Goal Setting in Kindergarten:
Motivating Young Learners to be Successful in Learning Sight Words

Ashley Brudvig
Taylor Anderson
Jarrett Moore
Black Hills State University

Introduction

Throughout our lives, likely, we have all set a goal for ourselves at some point or another. Whether it be a simple New Year resolution to eat healthier and wake up earlier, a religious devotion to stay off social media for a set amount of time or working tirelessly to be promoted to a long sought-after position at work, goal setting is implemented in many aspects of our lives. As adolescents we more than likely set goals for ourselves as well; as student-athletes working at keeping grades up, as band members trying to make it to first chair, or as state champion basketball players doing what it takes to keep the title for the next season. In our experience, goal setting has benefited our motivation by helping us strive to stay on track toward achieving our desired outcome. As teachers, we have seen how critical the element of motivation is to our students' academic success.

While the cognitive development of children has not changed, our expectations of their learning have become more rigorous. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have swayed from basic reading outcomes to fast-tracking children toward more complex reading skills and raising the bar for end-of-year benchmarks. Gambrell and Morrow (2015) believed for students to be successful they must have the motivation and confidence to persist when facing challenges. It is up to the educators of these children to help them find the motivation to learn and be successful in literacy. Because of the positive role goal setting plays in motivation, we hope to

use establishing goals to set our students up for success in meeting the demanding expectations of the CCSS.

Statement of the Problem

As learning expectations have increased over time, young students are often not fully prepared to participate and engage in multifaceted literacy standards requiring fast-paced instruction. In our experience as kindergarten teachers, many students start kindergarten with minimal to no background knowledge of letters and sounds. They are expected to make a significant increase in their ability to read and write by the end of the school year to be prepared for the demands of first grade literacy instruction. A key component of assisting students in reading achievement is to target high frequency words or sight words to promote automatic word reading and fluency (Rawlins & Invernizzi, 2019). Some kindergarten literacy curriculums or district policies require a goal of learning close to 100 sight words by the end of the school year so that students can read text with ease and focus on constructing meaning. Often students will remember the high frequency words as they learn them with familiar texts but forget them over a short time (Rawlins & Invernizzi, 2019). Additionally, the sudden and significant increase in expectations from preschool to kindergarten can affect students' levels of engagement and motivation. While preschool curriculums go slow and steady, centered around the basic letter and number knowledge and how to follow the rules and routines of school, kindergarten expectations are fast paced. Most kindergarten curriculums move quickly through basic letter and sound skills, jumping into sight word recognition immediately. This is often intimidating to our students and can cause a loss of motivation.

Motivation in literacy instruction refers to three key aspects "(1) interest, (2) dedication, and (3) confidence" (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p.62). These three keys to motivation are

crucial to students meeting the high expectations of the CCSS. All students are capable of being dedicated and interested, even if developing certain skills are more challenging for them. Dedication has to do with will and students are either dedicated or avoidant to the skill they are learning. The challenge is taking avoidant students and encouraging their interest in certain skills by making the connection between effort and outcome, seeing value in the knowledge, and value for their future (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015). Likewise, students who have confidence in their abilities believe in their success and like doing things well. A sudden increase in learning expectations can undermine a student's confidence, causing doubt and lowering their motivation toward achievement. Students who exhibit components of motivation take ownership of their learning, keeping them engaged. Unfortunately, not all skills taught in school are desirable to students, making motivation a challenge.

Sight word acquisition is an essential foundational skill that correlates with the CCSS for emergent readers in primary grades and one of those skills that can be undesirable to students. The purpose of this mixed-method research study was to determine if goal setting is an effective motivator for kindergarten students learning foundational skills such as sight word recognition. The following question guided this research study: How does goal setting in kindergarten affect student motivation and growth in sight word recognition?

Significance of the Study

In our experience as kindergarten teachers, the lack of motivation in our classrooms is becoming more and more prevalent as CCSS has set the bar high for our young learners. Lack of motivation is especially noticeable in students coming from low-income families. Many of our students from low-income families have had fewer experiences being read to or talked with, setting them up to be behind before they have even begun. This directly impacts our students'

literacy achievement, creating an immediate gap in both reading and writing. The confidence of these students is low, resulting in a lack of motivation to participate in classroom discussions and activities.

