



## Characteristics of Supplemental Reading Classes in American Public High Schools

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**ABSTRACT:** Supplemental reading classes can be described as classes that are provided for students who struggle in reading. The purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics of high school supplemental reading classes that were developed to support struggling readers in the United States of America. All data in the study was collected by a questionnaire that was developed by the researcher in order to describe the characteristics of high school supplemental reading classes. The questionnaire included 32 questions. All the participating schools were selected from the State of Wisconsin. A total of 223 teachers in 116 schools participated in the study. A total of 126 teachers completed and returned the questionnaire. The main findings of this study indicated that the availability of supplemental reading classes in American public high schools is limited and characteristics of reading instruction in these classes vary (e.g., student selection, assessment methods). Findings of the study are discussed and recommendations for developing a similar supplemental reading class in other high schools are provided.

**Keywords:** adolescent reading, supplemental reading, high school, teaching reading

### INTRODUCTION

Having strong reading skills is crucial to meeting the demands of the 21st century. In order to be successful in school and later in life, adolescents need to have adequate reading skills before they graduate from high school (Daniel et al., 2006). If adolescents do not have solid reading skills, they are likely to experience difficulties on a personal level and beyond. On a personal level, for instance, adolescents who have poor reading skills are at high risk of having more behavioral and emotional difficulties than adolescents with typical reading skills (Daniel et al., 2006). In addition, there is a relationship between low reading achievement and dropping out of high school. Students with poor reading skills are more likely than students with typical reading skills to drop out of school (Daniel et al., 2006). Graduating from high school is critical; students who cannot graduate are less likely to have access to the same economic and social privileges as students who complete high school. Therefore, increasing reading skills of adolescents in high schools is not only crucial for students' success during high school, but also increases the possibility of success in their personal life after school. Although reading proficiency is critical, American adolescents are not performing well in national reading assessments. The results of nationwide reading assessments in the U.S.A. consistently indicate that many students experience reading difficulties in high school. Millions of adolescents read below basic standards for their grade level (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). Additionally, the reading achievement of American high school students did not significantly improve in the last three decades. In 2004, 80% of 17 year-olds were able to interrelate ideas and make generalizations from text, up from 79% in 1971 – a gain of only 1% in over 30 years (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005).

One approach for improving reading skills of adolescents in high schools is providing supplemental reading classes. These classes are provided for students with or without disabilities who are struggling in one or more areas of reading. A special education or a reading teacher provides the instruction in a separate classroom apart from the content-area classes. The research on supplemental reading programs demonstrates that these classes can be effective in increasing the reading skills of adolescents (e.g., Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Showers, Joyce, Scanlon, & Schnaubelt, 1998). However, little is known about the availability and characteristics of these classes.

The review of literature on supplemental reading classes indicated that there is only one study (i.e., Barry, 1997) examining the characteristics of reading instruction in high schools. Barry conducted a nationwide survey study that asked 2,287 high schools to identify the programs available in their schools

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for students who struggle to read. Of those, 737 principals, reading specialists, teachers, and curriculum directors responded to Barry's questionnaire. According to the results of this study, 67% of respondents reported offering a reading program in their schools. Of those schools, 17% reported that these reading programs are only available as a part of the special education department, and 11% reported that there is no reading program provided for secondary school students. Of those 11% of schools, 9% indicated that although there is no reading program, the school makes several accommodations for students who struggle to read. Respondents in Barry's study also indicated that these reading classes served students across multiple grade levels: 64% served students in 10th grade, 62% served 9th grade, 58% served 11th grade, and 54% served students in 12th grade. According to Barry (1997), student placement in these settings was primarily based on standardized test scores (61%) and teacher recommendation (58%). The standardized tests high schools use varied. Respondents indicated using 70 different tests to place students in reading classes. The criteria schools used to evaluate student progress in these settings were similar to the criteria they used to place students in these programs. Most of the respondents (63%) indicated using teacher feedback and test scores (58%) to measure student progress. The reading programs were available to students from 1 day to 5 days each week, with the duration of instruction varying anywhere from 10 minutes to 120 minutes per session. The respondents in this study reported using various materials to support reading instruction, including both commercially produced and teacher-made materials.

By comparing her findings to similar studies from the 1940's, Barry found that supplemental reading programs in secondary schools were on the decline. Schools reported that this decline was the consequence of budget cuts and decisions made by administrators in their districts. Barry also found that fewer high schools reported using standardized reading tests to evaluate student progress and placement. Rather, the high schools tended to vary the tools used to evaluate students and their progress (e.g., teacher, student, and parent feedback, teacher-made tests). Furthermore, findings of Barry's study indicated that reading programs were mostly staffed by reading teachers and specialists (39%) and instructors who have additional reading endorsements (27%).

