

Reading fluency through reader's theater.



Reading fluency through reader's theater.

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Abstract.

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English is the language of modern science and technology. Most of the information published on the Internet is written in English; that is the reason why all competent professionals must learn this language starting in primary school to be able to read updated information. Accuracy, prosody and automatism are basic elements of the reading skill. These elements are not considered regularly in Ecuadorian classrooms. In this context, the aim of this investigation was to determine the correlation of the "Reader's Theatre" strategy and the development of reading fluency. The target group of this investigation were children between 10 and 12 years old. This study was based on qualitative and quantitative methodology by means of field and quasi-experimental research. An experimental stage in which Reader's Theatre was applied through the use of librettos and assessment rubrics were used with 82 students in a public primary school. A pre and post-reading test were given to the students to measure the effectiveness of the strategy. The findings showed that the use of the Reader's Theatre improves reading fluency.

Keywords: Economy, Financial System, Cooperatives, Stability, Government

Resumen.

El inglés es el idioma oficial de la ciencia y la tecnología. La mayor parte de la información publicada en el internet está escrita en este idioma, por esa razón para ser

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considerado un profesional competente se debe aprender inglés desde los niveles iniciales de formación para desarrollar destrezas que permitan acceder a información actualizada. Con respecto a la destreza lectora, la exactitud, prosodia y el automatismo son elementos básicos que se consideran regularmente en las aulas ecuatorianas. En este contexto, el objetivo de la presente investigación fue determinar la correlación de la estrategia del “Reader’s Theatre” en el desarrollo de la fluidez lectora. La población investigada fue un grupo de niños entre 10 y 12 años de edad con quienes se aplicó una metodología basada en el enfoque cuantitativo y cualitativo con la utilización de trabajo de campo y un diseño cuasi experimental. En la fase de experimento, se empleó la estrategia del “Reader’s Theatre” mediante el uso de libretos y rúbricas aplicadas a 82 estudiantes de una institución primaria pública. Para la medición de la efectividad de la estrategia se utilizó un pre test y un post test. Los resultados demuestran que la estrategia del “Reader’s Theatre” mejora la fluidez lectora.

Palabras Clave: Reader’S Theater, Destreza, Lectura, Fluidez, Inglés.

Introducción.

Nowadays, English is used in several fields all around the world. Business, international information, science, engineering and technology are some areas where English is utilized (Private-NEWS, 2015) [1]. Furthermore, according to the website Internet World Stats, English is the most used language by internet users around the world. [2] The latest technological and scientific information is published in English which is why competent professionals must master this language to have access to updated information. For these reasons, it has been recognized as an important tool to succeed in the modern world and it has become a mandatory language in many educational institutions.

Even though, the importance of English has spread around the world, there are many professionals who are not able to use it in a proficient way. For this reason, it is necessary to reinforce the English teaching methodologies starting at primary school. According to Education First (2016) [3], Ecuador has a low level of English language proficiency compared to other Latin American countries due to the lack of possibilities to use the language in a real environment. The Ministry of Education has increased the number of teaching hours and hired a higher number of educators to improve the English language communicative competence in all of the public education institutions. (Ministerio de Educación, 2014) [4]. However, the students' low English language proficiency is the result of the use of traditional teaching methodologies such as a teacher-centered approach, lack of student interaction in the classroom and teachers' confusion when applying communicative strategies.

Regarding reading habits in Ecuador, 27% of people do not read at all, while people who read do it for only one or two hours per day. Furthermore, 28% survey respondents do not read for

pleasure, but to complete mandatory academic assignments (INEC, 2012) [5]. For this reason, the teaching of reading is extremely important since it enables individuals to seek and receive information from all areas. Besides that, through reading, other language skills are well founded in aspects of vocabulary, syntax, or writing (Nuñez, Gonzalez, & Gonzalez, 2012) [6].

