation to the skill of reading.

Though the Matthew Effect is applicable to many scenarios, its link to reading will be analyzed here. According to Loh (2009), in its basic, fundamental definition, the Matthew Effect is best described as the “rich get richer and poor get poorer” concept. As one can see, this concept can be applied to many scenarios, not just reading ones, or even educational ones. Its basic premise is to help explain the natural cycle of life’s circumstances. It supports the somewhat obvious concept of those who are already at an advantage, and continue to upkeep that advantage, will remain at an advantage. On the other hand, it also explains how those who are disadvantaged are highly likely to remain disadvantaged. Now the question is, how does the Matthew Effect apply to reading, and more specifically, how does it apply to independent silent reading programs much like Sustained Silent Reading? A direct comparison using the
educational issue at question will be the best way to explain this correlation. Essentially, “when one is competent in reading, one learns more and hence grows richer in knowledge and proficiency. Conversely, when one is not competent in reading, one gets poorer in one’s language proficiency through the years” (Loh, p. 99). Once again, both this positive and negative cycle is evident.

According to Stanovich (2008), the development of higher level reading skills positively correlates to the amount of reading one does. Stanovich (2008) explains:

…if the development of vocabulary knowledge substantially facilitates reading comprehension, and if reading itself is a major mechanism leading to vocabulary growth—which in turn will enable more efficient reading—then we truly have a reciprocal relationship that should continue to drive further growth in reading throughout a person's development. (p. 36)

In other words, there appears to be an incredibly positive cycle connected to daily reading. This connection helps explain how the Matthew Effect is applicable to reading skills as well.

Knowing that the Matthew Effect can be applied to the skill of reading is one of the major proponents for the creation of Sustained Silent Reading. Though in essence, Sustained Silent Reading is a rather simple literacy strategy, it still works to solve the negative aspect of the Matthew Effect. Simply put, Sustained Silent Reading provides students with a daily, allotted time to self-select books. This daily practice creates opportunities for improved reading skills, motivation, and engaged aesthetic reading. Overall, it seeks to address the adverse negative correlation for poor readers by providing them with ample, aesthetic reading practice (Loh, 2009; Stanovich, 2008).
As Loh (2009) and other researchers have found, the simple act of daily reading has been known to improve reading skills and abilities among all readers, no matter their reading level. It is important to recognize this well-known practice because of its obvious benefits. The more one practices at a skill the better the person becomes at that particular task. This same principle applies to reading, and is even more relevant to independent reading where readers are given chances for self-selection. In conjunction, the practice of daily silent reading creates opportunities for improving reading skills, as well as increasing reading motivation through self-selection and aesthetic reading. Thus, it is safe to assume that daily practice with books that students actually enjoy will encourage even more daily reading, consequently resulting in better outcomes (Loh).

**Theoretical Perspectives for Motivation**

Motivation to read is perhaps one of the largest improvements made from the implementation of independent silent reading programs like Sustained Silent Reading. Though motivation, reading attitude, and reading interest are not necessarily basic reading skills, they are quite possibly the foundation for the continuing of reading. Sustained Silent Reading uses very specific methods and guidelines that reflect the intentions of its reading program. The self-selection, modeling, and scheduled, daily silent reading aspects of SSR are all advocates of aesthetic reading (McCracken, 1971). These three aspects work to improve reader’s motivation, attitude, and interest towards books by creating a comfortable, positive reading environment. Valeri-Gold (as cited in Chua, 2008) states, “reports have found positive outcomes of the SSR program, such as an improvement in students’ interests and attitudes to reading” (p. 180). Not surprisingly, numerous educational researchers and educators continue to support and implement independent silent reading programs because of this well-supported reading result.
On a related note, it is important to first become familiar with the common motivators to read. Eleven motivators have been identified by Wigfield, Guthrie, and McGough (1996) and Baker and Wigfield (1999). These are: self-efficacy, challenge, work avoidance, curiosity, involvement, importance, recognition, grades, competition, social motives, and compliance. These eleven factors can be further divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As proposed by Wang and Guthrie (2004) intrinsic motivation consists of curiosity, involvement, and challenge. Though Sustained Silent Reading can be slightly adapted to involve both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational techniques, a majority of its original methods and guidelines work to address the intrinsic aspects of reading motivation. According to Wang and Guthrie (2004), curiosity, involvement, and challenge are said to be the three intrinsic motivators to read. These three motivators are not based solely on outside factors such as society and outsider’s opinions. Instead, they are formulated internally, or from within a reader’s persona. Thus, Sustained Silent Reading and other similar independent silent reading programs, largely seek to motivate and activate reading attitude and interest intrinsically.

In conclusion, motivation to read is significantly improved by independent silent reading programs like SSR. According to Valeri-Gold (1995) and other researchers, staying motivated, interested, and positive towards reading is truly one of the most beneficial literacy lessons that an educator can instill within their students. Creating a comfortable, positive reading environment that encourages students to think positively about reading is a responsibility that all educators should strive to construct within their classroom. Similarly, Yoon (as cited in Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, 2007) states, “a 2002 analysis of seven quantitative studies measuring the effectiveness of SSR on attitude toward reading found that allowing time for students to read materials of their own choosing resulted in small but significant gains in reading attitude” (p.
14). Though this result has been stated to be small, it is still significant. Any gains in reading motivation, attitude, and interest are a monumental accomplishment for both student and teacher.

Suggested Benefits of Independent Silent Reading Programs

Many independent silent reading programs have been created and implemented within numerous classrooms around the world. This does not come as a surprise. Independent silent reading programs much like SSR have been found to improve an abundant number of reading skills. Research shows that comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, reading motivation, and even writing improve through independent silent reading (Anderson et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHHD, 2000). Before a careful analysis of these benefits can be made, one must look at these benefits as a whole.

Comprehension, fluency, reading motivation, and writing are all fundamental literacy skills that can and should be addressed on their own. Each of these literacy skills is monumental for developing readers. Due to their importance, they are often addressed individually through skills-based instruction, but are also practiced in conjunction as well. As one can assume and as studies done by researchers such as Bomer and Bomer (2001) have shown, independent silent reading programs much like SSR are not intended to be an instructional practice that involves explicit, skills-based teaching. Instead, these programs aim to address the aesthetic and motivational aspect so that reading is viewed as a natural, pleasurable experience (Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, 2007).

Therefore, to look at each of these reading skills individually would be to approach this reading strategy at an unfair angle. SSR is not intended to be a skills-based instructional practice. Thus, its overall and intended benefit is to improve reading comprehension at an aesthetic and motivational slant. Daily, self-selected reading practice has been shown to positively affect
vocabulary, fluency, reading motivation, and writing. All of these individual reading skills consequently work together to improve reading comprehension. Just as Moore and Miller (as cited in Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, 2007, p. 12) found that “in order to become a proficient reader, the student must understand individual reading skills that are taught directly in the classroom, but he or she must also be able to transfer and apply them to independent reading in context”. In other words, if a reader is highly fluent, has exceptional vocabulary, great motivation to read, and remarkable writing skills, then it is unquestionable that he/she would also excel at reading comprehension. Bylut Ermitage and Van Sluys summarize SSR as “allow[ing] students the time and materials needed to practice applying skills in a real-world experience” (p. 12). It is from this standpoint, that the suggested benefits of independent silent reading programs much like SSR will be viewed.

Comprehension

As stated previously, comprehension is the overall reading skill benefit of Sustained Silent Reading. The positive effects seen in more specific reading skills such as fluency, vocabulary, motivation to read, and writing all work in conjunction to improve reading comprehension. Though each of these skills is incredibly important and capable of standing alone, comprehension is the encompassing benefit of many independent silent reading programs. Independent silent reading programs that encourage students to self-select and read books that interest them have proven to be highly effective in improving reading comprehension. According to numerous research studies, Sustained Silent Reading has been shown to have remarkable gains on students’ reading comprehension. Research studies by Pilgreen and Krashen (as cited in Meyers, 1998) and Keffer (as cited in Meyers) have found that Sustained Silent Reading has positively impacted the students’ reading comprehension. In fact Pilgreen and Krashen found
that 93% of the students who participated in in-school free reading programs did as well or better on grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and spelling than those students who were engaged in traditional arts programs.

Subsequently, Elley (1991) found that introduction to a widespread range of high-interest illustrated storybooks encourages children to read more quickly, as well as, develop positive attitudes toward books. Elley’s analysis is highly supportive of independent silent reading programs that work to engage students by allowing them to self-select books of high interest to them. Even more impressive is the specificity of the grade-level books used in Elley’s research. Additionally, Robb and Susser (1987) explain through data and research that reading comprehension is highly affected by extensive reading programs much like SSR. They have found that extensive reading may be at least as effective as skills building, with the important advantage that it is more interesting for learners (Robb & Susser).

Overall, independent silent reading programs much like SSR seek to first model reading as a natural and enjoyable experience by making it motivational. In these programs’ attempts to do so, the focus is largely on modeling and self-selection of high interest books. Robb and Susser (1987) as well as numerous other researchers have found that encouraging students to become active readers by providing them with a routine for daily reading creates opportunities for natural reading. This natural reading of high interest books unsurprisingly stimulates reading comprehension because students are actively engaged in what they are reading.