One of the main areas we have seen this lack of confidence and minimal motivation to participate in learning is the area of high frequency words. For our struggling learners in kindergarten, identifying letters and accurately producing their sounds is challenging enough. To throw in words, especially those which do not follow common phonics principles, can create fear of failure. During both whole group and small group sight word activities, it is common to see struggling learners withdraw or avoid participating. They fidget with their pencils and crayons or ask to use the bathroom as soon as we begin instruction on a current or new sight word of focus.

Sight words require our students to become automatic upon recognizing our list of high frequency words brought forth by our districts' English language arts curriculum. The ability to automatically identify these words assists students with their reading fluency, allowing more time for overall comprehension. These high frequency words are not nouns, meaning they cannot be paired with a picture to assist our young learners' concrete thinking; the main reason why sight words are more challenging to learn (Taberski, 2011). We must find ways to motivate our learners to want to engage in our lessons on sight words to help them find success in this foundational skill. While Taberski (2011) discussed the importance of repeated exposures to these words and opportunities to engage in reading and writing every day, this may not be enough for our students showing signs of low confidence and avoidance in learning grade-level sight words.

Goal setting is an effective intervention in older children and adolescents; we believe it can also play a key role in the success of kindergarten students. Prior research and literature on

goal setting suggest a positive correlation between goals and motivation. Moeller et al. (2012) claimed that students' motivation increases when they identify goals with learning tasks, make connections to their aims, and give the task value and purpose.

Literature Review

For our students to have success with goal setting, we must understand the key aspects of setting a goal. This literature review suggests the importance of the goal setting process, bringing to light the necessary attributes needed when setting a goal. Literature and research imply different steps to providing support for our students when putting their goals into action. Furthermore, the significance of feedback on motivation and goal attainment is discussed in this review. This literature supports our focus on gaining a better understanding of the effect goal setting has on student motivation and automatic recognition of kindergarten sight words.

The Role of Theory in Goal Setting

Theories on goal setting unveil many elements necessary for success in goal attainment. Cook and Artino (2016) defined goal setting theories as an exploration of how goals are implemented, discussing goal properties, influential choice factors, dedication, and achievement levels. These elements must be considered when setting goals with children. Epton et al. (2017) claimed that for the goal setting process to be effective, goals must be set at an appropriate difficulty level and task complexity and adequate resources must be available. Goals should be attainable, and educators need to be willing to provide the proper tools and feedback to keep students motivated in achieving their goals. Goal setting theorists Latham and Locke (2006) suggested learning goals need to be in support of students learning the skills necessary to be effective, rather than focusing on simply attaining their goal. A child must not only be motivated to recognize sight words in isolation; they need to also understand the importance of applying

this skill to reading these words in texts.

Successful Goal Setting with Students

To successfully set goals with students, it is important to understand how the goal setting process relates to motivation and learning. Individualized goal setting, according to McTigue et al. (2009) focuses a student's effort, promoting motivation and learning. Setting goals can influence cognition by directing a person's attention and effort towards tasks associated with obtaining those objectives (Cabral-Marquez, 2015). Goals stimulate learners to put forth the effort needed to meet the demands of a task. This self-regulation influences persistence and motivation, which can be a successful technique since individuals are maintaining some control in the process. McTigue et al. (2009) suggested three essential attributes of goal setting to encourage motivation, learning, and self-efficiency, "(1) specificity, (2) proximity, and (3) difficulty" (p.429).

Specificity

Szente (2007) suggested specific performance goals tend to raise motivation and self-efficacy. Creating an action plan with specific steps in achieving the goal is equally important as setting the goal itself. McTigue et al. (2009) found evaluating specific and individualized goals targeting certain skills or tasks is easier to assess than general goals and results in increased self-efficiency when specific goals are attained. Cabral-Marquez (2015) indicated goals set with precise detail are more likely to improve self-regulation. When performance standards are created with comprehensive measures for success in mind, performance increases and enhances self-evaluation and self-efficacy.

Proximity

Cabral-Marquez (2015) proposed proximal goals increase motivation since they are attainable in a shorter amount of time than temporally distant goals. Young children are more likely to be influenced by proximal goals since their "temporal frame of reference makes it difficult to conceptualize distant outcomes" (Cabral-Marquez, 2015, p. 465). Daily goals or ones with short proximity are achieved swiftly, leading to a boost in self-efficacy and motivation (McTigue et al., 2009). Close range goals are most beneficial at the beginning stages of goal setting so that students see success early on, building confidence (Szente, 2007).

