A Study on the Effectiveness of Text-Based Reading Tasks to Improve Oral Reading Fluency in English Among Second Language Learners

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Abstract

The aim of this experimental study is to find out the effectiveness of text based paragraph oral reading tasks in English among IX standard Kannada medium students. The sample consisted of 60 students IX standard from two Kannada medium secondary schools. Paragraphs in English lessons prescribed for Class IX in Karnataka State were used for practicing of students in oral reading. The experimental design chosen was two group pre and post-test design. One group which received text based paragraph tasks is the experimental group and the other group exposed to conventional teaching is the control group. Students' scores in both the groups were compared using means, standard deviations and significance level of difference of means between the two groups using t-test (Welch, 1947). Significant improvements could be seen in students of Experimental Group compared to Control Group. This implies regular oral reading practice based on paragraphs in texts can improve oral reading capabilities of students.

Introduction

English is considered as a global language. It is the responsibility of English language teachers to prepare their students for changing demands and requirements of the globalization. A good reading habit paves way for better language development among the learners. Reading is a complex skill. Important component of reading which needs sustained attention from teachers is Fluency. The ability to decode rapidly, accurately and efficiently is known as Fluency. Defining reading Fluency is not an easy task for many reasons. Fluency component involves rapid and accurate processing. Fluency also enables the students automatic processing of large amounts of reading and incidental or implicit learning. Reading fluency may be defined as "the ability to read rapidly with ease and accuracy, and to read with appropriate expression and phrasing. It involves a long incremental process and text comprehension is the expected outcome" (Grabe, 2009). Such a definition of fluency implies rapidness in word recognition, reading rate, considerable exposure to print, accuracy in comprehension and incremental learning. All these skills require the development of automaticity, a large vocabulary, and extended periods of implicit learning. This skill set is only learned gradually and dramatic improvements are not expected in shorter training studies. Fluent

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reading ability, in either the L1 or the L2, is the prominent indicator of a highly skilled reader. Majority of L2 readers actually develop reading fluency after many years of reading L2 texts.

Important reading skills such as automatic word recognition, good vocabulary, skillful grammar knowledge, and the formation of basic meaning proposition units for reading comprehension are a result of implicit learning. Implicit learning can be gained only through extended periods of exposure and meaningful time on task (Ellis, 2005, 2007). Many researchers and teacher trainers undermine the importance of implicit learning which is key to both reading fluency as well as comprehension. Implicit learning is a gradual process and is often very weak in the beginning. Repetition of form and process over a long period of time is behind implicit learning. Hence the connection between fluency skills and implicit learning clearly points to the pedagogical importance of extensive reading, reading rate practice, and text re-reading and recycling as learning activities for reading development (Grabe, 2009; Nation, 2000). The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) strongly recommend that teachers build students' fluency skills and assess fluency regularly. This is the motivation behind the present study which attempts preparation of tools on fluency subcomponents.

Need and Importance

To become a good reader, it is essential to become a fluent reader, and in order to become fluent oral reader, second language learners need to read accurately the paragraphs of prescribed lessons. Fluency is regarded as the gateway to comprehension. It is essential in order to understand what one read. Lack of fluency leads to making word recognition errors, laborious reading without proper expression. Fluency helps in better comprehension of what one reads.

A study conducted by the US Department of Education (Pinnel, Pikulki, Wixson, Campbell, Goughe, Beatty, 1995) found that Fluency whether measured in terms of word recognition, automaticity or expression was strongly associated with silent reading comprehension. Recent study (Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman and Orange, 2005) reveals that reading fluency is significantly related to overall reading achievement for students beyond primary grade. A study of fluency among high school students in an Urban school district (Rasinski, Padak, Mckeon, Krugwilfong, Friedaver, and Heim 2005) reveals that fluency was strongly associated with students' performance in the high school, graduation test and that well over half of the students assessed could be considered disfluent. More than 10 percent of the students assessed read at a rate less than 100 words per minute, a rate normally associated with primary grade reader! Fluency is indeed an issue which is important for older as well as younger students.

Components of Reading Fluency

1. **Accuracy:** Decoding, the ability to correctly generate a phonological representation of each word. It is assessed as the number of student errors.
2. **Automaticity:** Word recognition or the ability to quickly recognize words with little cognitive effort or attention. It is assessed as the words count per minute (wcpm).
3. **Prosody or oral text reading:** The ability to read with proper phrasing and expression. This

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requires reading with appropriate expression, phrasing, and pace.