**Vocabulary Development**

Vocabulary development is yet another featured benefit of SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs. As explained by educational researchers such as Robb and Susser (1987) and Elley (1991), comprehension is the one of the most valuable reading skill
improved by this reading strategy. In concurrence, vocabulary development plays a vital role in reading comprehension. Consequently, the positive reading cycle is seen again in which the improvement of vocabulary also improves overall reading comprehension (Loh, 2009).

Improving vocabulary in developing readers can be done in a variety of manners. SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs are just one strategy that works to improve vocabulary and thus comprehension. Because SSR is a reading activity that was designed in a more aesthetic manner, much of its components seek to first motivate and engage readers. The opportunity for daily silent reading of high-interest, self-selected books is the overall premise of SSR (Bylut Ermitage & Van Sluys, 2007). This routine reading practice is an excellent opportunity for students to be introduced to new words.

Researchers such as Klesius and Searls (1991) have found that effective vocabulary instruction should involve both direct and indirect teaching methods; instruction should incorporate both direct and indirect teaching methods within the context of reading and literature (Glowacki, Lanucha, & Pietrus, 2001). Sustained Silent Reading can be seen as an indirect teaching method in which positive results in vocabulary development have often been seen. Effective vocabulary instruction can involve both direct and indirect teaching methods. Positive results in vocabulary instruction have been seen in both of these methods; however, the major difference is how the instruction is implemented.

The simple act of reading new texts with new words and new vocabulary provide readers with the opportunity to improve their current vocabulary. In summary, Loh (2009) reveals, “a person acquires his/her vocabulary not through memorization, but by accruing fragments of word knowledge for each of the thousands of words he or she encounters each day” (p. 97). It is clear that Sustained Silent Reading’s methods are the perfect proponent for increasing vocabulary
development. Similarly, Coady (1997) and Hirsch (2003) have both discovered that the act of improving vocabulary development can be achieved through reading. Their studies have demonstrated that through reading interesting texts, students learn new vocabulary and review old ones. Once again, this analysis greatly supports the methods of SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs. It is remarkable that the simple practice of daily reading can have so many positive effects of developing readers.

The motivational and engaging stance that SSR was developed upon helps to encourage students to view reading as a pleasurable experience. The organic process of aesthetic reading naturally increases vocabulary, and therefore, comprehension. SSR works to provide students with an outlet for aesthetic reading in school, while also modeling what pleasurable reading looks like (McCracken, 1971). Hirsch (2003) further supports this analysis by revealing that to improve reading, schools have begun increasing the amount of time allocated to language arts, focusing on general knowledge and effective use of school time. It is clear that Hirsch is a supporter for independent silent reading programs like SSR because they focus on the general knowledge of reading, while also using academic time responsibly. Implementing programs such as SSR are advantageous to both student and teacher because they address many basic reading skills in a more engaging way.

Overall, SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs seek to model reading as a natural and enjoyable experience by making it motivational first. In these programs’ attempts to do so, the focus is largely on modeling and self-selection of high interest books. Encouraging students to become active readers by providing them with a routine for daily reading creates opportunities for natural reading. This natural reading of high interest books unsurprisingly stimulates vocabulary development because students are frequently introduced to
new words (Garan & DeVoogd, 2008). New words eventually are made into new vocabulary and one of the only natural ways to be introduced to new words is through daily, pleasurable reading.

**Fluency**

Fluency is yet another reading skill that has been reported to improve through independent silent reading programs much like SSR. However, one certainly begins to wonder how fluency, something that is generally assessed orally, can be assessed for improvement through silent reading. Though this oral reading skill may be somewhat difficult to assess for improvement in a silent reading program, it is not hard to make the analysis that fluency will be affected. Once again, the previously discussed Matthew Effect comes into play; the more that someone is positively immersed in the desired skill, the more natural opportunities he/she is provided for improvement (NICHHD, 2000). Furthermore, studies done by various researchers such as Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) have found a strong relationship between reading ability and how much a student reads. According to Reed (2005), “fluency and automaticity are likely to improve with more [reading] practice” (p 14). These studies help support the connection often seen between the Matthew Effect, Sustained Silent Reading, and improved reading fluency.

Independent, silent reading programs much like SSR, have allowed students to improve fluency skills by allotting for increased opportunities for aesthetic reading practice (Osborn and Lehr with Hiebert, 2003). Independent silent reading program like SSR provide students with a routine amount of opportunities for immersion in high interest books that students themselves select. This frequent absorption in aesthetic texts keeps students motivated to read, and as Garan and DeVoogd (2008) suggest, “the more time students spent with ‘eyes on text’, the better readers they will become” (p. 340). Once again, immersion into text creates better overall readers.
Largely, SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs aim to improve the aesthetic aspect of natural reading. By providing students with an allotted time in school to read books of their own choice, students are directed to look at reading in a more pleasurable light. By approaching reading in this manner, the basic reading skills that are often drilled into students explicitly, are innately addressed. Comprehension remains the all-encompassing improvement of SSR and other similar independent silent reading programs. However, as comprehension improves along with reading attitude and interest, fluency naturally improves along with it. As Garan and DeVoogd (2008) beautifully summarize, “time spent reading is class time well spent” (p. 340). Thus, the argument that independent silent reading programs are instead unnecessary begins to seem ludicrous.

**Writing Skills**

Improvement of writing skills is yet another literacy benefit supported by independent silent reading strategies much like SSR. As stated earlier, reading comprehension remains the all-encompassing reading skill improvement seen in SSR. However, individually the basic literacy skills such as writing, vocabulary, and fluency simultaneously work to improve reading comprehension. Often times, it is witnessed that without growth in one particular reading skill, the reader does not grow in the others. Loh (2009) explains both this positive and negative cycle, “reading helps by introducing and giving exposure to writing conventions and genres” (p. 98). This connection and correlation between reading and writing suggest that the skills can be improved instantaneously through the simple practice of daily reading.

Studies have shown that reading affects children’s writing. The act of children mimicking the forms of writing that they are exposed to after they read has often been seen thus proving the correlation between the two literacy skills (Eckhoff, 1983; Loh, 2009). Additionally, numerous
“studies indicated an interactive relationship between reading and writing: Knowledge gained in one can often be transferred to the other” (Loh, p. 99). Without a doubt, the large number of studies that reveal similar data and results concerning this positive relationship, continue to further support the suggested benefits of independent silent reading programs. The daily practice of silent reading provides the students with a large variety of self-selected books. This variety of interesting books introduces the reader to differing writing styles, words, and topics thus, formulating better writing skills through immersion.

Overall, Rasinski and Padak (2004) best summarize the positive benefits of balanced literacy strategies much like SSR. They have found that in a truly balanced and comprehensive literacy program, it is critical for teachers to find the time to nurture students’ love for reading and writing. In addition, time needs to be spent daily in self-selected reading. Likewise, time also needs to be spent daily with the teacher sharing his or her own reading and writing life with students.

Value of Sustained Reading

To better understand why this often-recommended reading strategy has recently been questioned, one must first become familiar with the National Reading Panel’s analysis of independent silent reading programs much like SSR. Indeed, the National Reading Panel’s 2000 report sparked a rather controversial debate that in some cases offended those who support independent silent reading programs, or at the very least, brought forth cause for concern. However, before any accusations can be made against either side of the argument, thorough analysis of the NRP’s claims must be made first.

Paramount to this analysis is the National Reading Panel’s introductory statements concerning independent silent reading. Their opinion on independent silent reading programs
was not necessarily negative, but was, instead, questioning. The panel clearly understood the often-accepted reading benefits that independent silent reading has been known to instill in readers. From their introduction to the topic it is safe to assume that the NRP did not intend to deny or purposely prove these benefits null and void. They simply questioned the integrity of this reading strategy because of the correlational, rather than causational, research. Simply stated, the NRP believed that the research on independent silent reading programs proved to be “correlational in nature, and correlation does not imply causation” (NICHHD, 2000, p. 12). All of the correlational studies that have found independent silent reading programs to be incredibly beneficial to readers were acknowledged before their overall findings and determinations were even made. This once again proves that the panel’s intentions were not to destroy this reading strategy’s reputation, but sought rather to legitimatize its benefits. In summary, the panel fully recognized the established claims of independent silent readings’ benefits made towards a wide variety of reading skills. However, they were in search for legitimate, credible research to support these benefits.

As a result of their determination to seek credible research, the panel began a stringent search for research and data they believed would prove the suggested benefits as causational rather than correlational. In other words, they believed, “there are simply not sufficient data from well-designed studies capable of testing questions of causation to substantiate causal claims” (NICHHD, 2000, p. 13). Of course, the question then arises as to why this panel was given the authority to decide what research criteria is the correct criteria to prove all of independent silent reading’s benefits as inconclusive. According to Krashen, (2009), the NRP does not have that authority and refutes their research criteria with remarkably sound findings. In summary, Krashen found:
even more convincing are experimental studies in which students who do self-selected reading for a given amount of time are compared to students who devote the same amount of time to "regular" instruction. Self-selected reading has been a consistent winner in these studies, in first and second language, for children and older students, and in widely differing circumstances. (p. 20).