Although Barry's study provides valuable insights regarding the characteristics of supplemental reading classes in high schools, the reading classes surveyed in Barry's study included additional reading support programs, such as providing reading help in study halls and during English period. Therefore, our knowledge specific to the characteristics of supplemental reading classes in high schools is still limited. Additionally, there have been a lot of developments in the area of adolescent reading since Barry's study was conducted. In the last decade, researchers have spent a great amount of resources to identify best practices in adolescent reading. Today, educators know more about what strategies work for high school students with reading difficulties, and how to respond to the adolescent reading crisis (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). We also have more research on the effectiveness of high school supplemental reading classes on adolescent reading. However, our knowledge on how improvements in the field of adolescent reading affected the reading instruction provided to high school students is still unknown. Specifically, little is known about the characteristics of the students currently accessing high school supplemental reading classes and the teachers who staff them. In addition, little is known about how students place in and exit these classes, how students' progress in reading is assessed, and the total duration of instruction time in these settings.

The present study will fill a gap in the literature by providing information related to the characteristics that govern supplemental reading classes in regular public high schools. Such information can be useful for schools and districts that are willing to offer such a reading program, but do not know where to begin. Schools and districts can consider the procedures used in existing programs to develop reading programs that suit their specific needs. The purpose of this study was to portray the characteristics of high school supplemental reading classes in the United States of America. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of students and teachers in supplemental reading classes in American regular public high schools?
2. What are the characteristics of supplemental reading classes in American regular public high schools?

## METHODS

### Sampling

In order to gather information regarding supplemental reading classes, the author asked teachers of regular public high school supplemental reading classes to complete a short questionnaire. The total number of all public high schools in the state of Wisconsin was 558. However, this number included regular public high schools, charter, and alternative high schools. After eliminating the charter and alternative high schools, the total number of regular public high schools in the state was 416. Before sending the questionnaires, the author contacted all the regular public high schools and asked if they offer any supplemental reading class for their students. A total of 116 (30%) of the 416 regular high schools were identified as offering at least one supplemental reading class. Although the author identified 116 high schools in the study, the total number of questionnaires that the author sent to all high schools was 223, since many high schools assigned more than one teacher to supplemental reading classes.

Of all schools, 24.8% ( $n = 31$ ) were located in mid-size cities, 21.6% ( $n = 27$ ) in rural areas, 18.4% ( $n = 23$ ) in urban fringe of a large city, 17.6% ( $n = 22$ ) in small towns, 16.0% ( $n = 20$ ) in urban fringe of mid-size cities, 12.8% ( $n = 16$ ) in urban fringe of a mid-size city, and one school was located in a large city. Furthermore, the average size of schools was 1,197.1 ( $SD = 570.9$ , range = 174-2,427) and the average district size was 7,578 ( $SD = 7887.0$ , range = 565-24,628).

### Respondents vs. nonrespondents

Chi-square tests of goodness of fit and t-tests were conducted to compare the characteristics of the return sample of 86 schools to the characteristics of high schools that were included in the sample but from which no questionnaires were returned. The variables used for these analyses were: school size, geographic location, school district size, and percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The result of the chi-square test by geographic location was not significant, indicating that the respondents and nonrespondents were not different based on the geographic location. Additionally, the t-test results comparing respondent to nonrespondent schools on school size, district size, and percentage of students qualified for free or reduced lunch were also not significant.

### Questionnaire development

The author designed a questionnaire to collect information on high school supplemental reading classes. The author developed the questionnaire using the following steps: First, the author conducted a literature review on adolescent reading to identify potential questions related to the study. Next, the author consulted with experts for their constructive feedback on the questionnaire draft. After receiving initial feedback from experts, the author conducted cognitive interviews (Willis, 2004) with three high school supplemental reading class teachers to increase the clarity of the questionnaire. The revised questionnaire consists of 32 multiple-choice questions, Likert-type scales, fill-in-the blanks, and yes/no questions, and is divided into three sections.

