Action Research

The Read-Aloud Method as an Effective Teaching Tool: Mixed-Methods Action Research

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The purpose of this exploratory action research is to examine whether the Read-Aloud Method is beneficial for improving underperforming students' reading fluency and automaticity, which in turn may help improve their reading comprehension. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to assess the method's potential benefits. Results indicate that the Read-Aloud Method not only contributed to improved fluency features but also helped increase student confidence in learning Korean.

Keywords: *Read-Aloud, Reading Fluency, Student Confidence, Student Motivation*

BACKGROUND

Motivation for this Action Research

Our team sought to address the challenge of helping students reduce attrition rates and support DLIFLC's "80/40/10" goal for Basic Course students. That is, 80% of students in each class should earn a 2/2/1+ in overall production on the DLPT/OPI, 40% should earn a 2+/2+/1+, and 10% should earn 3/3/1+. We aimed to help higher-proficiency students achieve a reading and listening proficiency level of 2+ or higher, while concurrently assisting struggling students to meet level 2 in both areas as well as achieving level 1+ in the OPI. As a team, we tried various methods to help

struggling students and found the Read-Aloud Method to be beneficial for increasing their reading fluency and confidence.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies indicate the benefits of the Read-Aloud method. For instance, it has been found that this method enhances vocabulary knowledge, word recognition (Gibson, 2008; Lane & Wright, 2007; Stroh, 2012), automaticity (i.e., immediate word recall), and reading fluency (Chol & Lewis, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2010; Makebo et al., 2022; Rasinski, 2012; Taguchi & Iwasaki, 2008; Yildirim & Rasinski, 2014). Baker et al. (2020) found that the Read-Aloud approach helped students improve their comprehension ability for future reading passages. Researchers also found that the Read-Aloud practice enhances the confidence of foreign language learners (Lam, 2012).

Despite its positive effects and benefits, this method is not widely used in classrooms. Lane and Wright (2007) point out that one frequently cited reason for the limited application of the Read-Aloud method in real classrooms is a lack of time. The method necessitates considerable time for practice, making it challenging to implement as a standard instructional tool in an ordinary classroom setting. Another difficulty with the Read-Aloud method is that few researchers have developed and tested specific techniques for reading aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007). Similarly, teachers often lack knowledge about this teaching method, leaving them with vague and incomplete notions that limit their ability to foster the development of reading fluency in students (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

The most positive results for Read-Aloud have typically found that students benefit most from this method when it is tailored to their needs (Gibson, 2008). The current exploratory action research project customized classroom time, textbooks, and lesson content to implement this method, hoping that DLIFLC instructors in any language will consider adopting similar approaches in their classrooms.

Research Questions

This action research case study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Does the Read-Aloud method improve reading fluency with Korean texts?

2. What is the student's perception of the Read-Aloud method for supporting them in Korean language learning/development?

ACTION PLAN

Context

This action research case study was conducted within a period of six weeks with one student. At the beginning of the case study, the student read and spoke very slowly and had inaccurate pronunciation; she reported that a lack of confidence in her pronunciation caused her to minimize participation in classroom activities. After considering several learning methods such as shadow reading, paired reading, and scaffolded reading, we decided to utilize the Read-Aloud method to help her improve her reading fluency and regain confidence.

The following seven reading fluency features were selected from previous studies as fluency measures and were marked in the transcript during the read-aloud session (see Appendix) and then counted. The reason for counting these measures was to obtain a general idea of the degree to which reading aloud could have contributed to the student's improved reading fluency and therefore improved comprehension of Korean texts. For two of the measurements (i.e., reading speed and self-correction), higher numbers demonstrate student improvement; for the remaining measures (e.g., number of pauses, etc.), lower numbers indicate student improvement.

- Reading speed (higher number is better)
- Self-correction (higher number is better)
- Pause which is complete silence (lower number is better)
- Abrupt halts in Utterance (lower number is better)
- Rising intonation (lower number is better)
- Errors, both lexical and grammatical (lower number is better)

Actions Taken

The following actions were taken to prepare the student, have the student engage in Read-Aloud, and then assess potential benefits.

1. *Student Training*. The student was trained on potential benefits, procedures, and homework assignments. For homework, the "Read and Record Homework" designed for this case study replaced part of the student's typical daily homework.

2. *Read-Aloud Practice*. The student read aloud a text (selected from the following day's reading materials in the textbook) in the presence of the researchers, followed by a feedback session (total time: 20–25 mins). The researchers noted the student's performance on the seven fluency features on the transcript (see Appendix). In total, the student recorded a read-aloud of 10 texts for this step.

3. *Correction and Explanation*. The researchers corrected the student's errors and gave explanations (e.g., where to pause, how sentence intonation works, grammar features). This

step aimed to help the student understand the context and structure of the sentences while reading, rather than merely imitating sounds.