On the other hand, fluent reading is more than reading with great speed. Reading in a natural way involves the use of prosody, accuracy and appropriate decoding. Additionally, it is necessary to consider good pronunciation, accent, pitch, gesticulation, corporal movements, phrasing, word recognition, intonation, rhythm and attention to punctuation marks (Rasinski, 2004) [7]. When applying all the previously described elements, the message of the text is smoothly comprehended. According to Barrios (2015) [8], educators use teaching strategies which are not suitable to the students' level or interests.

In order to improve reading fluency, the "Reader's Theater" (RT) strategy was applied to verify its impact in the development of the reading skills of children aged 10, 11 and 12-year-old. After using this strategy, children made several comments regarding the positive effects of the strategy in their reading skills. The results of the study show that EFL students do have positive experiences in using RT for the improvement of reading fluency.

- It was clearly noticed that "Reader's Theater" made reading an entertaining activity for children while developing their reading fluency. McKay (2008) [9] agrees that RT strategy increases reading comprehension, students' interest in literature, and commitment for reading. Buzzeo (2011) [10] & Vogan (2013) [11] state that RT is a reading activity that has an authentic communicative objective since learners speak, read and listen. Fluency is a key aspect to develop successful readers. It is important to implement RT in EFL classrooms since positive experiences have been reported after using RT when developing communication skills (Patrick, 2008) [12]. Lekwilai (2014), [13] on the other hand, established that RT is a teaching method that improves the development of reading fluency in people's first language (L1), foreign language or second language. Similarly, he asserted that fluidity is the key to the formation of successful and competent readers. Furthermore, RT enhances cooperative work in an enjoyable manner (Tsou, 2011). [14]

Literature review.

A. "Reader's Theater"

Reader's theater (RT), is considered both, a strategy of oral, guided, and repetitive reading; and a method of teaching reading. Haughey (2015) [15] states that "it is an oral presentation of drama, prose, and poetry by two or more readers who first read and become familiar with the text presented in a libretto that includes several characters" (p.3). RT needs to be dramatic and well prepared to convey a message to an audience. In a study done by Liu and Hu (2015)

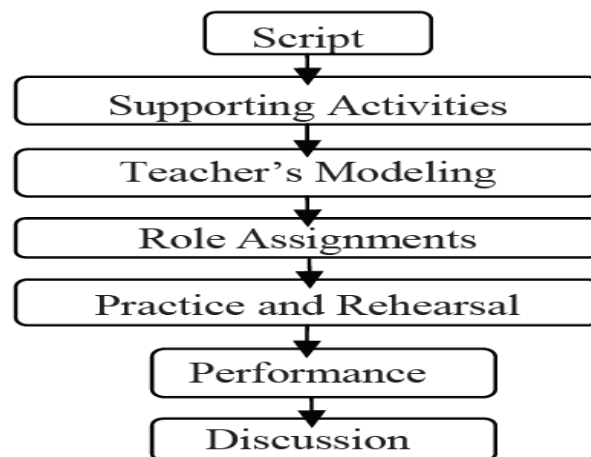
[16], this strategy helped to promote oral reading fluency, depending on the level of proficiency students may have.

Procedure.

Basically "Reader's Theater" meets the following process (Hsu, 2011) [17]:

- a. Libretto. The librettos are the most significant resources. They can be adapted or created.
- b. Supporting activities. The teacher should discuss the content of the text with the whole class. In addition, the teacher can get lexicon and present it in flashcards. The teacher should explain what RT is and which their purposes are.
- c. Educational model. The teacher's guide is vital so that the students listen to the pronunciation of the words. It is suggested to repeat the text as many times as it is necessary for better retention and understanding.
- d. Role assignments. Students can choose the characters by themselves or the teacher can assign the roles in order to have an organized environment.
- e. Practice. Students rehearse their libretto repeatedly in their teams. The teacher can give them advice and continuously check their rehearsal.
- f. Performance. Students go on stage with their librettos and perform in front of an audience.
- g. Discussion. After the performance, the teacher and the students reflect on their performance and provide feedback to correct errors for an upcoming new performance.
- h. Extra activities. Student do exercises to create librettos by themselves to give them the opportunity to practice their writing skill.

