

Silent Reading and Reading Aloud for Better Comprehension and Speaking Motivation: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This article compares the effectiveness of reading aloud and silent reading for comprehension and speaking motivation. The data were taken from the ninth graders of a community school of Jhapa, Nepal. The students were divided into two groups and each were asked to read ten sample comprehension questions. The groups were provisioned to have a silent reading and reading aloud differently. Each group was given just five minutes of time- two times a day- for three weeks and were measured for their scores. Conclusions were drawn comparing the pre- test and post- test results and by closely observing their oral participation in the class. The results showed that reading aloud is more effective than silent reading for comprehension and speaking encouragement.

Keywords: silent reading, reading aloud, reading comprehension, speaking motivation

Introduction

Reading is one of the two secondary skills of the four skills of language. Reading is an activity of decoding the message expressed in the conventional graphic representation. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (7th ed.) defines 'read' as verb as 'to look at and understand the meaning of written or printed words or symbol' (p. 1254). Reading can be either silent or loud in terms of the use of verbalization.

Silent reading is an act of receiving the message expressed in script. It is, "...perceiving a written text in order to understand its content." Richards et al. (1999, p. 306). Its main purpose is not to impress others but enhance the reader's own skill. Bhatia (1977, p. 327 as cited in Bhattarai 1995, P. 121) writes "...silent reading does not impress others but helps to acquire speed in reading and to improve the process of

comprehension.” So, the value of silent reading lies on cultivating one’s own reading skill for pleasure and knowledge enhancement.

Reading aloud is the vocalization or verbalization of printed representation of language. It is also called oral reading. Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1999) defines loud reading as “...saying a written text aloud (oral reading).” It is an act of producing noise while reading a text. Bhattarai (1995, p. 114) states that “...loud reading is the process of vocalization of printed symbols into audible speech sounds.” Unlike silent reading, it is a psycho physical process. It is a useful and effective activity in L2 teaching in junior grades. It helps young learners to associate between printed symbols and vocal symbols. Both reading aloud and silent reading are fundamental skills for developing reading comprehension skill.

Reading comprehension is the act of decoding the message encoded in the written form. It is understanding a written text. According to Grellet (1981, p. 3) reading comprehension is the process of extracting the required information from the written text as effectively as possible. Reading comprehension is “...understanding, understanding a text means comprehending a text” (Khaniya, p. 139). It is a complex mental activity of cognition. It requires a number of sub-skills that constitute the high- level skill of reading comprehension. Effective reading comprehension depends on reading strategies and linguistic competence of the reader. Gardner (1987, p.77) holds that adopting reading strategies contributes to gaining reading comprehension. For him, reading comprehension is not merely a function of capabilities within a reader but also predictive ability of the reader. Reading comprehension involves the process of extracting three levels of meaning; lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, and socio- cultural meaning. A reader’s ability to extract all these types of meaning depends on the following cognitive skills as forwarded by Abbott and Winard (1981, p. 93).

1. To anticipate both the form and the content
2. To identify the main ideas
3. To recognize and recall specific details
4. To recognize the relationship between the main idea and their expansion
5. To follow a sequence, e. g. events instructions, stage of an argument
6. To infer from the text
7. To draw conclusions
8. To recognize the writer’s purpose and attitude

Richards et al. (1999, pp. 306 -307) have mentioned four types of reading comprehension in terms of the purpose of reading. These include; literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical and evaluation comprehension, and appreciative comprehension. Reading comprehension at the secondary level is more focused on literal comprehension rather than the higher-level comprehension such as critical and appreciative comprehension.

This study was conducted to find out whether silent reading or reading aloud is more effective for better comprehension and speaking motivation at the secondary level while teaching English as a second language.

Literature review

Although reading aloud is often criticized as a mere waste of time and a kind of distracting activity from the viewpoint of content comprehension, a number of studies have shown the significance of reading aloud not only for pronunciation but also for comprehension.

Hale, et al. (2007) made a comparison between silent reading and loud reading for comprehension among 4th, 5th, 10th, 11th and 12th graders. The students were given 400-word passages to read silently and aloud. After reading each passage, the students answered 10 multiple choice comprehension questions. The results showed that comprehension was significantly higher when students read aloud as opposed to silently.