4. *Shadow Reading*. The researchers guided the student through a shadow reading 2–3 times— meaning the researcher read a portion of the text aloud and asked the student to re-read that portion but with more accurate pronunciation and phrasing.

5. *Recording of New Passage*. The student pre-recorded a different text from the next day's reading materials from the textbook without any prior practice (1st recording). In total, the student recorded herself reading aloud for 10 new texts in this step.

6. *Homework for Reinforcement*. Homework was assigned that required the student to read aloud the same text seven times, and then record herself. This assessed the degree of improvement from the 1st recording (without practice) to the 2nd recording (with practice).

7. *Student Feedback Collected.* Student feedback was collected through an unstructured interview at the conclusion of the study. An open-ended question was asked without probing questions: "How was the Read-Aloud practice for you?" The student shared her thoughts freely based on her experience.

8. *Data Analysis.* After all the information was collected, the researchers analyzed the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of the Read-Aloud Method on Fluency Features

Coded fluency features were analyzed to answer Research Question #1: Does the Read-Aloud method improve reading fluency with Korean texts?

Table 1 shows the ranges and averages for each measured variable across two readings. The reading speed was converted by dividing the audio length by the number of syllables. Therefore, "Syllables per Minute" denotes the number of syllables uttered per minute during speech for two different readings. The numbers in the Minimum, Maximum, and Mean columns indicate the average of the results from 10 texts for each feature.

As can be seen in Table 1, many features demonstrated considerable improvement; for example, the number of syllables per minute increased (*M*=117.9 to *M*=156.7), pauses decreased (*M*=5.1 to *M*=0.9), abrupt halts decreased (*M*=11.3 to *M*=7.4), and the number of errors decreased (*M*=8.2 to *M*=6.5). The students' self-corrections (*M*=7.1 to *M*=8.0) and rising intonations (*M*=13.7 to *M*=10.1) also improved, but to a lesser degree. Thus, the student demonstrated improvement in all areas studied.

Table 1

Counts of Seven Coding Features for 1st and 2nd Recordings

Feature	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Higher Number is Better			
Number of Syllables per Minute (1st)	107.3	148.4	117.9
Number of Syllables per Minute (2nd)	142.2	185.9	156.7
Self-Corrections per Minute (1st)	3.3	10.5	7.1
Self-Corrections per Minute (2nd)	5.0	14.1	8.0
Lower Number is Better			
Pauses per Minute (1st)	2.1	9.5	5.1
Pauses per Minute (2nd)	0	1.5	0.9
Abrupt Halts per Minute (1st)	5.2	18.4	11.3
Abrupt Halts per Minute (2nd)	2.8	15.9	7.4
Rising Intonations per Minute (1st)	10.9	16.6	13.7
Rising Intonations per Minute (2nd)	2.8	24.1	10.1
Errors per Minute (1st)	3.8	11.0	8.2
Errors per Minute (2nd)	3.2	16.5	6.5

Student Feedback Regarding the Effectiveness of the Read-Aloud Method

Below we report the findings for Research Question #2: What is the student's perception of the Read-aloud method for supporting them in Korean language learning/development?

The student reported her perception of the Read-Aloud method itself and also commented on its perceived benefits for her. About the method, she viewed it as a multi-step process that required commitment and regular practice and support. For this reason, the student noted that time management was both a key and a challenging factor in this project, since students must consistently allocate time for practice outside of class. As researchers, we note that some regular instructional hours and Special Assistance hours can be allocated to Read-Aloud practice, or it can also be assigned as Homework. Using class or homework time would reduce the student burden and increase potential positive impacts.

In terms of benefits, the participant perceived the Read-Aloud method as helping her overall Korean language skills improve, particularly in her speaking and reading, including correct and fluent pronunciation and sentence parsing. This is because during the reading practice with the student, the researcher explained where to break down sentences, and these breakdown points often overlapped with natural pause points. In other words, understanding where to pause naturally facilitated her understanding of the sentence structures, which appears to have helped her comprehension. The student also noted that the Read-Aloud method boosted her

confidence, and she felt more prepared for class. In fact, the student ultimately recommended this method to her peers.

The following section will explain specifics about conducting the Read-Aloud method.

Suggestions for Recording

My team practiced the Read-aloud method with our students in several different ways and found that subtle differences in steps can lead to significant differences in results. In this section, we would like to share the most effective Read-Aloud practice method my team implemented.

To accomplish the desired outcomes, we propose detailed steps that include the number of recordings, the time intervals between the first and second recordings, and the optimal timeframe.

1. *Initial Recording*. First, the student(s) should do the initial recording without any prior practice. By recording the reading material without prior practice, teachers can pinpoint the learner's exact level and the areas that need improvement. This approach allows for a clear demonstration of the learner's improvement during the second recording. The reading passage should be selected from the following day's reading materials in the textbook.