Difficulty

According to Cabral-Marquez (2015), goal difficulty influenced student motivation and the amount of effort they put into their learning. Difficulty in relation to goal setting refers to the necessary amount of skill needed to be successful in the required task. For goals to be attainable, McTigue et al. (2009) stressed the importance of setting goals at a suitable level of difficulty for the learner. Attainable goals should not be too hard for students to achieve, but likewise should not be too easy. However, at the beginning of the goal setting process, students should set easily attainable goals to experience success with setting and attaining a goal before challenging themselves (Szente, 2007).

Steps to Put Goal Setting into Action

Rader (2005) suggested for goal setting to be a successful technique for academic achievement, students must take an active role in the development process, using both original and creative thought, encouraging independence and responsibility. The opportunities students are provided with to set goals need to be at their appropriate developmental level and incorporate their interests. Rader (2005) found developing and integrating a feeling of control, ownership,

and autonomy allows students to engage in "opportunities to learn the skills necessary to make sound choices, evaluate decisions, and solve problems" (p. 123) which are essential factors in the goal setting process. To achieve self-set goals, students can follow *The Six Steps to Success*, "(1) choose a specific goal and write it down, (2) decide a time when your goal will be achieved, (3) develop a plan to achieve your goal, (4) visualize yourself accomplishing your goal, (5) work hard and never give up, and (6) self-evaluate" (Rader, 2005, pp. 124-125).

Understanding How Feedback Affects Goals

Performance feedback and goal setting work in tandem. Rather than the sole use of one of these elements, the implementation of both has proven to contribute to more success in overall achievement (Koenig et al., 2016). Educators must make a goal for themselves to provide students with frequent, constructive feedback to effectively support their goals and action plan. Koenig et al. (2016) also brought to light the importance of graphing performance in relation to giving feedback. Using graphs, tables, or charts to create a visual for students allows them to view their current progress or regression toward meeting their goal as something tangible. Children need adults to provide them with consistent feedback to effectively guide them when challenges arise, as well as to celebrate their successes (Szente, 2007). According to Moeller et al. (2012), when combining goal setting with specific feedback in a timely manner "higher achievement, better performance, a high level of self-efficacy, and self-regulation" (p. 154) are more likely to occur.

Using goal setting as a motivational technique has been proven effective in changing one's behaviors, making it a possible key element of successful interventions with students (Epton et al., 2017). With this study, we hoped to discover if using goal setting as an intervention for kindergarten students would help them grow motivated to recognize the grade-level sight

words necessary to become fluent, effective readers and writers. Using the knowledge gained through our findings in the literature we utilized the key elements proven effective when goal setting with our students.

Methodology

For young students to be ready to read and write, they need to have a solid foundation of the required literacy skills to be successful. Kindergarten students need to be motivated to reach the high end-of-year expectations set in place by CCSS for sight word recognition. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the extent to which training students in self-setting goals would motivate them to learn grade-level sight words and help them make the growth needed to become fluent readers and writers. The following question guided this research study: How does goal setting in kindergarten affect student motivation and growth in sight word recognition?

Description of Site and Sample

This action research study took place in two elementary schools located in communities on different sides of a midwestern state. One elementary school was a Title I public school with 539 students enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade; the other was a private primary school with 106 students enrolled in kindergarten through second grade. This study took place in two different kindergarten classroom settings. One setting was a typical classroom environment containing 20 potential participants. Of the 20 potential participants, 11 were male and 9 were female. The other setting was a small-group environment in which 19 potential kindergarten participants from the same classroom received pull-out intervention based on academic needs. Of those 19 potential participants, 7 were male and 12 were female.

This study utilized both convenience sampling and purposive sampling. While all 39 kindergarteners were potential participants, we also implemented an initial assessment on sight word recognition to determine which kindergarteners were struggling with the recognition of sight words and needed intervention. Based on consent form feedback and initial assessment scores, researchers each selected a small group of 10 participants, totaling no more than 20 participants altogether to ensure the study was manageable throughout its course and did not interfere with daily kindergarten instruction. Of the 10 participants in each small group, 5 were part of a control group and 5 were part of the experimental group to guarantee the most accurate results.

