

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching Reading Strategies: Importance In Improving Students' Reading Comprehension With An Emphasis On Reading Fluency And Accuracy

Janet Paul¹

Research Scholar, Department of English, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Prof. P. Rajendra Karmarkar²

Principal, College of Arts and Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Article Received: 9/4/2022,

Article Accepted: 28/04/2022,

Published online: 30/04/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.4.42

Abstract

The present methods for teaching reading comprehension focus on the products of comprehension rather than the processes of comprehension. The learners are often provided with inadequate opportunities to practice reading in English. It is of concern that while teaching reading in a class, teachers give fewer tasks related to fluency or accuracy. There exists a strong correlation between fluency and reading comprehension. Oral reading fluency and accuracy have a remarkable effect on reading comprehension performance. For high levels of reading achievement, automaticity of decoding fluency is highly essential. To develop this automaticity, teachers need to take time and listen to students read aloud and assess their progress and encourage thoughtful use of language to enhance the comprehension of the students.

Keywords: reading, reading strategies, reading comprehension, fluency, accuracy

Introduction

Problems in learning and teaching English as a Second Language relate to both learners and teachers. The teaching methods are partly responsible for this. It is common for most teachers to teach language using the lecture method, focusing on grammatical rules instead of language use. Ellis (2003) believes teaching language from context and meaning is much more productive. Another drawback to this lecture method is that learners find it monotonous and boring. They are demotivated because they are passive listeners, and this leads to limited input

RESEARCH ARTICLE

into the learning process. This leads to other difficulties. Many ESL learners cannot use English effectively in their communication because learning a language flourishes most when they are provided with opportunities to communicate in real-life situations. Accordingly, teachers need to abandon the traditional teaching method and replace it with communicative language teaching (Lochana and Deb, 2006).

Current methods for teaching reading comprehension favour the products of comprehension compared to the processes of comprehension. Two skills are particularly important to teach for enhancing the process of comprehension – monitoring and processing skills. Monitoring skills are those which help the learner to monitor continuing processing for possible comprehension failure. In case of any such failure, remedial steps can be taken to rectify their skills. Comprehension failures can occur at various levels – words, sentences, relations between sentences and also relations between larger units. Processing skills involve using clues in the text to generate, evaluate, and revise hypotheses about current and future events in the text. The teacher should first model these skills and then use the Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) in teaching these skills to the learners.

Al Yousef (2005) viewed reading as an "interactive" process between the reader and the text, which leads to automaticity. In this process, the reader interacts with the text to elicit the meaning using both linguistic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) and schematic knowledge (through top-down processing).

What is the importance of reading fluency?

According to Hudson et al. 2000, fluent reading consists of three important elements: accurate reading of the text at a conversational pace with appropriate expression (prosody). A fact is that a fluent reader can maintain this performance for long periods of time, even with no practice, and can generalise across texts. He can also read effortlessly in a smooth manner and does not get easily distracted. There exists a positive correlation between reading comprehension and reading fluency, and this becomes a compelling reason for efforts to be taken to train the learners to become fluent readers (Allington, 1983; Johns, 1993; Samuels, 1988; Schreiber, 1980).

Every aspect of fluency is connected to text comprehension. Accurate word reading is necessary for the reader to have access to the author's intended meaning. This aspect shows that inaccurate word reading may lead to misinterpretations of the text. Perfetti's (1977, 1985) verbal efficiency model suggested that weak automaticity in word reading or a laborious and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

slow word reading will hinder the interpretation of the text. Perfetti elaborated this explanation to propose that slow word reading is also exhausting because it uses working memory and, therefore, forestalls the individual from thinking about the text while reading. Slow word reading blocks working memory with the processing of word-level reading so as to prevent understanding at the content level. Thus, as a means to enhance reading comprehension, both a rapid reading of high-frequency words and rapid decoding of texts is essential for typical reading development (Fuchs et al., 2001; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; Meyer & Felton, 1999).

