

INVESTIGATING THE READING FLUENCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Fluency in reading, which is defined as the capacity to read with rapidity, precision and in a proper manner is the most important element of a successful comprehension. The fluent reader reads smoothly and by using the correct phrasing and tonality which allows them to read and comprehend the content efficiently. Students struggling with fluency may have difficulties in decoding, and can read in a slow and fast, or abrasive style that could make reading difficult and decrease motivation to read. As they progress into the middle elementary, the need for fluency is becoming more important due to the increasing academic demands for reading. This article focuses on the three essential elements of fluency - rate as well as accuracy and prosody. The review stresses the importance of evaluating and enhancing these elements with targeted instruction. Even though fluency on its own doesn't guarantee understanding but it does provide a crucial base for understanding. Although it is difficult to assess provocation or expressive reading the test remains an important measure of the development of fluency. Teachers must determine the level of fluency in students with appropriate assessment and apply specific strategies that help develop and sustain fluency throughout grades.

Background of the Study

Fluency is defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. In order to understand what they read, children must be able to read fluently whether they are reading aloud or silently. When reading aloud, fluent readers read in phrases and add intonation appropriately. Their reading is smooth and has expression.

Children who do not read with fluency sound choppy and awkward. Those students may have difficulty with decoding skills or they may just need more practice with speed and smoothness in reading. Fluency is also important for motivation; children who find reading laborious tend not to want read! As readers head into upper elementary grades, fluency becomes increasingly important. The volume of reading required in the upper elementary years escalates dramatically. Students whose reading is slow or labored will have trouble meeting the reading demands of their grade level (Hasbrouck, 2006).

Reading fluency is essential to ensure that our students have sufficient fluency, how fluency should be assessed, and how to best provide fluency practice and support for our students. We'll start by defining fluency level (Hasbrouck, 2006).

While the National Reading Panel's definition of fluency as the ability to read text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and good expression (NICHD, 2000) is widely accepted among fluency researchers, these experts continue to debate the more subtle aspects of fluency (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). However it is defined, this much is certain: Fluency is necessary, but not sufficient*, for understanding the meaning of text. When children read too slowly or haltingly, the text devolves into a broken string of words and/or phrases; it's a struggle just to remember what's been read, much less extract its meaning. So it's important that teachers determine if their students' fluency is at a level appropriate for their grade. If not, how should it be developed? If a student is appropriately fluent for her grade level, how does a teacher help maintain that student's fluency?

And, how does a teacher make these determinations? This process begins with assessments of the component pieces of fluency: prosody, accuracy, and rate (Stecker, Roser & Martinez, 1998).

The exact role of expression and phrasing or prosody in fluency and comprehension has not yet been determined, but it certainly is one element that signifies whether or not a student is truly a fluent reader (Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman & Oranje, 2005). This scale focuses on the level of skill a student demonstrates in phrasing and expression while reading aloud. After listening to an individual student read aloud, the educator rates the student's reading according to the level that best describes the student's overall performance.

Although most researchers consider prosody important, the subjectivity of judging students' prosody makes it a difficult component of fluency to study. Many researchers have focused on the more easily quantifiable components of fluency (rate and accuracy) and, therefore, some basic questions about prosody like what should be expected in second grade versus sixth grade have not been answered. Nevertheless, students' prosody is an extra piece of information for making instructional decisions. When students' speed and accuracy are at appropriate levels, reading with proper phrasing, expression, and intonation should be the next goal.

Rationale of the Study

Reading is one of the important skills that support the students in understanding the knowledge and content. The most of students' knowledge of content in classroom is gained from reading the text. In reading, fluency is one of the skills of importance. This skill determines the level of reading of students. The better a student's fluent; better his/her skill of reading and understanding the text and material. This study will analyze the reading fluency of secondary school students.

Objectives of the Study

Following objectives were developed to conduct this study:

1. To determine the reading fluency of secondary school students.
2. To find the problems associated with reading fluency.
3. To recommend the solutions to tackle the problems related with reading fluency.

Research Questions

According to the context of the study, following research questions were framed:

1. What is the level of reading fluency of secondary school students?
2. What are the problems faced by students in developing reading fluency?
3. How reading fluency can be improved?

Purpose of the study

Reading skill consist of many components i.e. fluency, comprehension and phonological awareness. Each skill is important for the development of reading skill among students. Students' fluency is an important skill that strengthens their reading skill.