Though it is obvious that Krashen is an adamant supporter of independent silent reading programs, his thorough collection and analysis of supportive research on this reading strategy cannot be disregarded.

Even so, the NRP has still brought forth a solid cause for concern. Their national accreditation and their legitimate claim against these programs’ ability to create causal reading benefits rather than correlational ones, is a dynamic argument which is best summarized in their concluding report. “In sum, methodologically rigorous research designed to assess the specific influences that independent silent reading practices have on reading fluency and other reading skills and the motivation to read has not yet been conducted” (NICHHD, 2000, p.13).

Nevertheless, Krashen (2005) once again responds with authentic and specific data to prove the NRP’s analysis wrong. Krashen counters the panel’s claims with explicit detail and finds “negative results in only three comparisons out of 53, and in the NRP report, which found no studies in which SSR students performed less well than controls” (Krashen, p. 445)

Overall, the National Reading Panel’s report has indeed sparked a heated debate on independent silent reading’s authenticity. Many individuals like Krashen (2001, 2005, 2009) continue to remain proud and adamant supporters of independent silent reading programs like SSR. On the contrary, other individuals do not support programs like SSR possibly because of the NRP’s report or possibly because of their own personal educational beliefs. Either way, the
National Reading Panel innocuously sought to find credible, causal research to support the widely accepted benefits of independent silent reading. At no point, did they ever claim that these types of reading programs do not formulate positive reading skill benefits; rather, they simply stated that currently, they have not been able to find credible, causal research to support it. It is safe to assume that the NRP did not intentionally seek to attack these reading programs, but rather encourage researchers and educators to design and create data that would prove it credible instead.

The question now remains as to how many current educators are actually following all of these original six guidelines. The original six guidelines hold students highly accountable for their own reading. Allowing students to read on their own as the educator reads alongside the students can be a somewhat frightening classroom strategy. For SSR to be beneficial for a majority of the participating students, excellent classroom management procedures and good teaching of silent reading behaviors and expectations are required. This high level of student accountability and minimal monitoring of students’ reading have led to the adaptation of silent reading strategies. As an educator, it is always important to analyze new educational practices and theories. Reflection and continuous growth and improvement are active ingredients in successful teaching. Therefore, researching the current adapted silent reading programs is an essential step for current SSR users to do.

Adapted Sustained Silent Reading Programs

Since the development of SSR, many very similar reading programs have been created and used in schools all around the world. Some silent reading programs are incredibly similar, while others vary significantly. Examples of some commonly used Sustained Silent Reading strategies are: Self-Selected Reading, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Be Excited About
Reading (BEAR), We Enjoy Books (WEB), Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Sustained Quiet Reading Time (SQUIRT), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), or High Intensity Practice (HIP) (Pilgreen, 2000). Overall, the main objective for these reading programs is to encourage students to read silently with daily, uninterrupted silent reading practice. However, it is not certain how strictly these varying reading strategies follow the original SSR guidelines.

After the release of the report by the National Reading Panel, practitioners began to search for ways to add to the traditional SSR so as to make it more accountable. Independent Reading (IR), Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR), and Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R³) are just a few of the adapted silent reading programs currently being used in elementary schools. All three of these programs address the two areas of concern mentioned above. The high level of student accountability and the minimal monitoring of students’ reading are successfully altered in these programs. Instead these programs require teachers to become more accountable for their students’ reading progress by actively monitoring them.

*Independent Reading (IR)*

Independent Reading (IR), the first Sustained Silent Reading program mentioned above, is an example of an adapted silent reading program that is significantly more structured than the original or even slightly altered versions, of SSR. This program’s goal is to “provide students with the self-selected reading time that they need and the social supports that foster reading engagement” (Trudel, 2007, p. 309). Independent Reading provides the students with more than just a reading model; it ensures that students are provided with the essential reading strategies for successful and independent silent readers. This aspect of IR is a rather remarkable improvement especially in the early childhood classroom. It addresses the developmental stage in which many young, early readers find themselves. Early childhood students often require structure, explicit
guidance, teacher modeling, and monitoring. To best understand this reading strategy, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) summarize Independent Reading with the following five key elements:

1. The teacher provides guidance in the students’ text selections.
2. Students keep records of what they read.
3. Students reflect what they read.
4. Both teacher and students participate in min-lessons and discussions from time to time.
5. The teacher is not reading during the entire reading block (unless modeling a strategy with a student). (Fountas & Pinnell)

Comparing these five IR elements to SSR is useful when deciding whether IR will work better for students in early childhood classrooms. These five elements use the explicit instruction that many young, developing readers still require. Many of the components of SSR may prove to be ineffective for young students who need to be explicitly taught basic silent reading skills such as self-selection, reading reflection, and other additional reading skills (Trudel, 2007).

Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR)

Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR), the second silent reading strategy mentioned, is another example of an adapted silent reading program that addresses the weaknesses of the traditional SSR program. Once again, ScSR provides the students with more structure. Additionally, it gives the students the much-needed accountability they require while reading. According to Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008), “ScSR makes use of silent, wide reading of independent-level texts selected from varied genres: periodic teacher monitoring of an interaction with individual students; and accountability through completed book response assignments” (p. 39).
Often when students are asked to complete a task on their own, it is assumed that explicit instruction and connecting assignments are implemented within the task as well. Unfortunately, many students need to be held accountable for their schoolwork or they may, more than likely, not complete it. Reading is not always an enjoyable task for all students, connecting it to various reading and writing activities may help students remain on-task. This provides the students with an additional boost of motivation to remain on-task and focused on what they are reading, while also improving students’ overall reading skills. “ScSR makes use of silent, wide reading of independent-level texts selected from varied genres: periodic teacher monitoring of an interaction with individual students; and accountability through completed book response assignments” (Ruetzel et al., 2008, p. 39). Overall, ScSR continues to keep the positive aspects of Sustained Silent Reading, while also addressing its perceived areas of concern.

Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R$^5$)

Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R$^5$), the third silent reading strategy mentioned, also addresses the original weaknesses in the traditionally implemented SSR program. Disengaged readers during silent reading was often a major cause for concern, therefore, R$^5$ was designed by Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006) to help keep readers on-task, focused, and driven to become active, silent readers. The main overview for the R$^5$ process is:

three days a week, students spend 10-25 minutes reading self-selected texts. After reading, they reflect in writing on their use of metacognitive practices taught during mini-lessons, guided reading, and read-aloud. Conversations about books, or the rap portion of R$^5$, occurred when students discussed reflections with partners. (pp. 151-152)
These five elements help prevent fake reading and inappropriate book selections based on students’ reading levels. Additionally, and unlike SSR, R5 also works to provide the students with a purpose for reading.

These three adapted silent reading strategies are a reflection of numerous educators’ concerns for the originally implemented SSR program. Though many educators do not question SSR’s well-known benefits, possible weaknesses within the program had been seen within classrooms. In addition, the National Reading Panel’s report brought forth further questions due to their inability to fully support and recommend SSR. Their analysis, explained previously did not prove SSR to be void of its benefits. Instead, they did not find sufficient research based on their stringent research criteria.

Summary

Many researchers have found that literacy skills, such as comprehension, vocabulary development, fluency, reading motivation, and even writing, can be improved through independent silent reading programs much like Sustained Silent Reading. Research results and data have shown that readers are given the opportunity to improve these reading skills through this reading strategy.

In addition, it is important to understand why this reading strategy was created; knowing how SSR improves a wide variety of reading skills helps support its creation. Though it appears that the initial reasons for this reading program were based solely on aesthetic, motivational concepts, this is not entirely the case. Most reading strategies are not merely created for one reason; multiple, differing angles are addressed so that balanced reading instruction can occur. As one can see, Sustained Silent Reading is a reading program that strives to first look at reading in an aesthetic, enjoyable light. Sustained Silent Reading intends to naturally address the basic
reading skills that develop in readers who read often. To continue, reading needs to be viewed as pleasurable and engaging; SSR seeks to address this frequent reading concern first and foremost.

Furthermore, Sustained Silent Reading has been subject to adaptation over the last several decades. A wide variety of either slightly, or even greatly, adapted SSR programs have arisen as a result of careful reflection done by current educators and researchers. Many Sustained Silent Reading programs’ basis continues to be focused on the aesthetic, motivational aspects of reading. When differences in program methods are seen, they are centered on basic reading skills that some educators feel need to be more explicitly taught to result in improvements.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ use and perceived values and benefits of Sustained Silent Reading within their classrooms. Specifically, the research questions under investigation the focus of this investigation was to answer two research questions were: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive SSR leads to improved reading skills? A unique survey on SSR was given to first, second, and third grade early childhood education teachers. This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used to conduction this investigation.

Methods

Research Design

First, second, and third grade teachers’ behaviors with regard to adherence to McCracken’s guidelines (1971) as well as their perceptions on Sustained Silent Reading were obtained using survey research. A unique, personally created survey was designed for early childhood education teachers polled in this study (See Appendix D). This was primarily a quantitative study with some qualitative data regarding teacher use of SSR.

