Unpacking the Academic Interventions for Improving the Academic Skills of Black Girls with Disabilities: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Most research on Black girls have focused more on their behaviors (Morris, 2007), when compared to their White peers. It is even worse for Black girls with Disabilities (BDGs) who have continued to be academically marginalized along the intersection of race, gender, and disability. As more special education research exists for improving the academic achievement of students with disabilities across United States’ K-12 schools, it becomes critical to systematically scope the academic interventions that have been used to improve the academic skills of BDGs. Using the PRISMA-SCR checklist (Troico et al., 2018) and Askey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework, 15 studies were scoped. Results from this scoping review revealed that nine academic interventions were used to improve the academic skills of BDGs across the 15 studies. With a narrative synthesis, themes on current strengths and gaps across the studies were discussed in line with systemic reasons why they are important to improving the academic skills of BDGs. Overall, repeated reading interventions (RRIs) delivered through computer assisted instruction (CAI) were more prevalent at improving the academic skills of BDGs.

Overarching Research Question

What are the academic interventions that have been used to improve the academic skills of BDGs within K-12 schools?

What academic skills have been targeted?

Operational Definition of Terms

- **Black Girls**: African American and African descent (from sub-Saharan African countries) girls in the United States. BDGs are Black girls who identified with any disability or special needs.
- **At risk**: Black girls identified in the studies reviewed as struggling learners, and whose educational progress is below average but do not yet have a disability.
- **Disability Impairment**: that substantially limits one or more major life activity (NCES, 2018).
- **Disability**: this is implied or intentionally used to counter the emphasis on having a student represented by what he/she cannot rather than what he/she can do (Amamnu, 2017). It is used to describe a disability as a process, which is not a thing to find and fix.
- **Academic Skills**: Basic skills of reading, writing, and math (Dunlap et al., 2001). This also extends to other content areas such as science.
- **Academic Interventions**: All types of interventions that are used to teach new academic skills to Black girls with disabilities.

Results

- A total of 15 articles met the eligibility criteria. Reported results of BDGs and those at risk were singled from these 15 studies.
- Total number of studies coded and reported (N = 15).
- A total of 36 BDGs and those at risk (N = 36) participated in the 15 studies.
- Six (17%) Black girls had identified for either or both high and low-incidence disabilities with Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
- Thirty (83%) Black girls were yet to receive a disability diagnosis, they had been identified to be at risk for special education and/or academic failure.
- Nine different academic interventions were used to improve the academic skills of BDGs across the 15 studies.
- All 15 studies targeted literacy skills and implemented interventions that focused on reading and writing skills.
- Eleven (73.3%) studies targeted reading skills.
- One (6.7%) study targeted both reading and writing skills.

Discussion

- **Reading-Focused Interventions**: Interventions that focused on reading skills.
- Multicomponent Reading Intervention: most (n = 10) studies implemented six interventions (Critical Literacy approach, CTA, culturally relevant materials, CR mat, reading relevant culturally engaging stories, Read Naturally software, RILEY, BRACES, RNSE, Flashcard drill, word box) that targeted at least two or more (oral fluency, comprehension, phonics, phonemic, and reading) components of reading.
- Repetited Reading Interventions (RRE): Of the 10 studies that implemented RRI, four incorporated CR mat which emphasized fluency practice in which a student repeatedly reads a passage aloud to increase oral reading fluency.
- Early reading intervention (ERI): Four studies implemented interventions that focused on early reading skills as either a packaged intervention (Narrative, Reading, and Self-monitoring, SR-OM) or a stand-alone interventions of WHI, Kuzwaz 3000, and Flashcard drill.
- **Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI)**: Nine studies utilized computer and software programs as tools or delivery strategy. Five interventions (BRACES, RNSE, Kuzwaz 3000, CCR Mat, RNSE, SM1 implemented CAI as a vehicle for delivering interventions.
- **Writing-Focused Interventions**: Interventions that focused on writing skills.
- Cognitive Strategy instruction: three studies utilized self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) intervention to teach students necessary cognitive processes and strategies to become proficient writers.
- Critical Literacy Approach (CLA): One study utilized student-selected read aloud and collaborative sessions connected to her interests and personal experiences.
- **Overlooked Identities and Needs of BDGs**
- Lack of adequate analysis
- Disability or at-risk status was presented from a deficit based point
- Understudied academic skills and grade level
- No study targeted math and/or science skills of BDGs
- Need to re-examine BDGs’ academic experiences and interventions
- Disconnect between BDGs’ instructional identity and intervention
- Lack of empirical research on BDGs.

Conclusion & Recommendation

- All reviewed studies targeted literacy skills among BDGs and those at risk for academic failure across K-8 grade level.
- RRI delivered through CAI were the most prevalent interventions implemented across studies reviewed.
- This scoping review revealed scarcity of research and academic interventions designed to improve the academic skills of BDGs.
- Further research should prioritize the intersectional needs of BDGs while designing and implementing academic interventions.
- There is a need for more studies that prioritizes research aimed at exploiting academic interventions that are targeted towards improving other academic skills (e.g., math and science) of BDGs.
- Early interventions should seek to promote more writing interventions that are culturally sustaining to meet the needs of BDGs.

References

References available upon request. Please email oshokoyao@duq.edu