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect information about teachers of high school supplemental reading classes. This section included 10 questions (Questions 1-10), formatted as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and open-ended questions. The first eight questions were related to the background and demographic characteristics of participating teachers (e.g., age, gender, certification status). Another question in this section was designed to gather information regarding how prepared teachers feel to implement certain activities in their reading classes. The second section of the

questionnaire was designed to gather information on the characteristics of the supplemental reading classes and the students in these classes (e.g., the placement and exiting procedures). This section included 14 questions (Questions 11-24) formatted as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, yes/no, and open-ended questions. The third section of the questionnaire was designed to gather information related to the instructional strategies used by teachers in supplemental reading classes. This section included seven questions (Questions 25-32) formatted as Likert-type scales and open-ended questions. The author designed these questions based on an extensive review of research on adolescent reading (e.g., Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Kamil et al., 2008; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007). These questions included (a) reading programs or curricula utilized during reading instruction, (b) decision procedures to select a specific reading program, (c) time spent on each reading skill area in a typical week, (d) procedures to assess students' progress in reading, (e) frequency of technology use to support reading instruction, (f) types of technology used to support reading instruction, and (g) strategies used to increase students' motivation in reading.

### **Procedure**

Prior to the data collection, the author requested permission from the school districts and/or the principals of schools to conduct the study in their high schools. After securing the permissions, the author sent printed questionnaire(s) to the principal in each school, including the cover letters, survey instructions, and other materials, and asked that he or she pass the envelope(s) to the supplemental reading class teacher(s). Since the procedures for receiving permission from some schools or school districts took more time than expected, the author sent the survey in multiple waves. In order to increase the response rate, the author gave 2 single dollars to each respondent. The author sent the monetary incentive with the first mailing. However, the author did not provide any additional monetary incentives in follow-up mailings.

In addition to a regular mail survey, the author offered an online survey option to the participants. The author sent an email invitation to principals in each high school, and requested that they forward this e-mail to their supplemental reading class teachers. This e-mail was several paragraphs long, and included a description of the study and its purpose, the instructions for taking the questionnaire, and a link to the website containing the questionnaire.

### **Data analysis**

Before beginning the data analysis, the author entered all the responses into the Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS). After entering all the data in the software program, the author randomly selected 20% of the submitted mail and online questionnaires, and asked another student to re-enter the data in order to calculate the reliability of data entry. Percentage agreement was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the number of agreements plus disagreements. Coding agreement between the two coders was 98.2%. Each disagreement was checked with the original survey and corrected in the SPSS database.

In order to address our research questions, the author used descriptive statistics. First, the author used descriptive statistics to summarize information on the participating teachers and their schools. In addition to descriptive statistics, the author coded the open-ended responses by content. In some cases, teachers did not respond all questions on the survey. Therefore, reports of data reflect some variation in number across summaries of individual survey items.

## RESULTS

A total of 126 teachers from 86 regular high schools completed and returned the questionnaires (57% of return rate). Of those 126 surveys, 21 (16.7%) were completed online. Even though 126 useable questionnaires were returned, some respondents did not answer all of the questions. Therefore, the response rates for several items on the questionnaire do not add up to 126 due to these missed questions.

**Table 1.** *Demographics of responding teachers*

	%	<i>n</i>
Gender		
Female	89.5	111
Male	10.5	13
Ethnicity		
Bi-racial	0.8	1
White	99.2	123
Type of Teacher		
General education teachers	39.3	48
ELL teacher	4.8	6
Reading specialist	15.6	19
Reading teachers	25.4	31
Special education teachers	47.5	58
Other	2.4	3
Teaching Certification		
Regular	87.0	107
Probationary	9.8	12
Temporary, emergency	1.6	2
Not certified	1.6	2
Teaching Experience		
5 years or less	24.3	28
6-10 years	23.5	27
11-20 years	29.6	34
21 or more	22.6	26
Experience in Supplemental Reading Classes		
5 years or less	66.4	81
6-10 years	17.2	21
11-20 years	10.7	13
21 or more	5.7	7

The majority, 89.5% ( $n = 111$ ), of the teachers was female, 10.5% ( $n = 13$ ) of the respondents were male, and two respondents did not answer this question. The age range of participants was from 24 to 64 ( $M = 41.9$ ,  $SD = 11.4$ ). The majority of the respondents were white (99.2%,  $n = 123$ ), one respondent was bi-racial, and two respondents did not answer this question. Of all the respondents, 47.5% ( $n = 58$ ) were special education teachers, 39.3% ( $n = 48$ ) were general education teachers, 25.4% ( $n = 31$ ) were reading teachers, and 15.6% ( $n = 19$ ) were reading specialists. Additional responses included English Language Learner (ELL) teacher ( $n = 6$ ), literacy coach ( $n = 1$ ), bilingual social studies teacher ( $n$

= 1), and literacy support person for school staff ( $n = 1$ ). In terms of teaching certification, 87.0% ( $n = 107$ ) indicated holding regular certification, 9.8% ( $n = 12$ ) holding probationary certification, 1.6% ( $n = 2$ ) holding temporary, provisional, or emergency certification, 1.6% ( $n = 2$ ) were not certified but they were in a program to obtain state certification, and three respondents did not answer this question.