Data Collection

For this study, participants in the experimental group were trained in effective goal setting strategies and the steps in which to successfully reach self-set goals. For this study to produce conclusive results, contributors to this group needed to actively engage in the goal setting process, partake in 1:1 meetings to determine the influence of goal setting on motivation levels, participate in a pre- and post-sight word assessment to establish beginning and ending points, and bi-weekly assessments to track progress in sight word recognition. Since the goal setting concept was a new process for many of our student participants, we provided a safe learning environment where self-evaluation was encouraged. Students in the control group took part in the pre- and post-sight word assessment to provide growth data to be compared with the experimental group at the end of the study. Contributors to this group remained in their day-to-day classroom setting throughout the study, receiving no intervention.

The implementation of this 6-week action research study began in February 2021 and concluded in March 2021. Quantitative data was collected in the form of a pre- and post-sight

word recognition assessment given to both the experimental and control group to determine and compare student growth in this grade-level foundational skill. Specifically, participants partook in a predetermined kindergarten sight word list assessment consisting of the 40 high frequency words both sites' kindergarten literacy curriculum required, to establish progress. Additionally, the experimental group created growth charts to compare their bi-weekly assessment results given at the 1:1 meetings. Qualitative data for the experimental group came in two forms: a weekly reflection survey filled out during 1:1 meetings with participants and anecdotal notes taken throughout the intervention. These forms of data assisted us in keeping professional documentation of notable effects on goal progress and the influence of goal setting on motivation levels. These anecdotal notes provided valuable data on observed behavior during the implementation of the intervention. The methods in which data was collected for this action research study were typical of standard classroom procedures and of minimal risk to the participants.

Before the first week of data collection, participants for the study were established. The sight word assessment was given to all students who had given consent to participate in the study. From there, we selected the 10 lowest scoring students at each site, for a total of 20 participants, and divided them into the control and experimental group. This initial sight word assessment determined the starting point for the experimental group's growth charts. The teacher-researchers conducted the pre-intervention meeting with participants in the experimental group to gauge motivational levels when it comes to learning foundational skills and their knowledge of the goal setting process. Once the initial sight word assessments and meetings were completed, the experimental group was then trained in the goal setting process to self-set their goal.

In the initial week of training, for the experimental group in goal setting, it was crucial to emphasize that they had a certain amount of control in the process. Participants were educated on the definition of a goal and the attributes that encourage motivation and learning: specificity, proximity, and difficulty (McTigue et al. 2009). This training promoted students to reflect on their capabilities and set a goal that was personalized to their needs. For participants to successfully set and achieve their self-set goals, we took them through *The Six Steps to Success* (Rader, 2005). First, students set a specific sight word goal they believed they could achieve in the 6 week timeline, keeping proximity and difficulty in mind. The next step guided participants in developing a detailed action plan, encouraging ownership in the process. Then they visualized themselves accomplishing their goal and viewed a growth chart as a visual to see their starting point and goal mark. The last steps encouraged hard work, never giving up, and self-evaluation throughout the study.

Students were shown a calendar with the 6 weeks of the study shaded in to provide a clearer understanding of the timeline. Students then personalized a goal with a difficulty level they thought was attainable in the given time. Participants' goals varied from selecting a specific number of sight words they would be able to recognize by the end of the study including the ones they already knew to students selecting how many more sight words they thought they could learn in the timeframe based on their initial amount of known sight words. For example, participant 13, who recognized 3 sight words during the pre-assessment set a goal of reaching 20 sight words including the ones they already recognized. Whereas participant 17, who recognized 7 sight words during the pre-assessment set a goal of learning 10 more sight words for a total of 17 by the end of the study. Participant 9, who recognized 14 sight words during the pre-assessment had the highest goal of reaching 30 sight words by the end of the study. After the

goals were set, teacher researchers encouraged participants to develop a specific action plan of how to reach their goals. Most students decided to either spend their work time at school practicing sight words or taking some time at home to practice. Each student was provided with a set of flashcards for the 40 sight words in the literacy curriculum to use during the study.

