

THE EFFECTS OF THE REPEATED READING
METHOD IN DEVELOPING ORAL READING
FLUENCY OF LOWER-LEVEL SKILLS TO IMPROVE
READING COMPREHENSION AMONG OMANI
GRADE THREE STUDENTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Cycle One Omani students still face remarkable reading difficulties either in reading a text fluently or in understanding it. Most students end the lesson having taken a long time to read the given text, which effects on their understanding to answer the comprehension questions. Therefore, this mixed method study was aimed at investigating the effects of the repeated reading (RR) method in developing oral reading fluency of lower-level skills to improve reading comprehension among grade three Omani students. The study underwent three stages. The first stage was a quantitative phase using a designed and validated online questionnaire, to which 121 teachers responded. This stage aimed to explore the opinion of grade three and four English teachers who applied the RR method in their classroom teaching in Al-Batinah North Governorate. The second stage was a qualitative phase using a semi-structured interview which sought the senior English teacher's opinion in the target school of the difficulties that grade three students encounter in reading. The third stage was applying the repeated reading method, which was used as a method in teaching the reading skill. A total of 14 grade three students from the involved school in Al-Batinah South Governorate participated in this stage of the study. A designed pre-test and post-test were given to the participants to measure the differences in scores in oral reading fluency (rate and accuracy) and reading comprehension before and after applying the RR method. During the repeated reading method, nine selected texts from the grade three curriculum were used with the RR method for two months. The findings revealed that the majority of grade three and four teachers who applied RR in their classroom teaching had a positive attitude towards the method. This is because it was effective in enhancing both the students' level of reading skill in particular, and other related English skills more generally. Moreover, the data showed that RR is an effective, new and useful method, which made the teaching environment more interesting and broke the usual routine of teaching the reading skill. The findings also highlighted that the grade three targeted students faced difficulties in their reading skill. For instance, they took time when reading and faced difficulties in answering comprehension questions. This is due to the lack of reading practice and training that, students should receive to answer comprehension questions as part of the curriculum for grades one and two. Moreover, the gap in the curriculum between grades one and two compared with grades three and four with regard to reading texts has contributed to such difficulties. Students are expected to read simple and short texts in grades one and two and long and more complicated texts in grades three and four. Therefore, this study recommends policy makers and curriculum designers move gradually in designing the curriculum to meet students' needs and encompass their individual differences. The results also indicated the crucial and effective role of the Jolly Phonics programme in building the basic phonics skills with grades one and two, which helps students later in reading accurately. Furthermore, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the findings of the pre- and post-tests. The results indicated that the scores of the post-test outperformed the scores of the pre-test for the targeted students. This suggests that there was a significant increase in all the variables of oral fluency (rate and accuracy) and reading comprehension. For example, the mean of the reading rate score was 23.36 in the pre-test and increased to 40.07 in the post-test; the mean for accuracy in the pre-test was 60.79 and this rose to 76.50 in the post-test.

With regard to reading comprehension, the mean score in the pre-test was 0.14, which increased sharply to 0.66 in the post-test. Based on these findings, the RR method had a substantial and beneficial impact on developing oral reading fluency (rate and accuracy) and reading comprehension. In the light of these findings, recommendations and implications for policy makers and practitioners, as well as for future studies, are presented.