National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the National Research Council (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998) recommend that teachers assess fluency regularly (NICHD, 2000). Fluency assessment should cover the above three components or foundation skills to provide a valid measure of fluency. Keeping these aspects of the previous research and also considering existing level oral reading fluency in English of regional language medium students, the investigator decided to undertake the present experimental study with following objectives.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the existing level of fluency in English of IX standard students of secondary schools.

2. To make students aware of the importance of text based paragraphs for practice in oral reading in English among IX standard students which is a stepping stone to improve their reading Fluency.

3. To quantify the effectiveness of text based paragraph practice in facilitating oral reading fluency in English among IX standard students.

Hypotheses for Fluency

1. There is no significant difference between the pre-test mean scores of control and experimental group students in fluency in English language among secondary school students.
2. There is significant difference between the post-test mean scores of control and experimental group students in fluency in English language among secondary school students.
3. There is no significant difference between the pre and post test scores of control group students in fluency in English language among secondary school students.
4. There is significant difference between the pre and post test scores of experimental group students in fluency in English language among secondary school students.

Experimental Design

The study being experimental, investigator decided to choose the true experimental design with randomized groups, pre-test and post- test design as given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Experimental Design--Randomized Groups Pre-test and Post-test Design

Randomly assigned	Pre-test	Independent variable	Post-test
Experimental group	T1 E	Text based reading tasks	T2 E
Control group	T1 C	Conventional teaching	T2 C

In this design researcher has selected two groups to know the effectiveness of text based paragraphs for oral reading practice in English. The subjects are chosen randomly, are assigned as

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experimental and control group. In this design, researcher conducted pre-test to both the groups. Research intervention was conducted for experimental group only. For control group researcher used conventional teaching method. After the completion of research intervention post-test was conducted for both the groups. The results of the both groups are analysed to bring out the effectiveness of the intervention in the form of text based reading tasks.

Description of the Tool

The tool used in this study was constructed by the investigator for the purpose of the present experimental study. For this tool the investigator selected paragraphs from the English prose lesson "The Three Questions", prescribed for IX standard students in the state of Karnataka. The objective of this tool is to assess the level of two subcomponents of fluency of IX standard students before and after the intervention. The investigator gave one minute to each IX standard Kannada medium student to read the paragraphs. The scores were calculated based on the number of words read minus erroneously read words per minute.

Table 2: Blue Print of the fluency tool

Component	Fluency	
Sl. No.	1)	2)
Sub Components	Accuracy	Automaticity
Objectives of the test	To know how accurately students read the given paragraph, before and after the intervention	To know the level of students automaticity in reading from the given paragraph before and after the intervention
Method of Administration	Individual	
Class	IX Standard	
Type of school	Government / Private High school	
Content	Paragraphs from the English prose lesson 'The Three Questions'	
Tasks	Oral Reading of Paragraphs	
Allotted time for reading paragraph	1 Minute for each student	
Maximum scores for a paragraph	Number of words minus erroneously read words per minute	
Total scores	Total words-erroneously read words= Obtained scores	

The investigator has considered two sub components of Fluency namely, Accuracy and Automaticity. The time required to complete paragraphs is one minute for each student and total thirty minutes for thirty students. Clear instructions were given before reading the given paragraphs

Sampling

a) Population

The population of the present study consists of two secondary school students studying in

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Kannada medium during the year 2018-19. The sample for the study was drawn from population of secondary schools and comprised of 60 students.

b) Sampling Procedure

The researcher selected simple random sampling because this provides an unbiased cross selection of the population. The researcher has drawn sample of sixty students from a population of eighty students. Names of all the students in two secondary schools were written on separate pieces of paper and these were placed in a container. Sixty pieces containing student names were drawn out one by one. In this way thirty students each for control and experimental groups were selected.

c) Size of the Sample

The total size of the sample of the present experimental study was sixty IX standard students. Thirty students from the experimental group were exposed to the text based tasks and thirty students in control group were not exposed to text based tasks, but traditional method of teaching was used in this group. One secondary school is a Government run school and the other is a private school.

Administration of Tools and Data Collection
a) **Administration of Pre-test**

The investigator decided to carry out the present experimental study in two secondary schools of North Bangalore District. With the prior permission of Head master/mistress of the both schools and English teachers, administration of pre-test date was done on 13th June, 2018. Time allotted for pre-test is 80 minutes.