Participants

The teachers participating in this study came from several schools within close proximity of one another. These schools were all elementary schools found in the Northwest Ohio area. The schools were located in what are considered rural areas, though some are actually categorized as city school districts. The other school districts are referred to as local school districts because of their classification as a village. First, second, and third grade teachers from 8 school districts and 13 elementary school buildings had been asked to participate in the SSR survey. This large number of school districts and elementary school buildings were visited so
that a reliable and statistically sound amount of data could be collected. In total, 107 first, second, and third grade teachers were asked to participate; 59 teachers returned the surveys.

**Instrumentation**

To obtain the first, second, and third grade teachers’ behaviors regarding McCracken’s guidelines (1971) and current perceptions towards SSR, teachers were questioned through the use of survey research. The teacher-survey first contained short-answer questions that allowed for data collection on how teachers are actually implementing, or have implemented, SSR in their classrooms. Next, the survey contained two sections of Yes/No questions. The first section was formatted in a closed-response Yes/No nature so that SSR implementation could be further gauged. The second section of Yes/No questions was formatted in an open-response manner where explanations could be additionally provided if the teacher had responded with a “No”. This set of Yes/No questions was also designed to better understand how teachers exercised SSR within their classroom.

The last section of the survey contained a set of five identified reading benefits which teachers were asked to rate using a traditional Likert scale. These addressed the five reading skills that Sustained Silent Reading has been said to benefit. Once teachers had finished rating the level of improvement seen in these five reading skills, they were asked to respond to two open-ended questions that were designed to measure their perceptions on the benefits and weaknesses of SSR within their classroom.

**Procedures**

After researching several studies about teachers’ perceptions of SSRs values, a survey was created for first, second, and third grade early childhood education teachers. This survey asked participants to comment on their behaviors regarding adherence to McCracken’s
guidelines (1971) as well as their current perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading within their classroom. Several Northwest Ohio elementary schools were selected due to the author’s familiarity with the schools and their reading programs, and also because of the schools’ proximity to the author and one another.

First, phone calls were made to several elementary school principals to see if they and their teaching staff might be interested in participating in a study on Sustained Silent Reading (see Appendix A for recruitment script). Calls continued until 13 Northwest Ohio elementary school buildings appeared to be highly interested in the study and were willing to schedule a day and time to further discuss the details of the study. If the principal seemed interested, a predetermined day and time was scheduled to discuss the formalities of the study in person.

At the scheduled meeting, details on the rationale behind the study, as well as verbal instructions on the procedures of the survey, were explained to the each of the 13 elementary building principals. Once all the details and instructions had been provided to the principals, any questions that may have occurred were answered at that time. Since all principals had expressed a high interest in the study over the phone recruitment sessions, the scheduled meetings consisted of going over the fine details of the study and then asking principals to sign a consent form (see Appendix B). Once the principals had signed the consent form, a date was decided upon when the researcher was to place the teachers’ survey packets into their school mailboxes.

The survey packet consisted of one instruction and rationale letter for the teacher-survey (see Appendix C), one teacher-survey, and one self-addressed stamped envelope. All first, second, and third grade teachers were given a survey packet in their school mailboxes. All teachers were asked to send the survey by the return-date, but only teachers that had used SSR in the past, or are currently using SSR, were asked to complete the entire survey. Teachers who
have never used SSR before only completed the survey through question #4, but were still asked to send it in by the return-date. This guideline and return-date were clearly stated in of the directions. In addition, teachers were instructed to respond as honestly, and as detailed as possible to the SSR survey that should have taken no more than 15 minutes of their time. Lastly, the teachers were clearly informed on when to return the survey to the author of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected from the 59 returned teacher-surveys. Of the 59 surveys, 5 teachers said they did not use SSR; therefore, their surveys were not considered in the data collection and data analysis sections. As a result, there were 54 viable surveys.

Then, the collected data were tallied, recorded, and organized using Minitab, a statistical computer program. Each individual survey response, even responses that were not answered, were tallied and organized using this statistical program. Data were further organized by the order of the question as it appeared on the survey, and the type of questions being asked. Once this organizing was completed, a Minitab worksheet was created that compiled all grade levels. The Minitab worksheet was an effective way to organize and run frequency distribution counts for all quantitative survey questions on the teacher-surveys.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from every question provided on the teacher-survey. Percentages were calculated and found using Minitab, a statistical computer program. For all quantitative questions in the teacher survey, frequency distribution counts were ran to generate percentages. Data were hand-tallied and recorded for all open-ended questions. First, all responses were individually read and then summarized categories were created. Then, the surveys were re-read and hand-tallied according to the categories. These tallied counts were then converted into
percentages that were transferred into frequency tables for quick and easy comparison and analysis.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to answer the following questions: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills? Fifty-four first, second, and third grade teachers indicated they used SSR and completed a survey that allowed them to indicate their adherence to McCracken’s (1971) guidelines and to voice their opinions on SSRs perceived values, benefits, and challenges. A three-page survey consisting of 23 specific, concise, and clear closed-response, and open-ended questions, was distributed.

The results of these returned surveys were then compiled through the use of simple statistical calculations for analysis and organization. Specifically, rating scales were used for the quantitative questions to easily calculate frequency counts. Additionally, an organizational tally method was used for the open-ended response questions. These responses were then analyzed to answer the stated research questions.
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Teacher reflection is a vital component for successful student learning. Often, teachers question whether or not their current teaching strategies, tools, and programs positively benefit their students, or if they in fact, are doing little to nothing for them. In today’s early childhood classroom, reading and writing are often the focus of daily lessons. With so much time, planning, and work spent on reading and writing, educators, parents, and possibly even students, wonder if the reading tools, strategies, and programs they use are actually working. Due to its wide popularity among all grade levels and its recent educational debate sparked by the NRP Report (NICHHD, 2000), one of these questioned reading programs is Sustained Silent Reading.

This study was undertaken to provide relevant information on the often-lacking Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) research within early childhood classrooms. The data were collected to answer two questions related to this silent reading program. Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills?

To answer these two questions, 54 first, second, and third grade early childhood educators from 8 Northwest Ohio school districts and 13 elementary school buildings completed a three-page survey regarding their current practices related to Sustained Silent Reading. Numerous questions were asked to create a realistic picture of what SSR actually looks like in the early childhood education classroom. Participants were also asked to rate, as well as to provide information, concerning what they perceived the level of improvement to be amongst their students’ overall reading skills. This chapter presents the analysis of data collected and then finishes with a discussion of the results.
Data Analysis

Through computerized counting and tallying done using the statistical program called Minitab, frequency counts were generated for all qualitative, closed-response and open-ended survey questions. Using this statistics program, percentages were calculated to identify the frequency of teachers’ responses. The survey was designed so that most of its questions could be analyzed in a quantitative, numerical manner. Therefore, a majority of the survey questions are quantitative in nature and could be analyzed using the procedure described above. Only four survey questions were qualitative within this teacher-survey. These four questions required a different data analysis process than the quantitative questions. This process is described below.

For these four qualitative, open-ended survey questions, a much different analysis was used. First, all qualitative survey questions were individually read. Based upon teachers’ responses, differing categories were then created for each of the four survey questions to produce analytical organization. All surveys were then reread; tallying was done within the predetermined analytical groups. Percents were calculated by hand to determine the amount of similar teacher responses to all qualitative survey questions.

Relevant Sustained Silent Reading Background Questions

The first six questions of the survey were designed to obtain relevant background information concerning teachers’ use of Sustained Silent Reading. The 54 participants were first asked to identify their current grade level. Thirty-nine percent of the teachers surveyed are currently teaching first grade; 34% are currently teaching second grade, and 27% are currently teaching third grade.

Next, participants were asked to identify the current reading series being used. Of the respondents, 31% indicated they were currently using the MacMillan/McGraw-Hill reading
series. The Houghton Mifflin reading series was being used by 24% of the teachers. The Harcourt series and the Scott Foresman series were reportedly used by 20% each of the teachers. The remaining 5% of the respondents either did not respond or did not indicate the use of a basal reading series.

The third survey question asked the teachers to provide an open-ended, qualitative response to the question “Briefly explain what SSR means to you”. After analyzing each teacher survey, a list of five common definition criteria were identified and labeled. Additionally, the totals will not equal the 54 returned surveys amount because several teachers’ responses incorporated more than one of these categorical responses. These categories included:

1. *Students self-select reading materials that are near their independent reading level* (N=31)
2. *Students read uninterrupted for a scheduled period of time* (N=27)
3. *Students read independently* (N=21)
4. *Students read silently* (N=21)
5. *Students read for pleasure, enjoyment, and to instill the love of reading* (N=13).

Many teachers defined Sustained Silent Reading as a combination of several, if not all, of these categories.

The fourth question asked whether the teachers ever used, or were currently using, SSR in their classroom. Of the 59 early childhood education teachers who responded, 92% have used, or are currently using, SSR within their classroom. Only 8%, or five of the 59 teachers, have never used this program before, and their responses were not considered for data analysis.