خلاصة البحث

لا يزال الطلبة العمانيين في الحلقة الأولى يواجهون مشكلة واضحة سواء في قراءة النص بطلاقة أو في فهم النص واستيعابه. فينتهي الدرس وأغلب الطلاب يأخذون وقتاً طويلاً في قراءة النص المعطى لهم، مما يؤثر على فهمهم وإجاباتهم على أسئلة الفهم المقروء. لذلك، تهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر استراتيجية القراءة التكرارية في تطوير القراءة الشفوية بطلاقة في مهارات المستويات الدنيا لتحسين الفهم المقروء لدى الطلاب العمانيين في الصف الثالث. تنقسم هذه الدراسة إلى ثلاثة مراحل. المرحلة الأولى هي المرحلة الكمية، حيث تم استخدام استبانة تم تصميمها وتحكيمها إلكترونياً، وقد هدفت هذه المرحلة إلى الكشف عن آراء معلمي الصف الثالث والرابع المطبقين لاستراتيجية القراءة التكرارية في فصولهم الدراسية، وبلغ عدد المستجيبين 121 معلمة. أما المرحلة الثانية هي المرحلة النوعية، حيث تم استخدام المقابلة الشبه مقننة، والتي هدفت إلى البحث عن صعوبات القراءة التي يواجهها طلبة الصف الثالث من وجهة نظر المعلم الأول بالمدرسة المطبق فيها الدراسة. أما المرحلة الثالثة فشملت على تطبيق إستراتيجية القراءة التكرارية، حيث تم تطبيق القراءة التكرارية كطريقة في تدريس مهارة القراءة وتم اختيار 14 طالب وطالبة من الصف الثالث من المدرسة المطبق فيها الدراسة في محافظة جنوب الباطنة. كما تم تطبيق اختبار قبلي وبعدي صُمم مسبقاً لقياس الاختلافات بين الدرجات في طلاقة القراءة الشفوية (السرعة والدقة) والفهم المقروء قبل وبعد تطبيق استراتيجية القراءة التكرارية. تم تطبيق الطريقة خلال شهرين، إذ تم اختيار تسعة نصوص من منهاج كتاب الطالب في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية للصف الثالث الأساسي بوزارة التربية والتعليم بسلطنة عمان. أظهرت النتائج إن معظم معلمي الصف الثالث والرابع المطبقين للقراءة التكرارية في فصولهم الدراسية بمحافظة شمال الباطنة لديهم آراء إيجابية تجاه الاستراتيجية، وذلك لان لها أثر فعال في تعزيز مهارة القراءة بشكل خاص، ومهارات اللغة الإنجليزية المرتبطة بها بشكل عام. إضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت النتائج إلى أن استراتيجية القراءة التكرارية طريقة فعالة ومفيدة وجديدة، جعلت من البيئة التعليمية أكثر ممتعة وغيرت الروتين المعتاد في تدريس مهارة القراءة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن طلبة الصف الثالث في المدرسة المطبقة للدراسة يعانون من مشكلات متعلقة بمهارة القراءة، فعلى سبيل المثال يأخذ الطلبة وقتاً طويلاً في القراءة كما يواجهون صعوبات متعلقة بالإجابة عن أسئلة الفهم المقروء. وتعدى هذه الأسباب إلى ضعف الممارسة والتدريب التي يجب أن يتلقاها الطالب في الإجابة على أسئلة الفهم والاستيعاب كجزء من منهج الصفين الأول والثاني الأساسي. إضافة لذلك أشارت النتائج إلى وجود فجوة في نوعية النصوص القرائية الموجودة في منهج الصفين الأول والثاني والتي تتسم بالسهولة

والقصر وبينها وبين النصوص القرائية في منهج الصف الثالث والتي تتسم بالطول والتعقيد. وبناء على ذلك اقترحت الدراسة الحالية لواضعي السياسات ومصممي المناهج في وزارة التربية والتعليم بالتدرج في تصميم المناهج الدراسية؛ لتناسب مع احتياجات الطلبة ومع الفروق الفردية بينهم. كما أشارت النتائج أيضاً إلى الدور الحاسم والفعال لبرنامج الصوتيات في بناء المهارات الصوتية الأساسية لطلبة الصفين الأول والثاني والذي مكنتهم من القراءة بدقة. علاوة على ذلك، تم إجراء اختبار مزدوج العينة لمقارنة نتائج الاختبار القبلي والبعدي، حيث أظهرت النتائج أن درجات الطلبة في الاختبار البعدي كانت أعلى من درجات الاختبار القبلي، والذي أشار إلى وجود ارتفاع كبير في جميع المتغيرات للقراءة الشفهية بطلاقة (السرعة والدقة) والفهم المقروء. فعلى سبيل المثال؛ بلغ المتوسط الحسابي لمعدل سرعة القراءة في الاختبار القبلي 23.36 بينما ارتفع إلى 40.07 في الاختبار البعدي، بينما بلغ المتوسط الحسابي للدقة في الاختبار القبلي 60.07 وارتفع ليصل إلى 76.50 فالاختبار البعدي. أما بالنسبة للفهم المقروء بلغ المتوسط الحسابي في الاختبار القبلي 0.14 وارتفع بمعدل كبير إلى 0.66 فالاختبار البعدي. وبناء على هذه النتائج، فإن لاستراتيجية القراءة التكرارية تأثيراً إيجابياً في تطوير القراءة الشفهية بطلاقة (السرعة والدقة) والفهم المقروء، وعلى ضوء هذا، خرجت الدراسة الحالية ببعض المقترحات والتوصيات والدراسات المستقبلية لواضعي السياسات وممارسيها في سلطنة عمان.

