LINK BETWEEN ORAL READING AND COMPREHENSION FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

JILLIAN THIELE

Abstract
Reading comprehension is one of the main aims of teaching. Without comprehending the written text, learners cannot achieve academically and progress from one learning stage to the next. In classrooms, that teach ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL) utilising oral reading has proven to be an effective step in improving reading comprehension. Many ESL learners fail to see reading comprehension as an active process involving certain strategies and behaviours. Second language readers often read slowly and have under-developed oral production when compared to native speakers. Oral reading practice was found to be more effective than other reading methods at increasing reading speed and comprehension among beginning second language (L2) readers. Oral reading also helps readers to see text as a whole with various levels of meaning, rather than as a dissectible passage of graphic cues. Oral reading allowed for better understanding and concentration. In L2 situations, poor readers are better at comprehending when text is read aloud as compared to reading silently, and are more adept at answering inferential questions. Research has shown that teachers who model with the spoken language and explain effective comprehension strategies help students become strategic readers. In second language learning situations, oral reading is the best way to teach pronunciation and word recognition during the early stages of second language learning. Oral reading reinforces correct understanding of punctuation and intonation and has a long term effect on reading comprehension and all forms of school performance. During read-aloud sessions, students share the excitement, the suspense, the emotion, and the sheer fun of reading.

Key Words: reading comprehension, oral reading, reading aloud, English as a second language, pronunciation, metacognition

Introduction
Reading comprehension is one of the main aims of teaching. Without comprehending the written text, learners cannot achieve academically or progress from one learning stage to the next. Students need to learn how to interpret written texts as a way of making sense of their world. One of the most effective ways of teaching reading comprehension is to use oral reading, by the teacher, and by the students. In classrooms, that teach ‘English as a Second Language’ (ESL), utilising oral reading, has proven to be an effective step in improving reading comprehension.

Definition of comprehension
Reading comprehension is defined as the ability of readers to understand the surface and the hidden meanings of the text. It is the process of unlocking meaning from a written text; not only understanding its' direct meaning, but also comprehending implied ideas. Reading comprehension is the thinking process used to make meaning of what a person reads (Block, Gambrell & Pressley, 2002) and specifically, enabling students to think about and
react to what they read (Tierney, 2005). Hannon and Daneman (2001) proposes four primary processes in reading comprehension: accessing relevant knowledge from long-term memory, integrating accessed knowledge with information from the text, making inferences based on information in the text, and recalling newly learned text material. In the schema theory, a predominant theory of reading, comprehension is viewed as the process of interpreting new information and assimilating this information into memory structures (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Teng, 2009). At the beginning of reading instruction, students need to understand that comprehension is the goal and that this process will occur over time (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001). Learners have difficulty achieving academically if they cannot comprehend what they read (Yuko, 2009).

**English as a Second Language learners (ESL)**

Many ESL learners fail to see reading comprehension as an active process involving certain strategies and behaviours (Pressley, 2000). They often think reading comprehension is just one step in learning English, rather than the cultivation of a process that is continually refined. Reading for comprehension in a second language requires more than the cognitive capacity for word identification than reading in one's native language. Second language readers often read slowly and have under-developed oral production when compared to native speakers. Oral reading practice was found by Taguchi and Gorsuch (2002) to be more effective than other reading methods at increasing reading speed and comprehension among beginning second language (L2) readers. Amer (1997) states that oral reading by the teacher helps readers discover units of meaning that arise from multi-word phrases, rather than meaning that is derived from individual words. Oral reading encourages the students to progress to higher levels of comprehension. Oral reading also helps readers to hear text as a whole, with various levels of meaning, rather than as a dissectible passage of graphic cues. As reported by Alshuamimeri, (2005), oral reading uses the skills of concentration to foster greater comprehension of the whole text.

