# ENHANCING READING FLUENCY AND COMPREHENSION IN ORAL READING THROUGH READING THEATRE

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**Abstract**

A Comprehension is the key of success reading. Researchers have shown that reading comprehension is improved when fluency increased. In order to construct the meaning of the text, instructional strategy which helps English language learners decode word until they fluently read and understand must be applied. This paper focuses on discussing the effects of using Readers Theatre as strategy to enhance English language learners' fluency and comprehension in oral reading. It also provides the overview of the use of repeated reading; Readers Theater in particular, the role of fluency and comprehension in reading and the correlation about how fluency influences reading comprehension.

**Keywords**: Reader's Theatre (RT), Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension.

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is a process where readers strive to understand and respond to ideas that are expressed in written text (Rachmatia, 2016). The capability to master reading skill is essentially needed to ensure future success. People who are good in reading are also indicated to have good linguistic intelligence which can be a basic provision for their future (Aminatun, Ngadiso, and Marmanto, 2018). Students or learners need to develop strong reading skill from early age, unless they will find difficulties in struggling for their education or career, it also makes them feel uncomfortable to enjoy reading.

In reading, especially in oral reading, the learners' fluency is like a mirror for other skills' proficiency. Fluency is also a bridge to build comprehension. In fact, reading fluency is defined as involving accurate prosody and expression revealing the text in an appropriate rate (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005). Moreover, reading comprehension is perceived as a simultaneously extracting and building contextual and interactive meaning process (Ayu, 2019). Reading comprehension is actually thinking about the text and making meaning out of it.

Fluency and comprehension in reading are related one and each other. In order for students to learn to construct meaning from text, it is necessary for teachers to apply instructional strategies that will help readers transition from simple decoding of words to fluent word identification. Moreover, fluent readers are able to identify words automatically and accurately, they are able to focus most of their attention on other components of reading, particularly comprehension (Ayu, Diem & Vianty, 2017)

Repeated reading has been identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as a widely used instructional approach for building reading fluency. Repeated readings emphasizes practice as a way of working on all of the areas of reading fluency— accuracy, rate, and prosody—and is one of the most-studied methods for increasing reading fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000). The repeated reading method, which is used with Readers Theatre, is one research based strategy that has been shown to build learner's fluency especially for early age learners. Hence, rereading the same passage repeatedly has been found to have a positive impact on both fluency and comprehension (Dowhower, 1989; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Samuels, 1997).

Reader's Theater is a form of repeated readings. The scripts are adapted from a piece of prose or poetry so they are suitable for oral reading (Hertzberg, 2000). Reader's Theater is a student performance of literary work in which the text is read expressively, but not fully staged or acted out (Reutzel & Cooter, 2011). In line with Vasinda & McLeod (2011) Reader's theater is a voice-only performance, where it is the reader's job to make the

characters come to life. Not only are students reading the text with expression, they essentially understand the meaning of the text when they understand where to pause and emphasize certain pieces of the text. There can be a deeper motivation when reading scripts because students have to essentially become a character, which creates a need for students to comprehend the text. Moreover Rasinski (2010) states that Reader's Theatre is "… an authentic, entertaining and educationally powerful way to read and communicate meaning … Reader's Theatre yields improvements in … word recognition, fluency and comprehension."

To summarize, reading comprehension is defined as  the act or result of applying comprehension processes to obtain the meaning of a communication process  (Rasinski, 2010). In addition, the comprehension level is categorized as: (a) getting the literal meaning, (b) getting the interpretive or suggested meaning in reading, and (c) evaluating what is read in a critical way (Harris & Hodges in Black, 2016). Furthermore, the reading fluency is a skill of word-recognition to help readers reveal the value or real meaning of the text (Rasinski, 2010). Reading theatre as a part of re-repeating reading is a way of rereading passage, text, or script until the level of fluency is reached.  (Black, 2016)

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study carried out a theoretical research, defined as a collection of related statements or propositions that attempt to describe, explain, or predict a particular aspect of experience. (Thyer, 2010).  Theory based research means that the writers build predictions based on theoretical conceptualization.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Prosody or expressive reading is a transitional bridge to link fluency to comprehension since to read with appropriate expressions, the readers have to understand the meaning of the passage and the prosody reflects and adds those meaning (Rowen, Biggs, Watkins & Rasinski ,2015). Furthermore, as stated by Miller & Schwanenflugel in Rachmatia (2016), prosody in reading fluency encompasses many oral reading skills, such as expression, intonation, suprasegmental ability and voice pitch. Expert Dowhower"s (1991) states that foundational work on reading prosody consists of  six indicators of prosodic reading:
1. There is a presence or lack of pausal intrusions with valid duration.
2. There is a minimum of seven words per phrase.
3. There is an appropriateness to phrasing (suprasegmental ability).
4. There is a lengthening of final words in phrases.
5. There are terminal intonation contours (pitch changes at punctuation).
6. There is a maximum of one stressed word for every five words read.

### *Reading key point: Reading comprehension*

According to Tarchi (2017), reading comprehension is a process of reading in constructing the meaning or understanding of a text or passage.  Reading comprehension is considered to occur at four levels of complexity. These levels are often referred to literal level, inferential level, critical level and creative level In reading comprehension process, there are some stages that should be known such as literal, inferential, critical, and creative (Duchovičová, Kozárová, Kurajda, Bajrami, & Baghana, 2019)

1. Literal level
In this level, the readers has access to the surface details of the text, and can recall details which have been directly related. The skills in this level are identification and remembering simple or detailed information.

