Critical Review – Experimental Research

Laura Damerell

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Dr. Dietmar Wolfram

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For the Critical Review – experimental research assignment, I decided to look at the study by Lynn Bowker titled “Against the Clock: Speed Training in Library and Information Science Education.” This study looked at speed reading and if it was something that LIS students could participate in to increase their ability to work in high pressure environments with time restrains. The abstract at the beginning of the document says that “the pilot project aims to develop and test a speed-training program to improve LIS students’ abilities to work under time pressure.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This idea is what I kept in the back of my mind as I read through the document and particularly with the results. As I read through the document, I wanted to see if I could identify strengths, shortcomings, completeness, results, etc. in order to fully understand the study and see if the results found anything.

Starting out the author poses the research questions that guided the study. From what I can tell the questions were: “Is trial by fire in the workplace the only way to acquire this skill? Or can it be deliberately cultivated and explicitly honed as part of LIS education, where the stakes are lower and the pressure is less intense?”[[2]](#footnote-2) I thought these research questions were good but, questioned if they could actually measure these situations to find an answer. I was optimistic that the author and the study would provide the answer to these questions and answer them in a way that the reader could understand. As I read further on, the author identified that the document had eight main sections. The sections that she identified were: literature, relevant work on speed training, how the participants of the study were selected, description of the tasks of the speed training study, an introduction of the data-collection methods employed in the study and lastly, the results of the experiment.[[3]](#footnote-3) I really appreciated that the author laid these sections out for the reader and after reading the entire document through, I discovered that she did in fact organize the document in this way. Keeping with the organization she laid out, the reader was able to follow the process from start to finish with no confusion. In addition to staying organized in the ways she stated, the author was thorough in each section she discussed almost to the point where she was redundant when she discussed the tasks of the speed training study.

Reading through the literature review section I was concerned for a couple of reviews that the author brought up. First, she presented a quote from 1902. This is well over 100 years old. The quote, relevant to the study, is just too old for a study conducted in 2021. It would have been beneficial if the author had found a newer. quote to fit what she was trying to portray to the reader. Another major concern and almost a red flag for me was that she only had one literature review from non-LIS material. I am not sure if that was the only review that was available or if there were more that she just was not able to access. There is no mention either way but, I almost think it was pointless to put this literature review into the document. It would have been more beneficial to either state that it was the only one or to just do without. I felt this review did little to contribute to the study except for causing the reader to question why just one non-LIS literature review mentioned. I feel this was a limitation to the study and it put into question the validity of the study from a non-LIS viewpoint. I do like that all her LIS related literature reviews were from more recent with the oldest ones being from 2000. She has over a dozen literature reviews and based on the titles; they were all relevant to the study being conducted.

Continuing though the document I came across the experiment group section where the author notes who participated in the study. There were only seven students enrolled in the class. She noted that they wanted to keep the initial group small because this was experimental, focused on this group due to it being a non-reference class, could implement the speed training into the course itself and these students would have completed a minimum of four of the six require foundation courses for the MLIS program.[[4]](#footnote-4) The control group selected was other students in the MLIS program not enrolled in the class that the experimental group was enrolled in. This group was recruited via posted word or mouth, etc. and were offered a $75 Amazon gift card if they completed all activities required for the study.[[5]](#footnote-5) There were ten candidates to be accepted for the control group and from what I understand only eight completed the tasks or qualified fully for the study. Honestly, I understand why they wanted to keep the study small but, I think 15 is a bit too small for a full-scale study like they were suggesting. Maybe I am mistaken, but I do not think that 15 individuals are a good number if the study is trying to look at MLIS students as a whole. I do like that she inserted the table with the comparison of the students. It was helpful to fully grasp the experience these students had with MLIS courses, thus could help the reader understand their experience with LIS situations.

I was unsure of what the author’s hypothesis was for this study. I think it was mentioned at the very end of the literature review section but, I was never confident that it was mentioned in the document. I did not like that I could not find her hypothesis to the experiment so I do not know if that came to be proven or not with this study. Something that I did like though was that she did a good job describing the various exercises that the participants participated in. She was descriptive, thorough and almost redundant when she described the various exercises. I also like that she mentioned that mentioned the challenges to these exercises a couple of different time to remind the reader that it was difficult to find texts of the same length, reading level and so on. By mentioning these challenges, and the recording issues, she reminds the reader that there are often limitations to a study that are sometime outside the control of the individuals conducting the experiments. I also like that she has a couple different tables showing the results of the study. These tables really helped the reader visualize the results of the study and see where speed reading helped the students improve. I was confused on the table she presented showing themes and comments raised during the session. This table, presented on page 341, was informative but, I felt was outside the scope of the initial study. It is nice to see that students thought it was a good exercise but, this could have been added as an appendix as additional information obtained from the study. Lastly, the author does a good job describing the success of the study and concludes that the study results suggest that speed training looks to be moderately effective in improving working under pressure for the participants. This study was overall interesting, the document was clearly written, easy to follow due to its organization and the results easy to understand due to the various tables presented.

Bibliography

Bowker, Lynne. “Against the Clock: Speed Training in Library and Information Science Education.” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*62, no. 3 (2021): 326–45. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.3138/jelis.2020-0030.

1. Bowker, Lynne. “Against the Clock: Speed Training in Library and Information Science Education.” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*62, no. 3 (2021): 326–45. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.3138/jelis.2020-0030. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bowker, Lynne. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bowker, Lynne. 326-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bowker, Lynne. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bowker, Lynne. 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)