Figure No. 1. Process.



Evoked by: Research Group.

A. Reading fluency

Fluency is usually compared with the reading speed and the number of words read per minute (Calero, 2014) [18]. In fact, Readers Theatre can have an enormous impact on students' reading fluency (Young & Rasinski, 2017) [19]. The quantity of words read per minute, makes the reader to be considered more fluid. But, it is also important for the reader to be able to understand the message of the text. Fluency involves reading naturally, confidently, and completely to understand what is read. Cotter (2012) [20] cites Kuhn, Schwanenflugel and Meisinger (2010) who claim that "fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and prosody which help the reader to the construction of meaning" (p.11). Furthermore, important improvement has been reported in prosodic elements which include expression, volume, phrasing, pacing, and smoothness (Clark, Morrison & Wilcox, 2009) [21]

B. Elements.

Reading fluency has three essential elements which are developed together in order to promote reading comprehension: (Ashley, 2016) [22].

- (a) Accuracy. Correct pronunciation.
- (b) Automation or decoding. Recognition of words, speed, conversion of graphemes to morphemes.
- (c) Prosody. Expressive reading, phrasing, intonation, volume, pauses, accent, gestures and body movements.

Method.

This study was carried out during a period of 5 months and aimed at gathering information on an educational public institution located in a rural area of the province of Tungurahua, Ecuador. The investigation had a qualitative and quantitative approach. In addition, the study involved bibliographic and quasi experimental research. Chi-square and T-test were used to verify the hypotheses and establish if significant differences were achieved during the pre and post-test.

A. Participants.

Eighty-two (82) students of 6th, 7th and 8th year of basic education whose ages ranged from 10 to 12 years old participated in the study. They responded a survey and participated in an experimental stage in which the Reader's Theater strategy was applied. The pre-test was given to the total children population. Based on the pretest results, thirty students who

obtained the lowest reading fluency levels were chosen for the experimental stage. Ten students from each level were considered for the experimental stage.

B. Instruments.

- **Survey.** Most of the information was collected through a survey supplied to 82 students. The survey had 14 questions which were validated by a team of expert teachers. The survey validation considered some aspects such as clarity, internal coherence, induction of the response, and appropriate language.
- **Rubric.** A rubric was applied to assess the reading fluency of the pre and posttests in the experimental stage. The "Six dimension fluency rubric" developed by Pinnell y Fountans (2010) [23] included 6 main points: pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, rate, integration, and guiding principles with a rating score from 0 to 3 for every aspect.
- **Librettos:** Five librettos were used. The first "Fire, fire" was applied for the pre-test. The following four librettos named "Grizzly", "Gooseberry Jam", "The lion and the mouse" and "The very hungry caterpillar" were applied like weekly practice. The "Fire, fire" libretto was used for the post- test. (Reader's Theatre librettos, s.f) [24].

C. Experimentation.

- **Stage 1. Pre-test.** 82 students were first evaluated through the use of the libretto "Fire, fire". The results showed that only 30 students, from the whole sample, reached the lowest reading skill level. Therefore, it was decided to work with them in the two further stages.
- **Stage 2. Rehearsal.** The 30 students, in groups of 3, 4 and 5 people, rehearsed the libretto on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays two hours per day. A new libretto, a word card, and the reading fluency components using the "Reader's Theater" strategy was introduced every Monday. On Wednesdays, the students together with the teacher, rehearsed the libretto which was based on guided, repetitive and shared reading aloud activities. The librettos were not memorized, but rehearsed continuously until students obtained good reading fluency. On Fridays, a final rehearsal was carried out for about an hour. At the end of the rehearsal, every group presented their role-play based on the librettos.
- **Stage 3. Post-test.** Students formed groups of 4. The students rehearsed their final libretto based on "Fire, fire" for an hour. Afterwards, they were assessed individually with a fluent reading rubric.

