

In The Name of God

The Most Gracious

The Most Merciful

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University of Isfahan
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English Language

M.A. Thesis

**Investigating the Effects of Repeated Reading Methods on
Improving Reading Rate and Performance of New Reading
Passages**

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To My Parents

For

Their Love and Support

&

To My Wife

For

Her Love and Endurance

Abstract

This research is an attempt to investigate the transfer effects of repeated reading approaches on improving the reading comprehension and fluency of Iranian lower-intermediate learners of English. To fulfill the aims of the study 60 lower-intermediate learners of the English language at Jahad institute were chosen and randomly divided into three groups, namely the control group (G1), assisted repeated reading group (G2), and non-assisted repeated reading group (G3). Following the grouping phase, the participants took a comprehension pretest as well as a fluency one; then they went through a 10-session treatment offered by the researcher himself. At the end of the treatment period, the same comprehension and fluency tests were given to the participants to examine the effectiveness of the treatments. After comparing the data obtained from the pretests and posttests, the statistical procedure revealed that the first experimental group (G2) gained significant improvement in terms of both reading comprehension and reading fluency, while the control group (G1) and the second experimental group (G3) did not show any significant improvements.

Keywords: Assisted repeated reading, Non-assisted repeated reading, Reading fluency.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Reading, a complex process compared to rocket science (Moats, 1999), has become less of a mystery in recent years. Reports, such as that of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), based on extensive research have highlighted details as how to best teach beginning reading. Topics in the NRP report include phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, comprehension, computer technology, and reading fluency. Fluency, in particular, has received an increasing amount of attention. Kuhn and Stahl (2003) reviewed the literature for fluency used during developmental and remedial instruction and concluded that teachers should use fluency instruction more often because of its benefits to reading. Fluency serves as

a bridge between decoding words and comprehension (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2004). Moreover, oral reading fluency has been shown to predict comprehension rate better than such direct measures of reading comprehension as questioning, retelling, and cloze (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Problems in reading fluency and performance have long been considered to be among the most common problematic characteristics of students. Interventions that have received research attention include repeated reading, peer-mediated instruction, computer-guided practice, previewing, and combined approaches. Most students experience difficulty in learning to read (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1996). Although problems with word reading skills and reading comprehension are often described, one of the most common characteristics of problem readers is a lack of reading fluency and accuracy (Adams, 1990; Mathes, Simmons, & Davis, 1992).

Reading dysfluency inhibits good reading performance in several ways. A reduced reading rate, by definition, means that students read less text in the same amount of time than more fluent readers and therefore will process less text to remember, comprehend, or appreciate. Moreover, slower reading rates suggest that students may be putting more cognitive efforts

into identifying individual words than students who read with more automaticity and, therefore, may have fewer cognitive resources available to process meaning (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, 1987; Sindelar, 1987). Slower readers also may be less able to hold extended segments of text in their memories and may be less likely to integrate those segments with the meaning of other parts of the text (Mathes et al., 1992). Consistent with these ideas is the fact that reading rate is correlated with other measures of reading, including reading comprehension (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1992).

Over the past two decades, substantial research has been devoted to improving reading comprehension, using such methods as direct questioning of text content, reinforcement, pictures and other text enhancements, and comprehension strategy training. Many of these treatments have been shown to be very effective (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1996). However, reading programs that do not attempt directly to enhance the reading fluency of dysfluent readers cannot be considered complete. No amount of comprehension training can compensate for a slow, labored rate of reading (Henk, Helfeldt, & Platt, 1986).

Extensive research has been done on eye-movements of monolingual readers of English showing the critical role of automatic word recognition in fluent, skillful reading. For example, readers fixate their eyes on about

80% of the content words but 40% of the function words. When skillful readers do skip, they rarely skip more than one word (e.g., Adams, 1990; Just & Carpenter, 1980). Readers exhibit extreme sensitivity to letter-level features of text. Rayner and Bertera (1979) masked one letter in foveal vision and found that readers' reading speed was reduced by 50%. Finally, the importance of automatic word recognition skills is underscored by Kuhara-Kojima, Hatano, and Saito (1996), who concluded that accurate, automatic word recognition is a prerequisite for reading comprehension. Skillful readers seem to execute word recognition tasks automatically and effortlessly, thus allowing them to direct their cognitive resources to comprehending text.

The notion of fluent reading is now widely accepted in both first language (L1) learning contexts (e.g., Adams, 1990; Just & Carpenter, 1987; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, 1979; Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1992), and second and foreign language (L2 and FL) learning contexts (e.g., Anderson, 1984; Eskey, 1988; Grabe, 1991; Day & Bamford, 1998). It is likely, however, that efficient word recognition is not the sole foundation of good comprehension. Background knowledge and higher-order comprehension skills, such as generating predictions and making inferences also influence readers' comprehension performances (e.g., Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Still, for either L1 or L2/FL readers, building automaticity in word recognition is essential because "it is highly unlikely that excellent reading comprehension will be observed in the face of deficient word recognition skills" (Stanovich, 1992, p. 4). Good readers should be able to decode words in text through "a kind of automatic identification that requires no conscious cognitive efforts" (Eskey, 1988, p. 94). These comments are particularly relevant to L2/FL reading teachers: Reading in a foreign or second language is usually a slow, laborious process (Jensen, 1986; Segalowitz, Poulsen, & Komoda, 1991).

Thus, "to many second language readers, reading is a suffocatingly slow process" (Anderson, 1999, p. 59). This state of affairs may point to motivational problems for learners in L2/FL contexts with regard to utilizing reading as a significant source of linguistic input. Nutall posits a vicious circle" to describe readers who cannot develop good reading skills (1996, p. 127). Slow readers do not read much, and if they do not read much, they do not understand. If they do not understand, then they cannot enjoy reading. Day and Bamford (1998) note that it is only through actual reading experience that L2 or FL readers can acquire complex linguistic, world, and topical knowledge needed to improve their reading skills. Therefore, for theoretical and pedagogical reasons, L2 and FL researchers and educators are focusing their efforts on finding effective methods to

help L2 and FL learners to increase their reading rates (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 1991; Silberstein, 1994).

Repeated Reading

There have not been many studies on Repeated Reading (RR) in L2 and FL settings, and even fewer on how RR affects comprehension. Blum et al's (1995) study did not utilize comprehension measures, and Taguchi and Gorsuch (2002) failed to find any significant gains in comprehension. Further research on RR will reveal the elements of this comprehension issue, but RR at least seems to work to improve reading fluency of L2/FL readers. It seems RR should receive the attention it deserves because the critical role of fluency in reading success has been so strongly suggested in empirical studies (Stanovich, 1992; Mathes, Simmons, & Davis, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible effects of assisted and unassisted repeated reading on improving the reading abilities of Iranian lower-intermediate learners of English both in terms of reading rate (fluency) and performance (comprehension). In essence, this study aims to examine the effects of these two types of repeated reading methods on the transfer of effective reading abilities to new texts.

1.3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Does Assisted Repeated-Reading method help Iranian lower-intermediate readers improve their reading rate and performance when reading new passages?

2. Does Unassisted Repeated-Reading method help Iranian lower-intermediate readers improve their reading rate and performance when reading new passages?

According to these research questions the following hypotheses are formulated for investigation:

H1. Assisted Repeated-Reading method significantly improves reading rate and performance of Iranian lower-intermediate students while reading new passages.

H2. Unassisted Repeated-Reading significantly improves reading rate and performance of Iranian lower-intermediate students while reading new passages.