It has been observed that in our education system, there is little emphasis on the fluency in reading. The students' actual level of reading in public schools is not studied. The purpose of this study is to identify the reading skill of students with respect to fluency. This study focused on measuring the level of reading fluency of students. This study may be useful for teachers of languages i.e. Urdu and English for developing fluency in reading. This study may be helpful for parents to indicate them the causes of low fluency of their children.

Research Design

This study is action research to solve the actual problems faced by teacher in classroom teaching. The participants were the students of the class 10th and their teachers. For this study, researcher used the test for reading fluency from students and questionnaire for teacher. Data was collected

personally by visiting the school by researcher. Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze and interpret the data.

Participants

This study was conducted in district Chakwal in a government high school. Participants for this study were the students of class 10th.

Instrument development

For this study, researcher developed two instruments i.e. reading test for fluency and open ended questionnaire.

For reading test for fluency, researcher took the textbook of the students from their course and selected few paragraphs for the test. Researcher developed the test and indicated the numbers of words in each line of the paragraph with using cumulative counting for proceeding lines.

Researcher developed the 10 open ended questions based questionnaire for teachers.

Data Collection

For this study, after developing the research instruments, researcher personally visited the school and selects the 10th class. Researcher conducted the reading test of fluency from students. Researcher guided these students to complete the test. This test was based on reading with using stop watch to give them a specific time for reading. During reading, researcher observed their level of fluency based on certain indicators.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Data was analyzed by using SPSS.

Finding and Conclusions

These were done based on data analysis and interpretation.

Discussion with teachers related to the Problem

Fluency of students is very important for the effective reading of text and materials. Teachers have viewed that in actual classrooms, there is little focused on fluency. Most of the teachers emphasized on word recognition. Speed of reading is important. But teachers used little strategies to impart fluency.

Teachers viewed that some students have low speed in reading, some students paused on some words, some students feel difficulty in reading certain words, and some students could not read the words and some students take time in recognizing the words.

Teachers stated that they used the repetition of words, drill and practice of difficult words, reading again and again of words, recognizing the words difficult by students and then practice of these words, repetition of paragraphs, home based reading of words assignments to impart the reading fluency among students.

Few teachers stated that they practice the vocabulary words on daily basis. Other teachers expressed that they used single word daily basis to learn and to pronounce.

Results

1. Although teachers acknowledged the significance of fluency in reading in order to comprehend books and other materials but it was a neglected subject in the classroom. Teachers reported that the majority of instruction was primarily centered around the recognition of words and paid little attention to the growth of the ability to read.
2. Teachers noticed a variety of challenges in students with regards to their reading proficiency. They noted the slow speed of reading, pauses while reading, difficulty in understanding specific words or words, and in certain instances, inability to read or

understand phrases accurately. These issues were deemed to be to be common in a large number of students.

3. In order to address the issues Teachers reported using a variety of methods. Most commonly employed strategies were repetition of terms, drill and the practice of challenging vocabulary, frequent re-reading of texts and the assignment of homework-based reading assignments. Teachers stressed the importance of the identification of words that students had difficulty with in the first place, then directing their upon these particular terms or phrases.
4. There were teachers who shared how they had incorporated the practice of vocabulary every day and some even mentioned using an "word of the day" strategy to improve the speaking skills as well as vocabulary. However, general data showed a deficiency of structured or systematic strategies that specifically target improving literacy proficiency, and highlighting the necessity for more targeted fluency teaching within the school.

As a researcher, reading fluency is an important matter and cannot be ignored. In the view of teachers by discussing with them, the reading fluency is needed to be study. Mostly students have faced the problems of reading fluency. Teachers have little knowledge of how to developing reading fluency. Teachers most emphasis in on word recognition instead of fluency. The findings and conclusions of this study may be supportive and indicator for teachers to show the actual picture of the reading fluency. As researcher, this study may be supportive for teachers in developing the reading fluency among students.

Recommendations

These are four simple suggestions which are a good match with the results of four:

- 1. Prioritize Fluency in Reading Instruction**

Change the focus of your classroom away from word recognition and practice structured fluency-building exercises to improve speed of reading as well as accuracy and comprehension.

- 2. Implement Regular Fluency Assessments**

Utilize diagnostic tools to pinpoint those struggling with fluency in reading and create individualized interventions for particular issues like slower speed, pauses as well as word recognition problems.

- 3. Adopt Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies**

Make sure that you use successful methods like repeated exercises in reading, vocabulary, as well as targeted instruction on challenging words in order to increase students ability to read.

- 4. Establish Systematic Fluency Development Programs**

Create and implement daily school-wide fluency practices, including words-of-the-day practice or "word of the day" exercises to ensure that you are consistently improving your the fluency of reading.

References

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