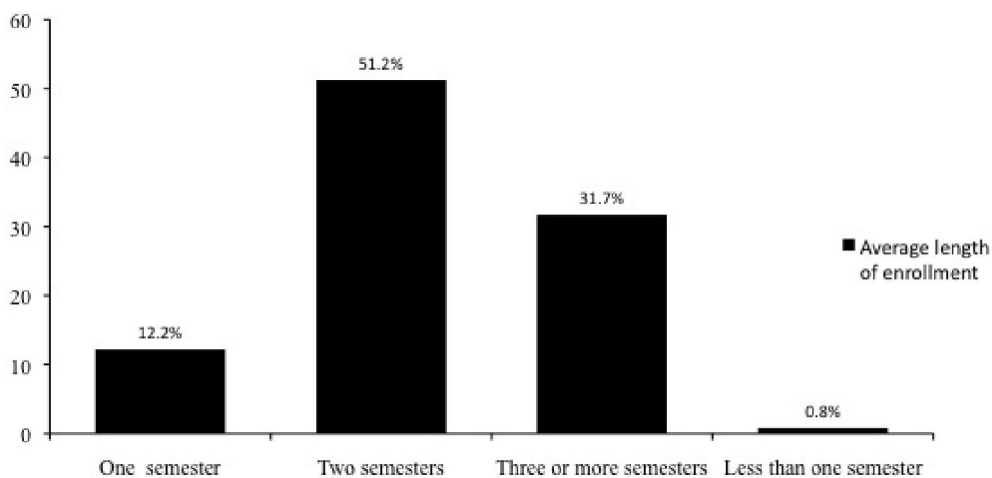
The teachers indicated having an average of 13.3 ( $SD = 9.4$ ) years of teaching experience. Since responses to this question varied, the answers to this question were recoded into four categories: 1 = 5 years or less, 2 = 6-10 years, 3 = 11-20 years, and 4 = 21 years or more. The teachers reported having an average of 6.3 ( $SD = 6.7$ ) years teaching experience in supplemental reading classes. The answers to this question were also recoded into four categories: 1 = 5 years and less, 2 = 6-10 years, 3 = 11-20 years, and 4 = 21 years and higher (See Table 1 for more information).

Teachers were also asked what kind of professional development activities in reading instruction they have been engaged in the last two years. A majority, 68.9% ( $n = 82$ ), of teachers indicated attending workshops, 49.6% ( $n = 59$ ) indicated attending conferences, 43.2% ( $n = 52$ ) indicated attending university courses related to teaching, 42.0% ( $n = 50$ ) indicated attending teacher study groups or networks, 36.2% ( $n = 43$ ) indicated attending seminars on teaching, and 31.1% ( $n = 37$ ) indicated attending technology training to support reading instruction. Other professional development activities reported were giving presentation at the conferences ( $n = 1$ ), coordinating a masters program through a university and supervising practicum students ( $n = 1$ ), attending Read 180 training ( $n = 1$ ), having in-service days ( $n = 1$ ), participating in one on one small group activities ( $n = 1$ ), tutoring ( $n = 1$ ), and one respondent did not answer this question.

### Characteristics of supplemental reading classes in regular public high schools

**Classroom title.** The respondents were asked to identify the title of their supplemental reading classes. Since some teachers staff more than one supplemental reading class, the number of classroom titles is more than the number of respondents. The participants reported a wide variety of responses to this question. Of those titles, “Read 180” was the most frequently reported title (41.7%,  $n = 50$ ).

**Duration of instruction.** The respondents were asked to report the total duration of instruction in their supplemental reading classes. The average duration of instruction in supplemental reading classes was 70.7 ( $SD = 21.9$ ; range = 40-120) minutes per session.