2. *Teacher Feedback & Student Practice with Teacher*. In this step, the student(s) reads the text aloud, with *teacher intervention being crucial*. This is because repeatedly practicing any errors yields no productive results. In our team, Step 2 was conducted during the 7th hour, when Special Assistance (SA) sessions were scheduled.

   a. The teacher should first demonstrate proper pronunciation, intonation, and pauses while explaining sentence breakdown points, based on grammar features.

   b. Then, the teacher and student engage in shadow reading practice a few times.

3. *Student Practice Alone*. The student practices reading the passage aloud independently at home, at least seven times.

4. *Second Recording*. The student completes a second recording at the end of the independent practice in Step 3. The following day, while reviewing the second recording, the teacher can provide feedback to address areas where the student continues to struggle. Based on our experiences, better results are achieved when there is a one-day gap between the first and second recordings.

5. Repeat Steps 1–4 for the new passage.

To briefly wrap up, the Read-Aloud approach begins with practicing the next reading materials with the teacher about two days in advance, followed by the student practicing independently the day before class, and then completing the second recording. Figure 1 illustrates a recommended timeline for recordings.

Figure 1
Suggested Timeline for Recording
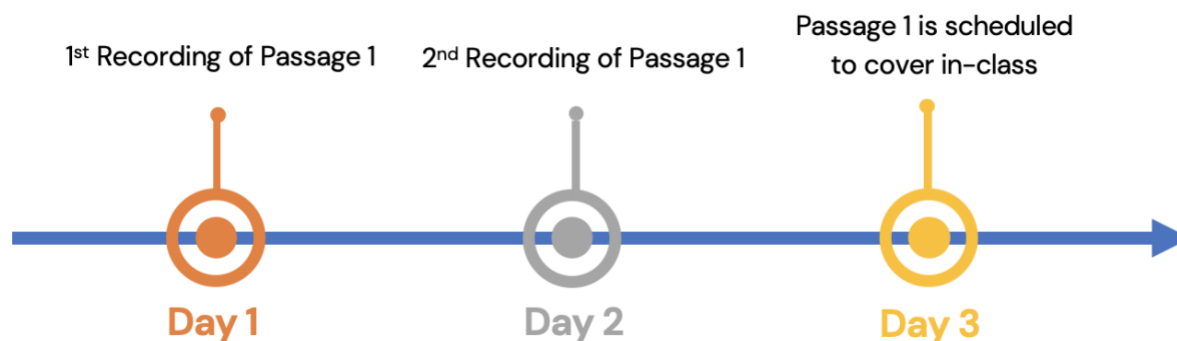
Limitations

While the student's reading fluency improved throughout this case study, it must also be noted that the reading skills accumulated from the earlier units might have influenced the reading as the texts progressed to the next unit. Also, this action research did not look at the difficulty of the texts the student read aloud, and these factors can impact reading speed and fluency. Future projects could take this factor into consideration in the action research design.

CONCLUSION

In a general language education setting, particularly in the DLIFLC context, finding ways to help underperforming students improve in a short period of time is a major concern for all teachers. The Read-Aloud method investigated in the current case study was initiated in response to these demands, and its potential benefits have been shown. The student improved her reading fluency, as she read texts faster with fewer pauses and abrupt halts after having practiced the Read-Aloud method. The interview with the student showed that this method boosted her confidence, as found in previous research (Lam, 2012). Given the importance of reading fluency elements accumulating over time, it is believed that the cumulative effect of such a practice ultimately aids in enhancing overall reading comprehension.

The process of reading consists of many skills, ranging from vocabulary knowledge to automatic/fast word recognition and an understanding of how grammar/sentence structure impacts intonation and pausing. The Read-Aloud method seeks to help students build these skills in order to gain reading fluency. Increased fluency leads to increased comprehension. This case study has shown how Reading-Aloud can benefit a student, similar to previous research in these areas (Baker et al. 2020; Chol & Lewis, 2018; Gibson, 2008; Kuhn et al., 2010; Lane & Wright, 2007; Makebo et al., 2022; Rasinski, 2012; Stroh, 2012; Taguchi & Iwasaki, 2008; Yildirim & Rasinski, 2014). It is important to note that the Read-Aloud method does not ask students to read out loud and immediately answer comprehension questions. Instead, this approach is used to

help students build their fluency and understanding of grammar structures for meaning so that they can improve their reading comprehension over time with future reading passages.

While this action research presented results from data collected and analyzed over a short period with one student, examining the long-term developmental process using data collected throughout the entire language program (e.g., 64 weeks for the Korean Basic Program) in the future would provide more comprehensive information regarding the benefits of the Read-Aloud method.

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