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# **Teacher Perceptions and Effects of Sustained Silent Reading on Measures of Academic Progress Scores**

*Elaina Eddy*

## **ABSTRACT**

Sustained Silent Reading is reading silently for an amount of time in a distraction free environment. Sustained Silent Reading is an important attribute for literacy development. If students read daily and learn to enjoy it, they will become lifelong readers, which leads to improvement in many skills. However, reading instruction varies in schools. Many schools use incentive based approaches to reading. This practice teaches children to read for a prize, instead of reading to read. Many struggling students are assigned to read in isolation or assigned to finish homework during reading time. This method leaves struggling readers with little time to improve while good readers often have more time to practice their reading. Studies have shown an effective Sustained Silent Reading focuses on routine, environment, access to materials, teacher roles, accountability, and time. This project administered a survey of teacher perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading to third grade teachers in a midsized Midwestern school district. Twelve third grade teachers participated in taking the survey and gave consent for obtaining Measures of Academic Progress scores of their students. Results from phase one of this study showed teacher perceptions and methods of reading instruction vary. Preliminary results showed the keyword “time” was used when asked what the biggest struggle of daily uninterrupted reading is. Results also showed teachers in the study took time for reading, but they did not always implement a distraction free environment or other factors that contribute to successful Sustained Silent Reading. Measures of Academic Progress scores were assessed for reading growth. Results varied but showed higher growth rates in teachers who implemented sustained

silent reading every day for 20-25 minutes. Clearly, research shows Sustained Silent Reading is an important factor for development of students.

## **STUDY INTRODUCTION**

Picture this: three different children sit down for their daily reading time. The first child comes from a school that enforces an Accelerated Reader Program. This child hurries to read his grade level reading book to take a test and win a prize. The second child is from a classroom that enforces twenty minutes of uninterrupted reading daily. However, this time is only for the children who have their work done. The struggling child tries to hurry to get their work done but are at a loss. He is forced to make up for his struggles during reading time. The third child is from a classroom similar to the second. His teacher implements sustained silent reading time for twenty minutes a day for every student regardless of whether they finish their schoolwork. Three different students, from different schools, and teachers who implement different programs when it comes to reading. What do they have in common? The commonality amongst these students is their teachers all play a role in implementing a type of reading program. What is different about these students? The difference is student one and student two are not reaping the important benefits of daily Sustained Silent Reading. Sustained Silent Reading is defined as setting aside daily quiet reading time (Krashen, 2004).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Why is Sustained Silent Reading Important?**

Sustained Silent Reading first emerged in the 1960s (Siah and Kwok, 2010). Lyman Hunt from the University of Vermont proposed the idea of uninterrupted reading daily and the idea soon traveled to many schools in the 1970s (Siah and Kwok, 2010). Although Sustained Silent Reading is a broad term, many programs of reading involve daily uninterrupted reading. Free

Voluntary Reading, Drop Everything and Read, Daily Independent Reading Time, and Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading are programs that incorporate daily uninterrupted reading (Gardiner, 2005). Although every Sustained Silent Reading program is different, the main focus is placed on increasing students' interest of reading.

Sustained Silent Reading improves skills that make students good readers. In 51 out of 54 tests, results showed students allowed Sustained Silent Reading time did the same or better on reading tests compared to students who participated in conventional reading programs (Krashen, 2004). Daily Sustained Silent Reading allows students to take in new words, adding to their vocabulary and syntax patterns. According to a study by the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement*, reading skills were compared among 32 countries (Gardiner, 2005). The results showed students who read for pleasure had higher scores than the other children. The amount of use of Sustained Silent Reading was vital in these results. Students who read daily opposed to weekly were shown to have higher scores. A similar study by Krashen in 1993 displayed surprising results. Through a study with 41 trials, 38 of the trials involved in Sustained Silent Reading did better on traditional standardized reading tests than those in no free reading programs (Krashen, 1993). Vocabulary growth is another important benefit from Sustained Silent Reading. Rather than memorizing a list of words, repeated exposure through reading promotes meaningful thoughts that pave the way through learning vocabulary (Mixan, 2013).

### **Motivation and Reading Programs**

Individuals are inspired to achieve by one element: motivation. Motivation is driven by intrinsic and extrinsic components. Intrinsic motivation is regulated by interest or the pleasure of carrying out a task. Extrinsic motivators are comprised of outside rewards, such as a prize.

Awards can be utilized properly in the classroom. However, when they are abused, it leaves the students with no motivation to learn to love reading. Accelerated Reader takes a different approach through “Earning by Learning” (Small et. al, 2009). These programs are reaching short term goals; however, in the end, the long term goal should be giving the children the gift of learning to love reading. According to a study by Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski, children who did not have an AR program read more in later years than those who did participate in an AR program (2002).

