

Developing Critical Thinking Skills of English Learners

Introduction

This research study aimed to explore the impact of guided practice of textual analysis with English learners. This research study focused on a sample of convenience taken from American Canyon Middle School. This sample consisted of a group of 22 students, English language learners, of mixed ethnicities aged 11 to 13. This sample also included students with I.E.P.'s. Students participated in a pre- and post-writing assessment. There is no potential risk to human subjects because the research will be conducted in a normal educational setting using normal practices. Benefits are unknown. Research study was conducted at American Canyon Middle School over a two week period in Spring 2017.

Background and Need

The ability to think critically is a major intellectual and practical skill. The point of critical thinking is to maximize the ability to think rationally. This type of critical reflection is essential to improving one's cognitive skills. In turn, it can lead to increased overall intelligence and performance. However, if students are expected to successfully engage with the world around them, then they must first improve their critical thinking skills. According to NAEP data, across all groups, only slightly more than 50% of students are meeting standards. Clearly, more must be done if we are to improve our national scores, and more importantly, produce intellectual and analytical citizens.

A review of recent CAASPP data further confirms a need for reevaluating our approach to developing higher order thinking, especially for our growing number of English language learners. According to the 2015 California Language Census, English learners make up roughly 20 percent of the total number of enrollment in CA public schools. According to CASSPP data, 43% of English language learners scored below standard in the area of Research and Inquiry in 2015. In general, English learner students are scoring lower than their native English speaking peers. According to data collected by "National Report Card" only 30% of English learner students were reading at or above grade level.

Despite the substantial number of English Learners in our country, not much has changed in the way they are taught, and therefore, there haven't been significant improvements in test scores. There are many possible reasons why critical thinking isn't receiving appropriate attention in schools, and the need to improve other assessment scores is but one. In any case, it is vital that students receive appropriate support in developing their higher order thinking skills. That is why this study aims to explore the impact of strategic guided practice with textual analysis on English learners. The knowledge to be gained from this study is whether guided practices can affect an English learner's success at analyzing a piece of text, forming a claim, and provide relevant evidence.

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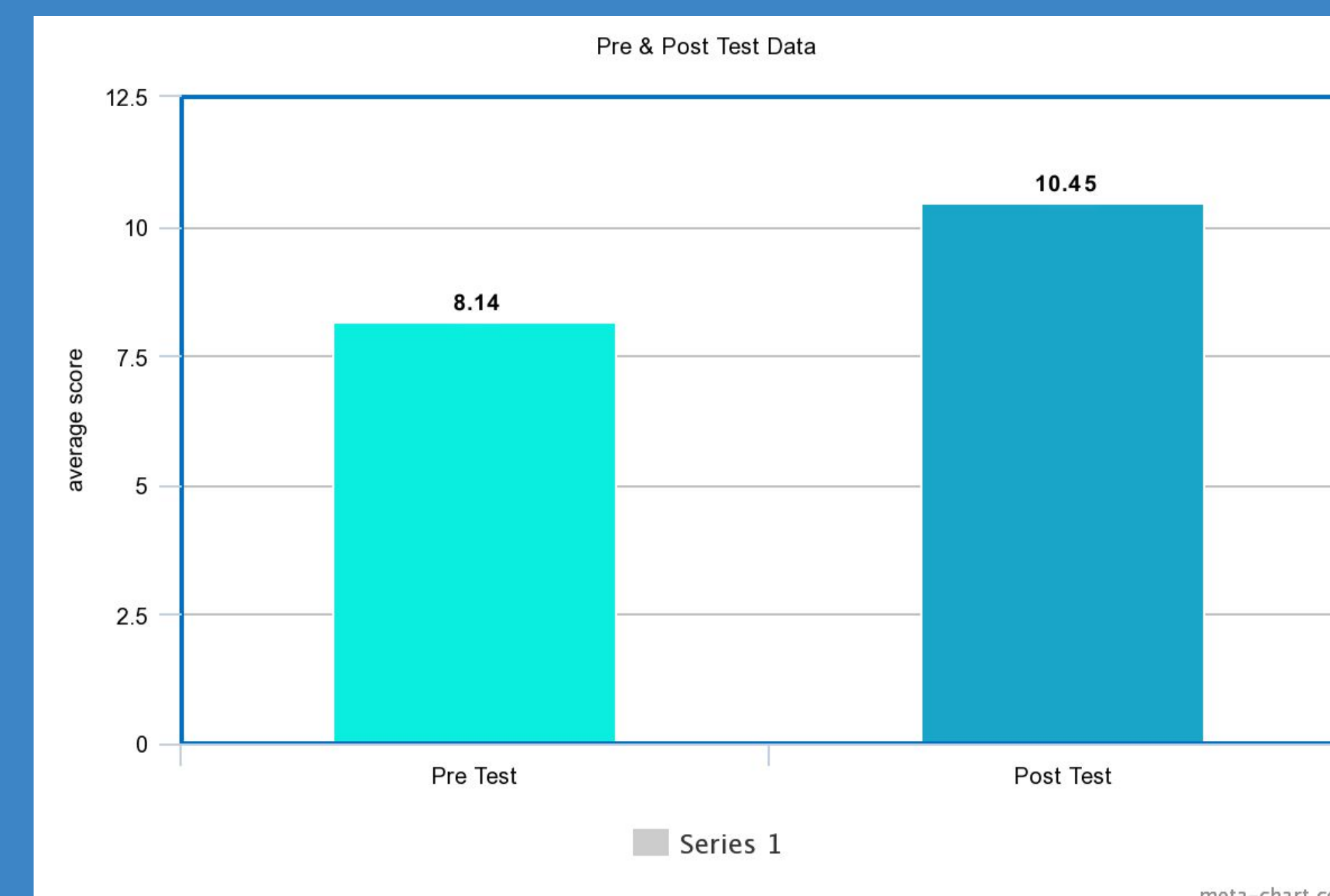
Driving Question