Zutell and Rasinski (1991) opine that while assessing reading fluency, teachers need to listen to the students while they read aloud so that the teachers can make judgements about the progress of reading fluency. The observation should be systematic observation to help assess students' progress and also to determine instructional needs. The teachers should take care to observe every critical aspect of fluency: rate, word-reading accuracy, and prosody.

What roles should teachers play in reading fluency?

With the changing scenario in the teaching and learning fields, the teacher roles need to be defined with the focus on improving communicative competence.

Breen and Candlin, 1980 posit that the teacher should take on the role of a facilitator to facilitate the communicative process among all participants in the classroom and the various tasks and texts. Here, the teacher takes the back seat and gives guidance and advice only when necessary. The teacher should also act as an interdependent participant within the learning-teaching group. The teacher must continually seek potential and actively share the responsibility for learning and teaching with the students. The teacher must realise that any unnecessary intervention may prevent the learners from becoming genuinely involved in the tasks and thus retard the development of their communicative skills. However, this does not suggest that the teacher should be passive. Instead, the teacher should develop students' potential through external direction and help learners develop their distinctive qualities.

Second, the teacher should have a passion for learning, a desire and an aptitude to continue discovering new knowledge for her learners to emulate. The teacher should always be updated with the latest developments in learners' areas of specialisation.

Third, the teachers also need to be creative and innovative in integrating learners' teaching with thinking and learning processes. The teacher must provide learners with more

RESEARCH ARTICLE

opportunities for expression and a healthy environment where creativity can thrive. The learners must be encouraged to express their thoughts freely and also to question so that their minds become inquisitive, leading to a better learning experience.

What should the teachers equip themselves with for better teaching?

The teachers must know the basics of linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, and so on to be able to exhibit the target language with enough accuracy. In addition to these, the teacher is also expected to know various teaching methodologies, the basic principles of testing, and the correct ways to research. The teacher ought to realise that it is mandatory for him/her to adopt different methods when dealing with different texts and when faced with students with different levels of English proficiency.

Should a teacher attach equal importance to accuracy and fluency?

As mentioned already, both accuracy and fluency are so closely related that they cannot be separated. Skehan (1998) feels that because the attention span of the learners is limited, there could be trade-off effects between accuracy and fluency. That is, when attention is paid to fluency, accuracy suffers and vice versa. Therefore, attaching equal importance to both fluency and accuracy is a must.

Accuracy tasks encourage thoughtful use of language, and fluency tasks encourage free expression. When assigning accuracy and fluency tasks, the teacher has to bear in mind the following:

- For one thing, when assigning tasks, the tasks should be relevant to the knowledge with which the learner is familiar because tasks based on information well known to the learners allow them to be more fluent in their performance.
- For another, the teacher should give the learners adequate planning time. It has been suggested that prior to conducting a task, the teacher should give the learners more planning time. This helps learners produce more fluent and complex language (Patanasorn, 2010).

How Do Teachers Measure Fluency?

Fillmore (1979) defines fluency as “(T)he ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and semantically dense sentences, showing a mastery of the semantic (meaning in language) and syntactic resources of the language.” Therefore, the easiest way to measure fluency, as in most skills, is to select a repeatable action and count the number of times a person can complete that action in a fixed time period. Precision Teaching (Binder, 1988; Binder and Watkins, 1990), an

RESEARCH ARTICLE

educational methodology, has identified scopes of count per-minute performance describing fluency for hundreds of academic skills.

How can a Teacher help Learners achieve fluency?

Practice is the key ingredient to any fluency-based program. Just as any skill can be perfected with constant and rigorous practice, so too does fluency. The development of reading fluency is likened to the development of other psychomotor skills, such as playing tennis, stating that both skills are strengthened with practice (Huey, 1908). But sad to say, many teachers do not realise this basic principle of skill growth. It is important for the teachers who understand the value of practice to focus on the right kind of practice to produce the largest gains rather than on practice routines that are boring, painful, and ultimately ineffective. Many fluency-based educators (Starlin, 1971; Haughton, 1972) found that attaining fluency on smaller “chunks” of a larger performance is easier than focussing on attaining mastery over the whole at once.

