Article Critique

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* What do you suggest to improve this research?

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**Summary**

Sight-reading is an important skill that leads to independent musicianship. Researchers have developed interest in finding the best practices for teaching students sight-reading skills. The study referenced in this paper aimed to investigates instruction strategies for sight-reading in young children or beginning sight-readers. In looking at previous studies, the researchers found that the literature has not investigated the effectiveness of individual assessment as part of instruction in younger or beginning sight-readers. In their current study, the researchers aimed to determine the effect of technology and individual practice on the vocal sight-reading achievement of beginning choir students. The study aimed to answer the following questions:

 1) What is the ability level of beginning choir singers in sight-reading?

2) Is there a significant gain in sight-reading scores after an 8-week instructional period using technology and/or individual practice?

3) Is there a significant difference in the scores of those who use technology versus those who do not use technology in instruction and individual practice time?

4) What is the effect of applied music instruction or previous choral experience on vocal sight-reading ability in for beginning choir singers?

To conduct the study, the researchers utilized 83 participants consisting of sixth grade beginning choir students at a suburban intermediate school in Central Texas. Participants were randomly assigned to gender-specific choir classes. There were a total of four classrooms (two technology classrooms and two on-technology classrooms) which met daily for approximately 48 minutes. Prior to instruction (tech or non-tech), students were given a pretest. Following the pretest, the eight-week treatment period began. Treatment conditions were as such: the technology classroom utilized the 2012b version of SmartMusic software and a headset microphone. The non-technology classroom used a projection camera. Each participant was administered an individual assessment session which utilized either SmartMusic or paper notation, and a continuously running video camera. Participants were given a post-test at the conclusion of the treatment period. To test participants for the pre and post-test, two melodies were composed. Each melody consisted of 1 notes, with scalar motion, tonic skips/leaps, and quarter and eighth notes. Scoring for tests corresponded to the instruction modality for each group (tech/non-tech). Tests were scored out of 24 (1 point for correct pitch and 1 point for rhythm).

The results from the study revealed no significant differences in scores between the treatment conditions. Participants in both treatment conditions scored similarly in the pre-test. Similar improvements in scores on the post-test were also observed. Significant differences were found in scores of students who had prior music experiences versus students who did not have any music experience.

**Critique**

Introduction:

The introduction briefly stated a problem which was that the literature has not investigated the effectiveness of individual assessment as a part of instruction in younger singers or beginning sight-readers. The problem stated is researchable, and could be done in a variety of ways. An issue with the introduction is that is does not provide a detailed description of the educational significance of the problem discussed. The researchers should provide an in-depth discussion of the significance of this problem.

The literature review utilized in the introduction was by no means lengthy or comprehensive. The researchers could have utilized additional background information from the literature to discuss the importance and educational significance of the problem under investigation.

Method:

 The size and characteristics of the population studied were described. The methods section did leave out information regarding participants’ prior music experience. This should have been included in this section. The sampling methodology was mentioned briefly, but not clearly described. The study should have provided a more in-depth description of the sampling methods. The sampling method has potential to provide a representative, unbiased sample. However, I don’t think the sampling method completely accomplished that in this particular study.

 In regards to instruments, the study did not provide a thorough rationale for the selection of instruments utilized in the study. One instrument was described in terms of its contents, but the purpose of the instrument was not discussed in great detail. The instrument used was fairly simple and self-explanatory. The instrument used was appropriate for measuring the dependent variable which was sight-reading skills. The researchers did not discuss the validity or reliability of the instruments used. This should have been included in the information provided. This could have had a great impact on the outcome of the study is the instrument used was not valid or reliable. The instrument used was developed specifically for this study. The researchers provided the procedures involved in its development, as well as information regarding the administration and scoring. However, validation was not described or confirmed.

 It would be difficult for another researcher to replicate this study as it did not go into detail about the design or procedures. The researchers did not discuss or account for potential confounding variables which most probably negatively affected the results of the study.

 The study did not explicitly state their hypothesis. Due to this, it appears that they did not address their hypothesis in the results section. The results were well-organized and easy to understand, but it appears that they did not do an extensive amount of complex descriptive statistics to analyze their data. For the most part, the researchers used descriptive statistics to show the averages of each group, and t-tests to show significance.

 The discussion section further explained the analyses and also provided the benefits or implications of the results found. Unfortunately, the researchers did not discuss the limitations of their study which would have been useful and necessary to disclose.