### **Key Factors of Sustained Silent Reading**

A study conducted by Pilgreen (2000) found many factors contributed to a successful Sustained Silent Reading time (Gardiner, 2005). Teachers who foster successful reading programs focus on access, appeal, conducive environment, encouragement, staff training, follow-up activities, and distributed reading time. A big speculation of Sustained Silent Reading time is finding the time to do it. Researchers Wu and Samuels (2004) at the University of Minnesota found struggling readers had better improvement in vocabulary when reading for 15 minutes and better comprehension when reading for 40 minutes (Gallagher, 2009). By third or fourth grade, students should be reading up to two hours per week. This time amounts to about 24 minutes per school day (Anderson, 1985). Another important factor in making the most out of independent reading is appeal and book access. Students should be offered a wide access to books, and teachers should guide their selection and offer appealing options. For example, a student might avoid reading by taking too much time on choosing a book or may stop reading because of a loss of interest. An environment with plenty of books will result in reading development (Krashen, 2004). In addition, a student might not grow from their experience with Sustained Silent Reading because they are reading a book below their ability. Consequently, they fail to gain new

words that could add to their language vocabulary. Struggling readers might choose books above their level of reading, causing them to not retain any information. Teacher involvement in this process can aid a child's choice, providing them the opportunity to expand their horizons and knowledge (Reutzel and Juth, 2014). Sustained Silent Reading holds students accountable through a follow up performed by the teacher. This follow up could be an informal talk with the teacher to check on their progress of reading. Sustained Silent Reading allows teachers to be role models to show successful reading (Gardiner, 2005). Studies show eight and nine year old students were more engaged during reading time when their teachers were reading opposed to when their teachers were not reading (Krashen, 2004).

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

Participants of this study were twelve third grade teachers in a Midwestern midsized school district. Teachers in this study came from the same area but with different demographics. About 42% of participants taught at a low socioeconomic status school. While 42% of teachers who took the survey taught at a high socioeconomic status school. Half of participants had a Master's Degree. About 67% of participants reported they liked to read. Half of the teachers in this study taught for more than twelve years. Participants were recruited through school and survey agreement.

### **Materials**

Materials of this study consisted of an informal survey containing questions about teacher perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading (See Appendix A). The survey was made through Qualtrics. Each participant was given a chapter book. Measures of Academic Progress scores were obtained through the school to compare survey results. Measures of Academic Progress

(MAP) tests are computer administered exams that assess a student's ability in a certain subject. It was founded by the Northwest Evaluation Association. Measures of Academic Progress test in fall, winter and spring. Educators use these tests to cater to their student needs in different subjects. MAP tests the subjects of math, science, language usage, and reading. The components of each test take an average of about 45 minutes per subject.

### **Procedure**

The researcher found common themes amongst research in the literature review of Sustained Silent Reading. First, a survey regarding teacher perceptions of Sustained Silent Reading centered on different themes from the literature was created. Thirty-two questions were formed. These questions were based on previous research of what makes Sustained Silent Reading successful. Participants were considered. Steps were taken for gain permission for this study. Permission was granted by the school district to administer the survey and obtain MAP scores. Participants were informed of the study by the researchers at a third grade class agenda meeting. An incentive of books for their in-class library was offered. The researcher completed the Collaborative IRB Institute training. A request for working with human subjects was made to the Institutional Review Board. After approval, the informal survey consisting of questions about teacher perceptions of sustained silent reading was administered through email. A copy of the consent form outlining the research project was attached to the survey information. Contact information of the researchers was dispersed in case of thoughts or concerns about the study. Cooperation of teachers was earned through an agreement to complete the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis of the survey results was obtained through Qualtrics. MAP test scores were obtained through the school district. Permission of obtaining MAP scores was granted through a

letter from the Associate Superintendent of the school district. Teacher names were protected in all reports.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Seen in Table 1 are measures of Reading MAP scores growth from fall to spring. Teacher names were coded to ensure confidentiality. Average points of growth ranged from 5.05 to 16.68.