What is the impact of guided practice of textual analysis with English learners?

Methodology

- This study was a mixed methods design with a pre-experimental component for quantitative data as well as a student self-evaluation for qualitative data. The sample was taken from a middle school and consisted of one group of 22 students. The sample included both female and male, English language Learners, of mixed ethnicities aged 11 to 13. This sample will also include students with I.E.P.'s. Students participated in a pre- and post-writing assessment as well as pre and post self-evaluations.
- **Pretest:** Students were required to independently read and analyze an informative article (lexile of 850). After reading the text, students were asked to respond to a writing prompt by writing a paragraph in which they made a claim, provided relevant evidence and explained how their evidence supports their claim. Student work was graded with a four point rubric.
- **Treatment:** Over the course of the following two weeks during the Spring of 2017, students received a treatment aimed to improve their skills of critical thinking. Treatment included guided practice through various activities such as
 - Close Reading, where teacher modelled strategies such as highlighting important information and circling unknown vocabulary words.
 - Collaborative Think-alouds, to help students make meaning out of the text using their verbal skills.
 - Visual thinking strategies, where students examined various images, made observations, and defended their ideas with evidence.
- **Posttest:** Finally students were given a post-assessment identical to the pre-assessment. Students again read an informative article and were asked to write a paragraph answering a question while providing evidence.

Results of the Research



Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to examine the process of critical thinking from the perspective of English learners, specifically, examining how students distinguish important aspects of information, make connections and draw conclusions as well as how might they use that information to support their claims. The hypothesis was that with the aid of guided practice, students may improve their ability to think critically.

Research Questions

- How does the development of critical thinking skills affect mastery and application?
- What role might close reading play in developing analytical skills?
- What are the effects of collaboration on student writing?
- What are the effects of Visual Thinking Strategies?

Literature Cited

Smith, V.G. & Szymanski, A. (2013). Critical thinking: More than test scores. International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation,

Conclusions

Today's world is constantly changing due to the many technological innovations that help make our world a better place. However, these changes also bring about new problems. Thus, we have put our students in a crucial situation. Today's students have countless advantages to aid in their search for education, and yet, they are faced with solving problems that none before them could have predicted. The ability to think critically, and to problem solve, is an unparalleled skill that is essential to becoming career and college ready.

It must be the goal of every teacher to properly prepare each student with the ability to approach a problem, analyze it thoroughly, gather evidence, and determine a course of action to solve that problem. The students of today will become the workers of tomorrow. It can be difficult to prepare students for careers that may not even exist presently. However, if we dedicate ourselves to explicitly instructing techniques and strategies that develop critical thinking skills, our students will be prepared for whatever the future may have in store.



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For Further Information...

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