

Changing Fonts in Education: The Time Dependence of the Benefits

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Abstract

It has recently been shown [1] that students across the ability spectrum demonstrate a significant improvement in retention and recall when presented with information in a disfluent font. Significantly, those students with dyslexia are also found to greatly benefit. One of the key questions raised by this research was whether the effect was diminished as students became more familiar with one specific disfluent font. This report records a small scale trial undertaken by the author.

The Test

Approximately twenty year 12 and year 13 pupils (age 16-18) were initially given two multiple choice tests in consecutive lessons. This followed a similar procedure to the previous research [1]: pupils read a simple passage of text (which was at the independent level for these pupils) at the beginning of a lesson and then answered a multiple choice test of 10 questions at the end of the lesson. In the first test the text was presented in Arial font and in the second the text was presented in Monotype Corsiva font. The average score on the Arial font test was 7.82/10 with a standard deviation of 1.22. In the Monotype Corsiva test the average score was 8.61/10 with a standard deviation of 1.17.

In the following 6 weeks pupils were taught 4 x 40 minute Physics lessons per week using class notes printed entirely in Monotype Corsiva. This made the students more familiar with the font.

Finally, after the 6 week period the students completed two further tests in consecutive lessons. The first of these was in Monotype Corsiva and resulted in an average score of 9.06/10 with a standard deviation of 0.85. The second was in Arial and resulted in an average score of 8.42/10 with a standard deviation of 0.76.

Conclusion

The initial pair of tests clearly reproduce the improvement seen previously [1] in the use of Monotype Corsiva with an improvement of 0.79/10. Following the six week period, the improvement is still present but was reduced to 0.64/10. However the average score had risen in both cases, perhaps due to pupils becoming accustomed to the procedure of reading the text passage and then completing the test.

The decrease in difference between the Arial and Monotype Corsiva tests at the beginning and after 6 weeks may suggest a weakening of the effect with time. However the decrease is very small at 0.15/10 or 19% and is significantly less than the standard deviation in the results. Thus, these new results which show consistency with previous work [1], lend their support to the effect still being present after 6 weeks and do not conclusively indicate that the effect wears off over this time scale. However at the statistically significant level they are inconclusive due to the small number of pupils taking part and the relatively large standard deviations. A much larger future study is needed.

[1] M M J French et al., Changing Fonts in Education:How the Benefits Vary with Ability and Dyslexia, accepted for publication in Journal of Educational Research 2013.