What Correlation exists between reading fluency and reading comprehension?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading (Pinnell, et al., 1995) clearly established the correlation between fluency and reading comprehension through large-scale analysis of data from a study. Forty-four per cent of the participants were found to be diffluent when they were made to read grade-level texts that they had silently read earlier. The study also exhibited a significant, positive relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension performance.

What methods can be employed to enhance reading fluency?

The following is a discussion of some methods that can be employed to enhance reading fluency:

Modelled Reading

One way to strengthen fluency is for teachers to model to learners by reading aloud (Dowhower, 1987; Hoffman, 1987; Smith, 1979). This reading aloud process needs to be supplemented with procedures which actually engross the learners' interaction with the text. It must be borne in mind that reading aloud providesthem with a model of how to pace their reading in connected text and how to infuse expression. Computer modelled or taped reading is also a viable way to provide fluency support. While it differs from study to study whether the learners followed along in their text copies, specialists recommend this as a way to engage the learners in the text earlier than their reading it on their own.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Repeated Reading of Familiar Text

Repeated oral reading or rereading a text is perhaps the most often documented approach to improving fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rashotte and Torgesen, 1985). It has been connected to improved outcomes for young learners (O'Shea, Sindelar, and O'Shea, 1987) as well as college-going students (Carver and Hoffman, 1981). According to Huey (1908), "Repetition progressively frees the mind from attention to details and makes facile the total act, shortens the time and reduces the extent to which consciousness must concern itself with the process" (104). It is evident from that that repetition improves the processing of units, words and connected text cognitively and allows the reader to think about the meaning of the text. This, in turn, results in increased comprehension.

Chunking Texts

Another very popular approach to fluency building is by providing struggling readers with texts in which meaningful groups or words or phrases are evolved for the reader as a method for improving comprehension and fluency (Cromer, 1970; Young and Bowers, 1995). Research reveals that different amounts of text presented in repeated reading do not necessarily seem to change the outcome. However, controlling the amount of text presented to the learners may be beneficial for those who are experiencing problems in reading accuracy since it may compel them to focus on the words for a longer period of time (Cohen, 1988).

Word Reading Practice

Based on the previously offered theoretical description of fluency and on Ehri's stage model of reading, the significance of individual word reading automaticity likely has practical overtones for fluency building. In studies where teachers had the learners practice reading lists of words that they would later come across in connected texts consistently led to increased fluency (Fleisher, Jenkins, and Pany, 1979-80; Levy, Abello, and Lysynchuk, 1997). However, it is essential to note that there was no concomitant increase in comprehension.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachers should conscientiously try to shift their attention from emphasising the accuracy of students' oral presentations to developing their ability to express themselves both accurately and fluently in English. For this to happen, the teachers can employ multiple means, such as combining the grammar-translation method and communicative approach and equipping themselves with the latest trends. They should also shift their roles as facilitators and attach equal importance to both accuracy and fluency tasks.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

References

- Al Yousef, Hesham Suleiman. "Teaching Reading Comprehension to ESL/EFL Learners." *The Reading Matrix*, vol. 5, no. 2, September 2005.
- Allington, R. L. "Fluency: The Neglected Reading Goal." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 36, 1983, pp. 556–561.
- Binder, C. "Precision teaching: Measuring and attaining exemplary academic achievement." *Youth Policy*, vol. 10, no. 7, 1988, pp. 12-15.
- Binder, C., and Watkins, C. L. "Precision teaching and direct instruction: Measurably superior instructional technology in schools." *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1990, pp. 74-96.
- Breen, M. and C. Candlin. "The essentials of a communicative curriculum for language teaching." *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1980, pp. 89–112.
- Carver, R. P., & Hoffman, J. V. "The effect of practice through repeated reading on gain in reading ability using a computer-based instructional system." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 16, 1981, pp. 374–390.
- Cohen, A. L. *An evaluation of the effectiveness of two methods for providing computer-assisted repeated reading training to reading disabled students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee, 1988.
- Cromer, W. "The difference model: A new explanation for some reading difficulties." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 61, 1970, pp. 471-483.
- Dowhower, S. L. "Effects of repeated reading on second-grade transitional readers' fluency and comprehension." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 22, 1987, pp. 389-406.
- Ellis, R. *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003.
- Fillmore, C. J. "On Fluency." *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behavior*, edited by C. J. Fillmore, D. Kempler, and W. S. J. Wang, New York: Academic Press, 1979, pp. 85–101.
- Fleisher, L. S., et al. "Effects on poor readers' comprehension of training in rapid decoding." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 15, 1979-80, pp. 30-48.
- Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., Hosp, M. K., and Jenkins, J. R. "Oral reading fluency as an indicator of reading competence: A theoretical, empirical, and historical analysis." *Scientific Studies of Reading*, vol. 5, 2001, pp. 239– 256.
- Haughton, E. C. "Define your act and set your fluency goals in personal, social, and academic areas." *Special Education in Canada*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1972, pp. 10-11.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