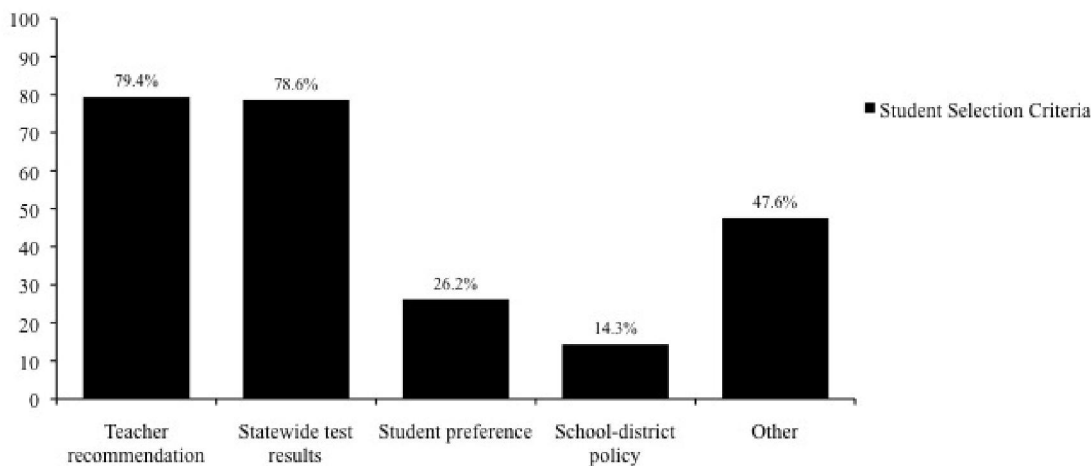


**Figure 1.** Average length of enrollment in supplemental reading classes

**Number of weekly meetings.** The respondents were asked to identify how many times per week the supplemental reading class was offered. The respondents indicated that the supplemental reading classes meet an average of 4.9 ( $SD = .7$ , range = 2-10) times per week.

**Number of students.** Another question asked was the number of students in each supplemental reading class. On average, 13.0 ( $SD = 5.8$ , range = 1-36) students enrolled to supplemental reading classes in each high school. Because of the wide range of responses received, this data was recoded into three categories: 1 = 5 students or less, 2 = 6-10 students, 3 = 11-20 students, 4 = 21 students and more. Of those, 8.4% ( $n = 10$ ) indicated having 5 or less, 15.1% ( $n = 18$ ) indicated 6-10, 36.1% ( $n = 43$ ) indicated 11-20, 29.4% ( $n = 35$ ) indicated 21-30, 10.9% ( $n = 13$ ) indicated 31 or more students in their supplemental reading classes, and seven respondents did not answer this question.

**Student selection.** The respondents were asked to identify how students are selected to be in supplemental reading classes. Of those, 79.4% ( $n = 100$ ) of respondents indicated using teacher recommendation, 78.6% ( $n = 99$ ) indicated using statewide test results, 26.2% ( $n = 33$ ) indicated identifying students based on students' own preference, 14.3% ( $n = 18$ ) indicated that student selection is mandated by school district's policy. Additionally, 47.6% ( $n = 60$ ) reported other criteria for selecting students. The most frequently reported other criteria were Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores (18.3%,  $n = 23$ ), standardized test scores (12.7%,  $n = 16$ ), IEP (5.6%,  $n = 7$ ), and using a combination of these criteria (4.0%,  $n = 5$ ).



**Figure 2.** Student selection criteria to high school supplemental reading classes

**Initial diagnostic tests.** The respondents were asked to report whether they use any diagnostic reading tests to identify the specific reading areas for which their students need support before the instruction starts. Of all the respondents, 81.0% ( $n = 102$ ) reported using initial diagnostic tests. The most frequently used tests were SRI (38.2%,  $n = 47$ ) and SRI in conjunction with another test (15.4%,  $n = 19$ ).

**Student assessment during the semester.** The respondents were asked how they assess student progress in their supplemental reading classes. Of the 126 respondents, 54.8% ( $n = 69$ ) indicated using diagnostic reading tests. The most frequently reported tests were SRI (22.6%,  $n = 28$ ), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP; 6.5%,  $n = 8$ ), Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE; 4.8%,  $n = 6$ ), and Woodcock-Johnson (WJ; 2.4 %,  $n = 3$ ). The most frequently used assessment tools were observation of student performance (88.9%,  $n = 112$ ), evaluating student work (80.2%,  $n = 101$ ), using teacher-developed test (63.5%,  $n = 80$ ), and using informal reading inventories (54.8%,  $n = 69$ ).

**Student exit policies.** The respondents were asked to describe how the decision is made for students to exit the supplemental reading classes. Of those, 38.3% ( $n = 46$ ) indicated students exit the

program after reaching a certain level of lexile score, 34.2% ( $n = 41$ ) indicated students stay in the program for a specified time (e.g., 1 semester), 18.3% ( $n = 22$ ) indicated students exit after reaching reading proficiency, 13.3% ( $n = 16$ ) indicated making decisions based on student performance, 8.3% ( $n = 10$ ) indicated students exit the program based on teacher recommendation.

**Successful completion of the class.** The teachers were asked to report the percentage of their students who successfully complete the reading class. On average, the respondents indicated that approximately 76.3% ( $SD = 25.9$ , range = 4%-100%) of their students successfully complete the supplemental reading classes, and 25 respondents did not answer this question. Some of these nonresponders reported that this is the first semester that they have implemented a supplemental reading class; therefore, they did not know what percentage of students successfully complete the supplemental reading class.