The investigator herself administered research tool to two school IX standard students as per the time table given in the above mentioned table. Pre-test was administered to know the existing level of students in oral reading fluency in English. The researcher considered the following points during the administration of a tool

General instructions for all the subjects selected for the experimental study given in tool. The detailed instructions for this tool were given clearly before the paragraphs. The stop watch was used to avoid the uneven time consumption by the subjects in completion of the test. The tool was administered to the subjects without the prior information about the particular lesson. The investigator taken care of the seating arrangements of students during test to avoid malpractices.

The investigator spent nearly forty-five minutes to orient the students with respect to details such as instructions and procedure of oral reading. After giving instructions to the subjects of the experimental study a tool on fluency was administered. The details of the tool on fluency administered in the pre-test is given in Table 1.

Procedure of Administration of Fluency Tool
Assessing the Existing Level of Fluency of 9th Standard Students

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Investigator selected a paragraphs consisting of 166 words from the lesson prescribed for them which was selected to test the existing level of fluency among IX standard students. The investigator gave the tasks namely paragraph reading and correct words per minute, to assess the existing level of fluency of second language learners.

Precautions in the Administration of Fluency Tool
- Separate copy of the paragraph for each student was given.
- Scoring was done with the help of a copy of paragraph with appropriate markings to make it easier to count the number of words read per minute by the student. A stop watch was used to ensure the reading was stopped after a minute.

Scoring
- Count the total number of words read in one minute.
- Subtract the number of errors such as misidentification, omission, hesitation, word substitution, reversal etc.
- Number remaining is the words read correctly per minute.

b) Intervention

Once it was ascertained from Pre-test scores, that both control and experimental groups have score distribution that are significantly not different from one another, intervention classes were conducted for both the groups for about 8 weeks during July-August 2018. Six lessons listed in Table 3, from Class IX English text book prescribed by Government of Karnataka were used to teach both the groups.

Table 3: Titles of the Lessons Selected from IX Standard English Textbook for Research intervention

Sl. No.	Title of the English Prose Lessons
1.	My Beginnings
2.	Whatever We Do
3.	Justice Above Self
4.	The Noble Bishop
5.	The Will of Sacrifice
6.	To My Countrymen

Details of the Conventional Teaching Conducted for the Control Group

Traditional Method of teaching was used by the investigator in the control group. Based on the discussion with English teachers of different schools the investigator prepared plan for six English lessons of IX standard. The traditional method of teaching was used by the investigator in the control group for a period of thirty-eight days during July – August, 2018. In this method there

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is no scope for the text based paragraphs oral reading to be given to the students and importance was given to content explanation. The investigator completed the six English lessons by using the steps followed by the regular teachers to complete the lessons.

Details of the Intervention Conducted for the Experimental Group

The investigator facilitated oral reading fluency in English skills among IX standard students in Experimental group through text based paragraphs. Same six lessons used in the conventional teaching of Control Group were also used here to carry out intervention during July – August 2018. In a class of 40 minutes, 10 minutes was used for oral reading of the paragraph and its explanation and remaining 30 minutes for oral reading practice of students.

c) Post-test

After the intervention the investigator administered post-test to both experimental and control group students during August, 2018. Post-test was conducted to know the effectiveness of text based paragraphs oral reading fluency in English as well as to assess its impact relative to conventional teaching

Scoring of the Post-test

The investigator considered the below mentioned guidelines while calculating scores of students in Post-test.

1. Scoring keys for tool was prepared by the investigator.
2. The scoring keys used in scoring of task sheets given in the test manuals.
3. The obtained scores from tool was tabulated separately.
4. Raw Scores obtained from the tool administered to both groups.
5. Significance of various hypotheses was tested by using t-test.

Hypothesis Tested
1. Hypothesis Number 1 listed in previous section

Table 4: Pre-test Fluency scores comparison between Control and Experimental Group

Sl No.	Sub Components of Fluency	Pre-Test mean scores				t-value	p-value	Significant (S) / Not Significant (NS)
		Control Group		Experimental Group				
		Mean	*Standard Deviation*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*			
1	Automaticity	59.50	29.36	48.47	26.22	1.54	0.13	NS
2	Accuracy	48.93	26.99	38.30	24.09	1.61	0.11	NS
3	**Average**	54.22	28.01	43.38	25.00	1.58	0.12	NS

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Table 4 presents comparison of pre-test mean scores between control and experimental groups. It is evident that there is no significant difference (at 0.05 level) between the pre-test scores of control and experimental groups in subcomponents of Fluency. This indicates that the level of fluency is nearly same for both the experimental and control groups in pre-test.