However, Andrea et al. (2010) came to a little different conclusion in this regard. They conducted a study entitled “An Investigation of Silent Versus Loud Reading Comprehension of Elementary Students Using Maze Assessment Procedures”. They intended to identify whether silent reading or reading aloud was more effective for comprehension. The participants were 89 first grade and second grade students from an elementary school in the Southern United States. Each student was exposed to four assessment conditions, which included WCPM, three tests from WJIII ACH and Maze reading comprehension reading passages. The result was somehow unexpected for them. No significant difference was found between loud and silent reading comprehension, which suggests that reading comprehension can be measured accurately under either reading condition.

Likewise, University of Texas (2017) made some significant remarks on the value of reading aloud indicating that reading aloud is an essential skill. Reading aloud

to children before they can even talk is one of the most important elements in literacy development. Reading aloud also benefits school age children as they build foundations of lifelong reading with it. Besides, reading aloud contributes to the development of phonological awareness in addition to expanding students' vocabulary. It ultimately contributes to the development of reading comprehension skills in school age learners. Sometimes, in higher-level classes, students prefer to read aloud because the combination of reading and listening can help them understand the text. These classes can lend themselves to more challenging texts and deeper discussions. When students hear their peers read out loud, it can expand their vocabulary and fluency by combining the reading knowledge of the entire classroom. Our classes are heterogeneous in terms of the learners' reading abilities. To accommodate this diversity of reading abilities, teachers can assign the struggling readers shorter sections to read aloud. This can help them develop confidence to read in front of their peers.

Similarly, Muhammad et al. (2019) drew their conclusion showing the significance of reading aloud. They conducted a study entitled "Effectiveness of Reading Aloud Strategies for Developing Reading Habits". The main focus of the study was on reading aloud and other reading strategies. The study was conducted in a government girls' elementary school. The data were collected from 25 students; 15 male and 10 female through a questionnaire, pre-test, and post-test. The results showed that reading aloud is better than silent reading and other reading strategies at the elementary level.

Moreover, Hardach (2020) summarized many studies to shed light on the value of reading aloud for comprehension. She has made the following conclusions based on her observation.

1. For much of history, reading was a noisy activity. The personal letters were read out loud to the intended audience.
2. Although silent reading is a norm today, a growing body of studies suggests that we may be missing out by reading only with the voices inside our minds.
3. People consistently remember words and texts better if they read them aloud rather than if they read them silently. This memory-boosting effect of reading aloud is particularly strong in children, but it works for older people too.
4. Macleod has named this phenomenon the "production effect". It means that producing written words- that is to say, reading them out loud- improves our memory of them.

5. In one study in Australia, a group of seven- to ten-year-olds were presented with a list of words; and some were asked to read silently and others aloud. Afterwards, they correctly recognized 87 percent of the words they had read aloud, but only 70 percent of the silently read ones.
6. Reading aloud boosts memory not only in young children but also in adults, even in elderly people of 60 or 70 years of age.
7. Reading aloud can also make certain memory problems more obvious, and could be helpful in detecting such issues early on.
8. Reading aloud, for many people, brings joy, comfort and sense of belonging.

Reading aloud is an important activity of a second language teaching process. Some of the previous studies in the field have found out silent reading to be more effective than reading aloud for enhancing comprehension. Yet, a good many of them have concluded reading aloud to be better than silent reading for enhancing reading comprehension and encouraging introvert learners for oral performance. The present study has provided one more additional conclusion on if reading aloud or silent reading is more effective in this regard.

Methodology

This study has an experimental design. Class nine students of a public school, where the researcher was working as an English teacher, were chosen as the participants for the study. All the students of both sections were involved in the study. Section 'A' and section 'B' were assigned as group 'A' and group 'B' respectively. The classes were conducted having all usual classroom activities with one additional activity of reading in each English period, five minutes in the beginning and five minutes in the end. During the usual class activities, the students were intensely observed to find out their participation in oral responses. One group of students were instructed to read the reading comprehension questions and their answers silently and the next section students were asked to do the same thing loudly. Both sections were given the same set of questions. A pre- test was conducted to measure their current level and a post- test after the intervention was administered to identify the difference in their achievement.

