

A Review on the Importance of Reading Aloud Technique in Teaching Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success. It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading. It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader listening to others read develops key understanding and skills, such as an appreciation for how a story is written and familiarity with book conventions. Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently. The purpose of this study is to review the studies on the relationship between reading aloud and reading comprehension. It contributes to the significance of reading aloud in teaching reads comprehension.

Keywords:

Reading skill,
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technique,
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comprehension
performance

Introduction

Language teaching scholars focus on reading skill as an essential skill in one's life. According to Grabe, (2004) reading skill is the most important and critical skill for learners in both classroom settings and real life environments. Hudson states that reading skill is an interactive process between the reader and the text (Hudson, 1998). In other words, this indicates that reading is a medium for communicating.

It should be focused that comprehension the text is the most important process in reading skill (Carrell, 1989). Moreover, Koda (2005) states that when the reader extracts information from the text and integrates it with prior knowledge, successful comprehension emerges. Based on my experience as a teacher, learners tend to read those texts that consist of their interesting topics with interesting activity. So, this is required to select an appropriate activity to comprehend effectively. The selected activity for this study is reading aloud activity that can be a helpful strategy because an EFL reader can discover unit of meaning that should be read as phrases rather than word by word. In my idea, as a teacher, reading aloud activity can be a good way to raise learners' focus on the reading texts even if not their favorite. This difference can be appeared through a method in reading comprehension performance.

On the other side of this study, the differences between two biological sexes were considered: male and female. A lot of studies on gender differences in education compare female and male attainment and features. According to Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), in verbal skills, females are superior to males; but in mathematical skills, males are better than females. Therefore, some teachers usually have some problems in teaching and training learners with different genders. This study can be useful to shed light on the possible difference between two genders in reading comprehension performance based on reading aloud activity.

Review of the Related Literature

Research about skills contains a long history. The language skills have been applied in two fields like psychology and education a lot of years ago. They are related to the improvement of interest in comprehension attempting to break down this concept into more accessible chunks in order to provide teachers and educators with a form for reading test, materials and syllabi. Moreover, the gender difference is taken into account. In this regard, specifically, various definitions, different types of reading skill and

different categories and strategies of reading skill are considered. Also, the principles of reading aloud strategy and gender difference are discussed. Moreover, previous studies about these variables are reviewed.

Definitions of Reading Skill

One of the four essential and primary language skills for those learning English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) is reading, for academic success, and for professional development. Reading is viewed as a fundamental skill to acquire information and it helps to improve our life. Simply, it can be defined as in a number of ways to explicate the process of what takes place when someone reads and how one comprehends a text. Reading is an interactive process and it not only between reader and text. According to Rubin (1982), reading is a more complex activity that includes different skills. Due to him, reading is "the bringing of meaning to and the getting of meaning from the printed page" (p. 8). Generally, reading is related to beyond the cognitive structures, meta-cognitive structures can explain reading process more properly. According to Mitchell (1974), 'reading' is defined as the ability to make sense of written messages (cited in Dubin, Eskey, &Grabe, 1986). Smith (1973, cited in Dubin et al., 1986, p. 28), in other words, explains reading as "an anticipatory, selective, purposeful, and comprehending process" wherein the reader interprets the text depended on the questions formulated about the text. Widdowson (1979) observes reading skill is as an interacting behavior between the text and the reader (as cited in Dubin et al., 1986). He mentions that reading is a process of relating information presented in a text to the reader's existing knowledge about the topic. Moreover, Nuttall (1996, p. 4) presents a definition about reading. Accordingly, reading is defined as the process of "getting out of the text as nearly as possible the message the writer put into it." Accordingly, reading is a necessary skill in the language teaching and learning process that is used to create interaction between the text and the reader.

The Significance of Reading Skill

Reading is a comprehensive skill because it is used widely in the ESL/EFL classroom contexts. Also it is an important skill, because it is the basis for the development of other skills, such as speaking and writing. It can be assumed that reading and listening belong to receptive skill, whereas writing and speaking belong to productive skill (Paris, Lipson &Wixon, 1983). According to Krashen (1982), in order for language acquisition to happen, first the learner should receive comprehensible input through listening and reading before using it. This is recognized as the first phase (cited in Lightbown&Spada, 2006). To develop second/foreign language reading research, different researchers and scholars have acknowledged the significance of reading skills for language learners (Grabe, 1991; Rubin, 1982). Grabe (1991) argues that the main importance of reading skills in academic contexts has concluded in considerable studies on reading in language as a second/foreign. For second/foreign language learners, reading is the main way for them to acquire information, to understand other nations' cultures and to know the world of English-speaking countries. Reading plays a very important role in second language learning and teaching. Carrell (1998) states that for many learners, reading is one of the most important skills among four skills in a second/foreign language, especially in English as a second or foreign language.