APPROVAL PAGE

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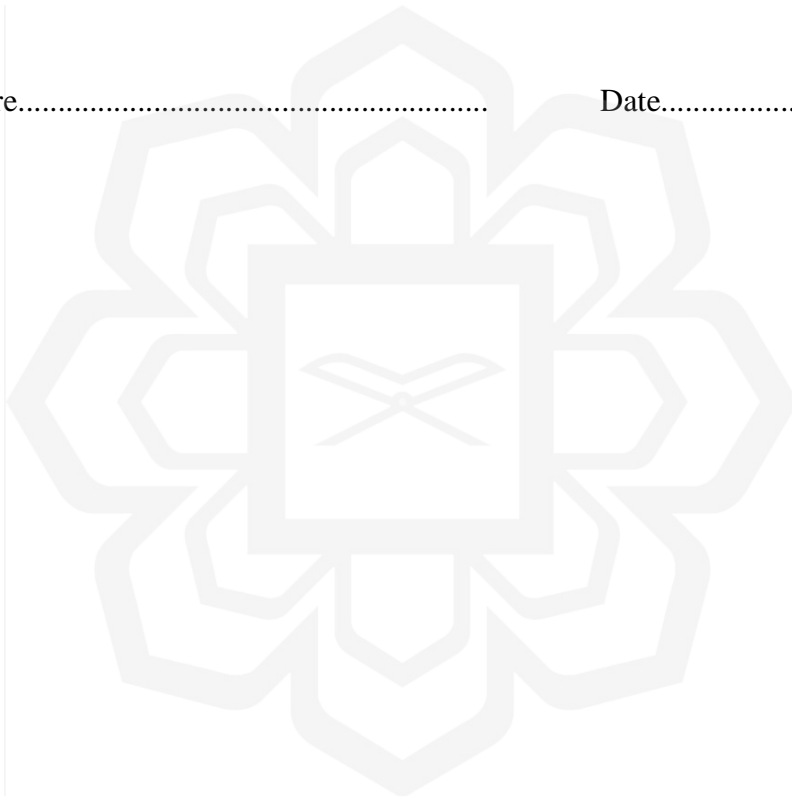
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at the IIUM or other institutions.

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DEVELOPING ORAL READING FLUENCY OF LOWER-LEVEL
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DEDICATION

All praise, honour and glory be to Allah the Almighty.

*To all those beloved people who loved, prayed for, supported, advised and cooperated
with me during this experience.*

*To all distinguished teachers that are eager to experience innovative methods to
create well-educated generations.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
BES	Basic Education System
DRA	Developmental Reading Assessment
EFL	English as a foreign language
EFM	English for Me
ELT	English language teaching
EWE	Engage with English
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IES	Institute of Education Sciences (US)
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MAP	Measurement of Academic Progress
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress (US)
NRP	National Reading Panel
RR	Repeated reading
SCPTT	Specialized Centre for Professional Training of Teachers
SEN	Special educational needs
SET	Senior English teacher
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WCPM	Words correct per minute
WHQs	Wh-questions
Wpm	Words per minute

