
Title	A two-tiered approach to supporting pupils with reading difficulties in primary 3 mainstream classrooms
Author(s)	Tan Chee Soon

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A Two-Tiered Approach to Supporting Pupils with Reading Difficulties in Primary 3 Mainstream Classrooms

By **Tan Chee Soon**

Tan Chee Soon is Lecturer with the Psychological Studies Academic Group at the National Institute of Education. She is also a Registered Psychologist in Singapore. Her research interests are in literacy assessment and intervention as well as systems support for students with reading difficulties.

The purpose of this study is to develop a process that will systematically identify and support Primary 3 pupils with reading difficulties in two schools in a targeted manner using a two-tiered approach. The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify and support pupils with reading difficulties;
2. To raise the *reading ability* and *self-perception* as readers of pupils with reading difficulties;
3. To increase teacher efficacy in supporting pupils with reading difficulties.

In the first phase, universal screening of all Primary 3 pupils in the experimental school and a comparison school was conducted. Thirty pupils with the lowest oral reading fluency scores from the experimental school were matched with 30 pupils from the comparison school who had similar oral reading fluency scores. The reading progress of these struggling readers in both schools was monitored before and after the implementation of the two-tiered approach in the experimental school.

During the second phase, the class-wide peer tutoring programme—known as Peer Assisted Learning Strategies-Modified (PALS-M) programme—was implemented in the experimental school. Based on progress monitoring data of the 30 pupils from the experimental school, 18 pupils who did not make sufficient progress were identified and received Tier 2 interventions as determined by the academic problem-solving process over a period of 3 months. The problem-solving approach is a systematic analysis of

instructional variables to isolate target skill deficit and design targeted interventions (Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, 2004). Tier 2 interventions were conducted thrice a week after school hours in small groups of 3, with each session lasting 30 minutes.

Professional Learning Communities meetings were held to discuss pupil progress. Based on the progress monitoring data, Tier 2 instructors were able to ascertain the difficulties faced by these pupils and whether they were responding adequately to the interventions used.

Results

The class-wide peer tutoring programme had a positive effect on pupils' reading comprehension. The effect of the intervention on reading comprehension is notable as it suggests that PALS-M not only provides all students with opportunities to read aloud, but also requires them to actively negotiate meaning beyond what was read—a critical skill in reading comprehension. The emphasis of PALS-M on reading comprehension and the use of differentiated questions may have contributed to improvement in reading abilities. While reading to a peer may have a positive impact on reading skills among struggling readers, it might also have surfaced their reading difficulties and this might have affected their self-concept as readers. Prior to the current study, pupils were used to choral reading and might not have been aware of their reading difficulties.

While the Tier 2 interventions seemed to have limited impact on students' reading skills, it had a small positive effect on their perception of reading competence and attitude towards reading. Students may have benefitted more if they had received reading support from school personnel who had prior experience in working with struggling readers.

Results from the study revealed that teachers were not equipped with the



knowledge of monitoring pupil progress and needed guidance in designing intervention plans to address specific reading difficulties without assistance. We may need to encourage teachers to embrace the philosophy that all students can learn and need to be empowered with the skills to succeed.

In addition, prior to the current study, many teachers were not familiar with monitoring individual pupils' reading progress using curriculum-based measures and interpreting progress monitoring charts. This study suggests that teachers would benefit from knowledge and skills related to literacy strategies, formative assessment and academic problem solving which would in turn help them to remediate the problems faced by struggling readers in their classroom.

Reference

Barnett, D. W., Daly, E. J., Jones, K. M., & Lentz, F. E. (2004). Response to intervention: Empirically based special service decisions from single-case designs of increasing and decreasing intensity. *The Journal of Special Education, 38*, 66–79.

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