From week one through week six of this action research study, participants in the experimental group implemented their developed plan to reach their goals. During these weeks, we met with participants in the experimental group once a week to revisit set goals using a visual growth chart, discuss motivation levels in chosen tasks using a smiley face chart, and provide ongoing feedback (Szente, 2007). Students were assessed on their sight words bi-weekly to add growth markers to their visual growth chart to see their progress along the way. The smiley face chart was used as a visual during each meeting to gauge participants' motivation levels. The information gathered from these weekly meetings was documented in the teacher's notes. At each meeting, participants were provided with any materials they required as part of their plan to achieve set goals, as well as being reminded of their goal mark by viewing their visual growth chart. These weekly meetings also provided participants who reached their goal marks before the end of the study the opportunity to set a new goal.

In the final week of the study, all 20 participants, from both the experimental and control group, completed a post-sight word assessment to determine how the goal setting intervention affected students' growth in sight word recognition. Once students completed the assessment, the experimental group participated in a post-intervention 1:1 meeting. During this meeting, we assisted students in graphing their final results and comparing them to their starting point and goal mark. The sight word assessments provided us with conclusive results as to whether goal setting influenced participants' growth in this foundational skill. During this final 1:1 meeting,

we determined student participants' understanding of goal setting and if it influenced their motivation in learning grade-level sight words. This data provided us with participants' opinions as to whether goal setting influenced their motivation levels.

Overall, during the 6 weeks of action research, the data collected for the experimental group participants included teacher journal entries and smiley face charts from 1:1 weekly meetings, kindergarten sight word assessments, and a visual growth chart. Data for the control group included the pre- and post- sight word assessment. This was a minimal risk research study as new strategies, such as goal setting and the plans developed to achieve goals, can be implemented as standard classroom practices. Student anonymity was ensured by data collected being titled only with a randomized number, posing no additional risks.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of our study included a mixed-methods approach, triangulating quantitative data collected through pre- and post-assessments and qualitative data collected through reflective weekly check-ins and anecdotal notes. After parent consent forms were obtained, all willing participants were given a pre-assessment on the predetermined kindergarten sight word list. The 10 lowest scoring participants at each site, for a total of 20 participants were then selected to be part of the study, with every other student being assigned to the experimental group for the most accurate results. Students in the experimental group were then trained in self-setting goals and chose a goal mark to attempt to reach by the conclusion of the study. These students participated in weekly check-ins to determine motivation levels and bi-weekly sight word assessments to create growth charts. At the conclusion of the study, all 20 participants took the post-assessment, which consisted of the same set of predetermined kindergarten sight words as the pre-assessment.

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the effects of goal setting on kindergarten motivation, as well as academic growth in sight word recognition. Quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-assessments are presented in the form of graphs to address the research question: How does goal setting in kindergarten affect student motivation and growth in sight word recognition? Figure 1 shows the results from the experimental groups' pre- and post-sight word assessments.

Figure 1

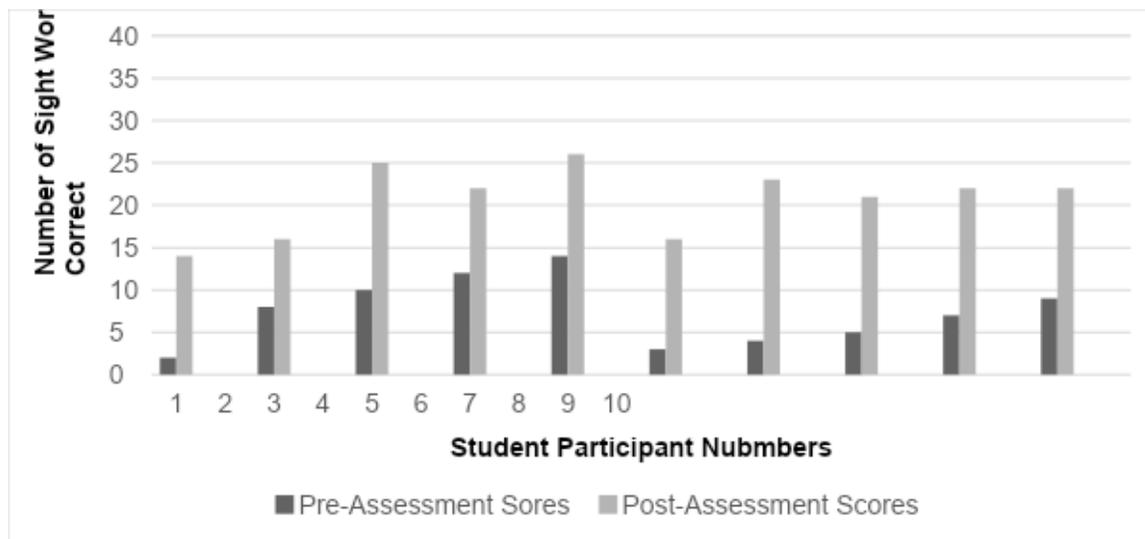*Experimental Group Sight Word Assessment Scores*

Figure 2 shows the control groups' results for a visual comparison of scores. Odd-numbered students in this study were part of the experimental group and even-numbered students were part of the control group. The figures show similar starting points for both the experimental group and control group, as well as the specific gains each participant in the study made.