Results.

Chi square statistic analysis was applied with the data obtained. This method was used to verify the relationship between the two variables. 4 out of 14 questions were chosen, 2 from each variable. This information helped to build the bases of calculations of both, the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies.

Question 3. Does your teacher make questions or ask you to make graphic organizers when you read?

Question 4. Does your teacher offer you maximum support to make you read properly?

Question 7. Does your teacher give you reading texts to make you develop speed, correct pronunciation, intonation, accent, body language, and facial expressions to promote reading fluency?

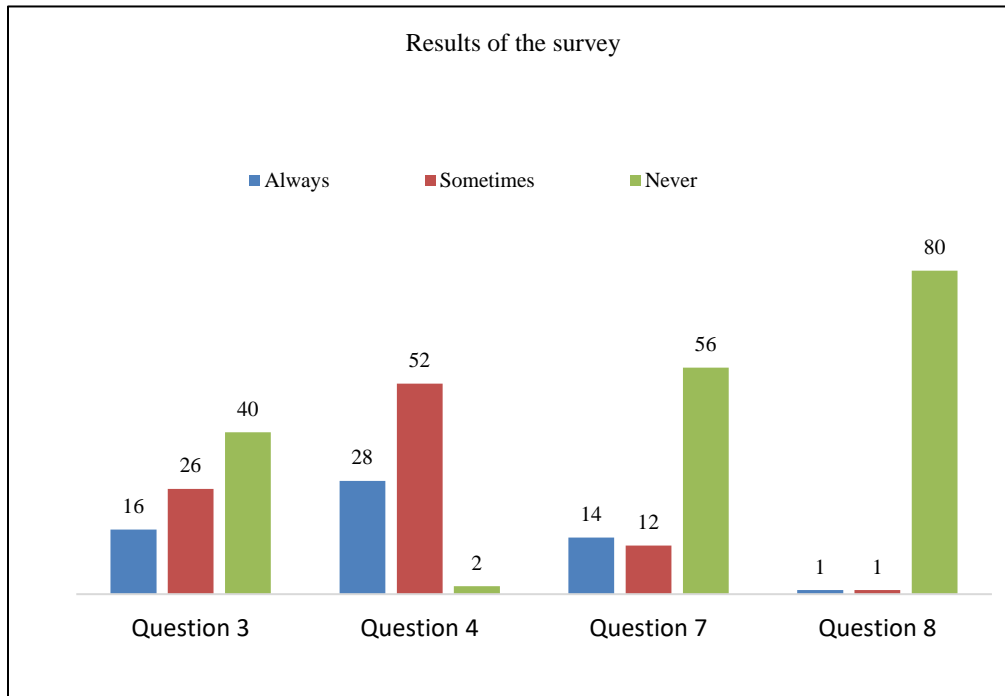
Question 8. How often does your teacher use different modes of reading, such as repetitive reading and choral reading, during an activity of reading fluency?

Table I. Results of the survey.

Option	OF	EF	Values
<i>Always</i>	16	14,75	0,1059322
	28	14,75	11,9025424
	14	14,75	0,03813559
	1	14,75	12,8177966
<i>Sometimes</i>	26	22,75	0,46428571
	52	22,75	37,6071429
	12	22,75	18,9258242
	1	22,75	20,793956
<i>Never</i>	40	44,5	0,45505618
	2	44,5	40,5898876
	56	44,5	2,97191011
	80	44,5	28,3202247
<i>Total sum calculated X2</i>			174,992694

Evoked by: Research Group.

Figure 2. Results of the survey.



Evoked by: Research Group.

Interpretation. Regarding question 3, the educators expressed that they rarely apply reading strategies to learners, who, at the same time, become not very competent readers. In question 4, the participants state that guided reading is not practiced enough; which causes confusion in all the stages of reading practice.