Results and Discussion

The collected data were analyzed and interpreted under the following thematic headings.

Students' Performance in Reading Comprehension

Both groups were engaged in the usual classroom procedures. Additionally, they were asked to read the questions and their answers. Their performance in the written tests looks as presented below.

Table 1

Students' Average Score before and after Treatment

Group	Full marks	Pre- test average	Post- test average	Range
A	20	13	15.3	2.3
B	20	8.2	11	2.8

Group 'A' had better performance than group 'B' in pre- test. The average score of group 'A' was better than that of group 'B' in post- test as well. However, group 'B' increased their average by 2.8 marks and while group 'A' increased their average only by 2.3 marks. It was not a big difference on surface. But it was a remarkable difference in a test that weighed 20 full marks. Besides, the average score of group 'B' was too low relative to section 'A' in the pre- test. This heavy difference was lessened by group 'B' who practiced reading aloud. This showed that reading aloud was more effective than silent reading for better retention. Group 'A' which practiced reading silently also increased their achievement relative to their own average score in pre-test. This indicated that silent reading too contributed to their reading comprehension.

Effect of Reading Aloud on Speaking Motivation

As the students practised reading as an additional daily activity, it had a positive effect on their speaking motivation. It looks as given below.

Table 2

Introvert Students' oral Participation Scenario

Group	Pre-test average score	Post- test average score	No. of students first attempting to answer (first week)	No. of students first attempting to answer (second week)	No. of students first attempting to answer (third week)
A	13	15.3	7	7+ 3	7+ 3 + 2
B	8.2	11	5	5+ 3	5+ 3 + 2

As the treatment started, both groups showed interest in a new model of reading practice. In Group A, seven introvert students proposed themselves to orally answer the questions on the sixth day of new practice. Although their answers were only partially correct, they attempted to present themselves in front of all friends along with the teacher's presence. In the second week, three more introvert students came forward to speak out in the class. Their answers got gradually more correct than in the first week. In the third week a total of twelve introvert students ventured to present answers in the class. They attempted to speak out with a relative ease, confidence and slightly improved natural fluency as an effect of reading practice. This showed that regular silent reading practice can be an effective tool of motivating shy and introvert students to speak in the class.

Similarly, in Group B, five introvert students got ready to answer the questions in the first week of the treatment. Three of them provided right answers and two of them gave partially correct answers. They seemed a little excited and motivated to speak. In the second week, three more shy students ventured to answer the questions. They could give a bit more improved answer. In the third week of reading practice, two more introvert students attempted the answer. They could not provide the correct answer. However, they ventured to expose themselves in front of the others. Their faces shone with the glow of self-esteem in addition to being a little confident in their presentation. They got rid of fear of mistakes. This hints that reading aloud practice can be a useful and effective tool of encouraging introvert students for self-expression.

During the intervention both groups showed interest in practicing a usual activity in a new pattern. They seemed to be enjoying the new practice. The students were not informed that they were under investigation. They were simply motivated about the value of reading for better retention. When they were assigned to read the question answers, they were gradually more motivated to reading. They showed readiness for answering the questions orally as well. The students who never proposed themselves to speak out in the class began to ask questions about the lesson. They began to take part in discussion and present their opinions. Not in all attempts were they correct, though. However, they enjoyed taking part in the discussion. Before this additional reading practice, they could hardly get ready to express themselves.

Conclusion

Reading aloud is not as negligible as it is perceived for secondary level students. In addition to being essential and useful to teach sound- script association at the elementary level, it is useful for secondary level learners as well. The present study has come to the following conclusions.

1. Reading aloud is more effective than silent reading for comprehension.
2. Reading aloud can be used as a motivating tool to encourage introvert students for oral performance.
3. It is good to encourage secondary level students for faster silent reading. In the meantime, English second language teachers cannot neglect the value of reading aloud while teaching reading comprehension.
4. Reading aloud is doubtlessly essential for phonological development. Yet, its significance does not end here. It goes further as far as semantics.
5. Reading aloud might be useful even for pragmatics which is yet to be systematically investigated in the future.

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