**Oral reading and ESL Learners**

**Engagement in the reading process**

The skill of reading out-loud provides the avenue for full engagement with the written text and promotes internalisation of ideas. This reading aloud process enables the teacher to expose and teach their students process of literacy, how words and sentences are structured, and reinforce sight vocabulary. Oral reading enhances comprehension skills by linking the oral spoken word to the written text. In L2 situations, Miller and Smith (1985) suggest that poor readers are better at comprehending when text is read aloud as compared to reading.
silently. This in turn, makes the students more adept at answering inferential questions. The results of Miller and Smith's study suggest that poor readers benefit from the use of oral reading in the classroom. Additional research has shown that teachers, who model with the spoken language and explain effective comprehension strategies, help students become strategic readers (Almasi, 2003). In addition, Carrell (1998) pointed out that effective comprehension strategies give the students opportunity to elaborate, organize, and evaluate text information.

**Linking listening to comprehension**

Oral reading is linked to listening. This is called the "act of understanding speech" (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Teaching students how to listen is a nice accompaniment to any read-aloud scenarios. The use of strategies to promote students' abilities to listen has been shown to be particularly effective for improving reading comprehension (Boodt, 1984). One reason for this is that listening instruction focuses interest on the material being read, and interest has been shown to be more of a factor in sentence recall than readability. Reading aloud can be productive if teachers read to their students as they follow along silently. Then if students have the confidence to read aloud, they are demonstrating to the teacher that they can use the complex skills of speaking, pronunciation, comprehension and coordinating word recognition, a highly complex process. Students whose language skills are limited are not able to process at this level, tend to concentrate on word calling; simply pronouncing a series or words without regard to meaning. Encouraging students to read aloud, a phrase or sentence, and then sharing the meaning to others, also encourages students to read for ideas, rather than for simple word recognition.

**Role modelling correct pronunciation and diction**

Good pronunciation and clear diction with the correct inflection and tone, assists the students in making sense of the words. According to Al-Qurashi, Watson, Hafseth, Hickman and Pond (1995) in second language learning situations, oral reading is the best way to teach pronunciation and word recognition during the early stages of second language acquisition. Oral reading, performed by the teachers, can reinforce correct meaning of words, how punctuation enhances meaning and how the correct intonation adds additional information to the sentence, all aspects of good comprehension.

**Metacognitive Strategies**

Another factor that greatly influences reading comprehension is the use of metacognition; the ability of students to take control of their own learning by defining their learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving these goals (Serah, 2009).
According to Sarah (2009), the implicit premise is that students who actively engage in cognitive and metacognitive strategies usually comprehend and recall more of what they read than students who do not use these strategies. Using strategies, such as summarizing, questioning, creating mental image, outlining the text structure, and predicting the story enable the students to monitor and evaluation their own reading process. Cain (2009) confirms that students "monitor their comprehension as they read by engag[ing] in strategic processing, such as oral rereading a previous text, to resolve comprehension failure. Individual learners, with a high level of metacognitive knowledge and skills are aware of their own strength and weaknesses, thereby ensuring their academic attainment (Hobson, 2008). In addition, students who display a wide range of metacognitive skills perform well, complete schoolwork more effectively and show improvement in comprehension (Flavell, 1981; Duke and Pearson, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1986), the student eventually internalizes the cognitive and metacognitive strategies, demonstrated by the teacher, and uses these skills to themselves. Many teachers believe that reading aloud has many benefits: aids in memorization and concentration; enhances classroom instruction and improves academic achievement; and, most importantly, assists in the transfer of oral comprehension skills to understanding the written text (Alshumaimeri, 2005; Grabe, 1991; Jackson & Colheart, 2001; Juel & Holmes, 1981; MaCallum, Sharpe, Bell, George, 2004; Prior & Welling, 2001; Rowell, 1976).

**Prior Knowledge**

Many studies have identified the importance of prior knowledge in reading comprehension. According to Pressley (2000) learners can employ prior knowledge activation by asking questions about the relevance of the text and constructing mental images during reading process. When interest is developed and connected to previous knowledge, the level of reading comprehension also increases. "Many researchers have shown that having some prior knowledge about the topic of a passage enables both greater comprehension of the text and better memory for it" (Priebe, Keenam & Miller, 2011). General knowledge of the world aids in understanding fiction and nonfiction (McNamara, 2009). Providing this general and world knowledge can originate from oral discussion and reading sessions by the teacher. An organised teacher prepares the students for a new text by planning ahead.