2. Hypothesis Number 2 listed in previous section

Table 5: Post-test scores of Control group and experimental on Fluency

Sl No.	Sub Components of Fluency	Post-Test mean scores				t-value	p-value	Significant (S) / Not Significant (NS)
		Control Group		Experimental Group				
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation			
1	Automaticity	66.83	28.95	82.27	21.95	-2.33	0.02	S
2	Accuracy	61.03	27.43	71.53	24.37	-1.57	0.12	NS
3	**Average**	63.93	28.15	76.90	22.78	-1.96	0.05	S

Table 5 indicates that there is significant increase in automaticity score for experimental group in post-test compared to control group. There is increase in accuracy for experimental group compared to control group which is not as significant increase as that obtained for automaticity. There is significant increase in average score as well. This implies that task based teaching has an overall significant impact in the scores of experimental group students as compared to control group students who were subjected to conventional teaching only.

3. Hypothesis Number 3 listed previously

Table 6: Pre and Post-Test scores of Control Group students in Fluency

Sl No.	Sub Components of Fluency	Control Group				t-value	p-value	Significant (S) / Not Significant (NS)
		Pre-Test		Post-Test				
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation			
1	Automaticity	59.50	29.36	66.83	28.95	-0.97	0.33	NS
2	Accuracy	48.93	26.99	61.03	27.43	-1.72	0.09	NS
3	**Average**	54.22	28.01	63.93	28.15	-1.34	0.19	NS

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Table 6 compares pre and post-test scores of control group. When compared the pre test scores with post test scores, there is no significant improvement in the performance in terms automaticity, accuracy as well as average score. Improvements in post-test mean score of accuracy compared to pre-test mean score for the control group is more significant compared to that of automaticity.

4. Hypothesis Number 4 listed previously

Table 7: Pre and Post-Test scores of Experimental Group students in Fluency

Sl No.	Sub Components of Fluency	Experimental Group				t-value	p-value	Significant (S) / Not Significant (NS)
		Pre-Test		Post-Test				
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation			
1	Automaticity	48.47	26.22	82.27	21.95	-5.41	0.00	S
2	Accuracy	38.30	24.09	71.53	24.37	-5.31	0.00	S
3	**Average**	43.38	25.00	76.90	22.78	-5.43	0.00	S

Table 7 presents comparison of performance in pre-test and post-test mean scores of experimental group students with respect to sub components of fluency. There is significant improvement in post-test mean scores of automaticity and accuracy compared to pre-test which is reflected in the average score as well. This improvement is due the practice of text based paragraphs. Reading fluency of experimental group students has significantly improved.

Findings of the Study
1. Pre-test mean scores of Control and Experimental Group scores are not significant at 0.05 level. From the pre-test means scores, we may conclude that Control and Experimental groups are homogeneous with respect to the oral reading fluency in English.

2. Post-test Fluency subcomponents scores for experimental group are higher than those of control group. Overall, there are significant increase in experimental group Fluency scores compared to the control group. Use of text based tasks made the score differences significant between the control and experimental group.

3. Although post-test Fluency scores of control group are higher compared to pre-test Fluency scores, the incremental increase is not significant as can be seen from p-values and t-values. Thus conventional teaching did not have major impact on post-test Fluency scores of Control Group students.

4. Experimental Group students mean score for Fluency post-test scores are significantly higher

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compared to their pre-test scores as can be seen from t-values and p-values. This is a strong statistical evidence that intervention in the form of usage of text based paragraph practice tasks resulted in significant improvements in Fluency scores of experimental group students as the same is not seen for control group students who were subjected to conventional teaching after pre-test.

Educational Implications of the Study

The study reveals that fluency is important component and it is significantly and positively related to reading skills in English of students. Daily practice in oral reading fluency contributes to reading ability of students in English. Lack of regular practice in oral reading fluency affect the reading skills in English among secondary school students. So, it is the need of the hour to give regular oral reading practice in English using the paragraphs of the lessons prescribed for the particular class and this in turn helps to form proper habit in oral reading skills in English among Kannada medium secondary schools students.

Conclusion

From the analysis and interpretation of the data the investigator obtained the above mentioned findings and based on the findings investigator has drawn the following conclusions. Regular oral reading practice of paragraphs given from the text prescribed for the particular class contributes to improvement in oral reading fluency in reading skills in English among secondary school students and this in reciprocate helps to facilitate reading skills in English among regional medium students as well as secondary school students.

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