**Figure 2**

Control Group Sight Word Assessment Scores
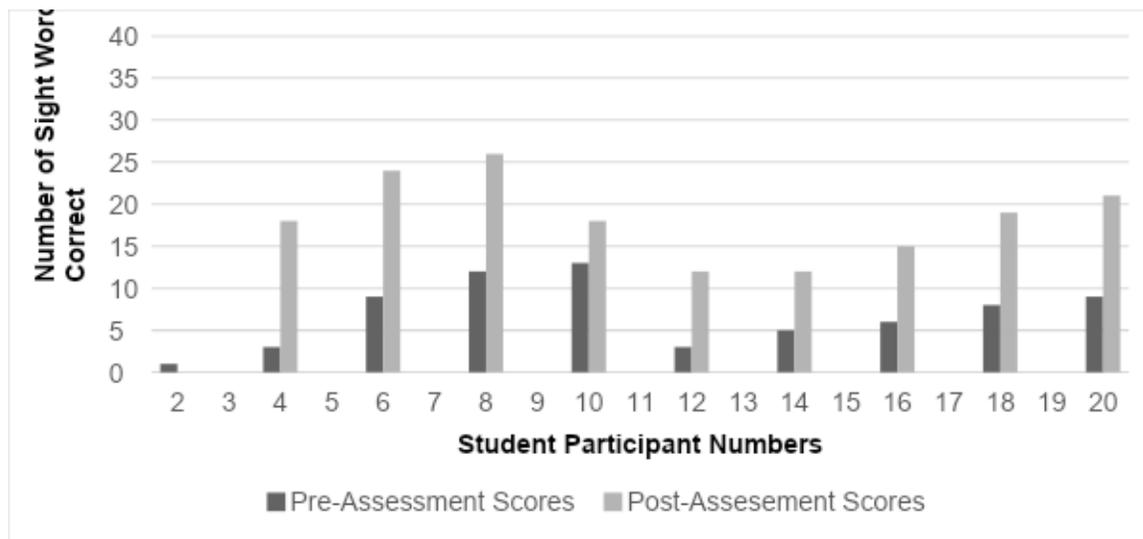
These figures show that all participants in the study, except one, made gains in grade-level sight word recognition. Although not every student in the experimental group made more gains than the students in the control group, a majority of them did. How the outlier in this study, participant 2, was figured into the final results is addressed later in this paper. Additional quantitative data was collected from the experimental group throughout our study to create a growth chart for participants to visually see their progress. This data was collected through bi-weekly sight word assessments and was used to help students visualize achieving their goals.

Figure 3 shows a comparison of the pre- and post- sight word assessment averages for the experimental group and control group. Students in the experimental group, averaged knowing 7.4 sight words from the list of 40 kindergarten sight words during the pre-assessment. After self-setting goals, participating in weekly check-ins, and viewing a growth chart with bi-weekly progress, students took the post-assessment and averaged knowing 20.7 sight words. This is an average increase of 13.3 sight words per student, for a 33% gain in the experimental group. Students in the control group, who did not set goals, averaged knowing 6.9 sight words during the pre-assessment. The post-assessment results showed students in this group averaged knowing

16.5 sight words at the end of the study. This is an average increase of 9.6 sight words per student, for a 24% gain in the control group. When compared, participants in the experimental group averaged 4.2 more sight words, for a gain of 9% more sight words than participants in the control group.