The remaining two questions asked teachers to indicate the number of days per week they used SSR in their classroom and the number of minutes per day devoted to SSR. Regarding the
number of days per week using SSR, the majority (54%) of the 54 surveyed first, second and third grade teachers stated that they tend to use SSR in their classroom on a daily basis, or five times a week. Some teachers responded with range of days; for instance, they stated they used SSR three to four times a week. The lowest number of that range was used.

The last of the organizationally directed SSR survey questions asked the teachers to indicate how much time, in minutes, they spend on each of their Sustained Silent Reading sessions. Nearly 60% spend around 15 minutes for each SSR session (see Figure 1). Due to the already numerical responses, no coding was necessary, however several teachers did respond with ranges. Therefore, the method described above was used once again so that statistical analysis was possible while also remaining constant and reliable.

Figure 1
Sustained Silent Reading Guideline-Specific Questions

After basic and relevant background information was obtained from participants, a series of Yes/No closed-response questions, Yes/No open-ended questions, and a collection of Likert closed-response questions were asked on the survey. In the first series of Yes/No closed-response questions, the teachers were asked to identify common practices associated with SSR. They were asked to circle either “Yes” if they followed a common practice or “No” if they did not. The first set of questions consisted of nine Yes/No closed-response questions. To analyze the data, the qualitative responses provided in this section of the survey were first numerically coded. “Yes” was coded as two and “No” was coded as one; whenever a question was missed, it was coded as a zero.

Once numerical coding was completed, data were reported for each individual question using frequency distribution counts in percentage form. The individual percentages were then compiled into a single, much more condensed, table for easier reader analysis. Many of the guideline-specific questions revealed that more than half of the teachers were following only some of the common practices typically associated with SSR (See Table 1).

Then next group of questions were also designed to better understand early childhood teachers’ implementation of Sustained Silent Reading. The six Yes/No open-ended questions were actually based upon the exact guidelines created by McCracken (1971). Teachers were asked to read the six guidelines and check “Yes” if they followed it, or check “No” if they did not. If they responded with “No”, they were also asked to provide a brief explanation as why they did not follow it (See Table 2). All qualitative responses were first numerically coded in
Table 1

How Teachers Implement Sustained Silent Reading within their Classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Unable to Participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is total silence required during SSR?</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are children allowed to read anything of their choice?</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are interruptions allowed?</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do others in the room read?</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is SSR a planned activity in your lesson plans?</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a classroom library?</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this a school-wide or district-wide program?</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this activity one you have chosen personally?</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, do your students enjoy SSR?</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

What Percentage of Teachers use the Original SSR Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSR Guideline:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Unable to Participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students read self-selected materials silently</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher models by reading silently at the same time</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students select one book, magazine, newspaper to read for the entire time</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A timer is set for a prescribed, uninterrupted time period</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reports or records are kept</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The whole class, department, or school participates</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the same manner as the previous Yes/No series of survey questions. After analysis of the teachers’ responses, it is understood that over half of the early childhood educators polled currently do not follow every one of McCracken’s original guidelines. In fact, the only guideline that almost every teacher does follow is the first guideline which happens to be the “heart and soul” of SSR, as 86% said their students read self-selected materials silently during SSR.
As stated earlier, whenever a teacher did not use a SSR guideline, he/she was asked to check “No” and then provide a brief explanation as to why he/she did not follow that guideline. After careful analysis of the qualitative responses recorded by teachers, a series of similar categories were created and tallied for frequency. This process was similar to the qualitative analysis used for survey question number three. To better organize results, each guideline had its own response categories.

The first Sustained Silent Reading guideline, *Students read self-selected materials silently* did not have many “No” responses. Only 5% responded “No” to this guideline; therefore, further, more detailed analysis into why students did not self-select materials silently was not necessary. However, the one teacher that responded “No” to this question explained that it was because his/her first grade students could not read silently yet; they instead read out loud quietly.

The second guideline, *The teacher models by reading silently at the same time* had four common responses. These being: *Teacher is doing daily planning, grading, etc* (N=5). *Teacher is assisting other students* (N=7); and last, *Teacher is working in small groups or conferencing* (N=11). Of those four responses, a majority of teachers (N=11 of 25) clarified that the reason why they were not modeling silent reading alongside their students was because they often were working in small groups or conferencing while SSR occurred.

The third guideline, *Students select one book, magazine, or newspaper to read for the entire time period* had only one common response. This was that many books near the students’ independent reading were simply too short and that students often finished reading books before the SSR session was over.

The fourth guideline, *A timer is set for a prescribed, uninterrupted time period* had two common responses. These being: *A timer is not used, instead I just watch the clock* (N=11); and
last, *Not all students are working on SSR at the same time* (N=5). Of those two responses, a majority of the teachers (N= 11 of 16) explained that the reason a timer is not set is because they simply just watch the clock.

The fifth guideline, *No reports or records are kept* had two common responses. These being: *I just never thought to keep records or reports* (N=2); and last, *Records are kept many times through the use of Accelerated Reader* (N=10). Of those two responses, a majority of the teachers (N= 10 of 12) stated that the reason records were being kept was because reporting tools were used such as Accelerated Reader.

The last SSR guideline had many “No” responses, but nearly every teacher stated that they simply were not sure why the whole class, department, or school did not all participate in SSR.

*Questions on the Suggested Benefits of Sustained Silent Reading*

Nearing the end of the teachers’ survey, participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the level of improvement seen in five, basic language arts skills (see Table 3). According to the participating teachers’ perceptions, these improvements were perceived to be a direct result of the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading within their classrooms. One of McCracken’s original guidelines states that no records or reports on students’ reading are to be kept during SSR. Therefore, authentic assessment would only be possible through informal, teacher observation. Informal teacher observation can be subjective, but teachers can monitor students’ progress objectively using other assessment tools linked to SSR, like Accelerated Reader. However, it still remains unclear whether Sustained Silent Reading is the responsible catalyst for improvement, or if it is the other strategies and tools being used.

Research has shown and suggested that five basic language arts skills are benefited
### Table 3
Teachers’ Perception of Students’ Level of Reading Skills Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSR Benefit:</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Unable to Participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reading</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Vocabulary</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reading</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reading</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Writing</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

through the use of Sustained Silent Reading; these are, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading motivation, and writing skills (Anderson et al., 1988;
Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHHHD, 2000). Teachers were then asked to rate what they perceived as the overall level of students’ improvement for each skill as a result of SSR. This rating was done using a four-scale Likert rating system where one equaled “None”, two equaled “Very Little”, three equaled “Some”, and four equaled “Significant”. Five distinct questions were designed using this Likert scale so that adequate attention to each of the suggestions benefits could be addressed. Therefore, question one addressed reading comprehension, question two vocabulary development, question three reading fluency, question four reading motivation, and question five writing skills.

To analyze the data, numerical coding was again required. However, much of the collected data were already quantitative in nature so little coding was necessary. First, all data was entered. Next, a frequency count and percentage was generated using Minitab. These results were then compiled into the more condensed table (see Table 3) for simpler graph analysis.

In nearly all five language arts skills areas, teachers perceived there to be “some level of improvement” within their students’ reading skills. Overall and at the very least, 42% of the teachers believed that their students’ reading skills were identified as seeing “some level of improvement”. Additionally and at the very highest, only 2% of the teachers believed that their students’ writing skills were identified as seeing no level of improvement. All and all, the participating teachers perceived there to be improvements in all five language arts skills. To better answer the driving questions of this study, the level of some improvement, significant improvement, and no improvement will be discussed below.

As stated previously, teachers perceived there to be some level of improvement (at least 42%) in all five reading skills said to improve through the implementation of SSR. Specifically, comprehension (54%), vocabulary (69%), fluency (43%), reading motivation (42%), and writing
(65%) all saw some level of improvement. Additionally, but excluding writing skills, teachers perceived there to be significant levels of improvement (at least 17%) in the four other reading skills said to improve through the implementation of SSR. Specifically, comprehension (32%), vocabulary (17%), fluency (37%), and reading motivation (43%) all saw significant levels of improvement. Analyzing any level of improvement is vital to addressing the driving question in this study: Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills? When combining the some level and the significant level of improvement ratings, the results revealed that a substantial majority of the participating teachers (at least 70%) believed there to be positive effects in all five reading skills when SSR is implemented within their classrooms. In addition, only 2% saw no level of improvement in the five reading skill areas. This small percentage was said to be seen in the writing skill area, while not a single teacher perceived there to be no level of improvement in the remaining four reading skill areas.