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The significance of being able to read in the early years of learning plays a vital role in students' entire academic life. "Being able to read is fundamental to individual intellectual development and personal growth" (Mullis et al., 2011) and, according to Sloat, Beswick, and Williams (2007), students who do not learn to read during the primary grades will probably never read well. Hence, the goal of all educators should be to teach students how to interact with a text in order to read and comprehend it. By achieving this primary goal, teachers open the door to limitless possibilities of exploration, discovery, and new learning for all learners, regardless of their age or ability (Rasinski, 2004a). Likewise, the ability to read and write influences students' success in all academic areas (Dagget & Hasselbring, 2007; Noursi, 2014). In the educational literature, there are various views and perspectives regarding reading skill. For example, Chious (2004) stated that reading can be considered a source of information, as a pleasurable activity, and as a means of extending one's knowledge of the language. Thus, reading is essential to achieving successful foreign language learning. According to Birjandi, Begheridoust, and Mosallanejad (2006), reading is the most important skill for most students of English throughout the world, especially in countries in which foreign language learners do not have the opportunity to interact with native speakers but they do have access to the written form of the language. Among the academic domains, reading has always been at the core in systematic research of English teaching and learning (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Regardless of the

context in which these studies were conducted, observations have almost constantly been made about learners' difficulties in reading (Floris & Divina, 2009; Kayaoglu & Turgut, 2011; Mourtaga, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2004, 2009) and the general poor reading proficiency levels (Deutsch, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2004; Sidek, 2011).

Such difficulties are not specific to Oman and other contexts in which English is taught as a foreign language. For example, studies in countries in which English is taught as a first language reported similar findings related to difficulties students face in learning the language and in students' reading skill specifically. For example, a US study of English taught as a first language the Nation's Report Card for 2017 (issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP]) showed the disheartening data that the majority of students in the United States were struggling to reach grade-level reading proficiency. By the fourth grade, only 37% of students were reading at a proficient level, and 63% of students were functioning at a basic or below-basic level (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], US Department of Education and Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2017).

In the Arab world, the issue of the reading problems of language learners has received some attention and several studies were conducted in various Arab countries to investigate reading in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). Specially, Arab readers have been characterized as generally slow readers who often have insufficient levels of comprehension, a lack of word recognition, and limited vocabulary (Bell, 2001). For example, Al-Qahtani (2016) explored the reasons for Saudi students' poor reading skills. Forty percent of the students from the target sample reported that they did not read at home, and 60% reported that they read once a week. Several teachers have also stated that students exhibit poor reading skills, such as shortcomings in reading comprehension, which led to problems with their

reading and overall learning. In Jordan, Al-Khawaldeh (2012) used a survey to investigate the reading problems of secondary school students. The most problematic areas as identified by students were: lack of familiarity with vocabulary items, mismatch of some reading teaching methods, lack of cooperative learning in reading instruction, teacher-related malpractices in teaching reading comprehension, lack of connection between intensive and extensive reading activities, and incongruence between learners' pre-knowledge and existing ideas in the reading passage. Moreover, O'Sullivan (2009) investigated the reading difficulties EFL students face in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and found that these problems could be attributed to two main issues: the first is deficient lower-level processes, such as letter and word identification; the second is vocabulary and lexis. The same situation has been found in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), as schools in the KSA tend not to focus on reading skills or strategies (Alsamadani, 2012). For example, reading comprehension and fluency are not clearly delineated in the reading curriculum in the KSA (Al-Jarf, 2007).

In Yemen, Balfakeh (2009) found that dealing with unknown words was by far the most problematic area among secondary school students, a result that was also echoed by researchers in several non-Arab countries, such as Turkey (Kayaoglu & Turgut, 2011) and China (Lin, 2002). Another study in non-Arab countries was conducted in Pakistan by Dilshad, Ahmad, Tanvir, and Shabbir (2016), stated that in learning English, primary school students faced a number of problems related to sound recognition, reading comprehension, sentence construction, pronunciation, applying grammar rules and insufficient support from family.