**Students with disabilities.** The respondents were asked how many of the students in their supplemental reading classes have individualized education programs (IEP). Teachers indicated an average of 9.6 ( $SD = 8.1$ , range = 0-40) students in their supplemental reading classes had an IEP. Students with IEPs constituted the 55.8% ( $SD = 37.9$ , range = 0-100) of all students in supplemental reading classes.

The respondents were also asked to report how many students in their supplemental reading classes are identified as having learning disabilities (LD), emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), and other special education labels. Teachers indicated that an average of 6.2 ( $SD = 6.1$ , range = 0-28) students in their classes were identified as having LD. Additionally, an average of 1.6 ( $SD = 2.3$ , range = 0-12) students were identified as having EBD.

**Grade levels of students.** The participants were asked to identify the grades of their students in supplemental reading classes. Most of the respondents 88.0% ( $n = 110$ ) indicated 9th grade, 74.4% ( $n = 93$ ) indicated 10th grade, 52.8% ( $n = 66$ ) indicated 11th grade, and 44.8% ( $n = 56$ ) indicated 12th grade. Additionally, 81.0% ( $n = 102$ ) indicated that students in their supplemental reading class are from multiple grades, and 19.0% ( $n = 24$ ) indicated that students in their supplemental reading classes are from a single grade.

**Average length of enrollment.** Teachers were asked to report the average length of enrollment for students in supplemental reading classes. Of all participants, 51.2% ( $n = 63$ ) indicated two semesters, 31.7% ( $n = 39$ ) indicated more than two semesters, 12.2% ( $n = 15$ ) indicated one semester, and one respondent indicated less than one semester.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of nationwide and international reading assessments demonstrate that many adolescents in American high schools have poor reading skills (Kamil, 2003). Since there is a strong correlation between having solid reading skills and in- and post-school outcomes, it is important to increase the reading skills of high school adolescents who struggle with reading (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). As a response to poor reading achievement of adolescents, American high schools can provide supplemental reading classes. Unfortunately, there is limited research on characteristics of reading instruction in these classes. This study is the first extensive to explore the characteristics of reading instruction in high school supplemental reading classes in the U.S.A. Our findings provide information regarding the current status of support provided to struggling readers in these classes.

### Characteristics of teachers in supplemental reading classes

One of the recommendations made by experts in adolescent literacy (e.g., Kamil et al., 2008) is that reading instruction for struggling readers should be provided by trained professionals in order to be effective. The good news is that the majority of supplemental reading class teachers in this study reported having an average of about 13 years teaching experience, are trained in teaching reading, and hold regular teaching certification (i.e., 87% of teachers in this study reported certification in either general or special



education). The disappointing news is that not all teachers in supplemental reading classes are well trained in teaching reading. Only 41% of teachers were either a reading teacher or reading specialist. Given the unique needs of students in reading, more and more teachers need to have expertise in teaching reading. Additionally, many of these teachers have very limited exposure to professional development activities on teaching reading. Recent reports disseminated by experts in adolescent literacy repeatedly indicated the importance of professional development in order to address the adolescent reading crisis (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Kamil, 2003; Kamil et al., 2008; Meltzer et al., 2002; NRP, 2000). In another study, Langer (2000) indicated that there is a positive relationship between student achievement and teachers' professional development activities. Therefore, future research should investigate the reasons for the limited participation of supplemental reading class teachers in professional development activities. If professional development opportunities provided by schools or districts are limited, additional opportunities should be provided. If there is sufficient number of professional development opportunities, the reasons for the limited participation of teachers in these professional development activities should be identified. Identifying potential reasons can help schools and districts provide supplemental reading class teachers with the best methods for professional development.

### **Procedures governing high school supplemental reading classes**

Findings of the current study indicated that most of the characteristics of supplemental reading classes vary. These variations can be observed in student selection, student exit criteria, and in many other procedures. For example, some schools reported using statewide test results and teacher recommendations to identify potential supplemental reading class candidates, whereas others reported selecting students based on their IEPs. Findings regarding student selection procedures are similar to those in Barry's (1997) study. Barry also found that most schools use standardized test scores and teacher recommendation for student placement. These findings reflect some areas of concern. One issue that needs special attention is the eligibility criteria for entering supplemental reading classes. Several schools reported that supplemental reading classes are available only for students with IEPs. Limiting supplemental reading classes only for students with disabilities might be problematic, because not all students who demonstrate poor reading skills may be identified with a disability. High school supplemental reading classes should open their doors to any student, no matter what their disability status, to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to receive the support they need.