The last two questions on the survey asked teachers what they believed were the benefits of their SSR program and the weaknesses of their program. All qualitative, open-ended responses were first read for similar answers. For the question that addressed the benefits of SSR, five categories were identified. These being: Improved fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and other reading skills (N=8); a provided time to read (N=10); an opportunity to self-select from a wide variety of reading material (N=16); reading enjoyment and creating an appreciation for books (N=18); and last, independent, confident readers (N=9). Of those five categories, the two most widely provided answers were the opportunity to foster reading enjoyment and create an appreciation for books (N=18), and the opportunity for students to self-select from a wide variety of reading materials (N=16).
The second of these two questions addressed the weaknesses of SSR. After analyzing the qualitative, open-ended responses, five common categories were also identified and responses were this tallied. These five categories are: *Does not remain as enjoyable and aesthetic* (N=2); *Students often “fake read”, misbehave, or have trouble staying focused and on task* (N=30); *Not enough time to daily implement or school-related interruptions occur* (N=17); *Hard to evaluate students’ progress* (N=2); and last, *Do not stick to the strict original SSR guidelines* (N=9). Of those five categories, the two most widely provided answers as to what teachers viewed the weaknesses of SSR to be were that students often “fake read”, misbehave, or have trouble staying focused and on task (N=30), and that there is simply not enough time to consistently schedule SSR daily, or school-related interruptions occur (N=7).

Discussion of Results

The research questions for this study were: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills? Results from this survey research show that none of the first, second, and third grade teachers implement Sustained Silent Reading using all of McCracken’s original six guidelines (1971). The only guideline that most of the polled teacher (86%) continued to use with their silent reading sessions was the first and most important one: they did not use the suggested guidelines because they viewed them as impractical and developmentally inappropriate for the early childhood setting.

The second question asked in this study and addressed in the teachers’ survey, was whether teachers perceived their students’ reading skills being improved as a result of Sustained Silent Reading. Much research has indicated that SSR benefits students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading motivation, and even writing skills (Anderson
et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHD, 2000). These five basic language arts skills were identified in the survey and asked to be rated using a four-scale Likert rating system. When teachers were asked to rate the perceived level of improvement that their students’ reading skills benefited, 42% said that nearly all of the suggested benefits improved “some” as a result of SSR, except reading motivation which improved “significantly” (43%). Not surprising, writing skills was considered one of the lowest improved language arts skills as a result of SSR’s implementation. In fact, the highest level of “little” improvement was seen in students’ writing skills (18%).

Summary

Through the use of survey research, this study investigated how Sustained Silent Reading is implemented in first, second, and third grade teachers’ classrooms, as well as what their perception of this reading program’s benefits and weaknesses are. A total of 54 first, second, and third grade teachers from eight Northwest Ohio school districts and 13 elementary school buildings reported somewhat similar results.

Many teachers believed the reading program was highly beneficial for reading motivation (43%) and reading fluency (37%). Teachers expressed that these two reading skills improved “significantly” more than any of the other five skills. However, they did not believe using McCracken’s (1971) original six guidelines were conducive to the early childhood classroom. Whether these teachers simply did not have enough time, did not feel comfortable allowing such young, developing readers that freedom, or they did not have the authority to ask other faculty members to participate along with them, the original six guidelines were not being used.

Overall, many teachers stated throughout the entire survey that they were aware of their “misuse” of SSR. They also proudly and understandably stated reasons why these guidelines
would not work in their classroom. Educators often take and adapt numerous teaching programs, tools, and strategies for their classroom and their students’ learning styles. It does not come as a surprise that Sustained Silent Reading is one of those reading programs that quickly is adapted to better suit both the individual educator’s teaching style and their students’ learning needs. Teachers know that SSR is highly beneficial especially concerning reading motivation.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results gathered from the data collected by the researcher play a substantial role in determining whether or not to use Sustained Silent Reading in the early childhood classroom. This reading program is widely popular due to the simplicity of the program, and the many benefits that it is said to influence and improve. Research has shown that silent reading programs much like SSR are highly beneficial to its participants. Basic reading skills such as comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency are said to be positively affected by the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading. Motivation to read is decidedly improved by this daily practice of silently reading self-selected materials. Likewise, students’ writing skills have also benefited from this program’s daily immersion into elements of stories and poems, and various other reading materials (Anderson et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHD, 2000).

As recent educational debates continue and natural teacher reflection occurs, silent reading programs much like Sustained Silent Reading remain to be questioned. Highly effective teachers reflect daily on their lessons and the teaching tools, strategies, and programs found within those plans. To ensure student-centered learning, reflection and monitoring of progress must occur. Just because a few research studies state that SSR is highly beneficial does not necessary mean that it will benefit all teachers and students. Analyzing the components of this silent reading program for what works and what does not work within the early childhood classroom is a necessary step for students’ reading success. Being aware of how the fifty-nine first, second, and third grade teachers use Sustained Silent Reading, and also their perceptions of SSR is helpful for teachers and principals when selecting school and district-wide reading programs.
Summary

The driving questions behind this study were: Do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines? and Do teachers perceive that SSR leads to improved reading skills? To answer these questions, teacher survey packets were created and delivered to 13 elementary school buildings located in eight Northwest Ohio school districts. Of those 107 placed survey packets, only 59 surveys were returned. Only five of the 59 teachers who returned surveys indicated they had never used Sustained Silent Reading within their classrooms.

Teachers were asked to truthfully and completely answer the survey questions which were exclusively designed to answer the study’s two driving questions. The participants first were asked to provide basic, but highly relevant background information. Then they were asked to answer two sections of the survey that would help the researcher better understand how early childhood educators were implementing this silent reading program. In the last two sections, participants were asked to express their opinions on the suggested benefits of Sustained Silent Reading and their overall perception of this program’s benefits and weaknesses.

The results of the survey showed that a majority of the first, second, and third grade teachers participating do not follow all of McCracken’s six original guidelines, but generally do follow his first and most-important one: *The students read self-selected materials silently*. In addition, the teachers’ surveys revealed that most of the teachers do see at least “some” improvements in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and even writing skills. However, most teachers saw that a “significant” level of improvement was seen in students’ motivation to read.
Conclusions

After analyzing the results from the beginning six survey questions, it can be concluded that many of the teachers understand what the original intention of Sustained Silent Reading is, but perhaps do not know, or possibly choose not to use, many of SSR’s original six components. The last two questions within this section asked teachers to provide the frequency and length of their SSR sessions. Many teachers stated that their students participated in SSR daily, and that the sessions lasted on average 15 minutes. This daily and consistent implementation of SSR is one of McCracken’s (1971) guidelines. This consistent daily practice of silent reading is highly valued by both the early childhood teacher and their young, developing readers who strive on stability and regular practice. This collected information was similar to many current and past teachers’ opinions on this independent silent reading program (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006; Krashen, 2001, 2005, 2009; Reutzel et al., 2008; Trudel, 2007).

Many educators have used SSR, but have chosen to adapt it and design new programs. Much like the polled teachers, many educational researchers believe that “there may not be enough guidance occurring during SSR. Teachers don’t have the opportunity to assess students’ skills and provide appropriate instruction” (Trudel, 2007, p. 314). The first driving question of this study is, do first, second, and third grade teachers currently implement SSR using McCracken’s six original guidelines (1971)? The obvious answer to that question is that most early childhood educators do not use these six original guidelines. It is not enough to simply this question with a “yes” or a “no” however; it is just as important to discuss why these educators are currently choosing not to follow all six of these guidelines. According to the survey research done in this study, early childhood educators appear to find McCracken’s six original guidelines (1971) unsuitable for their existing classroom environment and curricular requirements. Nearly
every single surveyed teacher stated that they did not follow any of the six guidelines for various reasons. For example, many surveyed teachers chose not to model silent reading alongside their students because the teacher is instead working in small groups or conferencing, assisting other students, or doing daily teacher-work. Similarly, students did not select one book because most of the books that early childhood students can read are too short. Additionally, a timer was not used because teachers simply watched the classroom clock instead, and reports were kept when they should not be because records needed to be kept to monitor developing readers’ growth.

Just as the polled teachers in this survey stated, the original six guidelines of Sustained Silent Reading ask the teacher to place a great deal of responsibility on very young, developing readers. According to many early childhood educators, this level of responsibility appears to not be appropriate for this age level and this educational era. Consequently, their independent silent reading program varies greatly to McCracken’s (1971) original SSR guidelines. It appears that their programs seek to provide their students with daily, consistent independent, silent reading time so that fluency and reading motivation through self-selection can be encouraged. Much like these polled teachers, many other educators have created greatly adapted programs that still maintain the core of independent silent reading. Some of these programs are: Independent Reading (IR), Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R5), and Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR) (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006; Krashen, 2001, 2005, 2009; Reutzel et al., 2008; Trudel, 2007).

The two sections that followed in the survey were designed to better gauge what components of SSR current teachers were using, and what, if any, strategies and tools they had added to their independent silent reading sessions. After analyzing these two sections, none of the participating teachers in this study used McCracken’s (1971) six original guidelines. Eighty-
six percent of the polled teachers did however continue to use the vital number one guideline, “students read self-selected material silently”. Garan and DeVoogd (2008) state that according to Stahl (2004), “regardless of the amount of teacher involvement, however, the distinguishing feature of SSR is that every day for at least 15 to 30 minutes, students are permitted a block of time to read a book, usually of their own choice” (p. 337). This summarizing statement clearly defines many of the polled teachers’ opinions and perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading. However, it is also seen from these series of survey questions, that teachers and other authorities throughout the classroom or school, are not modeling silent reading alongside their students. According to McCracken, this is the second most important guideline of Sustained Silent Reading because proper silent reading needs to be modeled and shown to young, developing readers. Similarly, Loh (2009) found that “when children see their teachers enjoy reading during SSR, it reinforces the idea that reading is valuable and important” (p. 95). For whatever reason, teachers for example often find themselves forgetting, or not being able to, model silent reading alongside their students.

