DOES REPEATED READING CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS’ FLUENCY AND COMPREHENSION IN EFL READING?

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Abstract

Many students lack fluency in English as a foreign language (EFL) reading. Like in first language settings, repeated reading is proposed as an instructional method to improve fluency in EFL too. Present study investigates the effects of repeated reading on students’ reading fluency and comprehension in EFL. 11 students studying at English Language Teaching (ELT) program participated in the study. Three texts consisting of 2,252 words in total were divided into 8 passages. The study lasted 8 sessions and the students were asked to read each passage 7 times in each session. A pretest and posttest were used in order to see whether repeated reading would improve students’ fluency and comprehension in L2 reading. The results showed that there was not a significant change in students’ fluency. However, students’ reading comprehension improved significantly. It was discussed that while 8 sessions were not enough to develop students’ reading fluency, it helped them to enhance their reading comprehension. It is suggested for future research that a longer treatment would be needed for improving reading fluency.

Keywords: repeated reading, fluency, comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

As it has an impact on almost all academic areas, reading is regarded as one of the most essential and major educational skills. In the first language setting the role that fluency plays in efficient reading has been demonstrated by a great deal of research. In order to develop fluency in reading, repeated reading has been proposed as an instructional strategy. In second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) setting on the other hand, the interest to develop reading has emerged in the last two decades (Day and Bamford, 1998). Similar to L1 setting, repeated reading has been adopted as a reading strategy instruction in L2 and FL setting. However, unlike in L1 setting, it is a relatively new strategy used in these disciplines.

Theoretical Background

Reading Fluency

Reading is defined both in terms of cognitive process and social process and there is a variety of definitions for reading. Grabe (2009) emphasizes ten processes to define reading. These are rapid, efficient, comprehending, interactive, strategic, flexible, purposeful, evaluative, learning and linguistic processes (p.14). Among them, rapid and

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efficient processes are components of fluent reading. Furthermore Hudson, Mercer, & Lane (2000) point out that there are three important elements that fluent reading includes. These are accuracy, rate and prosody. As fluency is regarded as an important ability for reading successfully, there are a number of strategies suggested to improve it. In regard to L2 and FL contexts, repeated reading is proposed as a type of instruction as a useful way to promote reading fluency.

Reading Comprehension

“Interpretation of the information in the text” is suggested as the most common component among various definitions of reading comprehension (Kendeou et al., 2007: 28-9). With the help of fluency and automaticity particularly, the readers can focus on the meaning and the context of the text, and link it to the background knowledge that is necessary to comprehend the text (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Samuels, 2002). In L1 reading fluency is suggested to be both a prerequisite and conclusion of reading comprehension (Snow & Sweet, 2003). Readers who cannot read fluently can have difficulty in comprehending the text. Furthermore, in order to be a fluent reader, one has to comprehend the text as well.

However situation is changes in L2 setting. According to Grabe (2009), L2 readers especially in academic settings may read a text with a high level of comprehenion but with a low level of fluency. If L2 students are given enough time, they can be quite successful in comprehension. Thus it is a matter of discussion among researchers whether L2 students need to improve fluency if they could comprehend the text.

Repeated Reading

It is Samuels (1979) who originally made the repeated reading strategy popular for the readers in first language. Homan, Klesius, and Hite (2015) describes the instructional stages as (1) While the student reads loudly, the teacher identifies the mistakes, (2) The student reads the same passage repeatedly either loudly or silently, (3) As in the first stage, the student reads the same passage loudly and teacher notes down the miscues, (4) The student and the teacher works collaboratively on a graph which shows the reading development. As this strategy offered successful results, it is widely adopted in L1 reading development (Kuhn and Stahl, 2000).

In FL or L2 contexts, the student reads a specific text from graded readers several times. In this context, the aim is to enhance the students to recognize words and phrases which leads a better comprehension and fluency (Blum, Koskinen, Tennant, Parker, Straub, and Curry, 1995; Dlugosz, 2000; Taguchi, 1997; Taguchi and Gorsuch, 2002). The research evidence proposes that it is a promising strategy to enhance L2 or FL learners’ fluency which in turn develops their comprehension (Anderson, 1994).

Literature Review

In a study by Blum, Koskinen, Tennant, Parker, Straub, and Curry (1995) it was aimed to examine if reading repeatedly with audio cassettes at home was a good instruction for L2 literacy. They found that repeated reading increased L2 reader’s fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, the participants told that their motivation was enhanced with this method.