This modality should be used with more frequency in the classroom. In question 7, it is notorious that the development of fluent elements is inadequate.

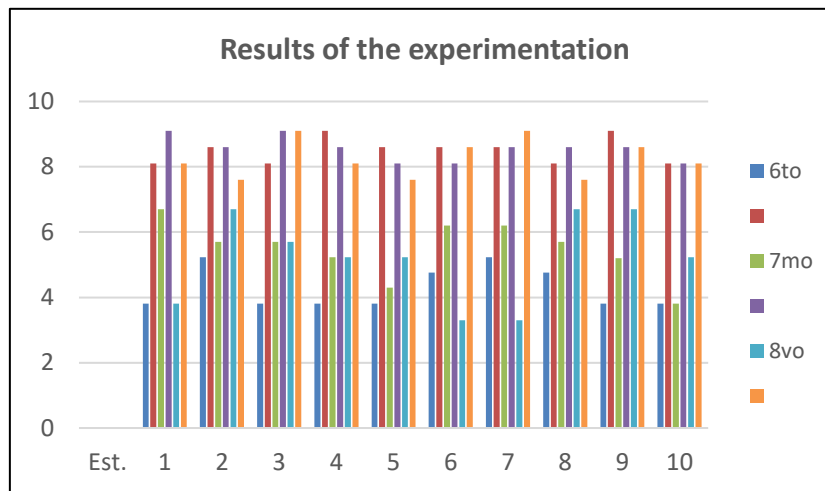
As a result, reading fluency and reading comprehension don't have a good impact in the students' reading development. In relation to question 8, it is obvious that the English teacher has never applied different modalities of reading, such as repetitive, choral, aloud and shared; which are beneficial in the correct fluency development. For the verification of the data of the experiment, the T test was used to contrast the results obtained of the 30 participants involved in the pre and the post tests. This information has been separated by levels.

Table II. Experimentation results .

#	6th		7th		8th	
	<i>pre</i>	<i>post</i>	<i>pre</i>	<i>post</i>	<i>pre</i>	<i>post</i>
1	3,81	8,1	6,7	9,1	3,81	8,1
2	5,23	8,6	5,7	8,6	6,7	7,6
3	3,81	8,1	5,7	9,1	5,7	9,1
4	3,81	9,1	5,23	8,6	5,23	8,1
5	3,81	8,6	4,3	8,1	5,23	7,6
6	4,76	8,6	6,2	8,1	3,3	8,6
7	5,23	8,6	6,2	8,6	3,3	9,1
8	4,76	8,1	5,7	8,6	6,7	7,6
9	3,81	9,1	5,2	8,6	6,7	8,6
10	3,81	8,1	3,81	8,1	5,23	8,1
T VALUE	1,205e-08		1,379e-07		0000136	

Evoked by: Research Group.

Figure 3. Experimentation Results.



Evoked by: Research Group.

Interpretation. T test worked with a level of reliability of 0.05. Then, when compared the scores of the students from 6th, 7th and 8th years in relation to the pre and post-tests, it was obtained values of 1, 205e-08, 1, 379e-07 and 0000136. It means there is a significant difference between the results of the pre and the post tests. Therefore, the students had a broad progress in reading fluency.

Conclusions.

- Ultimately, this research has helped to determine the existing correlation between the “Readers Theater” strategy and the reading fluency of the English language through the statistical calculation Chi square and T test. Despite the benefits of such a reading strategy, in the formation of expressive readers, who are successful in recognizing words and in pronunciation; it is unfortunate to see that such a reading tool is not applied during the English reading instruction; and that teachers, as well as students do not know about it.
- The main components that enclose the reading fluency were highly developed by the 30 children involved in this study. Previous studies establish decoding, prosody, and precision as paramount aspects to make them fluent readers. Today, these elements are developed and recognized while the students read. As a result, readers understand the content of the text.

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