The benefits of independent silent reading programs much like SSR have been said to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading motivation, and even writing skills (Anderson et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHHD, 2000). These five basic language arts skills were identified in the survey and asked to be rated using a four-scale Likert rating system. When asked to rate the level of improvement, many teachers believed that nearly all of the suggested benefits improved “some” as a result of SSR, except reading motivation which improved “significantly”. Not surprisingly, writing skills were considered one of the lowest improved language arts skills as a result of SSR’s implementation. The polled teachers’ results and conclusions reveal data that
directly correlates with the current available research on Sustained Silent Reading’s benefits. Reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, reading motivation, and even writing skills are often improved through the implementation of this reading strategy (Anderson et al., 1988; Eckhoff, 1983; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Hirsch, 2003; Loh, 2009; NICHD, 2000). Though much of the current research addresses these benefits in a rather vague, all inclusive manner, the data from this study revealed that reading motivation was the most improved skill, with reading fluency following not far behind.

Recommendations

*University Educators*

Often university educators sit at the seat of current and past educational controversies and issues. Regularly, universities are viewed as the center for learning, for higher education, and the location where educational reflection and reform can begin. It is not shocking, that current teachers look to universities and their educators for teaching strategies, tools, and assessments. Many aspects of education are addressed in university classrooms and lectures. Independent silent reading strategies, such as Sustained Silent Reading, are more than likely one of those often discussed topics. Universities are where current educators can go to for new and reliable educational information. They help to inform educators of the current research and reliability of educational tools and strategies; they aim to show educators both sides of any issue.

The collected data and information from this study may become useful knowledge that might allow teachers to better reflect and adapt their current independent silent reading programs. Two driving questions directed this study, and helped mold the survey. This survey hoped to discover how teachers are currently implementing SSR and what they perceive the level of reading skills improvement to be once SSR is used. Knowing what components of the original
SSR current teachers are using, and what new ideas are being added, is highly relevant information that university educators who strive to educate their current and future educators might value. It is recommended that university educators first educate themselves on the subtopics of Sustained Silent Reading that have been discussed throughout this thesis. Several university lessons might be taught on the history of SSR and its original guidelines, the current educational controversy surrounding independent silent reading programs much like SSR, and the creation of adapted reading programs that have recently been designed. These lectures would serve to show current and future teachers both points of view on independent silent reading programs. Teaching students about McCracken’s original six guidelines (1971), informing students about the controversy surrounding the National Reading Panel’s findings (NICHHD, 2000; Krashen, 2005, 2009), and then showing them popular, adapted SSR programs such as Read, Relax, Reflect, Respond, and Rap (R5) (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006), Independent Reading (IR) (Trudel, 2007), and Scaffolded Silent Read (ScSR) (Ruetzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008), are all possible lessons that university educators might address in their classes.

Administrators

School administrators often hold the power to implement school-wide or district-wide educational programs. Many independent silent reading programs are intended to be done as an entire school building where every individual participates, even the principal! In order for programs like SSR, or very similar programs like Self-Selected Reading, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Be Excited About Reading (BEAR), We Enjoy Books (WEB), Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Sustained Quiet Reading Time (SQUIRT), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), or High Intensity Practice (HIP) (Pilgreen, 2000) to work, an administrator needs to mandate it.
The study done for this thesis aimed to collect data on how teachers are implementing Sustained Silent Reading within their classrooms and what they perceive the benefits of SSR to be. Studies similar to this one can be a great way for administrators and educators to inform themselves on the positives and negatives of educational programs like Sustained Silent Reading. Therefore, it is recommended that before considering implementation of school-wide, district-wide programs, administrators, principals, and teachers should discuss the research on independent silent reading programs, much like SSR, in order to better understand the program’s reliability and effectiveness. One of the responsibilities of administrators is to educate themselves on the current educational research so that they can make appropriate, student-centered administrative decisions. Additionally, so that teachers are able to provide their students with a plethora of interesting reading materials, it is suggested that administrators seek funds for creating well-stocked classroom libraries. These well-stocked classroom libraries encourage the continuation of student self-selection, a key factor in reading motivation.

*Classroom Teachers*

Highly-effective teachers daily reflect on the current teaching tools, strategies, and programs they use. They also educate themselves on any updates to the current materials they are using, while continuing to explore other relevant teaching tools, strategies, and programs that may be more beneficial to their students. Making oneself aware of the current educational opinions, perceptions, and research allows teachers to successfully create student-centered learning. This study aimed to collect and analyze first, second, and third grade teachers’ perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading. Two driving questions directed this study, and helped mold the survey. This survey hoped to discover how teachers are currently implementing SSR and what they perceive the level of reading skills improvement to be once SSR is used.
The collected data and information from this study can become useful knowledge that can allow teachers to better reflect and adapt their current independent silent reading programs. Knowing what components of the original SSR current teachers are using, and what new ideas are being added, is highly relevant information that other educators who use this reading program might value. According to Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006), “…we are well aware of the strengths of SSR but equally aware of possible weaknesses. Students often read inappropriate reading material (too hard or too easy), and many students were fake reading during this time. The lack of response or feedback left some students without a purpose for reading” (p. 150). Even though many of the participating teachers saw similar weaknesses as Kelley and Clausen-Grace did, these polled teachers still believed that the research-based suggested benefits of Sustained Silent Reading improve their students’ reading skills. In fact, reading motivation and reading fluency were identified as the two most significantly improved reading skills. Knowing a more detailed opinion provides educators with a more solid starting point for lesson planning and curriculum design. Additionally, it is recommended that teachers note that McCracken’s original six guidelines (1971) do not appear to be appropriate for many current early childhood classrooms using similar SSR programs. This information is vital to teachers interested in implementing their own independent silent reading programs so that they understand that is acceptable to adapt the program to better suit their teaching environment and their students’ current educational and developmental needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

After analyzing the responses by teachers, the researcher recommends modifying the survey questions and making them more specific so less interpretation could be made by participating teachers. A few of the Yes/No questions that were designed to gauge how the
teacher implemented SSR in their classroom were interpreted in a different manner than was originally intended. Therefore, some responses had to be closely examined for their actual answer. In addition, and as noted in Chapter IV, the low level of returned surveys needs to be discussed. After analyzing this low return, the researcher recommends that providing a longer return date for the survey may have resulted in a larger amount of participants. During the placement of the teachers’ survey packets, inclement weather occurred. This inclement weather meant closed schools and delayed school days which may have hinder the ability to complete the survey by the return date. Consequently, teachers may have assumed that surveys would not be accepted passed the return date.

Additionally, further survey research could be done to gain more in-depth knowledge on the more current, adapted Sustained Silent Reading programs that have become more common in the current early childhood classroom. Though some of these highly adapted SSR programs (ScSR, R⁵, and IR) were address in Chapter II of this thesis, the implementation of these highly adapted programs was not actually addressed in the teacher-surveys at all. Further survey research could ask more direct questions on adapted SSR programs to obtain a more current collection of data results. Likewise, further survey research could be done to measure the actual amount of improvement seen in the five research-suggested reading skills. Additional questions and/or research methods could be used to gain more comprehensive data on the improvements seen in comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, reading motivation, and writing skills. These revised research methods might create more reliable data analysis in accordance to the two driving questions of this study.
Summary

This study attempted to answer the following questions: How are early childhood educators implementing SSR within their classrooms?, and What do early childhood educators currently perceive to be the benefits, challenges, and overall value of SSR within their classrooms? Through the use of survey research first, second, and third grade teachers’ current perceptions on SSR’s benefits and implementation criteria were found. This information is important to early childhood educators and all other educators who are interested in implementing or adapting an independent silent reading program similar to Sustained Silent Reading. To help ensure the improvement of SSR’s suggested benefits, it is vital that educators take time for teaching reflection. It is vital to know not only what current research states about SSR, but also what the teacher personally thinks about this program and its effectiveness within his/her classroom.

The results of the survey showed that the teachers do not use McCracken’s (1971) original six guidelines. Many of the teachers’ decision to not follow the original SSR guideline of modeling silent reading alongside their students, was a rather distinguishing result. They do however maintain the vital component that labels Sustained Silent Reading an independent silent reading program---they allow students time to read self-selected materials silently. The results also found that much of the research-based suggested benefits are on fact being seen with their classrooms. A majority of the teachers saw “some” level of improvement for all reading skills. Reading motivation was the single skill that appeared to improve “significantly” instead of “some”. Overall, the survey revealed that first, second, and third grade teachers are well-aware of the benefited reading skills, and are in fact witnessing these improvements. In conclusion, teachers stated that the true SSR program may not be developmentally appropriate for such
young, developing readers. Many teachers have witnessed weaknesses within this program that asks for so much student independence and so little teacher accountability. Often, students misbehave, interruptions occur, or Sustained Silent Reading gets pushed aside for another less busy day. These common teacher complaints have created the necessity for personal adaptations to this independent silent reading program.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT
Recruitment Script

Either done in person (preferred) or by phone

Hello! My name is Sara Stobbe! I am speaking to you in regards to the study that I am currently conducting on Sustained Silent Reading in the early childhood classroom.