Additional findings of this study indicated that exiting policies vary from school to school. Most teachers reported that students exit the supplemental reading class after reaching a certain reading proficiency level (e.g., reaching a lexile score) or after staying in the program for the required time (e.g., 1 semester). There are several issues that need to be considered regarding these exiting policies. First, there is no standardization regarding the length of time students are required to spend in supplemental reading classes, or other forums for reading instruction. In some schools, students are released from supplemental reading classes at the end of a semester, even if they do not improve their reading skills, because the reading program is only provided for one semester. This policy can be problematic because not all students successfully complete these reading classes. Some teachers reported that as low as 4% of their students successfully complete the supplemental reading class at the end of the program. If students exit these classes before reaching a certain proficiency level, they may still experience reading difficulties after leaving these programs. Therefore, schools should consider using student reading performance data when making exit decisions.

Moreover, several teachers reported that students exit the program even if they do not present any progress in their reading. Several questions need to be addressed regarding this policy: If the students are not making any improvement in supplemental reading classes, why are these students forced to leave these classes? If students do not make any progress after attending these classes, what happens to these underachieving students after they exit these classes? Is there another level of supplemental reading class in which these students can enroll? Can schools provide individualized reading instruction to these

students? Although teachers reported that, on average, 80% of their students successfully complete the reading class, not all the students meet the curriculum standards by the end of the semester.

Another interesting finding regarding supplemental reading class policies is that not all teachers use diagnostic reading tests at the beginning of the semester to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in various reading areas. Although schools can use statewide assessment test scores to measure the overall reading achievement of students with poor reading skills, these tests may not be an effective way to evaluate reading instruction. According to research reports on adolescent literacy, teachers should have ongoing formative and summative assessments of their students (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). After determining which students are eligible for supplemental reading classes, schools should assess in what reading areas these students need additional reading support. Assessing the reading skills of students can be useful to identify the specific reading areas with which students struggle, and to modify reading instruction based on these areas of need.

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# Amerika’da Devlet Liselerindeki Okuma Becerisini Arttırmaya Yönelik Destek Sınıflarının Özellikleri

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## ÖZET

Okuma becerisini arttırmaya yönelik destek sınıfları okuma becerisi zayıf olan öğrencilere bu becerilerini geliştirmek amacıyla çeşitli destek hizmetlerinin sağlandığı sınıflar olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’ndeki devlet liselerinde, okuma güçlüğü olan öğrencilerin okuma becerilerini arttırmak amacıyla oluşturulmuş destek sınıflarının özelliklerinin betimlenmesidir. Araştırmanın verileri, destek sınıflarında çalışan öğretmenlerin bu sınıflarda kullandıkları yöntemleri ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen ve 32 sorudan oluşan anket ile toplanmıştır. Destek sınıflarının tamamı Amerikanın Wisconsin eyaletindeki okullardan seçilmiştir. Belirlenen 116 devlet lisesinde, destek sınıflarında görev yapan 223 öğretmene araştırma anketi gönderilmiştir. Anket gönderilen öğretmenlerden 126’sı anketi cevaplayarak geri göndermiştir. Bulgulara göre okullardaki okuma becerisini destekleyen sınıflar sınırlı sayıdadır. Ayrıca, bu sınıfların genel özellikleri okuldan okula değişebilmektedir (öğrenci seçimi, değerlendirme teknikleri gibi). Araştırmanın bulguları tartışılarak, bu tür sınıfların diğer okullarda da açılması sürecinde yardımcı olacağı düşünülen öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Amaç ve Önem:** Bu çalışmanın amacı ABD’de liselerde okuma güçlüğü yaşayan öğrencilerin okuma becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik olarak oluşturulmuş destek sınıflarının özelliklerinin belirlenmesidir. Okuma becerisi, hem okul çağında hem de bireylerin okul sonrası yaşamlarında sıklıkla kullandıkları önemli becerilerden birisidir. Okuma becerisi zayıf olan bireyler okul yıllarında çeşitli akademik alanlarda pek çok problem yaşamaktadırlar. Bu problemlerin giderilmesi amacıyla Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’ndeki bazı okullarda öğrenme güçlüğü olan ve özellikle okuma güçlüğü olan öğrenciler için özel sınıflar açılmaktadır. Son yıllarda yapılan çalışmalar bu sınıflarda sağlanan okuma desteğinin öğrenci başarısını arttırmada etkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak bu sınıflardaki öğretmenlerin özellikleri, sınıflardaki öğrencilerin nasıl seçildiği, öğrenci başarısını ölçmede hangi değerlendirme tekniklerinin kullanıldığı gibi pek çok genel özellik henüz bilinmemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, okuma becerisini desteklemek amacıyla oluşturulan destek sınıflarının genel özelliklerinin belirlenmesidir.