Common themes were found amongst all participants. 100% of teachers in this study encouraged their students to read independently and offered appealing reading materials. Another common theme was access and choice of books. Only 33.33% of teachers always provided a distraction free environment during Sustained Silent Reading Time. When asked how teachers keep students accountable during Sustained Silent Reading, answers varied. A common theme was found throughout 58% of participants. When asked, "What is your biggest struggle for Sustained Silent Reading?" 58% used the key word of "time." Scheduling reading time was another theme discovered. One participant answered, "The biggest struggle is time. We are not able to set aside a consistent amount of time both in minutes and daily." 8.33% of teachers implement sustained silent reading 1-2 times a week, 41.67% of teachers in this study implement sustained silent reading 3-4 times a week, and 50% of teachers in the study implemented Sustained Silent Reading every school day. Amount of reading time implemented varied. 66.67% of teachers in this study spent 10-15 minutes on Sustained Silent Reading time and 33.33% amount of teachers spent 20-25 minutes on Sustained Silent Reading time. 75% of participants offered a routine time for independent reading. 33.33% teachers only offered reading time when work is done. All participants reported they read or interacted with students during Sustained Silent Reading time. Not all participants agreed Sustained Silent Reading is beneficial for their



students. When asked, only 66.67% of participants answered “very.” 58.33% of participants’ schools implemented an incentive based reading program. When asked what they would change about their reading program, participants provided various answers. However, a common theme of time, consistency, and motivation was found amongst some participants. One participant answered, “Some students are not reading for fun. They read to get A.R. points and once they reach their goal, they no longer want to read.” Another participant answered, “I think there are some great benefits to an incentivized program. I also think when TOO much weight is placed upon it, it can place too much pressure on kids. I think a balance is key.”

Teacher	Points of Growth
A	12.1
B	9.95
C	16.68
D	13.35
E	11.89
F	6.25
G	9.16
H	6.15
I	5.64
J	11.8
K	5.05
L	13.56

***Table 1: Average points of growth ranged from 5.05 to 16.68.***

The classrooms with the lowest growth points had commonalities. Teacher K had 5.05 points of growth and was from a high socioeconomic status school. Teacher I had 5.64 points of growth and was from a middle socioeconomic status school. Although they did encourage their students to read independently, they did not implement Sustained Silent Reading every day. They both implemented 10-15 minutes of Sustained Silent Reading. Teacher K sometimes offered a distraction free environment. Teacher I offered a distraction free environment. Teacher K offered a routine time to read in the afternoon. Teacher I only offered time to read when work is done. Both teachers were not positive if Sustained Silent Reading is beneficial. Teacher K answered, “I’m not sure” when asked if Sustained Silent Reading is beneficial and Teacher I answered, “a little.” Teacher K had no incentive based reading program, while Teacher I’s school implemented an incentive based reading program.

Teacher K: lowest improvement at 5.05 points	Teacher I: second lowest improvement at 5.64 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High socioeconomic status</li> <li>•20 students</li> <li>•Encourages students to read independently</li> <li>•3-4 times a week</li> <li>•10-15 minutes</li> <li>•“Sometimes” offers a distraction free environment</li> <li>•Offers a routine time to read in the afternoon</li> <li>•“I’m not sure” – Is Sustained Silent Reading is beneficial?</li> <li>•No incentive based reading program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Middle socioeconomic status</li> <li>•22 students</li> <li>•Encourages students to read independently</li> <li>•1-2 times a week</li> <li>•10-15 minutes</li> <li>•Offers a distraction free environment</li> <li>•“No” to offers a routine time – offers time to read when work is done</li> <li>•“A little”- Is Sustained Silent Reading is beneficial?</li> <li>•Incentive based program</li> </ul>

The top classrooms with the most points of growth on Reading Measures of Academic Progress scores had commonalities. Both of these classrooms were from schools with a high socioeconomic status. Both teachers encouraged their students to read independently every day

in the morning. They implemented the highest reading time of 20-25 minutes. Teacher L and C sometimes offered a distraction free environment when implementing Sustained Silent Reading. Both teachers viewed Sustained Silent reading as “very” beneficial. The schools both were involved in an incentive based reading program.

Teacher L: second highest improvement at 13.56 points	Teacher C: highest improvement at 16.68 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High socioeconomic status</li> <li>•25 students</li> <li>•Encourages students to read independently</li> <li>•Every day in the morning</li> <li>•20-25 minutes</li> <li>•“Sometimes” offers a distraction free environment</li> <li>•“Very” - Is Sustained Silent Reading beneficial?</li> <li>•Incentive based reading program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•High socioeconomic status</li> <li>•25 students</li> <li>•Encourages students to read independently</li> <li>•No independent reading routine</li> <li>•Every day in the morning</li> <li>•20-25 minutes</li> <li>•“Sometimes” offers a distraction free environment</li> <li>•“Very” – Is Sustained Silent Reading beneficial?</li> <li>•Incentive based reading program</li> </ul>