- Hoffman, J. V. "Rethinking the role of oral reading in basal instruction." *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 87, 1987, pp. 367–374.
- Hudson, R. F., Mercer, C. D., Lane, H. B. *Exploring fluency: A paradigmatic overview*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Florida, Gainesville. 2000.
- Huey, E. B. *The psychology and pedagogy of reading*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1908.
- Johns, J. L. *Informal Reading Inventories*. DeKalb, IL: Communitel, 1993.
- Kuhn, M. R., and Stahl, S. A. *Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices (Technical Report No. 2-008)*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2000.
- Levy, B. L., Abello, B., & Lysynchuk, L. "Transfer from word training to reading in context: Gains in reading fluency and comprehension." *Learning Disability Quarterly*, vol. 20, 1997, pp. 173-188.
- Lochana, M. and Deb, G. "Task-based teaching: learning English without tears." *Asian EFL Journal*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2006, pp. 140-154.
- Meyer, M. S., and Felton, R. H. "Repeated reading to enhance fluency: Old approaches and new direction." *Annals of Dyslexia*, vol. 49, 1999, pp. 283–306.
- National Reading Panel. *Teaching Children to Read*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health, 2000.
- O’Shea, L. J., Sindelar, P. T., and O’Shea, D. J. "The effects of repeated readings and attentional cues on the reading fluency and comprehension of learning disabled readers." *Learning Disabilities Research*, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 103–109.
- Patanasorn C. *Effect of procedural content and task repetition on accuracy and fluency in an EFL context*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University, AZ, USA, 2010.
- Perfetti, C. A. "Language comprehension and fast decoding: Some psycholinguistic prerequisites for skilled reading comprehension." *Cognition, curriculum, and comprehension*, edited by J. T. Guthrie, Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1977, pp. 20–41.
- Perfetti, C. A. *Reading Ability*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Pinnell, G. S., et al. *Listening to children read aloud*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. 1995.
- Rashotte, C. A., and Torgesen, J. K. "Repeated reading and reading fluency in learning disabled children." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 20, 1985, pp. 180–188.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

- Samuels, S. J. "Decoding and automaticity: Helping poor readers become automatic at word recognition." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 41, 1988, pp. 756–760.
- Schreiber, P. A. "On the acquisition of reading fluency." *Journal of Reading Behavior*, vol. 7, 1980, pp. 177–186.
- Skehan, P. *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.
- Smith, D. D. "The improvement of children's oral reading through the use of teacher modelling." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, vol. 12, 1979, pp. 172–175.
- Starlin, C. "Evaluating progress toward reading proficiency." *Learning disorders: Vol. 4. Reading*, edited by B. Bateman, Seattle, WA: Special Child Publications, 1971, pp. 389-465.
- Young, A., and Bowers, P. G. "Individual differences and text difficulty determinants of reading fluency and expressiveness." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, vol. 60, 1995, pp. 428–454.
- Zutell, J., and Rasinski, T. V. "Training teachers to attend to their students' reading fluency." *Theory into Practice*, vol. 30, 1991, pp. 211–217.