**Teachers’ knowledge of the subject matter**

Nwuba and Nwuba (2005) suggest that to be effective, the teacher should have a good grasp of the subject matter to be taught. It means that teachers are expected to be knowledgeable in their subject area. Knowledge of the subject matter does not stop at just
getting information about the subject; it assumes imparting this knowledge to the learners. Therefore, knowledge of the subject matter is a holistic package which involves researching and utilising information that will enhance future the teaching and learning of the subject (Bisong, 2005; Uwatt, 2001). Students' quality of learning increases with the teachers' level of knowledge of subject matter. In other words, those who perceived their teachers' knowledge of subject matter as high performed better than those whose perceive that teachers with little content knowledge. Teacher’s confidence, enthusiasm content mastery, dexterity and finesse to the subject matter are transferred to the students. Such teachers inspire and motivate students to learn by providing opportunities for students to read and become interested in the content.

Scaffolding

One of the most effective metacognition skills is Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding. In this process, "children first experience a particular set of cognitive activities in the presence of experts, and only gradually come to perform these functions by themselves” (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Students who participated in the various forms of oral reading during the scaffolding process showed dramatic improvement in comprehension scores (Krashen, 1993).

Parent Involvement

Another important aspect in improving comprehension is the sharing of books, with peers and with parents. What was important was that parents read aloud books to their children and they talked about what they were reading together. Parental involvement can override social disadvantages within the family. Continued oral reading engagement with parents has a long term affect on reading comprehension and all forms of school performance.

Reading for Pleasure

Good readers read to understand. Krashen (1993) study on free voluntary reading in many different countries shows an improvement in reading comprehension. A similar result was also reported in Hayashi (1999), study on the effects of extensive reading on Japanese university students' proficiency in English. It was found out that students who read more English books showed a major improvement in reading ability than those who read less. According to Sheu (2004), reading extensively allows students to apply reading strategies they learnt in skill-based instruction. According to Nell (1988), in order for students to take up pleasure reading, teachers’ enthusiasm to read aloud encourages students to be enthusiastic about their own reading. One of the most effective means of transferring this enthusiasm is by engaging shared book read aloud sessions. This interactive reading provides
a direct avenue for developing students' understanding of the concepts of "word" and "letter" (Holdaway, 1979; Snow & Tobors, 1993), vocabulary (Robbins & Ehri, 1994), and syntax and style (Bus & Pellegrini, 1995; Feitelson, Goldstein, Iraqi & Share, 1993), as well as motivation to read for pleasure.

**Listening to high quality spoken English**

Language learning expert Stephen Krashen (1993) says that students learn a language from input that they understand. It is important that students listen to a higher level of language by their teachers if they wish to improve their comprehension. During read-aloud sessions, teachers should engage the students in a variety of strategies. First, the teachers must encourage students to ask questions, to respond to other students' questions and respond to teacher-generated questions. Secondly, teachers need to highlight certain print features and conventions, grammar, punctuation, word selection, and spelling that have enhanced the reading process. Stephen Krashen (1993) believes that student can learn grammar better by hearing and reading the language. Thirdly, the use of "repeated reading" through oral reading reinforces language comprehension. Fourthly, recording students’ oral reading allows each student to hear their own strong and weak points, and allows the student to make the necessary corrections.

**Conclusion**

Comprehension is the aim of reading. Teachers reading aloud and encouraging students in the read aloud process has the potential to enhance the process of comprehending written texts. "During read-aloud, we share the excitement, the suspense, the emotion, and the sheer fun of a new book and its intriguing or annoying characters," said Nancy Lacedonia (1999), who teaches in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. Parents and children reading together at the start of school, and then throughout all the years of schooling, have a positive and long term effect on reading comprehension. Students, who learn English as a second language, need reinforcement of these students even more than students who are learning to read their own language.

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