Teachers who implemented more Sustained Silent Reading were found to have higher points of growth between their Reading Measures of Academic Progress scores. Average points of growth ranged from 5.05 to 16.68 as seen in Table 1. The featured participants K and I had the lowest points of growth at 5.05 and 5.64. Common themes between the lowest points of growth exemplified that these teachers did not implement Sustained Silent Reading every day but encouraged their students to read. From the participants in this study, results showed although every teacher encouraged their student to read, they did not always employ techniques that the research shows makes Sustained Silent Reading successful. Not all teachers implemented the recommended 2 hours of reading per week. 58% of teachers felt time was a key issue. Various teachers who implemented incentive based reading programs felt they placed too

much pressure on a prize, rather than “reading to read.” Teachers who only let children read when work is done could be putting struggling children at risk with no reading time. The top teachers with the highest points of growth produced similar answers. Teacher L and C implemented reading every day in their classroom for the recommended 20-25 minutes. They both viewed sustained silent reading as “very” beneficial. However, the two teachers with the lowest scores answered “A little” and “I’m not sure” when asked if Sustained Silent Reading is viewed as beneficial to their students. Overall, teachers in this study encouraged their students to read. However, not all employed the time and consistency that makes Sustained Silent Reading successful.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE TRENDS**

This study had limitations that could sway results. The participant pool was found to be small. Teachers were initially informed of the study. However, when they were informed other teachers were participating in the study, select teachers chose not to participate due to counterparts’ participation in fear of low scoring. A fear of competition and exposure was prevalent amongst the participants. All teachers ranged in different levels of experience and education. Not all teachers implemented the same reading program. Differences in implementing reading time could affect results as some classrooms differ in how they structure reading time.

For future reference, the researcher should pick from a larger pool of participants. If participants did not know of each other, this study could produce more accurate results with increased participation. This study should provide a follow-up survey of professional development. Another follow-up examination of the same students reading at another grade level could be implemented to examine possible differences. Education of the benefits and instruction

of Sustained Silent Reading could be implemented to further the professional development of teachers.

### **CONCLUSION**

Clearly, previous research shows Sustained Silent Reading is an important tool that teaches students to potentially become lifelong readers. The research shows the components of time, access and choice, environment, and accountability are important in implementing a successful Sustained Silent Reading Program. However, not every teacher in the study implemented these factors in their reading time. Results of how teachers implement reading in their classroom varied greatly. Only 50% of teachers implemented Sustained Silent Reading daily in their classroom. The teachers who implemented Sustained Silent Reading every day for 20-25 minutes had higher growth in Reading MAP scores. The results from this study indicate daily Sustained Silent Reading for a longer period of time result in higher points of growth in reading MAP test scores. However, it must be recognized that other factors can influence results.

<b>Appendix A: Survey Questions</b>
Q37 Please type your name in the following text box. Note: Names will be kept confidential.
Q35 Which socioeconomic status describes your school?
Q2 What is your level of education?
Q4 Do you like to read?
Q5 How many years have you been teaching?
Q3 What grade do you teach?
Q6 How many students are in your class?
Q7 How many students in your class are reading below grade level?
Q8 Do you encourage your students to read independently?
Q9 What is your definition of sustained silent reading?
Q10 How often do you implement sustained silent reading in the classroom?
Q11 How much time do you allow your students for sustained silent reading?
Q12 Do you offer a silent and distraction free reading time for sustained silent reading time?
Q13 Do you offer reading materials in the classroom that are appealing for students?
Q14 Do you offer a routine time for independent reading?
Q15 What time do you offer sustained silent reading?
Q16 Do you offer areas in the classroom that are comfortable and quiet for sustained silent reading?
Q17 How beneficial is sustained silent reading for your students?
Q18 Do you feel that students benefit from sustained silent reading from a young age?
Q19 Is scheduling an issue for sustained silent reading in your school?
Q20 Are supported services (ex. speech therapy) a conflict for sustained silent reading time?
Q21 What is your biggest struggle for sustained silent reading time?
Q22 Do you display books in the classroom?
Q23 Do you offer a wide range of reading material in the classroom? (magazines, novels, comic books, fiction, nonfiction)
Q24 Does your school use an incentive based reading program?
Q25 What is the name of the program? (If not applicable, please answer "N/A.")
Q26 Does your school use a theme for your reading program?
Q27 What would you change about your reading program? If you don't have a reading program, please answer "N/A." If you would change nothing about your current reading program, please answer "nothing."
Q28 Are you educated about implementing reading from your department or other staff?
Q29 Do you allow students to do other work during sustained silent reading time?
Q30 How do you hold your students accountable when it comes to sustained silent reading?
Q31 Do you think there are benefits from sustained silent reading? If so, what are they?
Q32 What do you do during sustained silent reading time in your classroom? (If not applicable, please answer N/A)

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