Figure 3

Growth Comparison of the Experimental and Control Groups Pre- and Post-Assessments
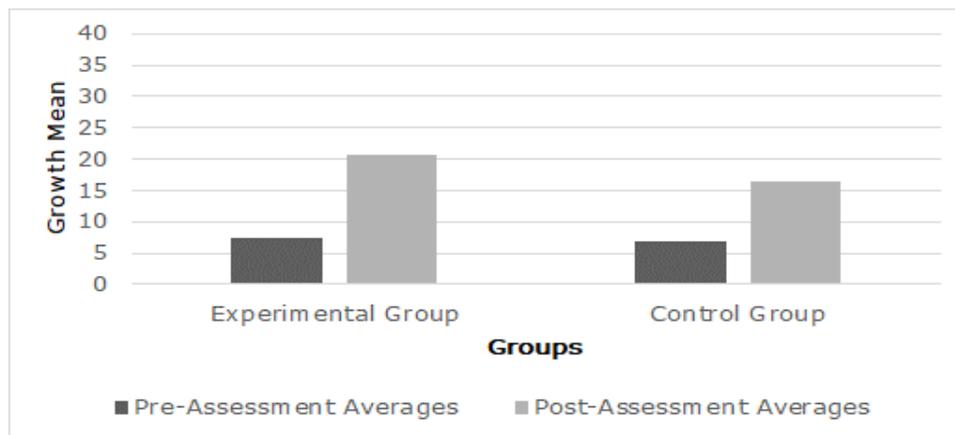
To address the growth aspect of the research question, "How does goal setting in kindergarten affect student motivation and growth in sight word recognition?" more accurately, we must take into consideration the outlier presented in our data collection, participant 2 (see Figure 2). Participant 2, who was part of the control group was the only participant who regressed throughout the study. This student was referred for special education testing during the process. When taking a closer look at the data with this outlier, the range for the number of sight words the experimental group knew during the post-assessment is only 12 compared to the control group's range of 26. To further validate our data analysis of the means, due to these differing ranges, we must also do a comparison of the median number of sight words for each group during the pre- and post-assessment. Table 1 displays the median data sets for both the experimental and control group. The median number of sight words for the experimental group

during the pre-assessment is 7.5 and 22 post-assessment, showing a median growth of 14.5 sight words, for a 36% gain. The median number of sight words for the control group during the pre-assessment is 7 and 18 post-assessment, showing a median growth of 11 sight words, for a 28% gain. When comparing this data, participants in the experimental group knew on average 3.5 more sight words, for a gain of 8% more than participants in the control group, justifying the previously stated gains found using the means.

Table 1

Sight Word Assessment Median Data Sets

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Experimental										
Pre-Assessment	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	12	14
Post-Assessment	14	16	16	21	22	22	22	23	25	26
Control										
Pre-Assessment	1	3	3	5	6	8	9	9	12	13
Post-Assessment	0	12	12	15	18	18	19	21	24	26

Qualitative data was collected using a weekly reflection survey to address the motivation aspect of the research question: How does goal setting in kindergarten affect student motivation and growth in sight word recognition? Because of the participants' young ages and basic writing skills, our survey utilized a smiley face system to help our kindergarten-aged participants easily answer the three questions on their weekly reflection survey: how they felt about (1) recognizing kindergarten sight words, (2) reaching their sight word recognition goal, and (3) the work they are doing to contribute to attaining their goal so far. Analysis of this qualitative data included

comparing the responses of the participants throughout each week of our study to determine the motivation level of the participants in our experimental group. According to the qualitative data collected, the participants felt highly motivated toward learning grade-level sight words with an average of 92% of the participants marking smiley faces and only 8% marking frowny faces throughout the course of our study. The results of this data are organized into a table (see Table 2) to provide a visual representation of the weekly responses to each reflective survey question.

Table 2

Participant Reflection Survey Results

Question	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Question 1						
Smiley	9	9	10	9	10	10
Frowny	1	1	0	1	0	0
Question 2						
Smiley	10	9	9	10	10	10
Frowny	0	1	1	0	0	0
Question 3						
Smiley	8	9	7	8	9	9
Frowny	2	1	3	2	1	1

In addition to analyzing the response results of the survey questions, we reviewed the anecdotal notes taken during weekly check-ins with the participants in our experimental group. These notes were analyzed to determine any recurring themes in motivation levels, which provided more insight into why the participants answered the reflective survey questions the way

they did. Patterns throughout our anecdotal notes showed connections between visual feedback and confidence levels, gender and excitement towards growth charts, and support from home and the amount of effort put forth by the student, all of which contributed to the participants' motivation toward attaining their goal.