The issue of reading difficulties has also been investigated and studied in the Omani context. The results of these studies and investigations are similar to what has

been found internationally and others differ due to the nature of the country and the philosophy of education within it. Al-Khamisi (2014), Al-Ajmi (2003) and Al-Brashdi (2002) conducted some of the studies in the Omani context and found that Omani students face difficulties in reading skills either in the early years of learning EFL or in the advanced years. For example, Al-Ajmi (2003) investigated the reading difficulties of Omani students soon after they graduated from secondary education. According to the students in her study, the difficulties they encountered most were a lack of content/background knowledge and not possessing the automatic recognition skills that enable students to recognize sounds and words. Furthermore, Al Khamisi (2014) reported on poor test results in national reading exams where the mean scores of grades four students were equal to F in the MOE grading system while grade ten students' scores fit in the D category (p.72).

One of the most important issues found in the literature and research studies that affect students' reading skill is the child's ability to read in the early stages. A child's ability to read is crucial to the overall education of that student, hence a stronger need to focus on reading if there is a deficiency. Students who cannot read proficiently rarely catch up with their academic potential (Zakariya, 2015). In this respect, difficulties with the reading skill in the early years of teaching can be avoided and minimized by providing certain elements. For instance, Eskey (2005) stated that "good teaching" is the key element in teaching reading or any other subject. In terms of applying practical and effective techniques and strategies in teaching reading skills in the early years especially, reading strategies are not emphasized until the third grade or late during the early elementary years (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012). According to DiSalle and Rasinski (2017), 90% of comprehension problems are due to a deficiency in oral fluency. Thus, students who have poor reading fluency

in the early stages of their academic life are also likely to have problems in the later stages. For this reason, it is essential to build and develop literacy skills in the early learning stage (Rasinski, 2014) or learners who are poor readers by the end of the first grade may not be able to develop even average- level reading skills by the end of their elementary schooling without substantial remediation efforts and intervention (Emam et al. 2014). However, this has been neglected in many English learning programmes in various countries (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). Therefore, the current study investigates Cycle One students by focusing on grade three in order to delve into such types of difficulty.

Based on my experience as an English supervisor in Al-Batinah North Governorate and working closely with a group of English supervisors - the English supervisors of the Al-Suwaiq and Al-Khaboura team - we noticed that students in Cycle One schools in Al-Batinah North lacked fluency and comprehension while reading a text. Therefore, suggesting a practical and efficient method of overcoming this problem might enhance and develop students' ability to read fluently and answer comprehension questions. Although the repeated reading (RR) method is used as a method to support students with their reading, there is a lack of research studies that have investigated the effectiveness of the method. I only found one piece of research conducted in the Omani context that investigated the RR approach. Therefore, I decided to investigate the effects of the RR method in developing oral reading fluency of lower-level skills to improve the reading comprehension of grade three Omani students.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is a relatively small country in southwest Asia, on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman is a highly multilingual society with an extraordinary rich and diverse history. Its geographical location at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and on the Strait of Hormuz has historically made it attractive to foreign powers, due to its strategically important position on the trade routes to the east. In modern times, this location has given Oman significant geopolitical importance. According to figures published by the *Oman Daily Observer* newspaper, the population in August 2019 was 4.7 million (Al-Issa, 2020). The Sultanate is bordered to the southwest by the Republic of Yemen, to the west by the KSA and by the UAE to the north and west. The total area of the Sultanate of Oman is 309.5 thousand sq. km and it is the third-largest country in the Arabian Peninsula (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020). Moreover, Oman is a young nation state, as well as an oil-producing country in the Gulf, and has established a national mass education policy and invested heavily in education over the past 40 years or so. Through formal schooling, the Sultanate has successfully improved the level, quantity and quality of its human capital (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012).

1.2.2 Education in Oman

When His Majesty Sultan Qaboos took the throne in 1970, there were only three schools in the country, educating some 900 selected boys; today, there are thousands of schools educating tens of thousands of students. The education system in Oman has developed continuously. In 1998, a new system, the BES, was created based on a new education philosophy, which takes into account the different stakeholders' needs and