Purpose of Reading

Reading has different purposes. People use reading skill for different reasons. They reasons can be diverse as using reading skill to understand a text and answer comprehension check questions, to do grammar activities, to solve language problems, to enhance language ability, to achieve pleasure and information, to know the instruction of using a specific medium, to be familiar with a particular a place, to find idea from inscription from any objects, to decode message from a printed document, and so on. As Doff (1997, p. 170) declares that the purpose of reading skill is that "there is something we want to find out, some information we want to check or clarify, some opinion we want to match against our own etc."

The reasons and purposes of reading "a text differs from person to person because of their different opinions, backgrounds and experiences and schemata" (Nuttall, 1996, p. 18). Therefore, even the same text and passage can be a repertoire of various interests based on the person concerned. Due to the aims of and reasons for reading skill, Grellet (1996, p. 4) categorized non-academic reading into two main criteria: (a) reading for pleasure and (b) reading for information.

Reading for Spending Time and Pleasure

Based on non-academic reading in Strong's article (1995), "Reading for Pleasure", (cited in Nuttall, 1996) explains that the touchable reason for reading a text is because we enjoy it or hope to enjoy it because 'pleasure covers a whole variety of feelings and shades of feeling', and so one should read 'only what one likes' so that s/he may get expected range of pleasure. Eagleton (1996, p. 166) expresses the same comment that those people tend to read books of poems, short story, novels and so forth tend to enjoy this process, and actually, it is proper as far as the foreign language is regarded. The purpose for seeking pleasure from a text makes readers read more and more which consequently leads them towards a better understanding of and building up vocabulary, and it ultimately assists the learners to enhance the overall skills in reading in the ESL/EFL contexts. A reader enjoys a book when s/he gets pleasure. If the book ceases to provide the pleasure s/he tries to find out, s/he will simply stop reading. For this reason, the aim of a reading program should be, based on Nuttall's views (1996, p. 31), "to enable students to enjoy (or at least feel comfortable with) reading in the foreign language." As reading for pleasure, Rosenblatt (1938) interpreted in as 'aesthetic reading' since it meets the thirst of souls and provides readers with aesthetic pleasure (as cited in Dubin et al., 1986).

Reading for Getting Information

Reading for information is the second purpose of Grellet's (1996) categorization. According to Williams (1986), reading for information can be efficient for people because numerous people tend to read to collect information from anything written. Grellet (1996, p. 4) states that people read books "in order to find out something or in order to do something with the information [they] get". Nuttall (1996, p. 3) like as Grellet, has the same comment that the purpose of reading is to get something (information) from the writing. In the information technology (IT) era, this is difficult and time-consuming for people to collect and storing information, (updating news of the world, information about business, culture and politics information, news of foreign affairs, and so on. The primary sources of can be getting information from: newspaper, magazines, and internet, and these media need essential skills in reading. Since, computer and international newspapers and magazines use English as an international language, therefore, reading skill in ESL/EFL is vital. In addition, students go abroad with a particular goal— getting job, studying in the universities, or dealing with overseas customers, and so forth (Nuttall, 1996). Rightly Williams (1996, p. 124) believes that "reading for information in English is one of the most important purposes that the learners may have in learning English"

Reading Comprehension

Definitions of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension (RC) is an integral and significant component of learning a foreign language in general and reading skill specifically. Although it can be said that it is possible to learn a language by listening and speaking, without RC, the language learner has limited hope of learning new vocabulary and stagnates with what linguistic oral productive knowledge he/she has obtained. To speak and understand oral language is to have only partial language proficiency. Functional language proficiency in the foreign language learner is required as well. A combination of various processes takes place in reading. At a basic level, a reader has to be able to recognize and use individual sounds to create words. In the second level, the reader has to have the ability to decode what he/she is reading, to have the ability to recognize written the representations of words (Adams, 1990). Another important characteristic of reading is that

the individual develop the skills to read a text accurately and quickly, to develop fluency and this includes learning the meanings of words and developing a certain amount and type of vocabulary. In addition to learning vocabulary, the reader needs to integrate new materials into their existing knowledge base, to construct new understanding, and adapt existing conceptions and beliefs as needed. The existing conceptions that a reader relies on to comprehend is the reader's background knowledge. According to Grabe (2004), reading is as "a well-documented process that readers comprehend texts better when texts are culturally familiar or when they relate to well-developed disciplinary knowledge of a reader" (Grabe, 2004, p. 51).