2. Interpretative level
In this level, the students go beyond what it is said and read for deeper meaning. They process their ideas based on what is not stated, but implied, by author, including points the author intended the reader to deduce.

3. Critical level
At the critical level the reader assesses the good sense of what she/he reading, its clarity, accuracy, and any apparent exaggeration of bias. To read critically is to make judgment about how a text is argued.

4. Creative level
In creative reading, the readers try to come up with the new or alternative solutions to those presented by the writer. Creative reading uses divergent thinking skills to go beyond the literal comprehension, interpretative and critical reading.

Similarly, Duncan, et.al., (2016) mentions that at the lowest stage, students are only able to interpret the reading explicitly. Furthermore, for the second stage, the readers can reveal and try to understand the implicitly

stated meaning of a text (Kocaarslan, 2016). The next stage of comprehension is critical comprehension where the readers are required to have the ability to evaluate text material. Critical comprehension is basically similar with evaluative comprehension (Bogan, King-Mckenzie, & Bantwini, 2012). While the highest stage of comprehension is the stage when the readers are required to use their imagination to get new perspective exceed from what served by writer (Yavuz Mumcu & Aktürk, 2017)

### *Instructional Plan for Readers Theater*

Based on the instructional model for 30-minute daily sessions in Readers Theatre, there are four main steps in applying Readers Theater namely; choosing the text, preparing the scripts, organizing repertory groups and performing (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998) Choosing the text means that the students look for books or story of varying difficulty level, so that each child could meet with text within his or her instructional range. It is also important to look for a body of work or a series with interesting characters who meet pondering dilemmas to ensure that children would come to know the characters well and thoroughly.  Preparing the script is defined as a step on which students prepare for the brief narration and scripts. The next step is where the students divided into groups called repertory groups, each of the member has role and own script. They are rehearsal repeatedly before having performance.

There is also brief instructional plan for Readers Theater by Martinez et al. (1998)

Figure 1. A 5-day instructional plan for Readers Theater

Pre Day 1 Teacher chooses stories and develops scripts for each text.
Day 1      • Teacher models fluency by reading aloud the stories on which the week's scripts are based.
         • Teacher offers a brief minilesson that presents explicit explanation of some aspect of fluency.
         • The teacher and students discuss each of the three stories.
         • Students begin to practice reading personal copies of scripts, reading all the parts independently.
         • Teacher encourages students to take these unmarked scripts home for further practice.
Day 2      • Students gather in repertory groups. Teacher provides scripts for each group with specific parts highlighted.
         • Students read the script, taking a different part with each reading.
         • Teacher circulates among the three repertory groups, coaching and providing feedback.
Day 3      • Procedures are the same as for Day 2.
         • During the final 5 minutes, students within each repertory group negotiate and assign roles for Day 5's performance.
         • Teacher encourages children to pay special attention to their newly assigned performance role when practicing at home.
Day 4      • Students read and reread the parts to which they are assigned within their repertory groups.
         • During the final 10 minutes, students make character labels and discuss where each will stand during the performance.
Day 5      • Repertory groups "perform," reading before an audience

Similarly, Marz et al. (2013) had been developed and published the program and scripts were read daily during the first 30 minutes of the two-hour literacy block. The program was administered to provides for repeatedly reading each new script which mainly divided into 5 days for a weekly cycle.
• Day 1 - Shared Reading: In a whole class setting the story was introduced.  Background knowledge was activated and developed during this initial reading. The teacher modeled expressive reading in order to demonstrate what accuracy, automaticity, and prosody should sound like. Next, the shared reading approach was used where students followed along in their text as the teacher read the story out loud to model automaticity and prosody.
• Day 2 - Echo Reading: Still utilizing a whole class setting the teacher read a portion of the selected text aloud and then the students read the same section back to the teacher chorally
• Day 3 - Paired/Partner Reading: At this point in the lesson students were divided into pairs and took turns reading alternating sections of the script until the entire text was read.  Afterwards, students reread the text reading the opposite sections that were read during the first reading. The partners were encouraged to provide positive feedback to one another regarding the reader's fluency efforts.

• Day 4 - Choral/Expressive Reading: Choral reading provided practice and motivation for another reading as students read together as a class and then took on their selected parts.

• Day 5 - Performance:  After quickly reading through the selection one final time in their assigned parts and having a final discussion regarding aspects of the performance, the script was performed before another third grade class.

## CONCLUSION

Repeated readings emphasizes practice as a way of working on all of the areas of reading fluency—accuracy, rate, and prosody—and is one of the most-studied methods for increasing reading fluency (Kuhn & Stahl 2000). After certain period of time, Readers Theater must help student to have a good word accuracy as LaBerge and Samuels (1974) stated that there should be as little mental effort as possible expended on decoding so that readers are able to use their finite cognitive resources for construction meaning.  The capability of decoding words into meaningful context helps students deepen understanding and comprehension. While students' prosody which related to the rhythm, intonation and expression are improved as Dowhower (1991) state that a t the end of the six weeks of Readers Theater implementation, students read in expressive, rhythmic, and melodic patterns. Prosody is like a mirror of students' fluency. By listening to models of fluent reading, children were able to hear how the reader's voice made text make sense (Martinez et al., 1998). Since the ultimate goal of this fluency intervention was to increase students understanding of text the post measure on comprehension also revealed encouraging results.

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