The reasons why I am doing this study are because of my interest in this widely-recommended and often-used reading program, as well as its connection to the achievement of my Master’s in Reading at Bowling Green State University. Overall, my goal is to obtain reliable data on what actual teachers perceive the benefits of SSR to be, or the lack thereof.

Now, my question is if you and your elementary teaching staff would be willing to complete a short 15 question survey on SSR. Teachers that have used SSR in the past, or that are currently using SSR, will be the only teachers that can participate in this survey. The survey process will not take your teaching staff more than 15 minutes of their time! In addition, your school’s participation in this survey will greatly help the cause of research and the improvement of our schools’ literacy and reading programs.

[Wait for response and questions. Answer any to the best of my ability. If principal is interested continue with script. If not interested… Say, “Thank you very much for your time! It was a pleasure speaking with you and being welcomed into your school!”]

Thank you! Your agreement to participate is fully appreciated and will be highly valuable for the conduction of this survey.

Now, there will be a few simple directions for your teaching staff to follow as they complete their surveys. Once again, it should not take more than 15 minutes of their time. Since you and your school have agreed to participate, I have already prepared and brought with me the SSR survey packets for each of your elementary teachers. These packets include: directions for completing the teacher survey, the teacher survey, and a self-addressed, stamped manila envelope. I will place all of these survey packets inside the teachers mailboxes myself to ensure consistency. Due to time restrictions at the University, a strict survey return-date will be implemented. Because the survey will take no more than 15 minutes of your teacher’s time and since the survey materials have all been provided, I hope that many of your faculty will be able to participate in a timely fashion!

Directions are quite simple:
1. Teachers receive survey in mailbox
2. Teacher complete survey by return-date
3. Teachers enclose completed survey in self-addressed, stamped envelope and send in the mail!

[Wait for any questions. Answer any to the best of my ability.]
That is all that your staff will need to do! Thank you so much for your time today, and your agreement to participate in the study! Your time and responses will no doubt be highly appreciated and put to good use!

Thank you!
APPENDIX B.

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORMS
Dear Sara M. Stobbe:

I have been informed that Sara M. Stobbe of the Bowling Green State University Graduate Reading Program is intending to obtain data through teacher-surveys on the actuality of the perceived benefits of Sustained Silent Reading occurring in the early childhood classroom.

After hearing the specific educational reasons for the completion of this study on SSR, I have agreed to allow my elementary teaching staff to participate in the enclosed questionnaire. It is understood that participation in this project is purely voluntary. Both my decision to participate or not, and my teachers’ decisions to participate or not, will not impact our current or future relationships with Bowling Green State University. In addition, I have also been notified that my elementary teaching staff and I are free to withdraw from the project at anytime. Sara has assured me that both my elementary teaching staff and I will not be subjected to any personal benefits or risks while participating in this project.

Additionally, clear detailed directions have first been verbally described to me, and then reinforced with written instruction for my teaching staff to follow. The teacher surveys, the self-addressed, stamped manila envelope, and the directions for returning these surveys have been clearly provided as well.

I have been informed that I will not personally need to do anything, but that my teaching staff will be asked to do the following:

1. Pick up the enclosed survey and instructions from their school mailboxes
2. Complete survey as honestly and as thoroughly as possible
3. Enclose the completed survey in the supplied, self-addressed stamped envelope to ensure arrival by predetermined return-date

The purpose of this letter is to let you know that I do endorse this project, and am grateful that I have been asked to participate. In addition, Sara has assured me that all participants will remain anonymous throughout the entire duration of the project because no personal identification will be asked of any teacher participant. Sara has also guaranteed that due to her meticulous data collection, all acquired information will remain confidential throughout the duration of this project.

I have been informed that any and all questions are welcome and can be directed to Sara at (419)902-8371, stobbes@bgsu.edu, the HSRB at (419)372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, or Dr. Cindy Hendricks at (419)372-7341, cindyg@bgsu.edu.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Principal’s Name
APPENDIX C.

INFORMATIONAL AND DIRECTIONAL TEACHER LETTER
Sara M. Stobbe  
2055 Napoleon Rd. #18F  
Bowling Green, OH 43402-4868  
(419) 902-8371

February 11, 2010

Dear Teacher:

The purpose of this study is to gain information on the commonly accepted benefits of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in the early childhood classroom. A wide-range of reading improvements have been said to occur from SSR’s implementation. Research has suggested that students who have been participants of SSR have exhibited improved reading comprehension, increased vocabulary development, enhanced fluency, greater motivation to read, and even enriched writing skills. Once again, my purpose is to evaluate if these benefits are actually being seen within the classroom.

Several schools in the Northwest Ohio area are being asked to participate in this study. Pleased be assured that participation in this project is purely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your current or future relationships with Bowling Green State University. Additionally, you are always free to withdraw from the project at anytime. It is also important to note that participation in this project will result in no personal benefits or risks. However, by answering the enclosed questionnaire you will be greatly helping the cause of research and the improvement of our schools’ literacy and reading programs!

To ensure that all data remain anonymous, the completion of this survey will constitute as your consent to participate. Due to this consent process, no personal identification will be collected and your participation will remain anonymous throughout the entire duration of the project. In addition, meticulously collected and organized data will keep acquired information confidential at all times.

Participation is simple and will require only 15 minutes of your time! Within this packet you will find a SSR survey and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for hassle-free return. Simply complete the survey as honestly and as thoroughly as possible, and then enclose the completed survey in the supplied, self-addressed stamped envelope to ensure arrival by February 18th, 2011! However, if you have never used this reading program before, complete survey through QUESTION #4 only, and mail by the above return-date.

Thank you for cooperating in this survey! Please remember to return your completed survey by Friday, February 18th. If you have any questions please direct them to myself at (419) 902-8371, stobbes@bgsu.edu or Dr. Cindy Hendricks at (419) 372-7341, cindyv@bgsu.edu. For questions about participant rights please contact the HSRB at (419) 372-7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu. Your time and responses are greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Sara M. Stobbe
APPENDIX D.

SAMPLE TEACHER-SURVEY
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHER SURVEY

1. What grade level do you teach?

2. What type of reading program do you use? (please give name of series, publisher)

3. Briefly explain what SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) means to you. (use back of sheet if necessary)

4. Have you ever used SSR, or are you currently using SSR in your classroom?

   If your answer is “No”, please provide a brief explanation below as to why you have chosen not to use this particular reading program. (use back of sheet if necessary)

   ***If you answered “Yes”, continue with survey. If you answered “No”, stop survey after the completion of this question, but still return to sender.***

5. How often do you use SSR in your classroom? (per week) (daily)

6. What is the approximate length of time of SSR per session?

Please circle Yes or No to the following questions.

7. Is total silence required during SSR?
   Yes    No

8. Are children allowed to read anything of their choice? (catalogs, comic books, newspaper, etc.)
   Yes    No

9. Are interruptions allowed?
   Yes    No

10. Do others in the room read? (aides, teachers, student teachers, etc.)
    Yes    No
11. Is SSR a planned activity included in your lesson plans?
Yes              No

12. Do you have a classroom library collection independent of the school library?
Yes              No

13. Is this a school-wide or district-wide program?
Yes              No

14. Is this activity one you have chosen personally?
Yes              No

15. Overall, do your students enjoy SSR?
Yes              No

16. Traditional SSR has the following components. Please check “Yes” if you follow this guideline. Check “No” if you do not and explain why you do not.

   • The students read self-selected materials silently. ___Yes
     ___No, because

   • The teacher models by reading silently at the same time. ___Yes
     ___No, because

   • Students select one book, magazine, or newspaper to read for the entire time period. ___Yes
     ___No, because

   • A timer is set for a prescribed, uninterrupted time period. ___Yes
     ___No, because

   • No reports or records are kept. ___Yes
     ___No, because

   • The whole class, department, or school participates ___Yes
     ___No, because
17. Rate the level of improvement SSR has benefited your students’ reading comprehension.
   1  2  3  4
   None  Very Little  Some  Significant

18. Rate the level of improvement SSR has benefited your students’ vocabulary development.
   1  2  3  4
   None  Very Little  Some  Significant

19. Rate the level of improvement SSR has benefited your students’ reading fluency.
   1  2  3  4
   None  Very Little  Some  Significant

20. Rate the level of improvement SSR has benefited your students’ reading motivation.
   1  2  3  4
   None  Very Little  Some  Significant

21. Rate the level of improvement SSR has benefited your students’ writing skills.
   1  2  3  4
   None  Very Little  Some  Significant

22. What do you believe are the benefits of your SSR program?

______________________________________________________________________________

23. What do you believe are the weaknesses of your SSR program?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU!

😊