Significance of Reading Comprehension

According to Pressley (2000), developing comprehension for all learners in order for them to comprehend what is read in many subject areas is important. It means that reading skill plays a significant role language learning and teaching process. It was manifested in regarding to RC from past to present. Traditionally, RC was regarded as a passive approach to learn different skills and the overall knowledge of those skills were summarized in reading comprehension. More recently, this process was paid attention differently as being more cognitive and interactive with texts as readers utilize their background knowledge to uncover relevancy, make inferences, and to expand upon the text. Based on Franzak's (2006) view, the importance of RC process will be more when RC instruction should comprise teaching strategies to students in order for them to get to the meaning of what they read as well as facilitating students to be metacognitive and knowledgeable in applying strategy use to different genres. He stressed that as the students become more strategic, a teacher can scaffold less assistance in their construction of understanding (Franzak, 2006). The instruction that teachers provide should be adapted to support what the learners need to be active more and more and construct their own meaning (Alfassi, 1998).

A Framework for Comprehension

Comprehension takes place as the reader builds a mental representation of a text message. According to Van Dijk and Kintsch, (1983), the situation model shows an image what the text is about. The processes of comprehension takes place at multiple levels: word level, (lexical processes), sentence level (syntactic processes), and text level. In these levels, processes of word identification, parsing, referential mapping, and a variety of inference processes all contribute, interacting with the reader's conceptual knowledge, to produce a mental model of the text. In other words, this is based on an interaction first starts with the 'decoding' of linguistic information from print; that is, this process is associated with the cognitive view.

In the 'text-information building' phase, the new information will be synthesized with prior information. In another view, according to this perspective, RC takes place at (a) the word level, (b) the level of proposition, (c) the level of local coherence, (d) the level of macrostructure of the text, and (e) the level of superstructure including the context of the reading event (Miller, 1988; Perfetti, 1994, cited in Zoghi, Mustapha, & MohdMaasum, 2010). Urquhart and Weir (1998) state that RC is sequential; it means that it encompasses a series of steps, "each of which is complete before the next stage begins" (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p.39). According to Koda (2005), in general, decoding skills in this view, "account for a moderate, but significant portion of L2 reading variance" (Koda, 2005, p. 25). In point of fact, RC cannot take place effectively unless decoding skills have been mastered. However, skill in decoding or possessing linguistic knowledge does not necessarily imply skill in reading comprehension (Eskey, 2005; Perfetti, 1988 cited in Zoghi, Mustapha, & MohdMaasum, 2010). Nation, Snowling & Clarke (2004) stated that there is a difference between poor-readers and good-readers. Koda (2005) mentioned that successful comprehension, on the basis of cognitive view, contains two key factors: linguistic knowledge and the skills to put the knowledge for text-meaning construction into use. However it is asserted that RC is a complicated process that can fail for a host of possible reasons, and moreover, no clear "poor comprehender" profile has emerged yet (Nation et al., 2004), a lot of studies has determined certain type of poor comprehenders as a group of readers who have the ability to decode and associate meaning with

single words, but they fail to integrate the meanings of separate words to arrive at the meaning of an entire sentence or of the whole text (Wise, 1999). Bolos (2012) states six different strategies to comprehend in the better ways: a) Making connections; b) predicting; c) Questioning; d) Monitoring; e) Visualizing; and f) Summarizing. Thus, comprehension monitoring, question generation and answering, and summarization can all help improve RC (Bolos, 2012).

Strategies of Reading Comprehension

Different researchers have specified the most efficient strategies in supporting RC (Wiseman, 2011). It is important to practice RC strategies and should be reinforced throughout a student's education. Bolos (2012, p. 17) has reported the main RC strategies as: using connections, asking questions, and identifying the importance of comprehension. In addition, Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007, p. 562) suggest the following items as RC strategies:

- a) Read slowly: This is an effective strategy that readers require to read slowly based on the text difficulty.
- b) Pause: A short pause can be needful to enhance RC.
- c) Look again: Looking back takes place when readers take a quick overview and read the previous text again to encourage RC.
- d) Repeat text: Repeating a text is another RC strategy that can increase RC.
- e) Reading-aloud: This strategy often takes place automatically with hard texts or in noisy contexts. This strategy is one of the most common reading strategies and it should be considered in this study as a variable.

Conclusion

A few educational implications of the conclusions of this study have been presented:

- 1) Another pedagogical implication can be drawn here that language educators need to take advantage of the significant effects of content familiarity on learners' comprehension performance to provide students.
- 2) Reading skill is one of the fundamental and core skill in the process of language teaching and learning. It is important to pay attention to this process more by textbook designers, teachers, and scholars.
- 3) Gender is important as one the learners' differences. In the EFL contexts like Iran, it is not considered very much. It can be noticeable to consider this phenomenon by teachers, researchers and textbook designers.
- 4) Reading skill can be an enjoyable technique for the learners, it can be useful that teachers increase the frequency of which they read aloud to their students.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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