In another study, Taguchi (1997) worked on 15 Japanese undergraduate students who were learning English as an FL. He attempted to investigate the effects of repeated reading on silent or oral reading rates of these participants. The study consisted of 28 sessions during ten weeks. The students were instructed to read a passage silently for seven times which included three sessions with an audio cassette accompany. What Taguchi found was that there was an improvement in the seventh reading, but the higher
level students could not transfer these rates to a new passage. The lower level students on the other hand, could transfer these improvements to the new passages and they showed a significant increase in reading new passages orally.

Encouraged by the results of Taguchi’s (1997) study, Taguchi and Gorsuch (2002) attempted to investigate whether students could transfer reading rate and comprehension to a new passage for silent reading. However, they could not reach conclusive results. Even if they found that there was improvement from a pre-test of a reading passage to post-test of a different reading passage, it was not a significant improvement as the results were lower than $p$ value. Furthermore, there was not much difference between experimental and control group who also showed a moderate level in comprehension. The researchers pointed out that not reaching a significant result could be due to the short treatment period.

Lastly, in another study Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch (2004) extended the treatment period to 42 sessions in an attempt to see whether and in what way repeated reading increases reader’s fluency in FL reading. They compared the effects of two different strategies: extensive reading and repeated reading. They found that there was a significant increase in repeated reading group’s reading rate. However again, they could not transfer it to a new passage. They reported that there was not a decline of rate and comprehension in the new passage. They further pointed out that, students revealed positive perceptions about assisted repeated reading. It was concluded that, to be exposed to text accompanied with an audio helped the readers who were at the beginning levels and also increased their motivation for reading.

**Present Study**

Based on the results of the previous studies, this study attempts to investigate whether it is possible to reach conclusive results about the effects of repeated reading for reading fluency and comprehension in FL. It further aims to contribute to the related area as compared to L1 setting, no significant attention has been paid to repeated reading studies in FL context. Based on these aims, present study tries to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Does repeated reading enhance reading fluency of students’ English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?
2. Does repeated reading enhance reading comprehension of students’ EFL?

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

The participants of this study were 11 English Language Teaching (ELT) students at a tertiary institution in Turkey. They were all at the first grade and taking Advanced Reading and Writing course three hours a week. Their L1 was Turkish and they learned English as a foreign language. Among them, one was male, the rest of the ten students were females. The students were between 18-20 years old. The participants were informed about the possible relationship between repeated reading and its possible effects on reading fluency and comprehension. They were also informed about the study and its aims and all volunteered to participate in the study.

**Materials**

Three different texts were used as materials to be reread by the participants. These texts were taken from the website of British Council (https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/magazine): *Sojourner Truth, A beach,*
Illiteracy. The level of the texts was B1 which was decided according to the levels of the students. According to Grabe (2009), fluent readers are able to read 250-300 words per minute. Thus, each of the text was divided between 250 and 300 words for the total 8 sessions. The total number of the words read by the students was 2,252. They read each passage seven times in each session.

Pretest and Posttest

One pretest before the treatment and one posttest after the treatment were used in order to see if there is an increase in the fluency and comprehension of students’ reading in English. Both tests were at B1 level and were taken from the website of British Council. While the pretest consisted of 443 words, the posttest included 355 words. After reading the passage, the students were to answer a multiple-choice question to see whether they understood the text or not.

Procedure

The study lasted 8 weeks from the 6th of November until the 25th of December, 2015. About half an hour of each Advanced Reading and Writing course, was spent for rereading sessions. There was one session in each week and the total number of sessions was 8.

The procedure by Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch (2004) was adapted to implement the treatment of this study. In each session, the students were instructed to read the previous passage in order to remember it. They later reread the new passage 7 times silently. A makeup session was provided for the students who missed a treatment session.

Analysis

In order to see whether reading repeatedly contributed students’ reading fluency in EFL, the Words per Minute (WPM) of pretest and WPM of posttest were recorded. SPSS was used in order to see whether there was a statistical difference between pretest and posttest. As the number of the students was below 30, a non-parametric analysis was conducted.

In order to calculate whether there was an improvement in students’ reading comprehension, again the correct and incorrect answers of the students for pretest and posttest were compared. To see whether there was a statistical difference between the answers for pretest and posttest, again a non-parametric analysis was conducted. A Wilcoxon test was used with .05 p value.