**Yöntem:** Araştırmanın verileri, destek sınıflarında çalışan öğretmenlerin kullandıkları yöntemleri ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen ve 32 sorudan oluşan bir anket kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Anketin birinci bölümündeki sorularla, öğretmenlerin cinsiyetleri, etnik kökenleri, öğretmenlik deneyimleri, eğitimleri ve destek sınıflarında çalışma deneyimlerinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Anketin ikinci bölümünde ise okuma sınıflarına hangi yöntemlerle öğrenci seçildiği, bu öğrencilerin akademik performanslarının nasıl değerlendirildiği, öğrencilerin bu sınıflarda geçirmiş oldukları toplam süreyi özetleyen sorular sorulmuştur. Anketler 116 lisede destek sınıflarında görev yapan 223 öğretmene gönderilmiştir. Anket gönderilen öğretmenlerden 126’sı (%57) anketi cevaplandırmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Araştırma verilerinin analizine göre, ABD’denin Wisconsin eyaletindeki liselerde, okuma becerisini desteklemeye yönelik sınıflarda görev yapan öğretmenlerin (% 89.5) kadın öğretmenlerden oluşmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin ortalama öğretmenlik deneyimleri 13.3 yıldır. Okuma sınıflarında verilen derslerin ortalama uzunluğu 70.7 dakikadır. Bu sınıflardaki öğrenciler haftanın beş günü eğitim

görmektedirler. Destek sınıflarının ortalama sınıf mevcudu ise 13 öğrencidir. Öğrencilerin sınıflara seçilmek amacıyla değerlendirilmesinde her okulda farklı kriter kullanılmıştır. En çok kullanılan değerlendirme yöntemi standartlaştırılmış okuma testleri (%81) olmuştur. Okuma destek sınıflarındaki öğrenciler çoğunlukla önceden belirlenen bir okuma başarısı hedefine ulaştıklarında bu sınıflardaki eğitimlerini tamamlamışlardır. Bu başarı hedefi Amerikadaki okullarda sıklıkla kullanılan lexile puanları değerlendirilerek belirlenmiştir. Eğer önceden belirlenen bir başarı hedefi yoksa, öğrenciler okul tarafından önceden belirlenen bir süre (2 akademik dönem gibi) boyunca bu sınıflara devam etmişlerdir. Okuma destek sınıflarında eğitim gören öğrencilerin %76.9'u bu sınıflardaki eğitimlerini önceden belirlenmiş olan hedefe ulaşmaları ile başarılı bir şekilde tamamlamışlardır. Okuma sınıflarındaki öğrencilerin özellikleri incelendiğinde bu öğrencilerin %55.8'inin özel gereksinimli öğrenciler olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu öğrencilerin yarısına yakını da öğrenme güçlüğü olan öğrenciler oluşturmaktadır.

**Tartışma, Sonuç ve Öneriler:** Okullardaki okuma becerisini arttırmaya yönelik çabaların etkili olabilmesi için bu eğitimin deneyimli öğretmenler tarafından verilmesi gerekmektedir (Kamil, 2003). Bu araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre öğretmenlerin büyük bir çoğunluğu yeterli deneyime sahiptir. Ancak öğretmenlik mesleğindeki deneyim, destek sınıflarındaki öğretimin kalitesini arttırmaya yeterli olmayabilir. Bu nedenle, destek sınıflarında görev alması beklenen öğretmenlere hizmetiçi eğitim olanakları sağlanabilir. Araştırma sonuçlarından bir diğeri ise okullardaki destek sınıflarının özelliklerinin farklılık göstermesidir. Destek sınıflarının okuma becerisini arttırmadaki etkililiğinin belirlenebilmesi için bu okullardaki öğrenci seçimi, öğrencilerin değerlendirilmesinde kullanılan yöntemler gibi özellikler standartlaştırılmalıdır. Örneğin, ABD'deki bazı okullar okuma destek sınıflarına sadece özel eğitim tanısı almış öğrencileri kabul ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu durum bazı sıkıntılar doğurabilmektedir çünkü okuma becerisi zayıf olan öğrenciler sadece özel gereksinimli öğrencilerle sınırlı kalmamaktadır. Herhangi bir özel eğitim tanısı almamış olan öğrenciler de okuma alanında sıkıntı yaşayabilirler. Bu nedenle, okuma destek sınıflarının kapısı tüm öğrencilere açık olmalıdır. Son olarak, araştırma sonuçları göstermektedir ki okuma destek sınıfları sınırlı sayıdadır. Okuma becerisini arttırmak amacıyla bu sınıfların sayısı artırılmalıdır.