Based on participant reflections and anecdotal notes, we found there to be differing motivation levels during weekly check-ins with the participants in our experimental groups. Our anecdotal notes taken during weeks 2, 4, and 6 showed themes of higher confidence levels and excitement toward goal attainment, which were the weeks we administered our bi-weekly sight word assessment, allowing the participants to see their growth in concrete form. While the participants remained optimistic during weekly check-ins which did not include an assessment— weeks 1, 3, and 5, we believe motivation levels were heightened when visual feedback was presented. For example, after the assessment on Week 4, a participant who lacked confidence in learning sight words and often marked frowny faces during self-reflections stated, "I think my bar is going to grow today." After viewing the growth chart and watching the progress bar grow the participant exclaimed, "Yay, now I just need 5 more. I am actually pretty good at reading the sight words." The same participant on week 5 was still feeling better about sight words, but stated, "My goal is higher, the chance of getting to my goal is 80 something (percent)," suggesting the student would have benefitted from an assessment to see progress. Koenig et al. (2016) places importance on graphing performance as a form of feedback and how this visual allows students to view progress towards a goal as something concrete. This was confirmed by the key role visual growth charts played in participants' motivation levels during this study. However, one possible limitation to the visual growth chart for this study could be the bi-weekly assessments. Future studies should consider doing a weekly assessment to determine whether or

not having weekly data versus bi-weekly data for students to view their progress would heighten motivation levels even more.

Another area of motivational difference was found amongst male and female participants, with many male participants showing more excitement towards goal attainment after viewing their visual growth chart than females. Male students often mentioned not only wanting to reach their goal but surpass it and make their bars grow off the growth chart. For example, after viewing his growth chart one male participant stated, "If I do more than 3 more (sight words) that is over my goal, and what if it made it out of my chart? That is very close, I can't believe it right now. I am going to have to tell my family because that's really good." This participant, along with other male participants made similar statements throughout the study and although most female students exhibited excitement towards reaching their goals, they were more reserved in expressing their feelings. The visual growth chart seemed to motivate male participants more than female participants in reaching or surpassing their personal goals. However, these higher displays of enthusiasm did not make a significant difference in the actual overall growth made when comparing the data of male and female participants.

The study also showed that participants who were receiving more support at home with kindergarten skills, such as sight words, were more confident in themselves when answering questions 2 and 3 on their reflective surveys. Conversations during weekly check-ins showed some uneasiness from participants who admittedly did not work on sight word recognition at home due to different home-life situations. Our anecdotal notes taken throughout the course of the study revealed common themes of lowered confidence among these participants as they made similar statements expressing their parents' or guardians' inability to work with them on schoolwork at home due to work schedules.

Another finding or possible limitation of this study had to do with high achievers. The highest scoring participants on the pre-assessment from each site set goals comparable to other students yet were the only two students who did not reach their set goals by the end of the study. Both participants were only a few sight words short of reaching their goal and would have benefited from more time. This shortfall could be due to high achievers having less room for growth than their counterparts who knew fewer sight words to begin with, giving them more room to grow. These findings are something to consider when introducing the goal setting process to high achievers in the future. McTigue et al. (2009) suggested three essential attributes when it comes to goal setting: specificity, proximity, and difficulty. The goals set by the high achievers in this study were set with a specific action plan, leaving proximity and difficulty as the elements needing reconsideration. High achievers could be used to achieving goals swiftly and would benefit from setting goals with shorter proximity than this study's set timeline. This change in proximity would then affect the difficulty level of the goal they set and encourage them to set a lower more attainable goal.

In conclusion, we believe this action research project shows that goal setting in kindergarten has a positive effect on student growth in sight word recognition. McTigue et al. (2009) believed individualized goal setting focuses a student's efforts, promoting motivation and learning. Students who self-set goals in this study showed higher percentages of gains and improvements than students who did not set goals. Viewing a visual growth chart of progress towards a self-set goal and having weekly check-ins with a teacher also played a substantial role in the motivation aspect of the goal setting process. Assessing sight words weekly versus bi-weekly could potentially heighten students' motivation levels even more. Overall, goal setting in this study had a positive effect on kindergarten students' sight word recognition growth,

motivation levels, and self-regulation abilities, along with improving students' confidence levels. Further study is needed to determine if goal setting would be an effective motivator for growth in different foundational skills and other grade-levels.

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