RESULTS

Results for the 1st Research Question: Does repeated reading enhance reading fluency of students’ EFL?

Table 1 provides us the results of the comparison of students’ before and after WPM score. It can be seen from the table that 9 students had a higher WPM score after the treatment. On the other hand, there is 1 student who had a lower WPM score after the treatment. There is also 1 student who did not show any change in the Pretest and Posttest.
Does Repeated Reading Contribute to Students' Fluency and Comprehension in EFL Reading?

Table 1: Ranks table for Comparison of Pretest and Posttest for fluency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posttest - Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Ranks</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>10,00</td>
<td>10,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>9b</td>
<td>5,00</td>
<td>45,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Posttest < Pretest
b. Posttest > Pretest
c. Posttest = Pretest

Table 2 gives us the statistical results for comparison of pretest and posttest for fluency. The Wilcoxon signed rank test demonstrated that 8 sessions of repeated reading treatment did not lead a statistically significant difference in students’ WPM score ($Z=-1.820^b$, $p=0.069$).

Table 2: Test Statistics$^a$ for Comparison of Pretest and Posttest for fluency

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest - Pretest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>$-1.820^b$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks.

Results for the 2nd Research Question: Does repeated reading enhance reading comprehension of students’ EFL?

Table 3 presents us data on the comparison of participants’ comprehension scores before and after the treatment. While there are 8 students who showed an increase in comprehension, 1 student showed lower comprehension. Moreover, there are 2 students who did not show any difference in comprehension after the treatment.

Table 3: Ranks table for Comparison of Pretest and Posttest for comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PosttestComprehension - PretestComprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Ranks</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>5,00</td>
<td>5,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>5,00</td>
<td>40,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>2c</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. PosttestComprehension < PretestComprehension
b. PosttestComprehension > PretestComprehension
c. PosttestComprehension = PretestComprehension

Lastly, table 4 shows whether there is a statistical difference for comprehension in pretest and posttest. It is seen that the repeated reading treatment that lasted for 8 sessions led a statistically significant change in students’ reading comprehension ($Z=-2.333^b$, $p=0.020$).
Table 4: Test Statistics for Comparison of Pretest and Posttest for comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statisticsa</th>
<th>PosttestComprehension - PretestComprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-2,333b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks.

**DISCUSSION**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of repeated reading on reading comprehension and fluency in EFL. In order to find answers to the research questions, an 8-session of repeated reading strategy was applied to ELT students. The data was obtained through measuring students' WPM scores and answers to comprehension questions in reading pretest and posttest. After collecting the data, it was run through Wilcoxon test.

The results of the Wilcoxon test showed that an 8-session repeated reading treatment did not contribute to students’ reading fluency. However, it showed a positive effect on students’ reading comprehension. The result that it contributed to students’ reading comprehension is consistent with the study by Homan, Klesius and Hite (1993). However, it does not show consistency with Samuel’s (1979) that it helps students improve their reading rate.

The reason why it did not affect reading fluency positively may be the number of treatment sessions. In order to see a significant contribution of repeated reading on student’s reading fluency, more sessions could be needed. However, these results may also raise the question mentioned in the theoretical background: Whether students need to develop better fluency if they can do well in comprehension. While fluency is both a prerequisite and conclusion of comprehension in L1 reading (Snow & Sweet), the situation changes in L2 context. Grabe (2009) suggests that in tertiary level students may have a low level of fluency, but they can still do well in text comprehension. The results we obtained from present study are consistent with Grabe’s statements as students succeeded in comprehension, but they could not develop fluency in EFL.

**CONCLUSION**

The study attempted to answer two research questions. While the first question asked whether repeated reading influences readers’ fluency, the second asked if it influences reading comprehension. It was found that while it does not show any change on students’ reading fluency, it contributes their reading comprehension positively.

Small number of treatment sessions can be suggested as a limitation of the study. Furthermore, not receiving students’ perceptions about the treatment can be shown another limitation of the study.

In terms of applications and implications of the study to the field, it is suggested that in order to improve students’ comprehension in FL reading, repeated reading can be adopted as an instructional strategy.
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As a suggestion for further research, a longer period of repeated reading sessions may be used in order to see its effects on reading fluency. Furthermore, students’ perceptions are important about the strategy they are using. Thus, in a further research a questionnaire can be used to learn about their perceptions of repeated reading instructional strategy.

References