



ER and young learners: Building a foundation for English reading through teacher reading aloud

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This exploratory study uses reading aloud as a platform for a large study of language young learners' English improvement. A class of 21, 10 male and 11 female, beginning English primary students enrolled in a five-session Teacher-Researcher Reading Aloud Project in supplementary English classes at a children's languages center of a Mexican university. Students were asked to respond to an evaluation rubric concerning their amusement and reading comprehension in certain selected children's literature readings. The main finding is students developed links between reading aloud project and reading comprehension. Findings and comments are exposed to explore language learning process and conducting prospective intervention to build a foundation in English reading. Although it seems premature to claim reading aloud suitability here, the overall results lend support to the legitimacy of practicing diverse English reading strategies.

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Extensive Reading (ER) has gained great popularity as an effective tool to develop English language proficiency. Reading is a fundamental element in language learning which offers students a wide range of vocabulary, grammar and correct language structures (Smith, 2004). Similarly, Chio (2012) states, "one factor that affects the impact of reading on L2 vocabulary uptake has to do with the frequency of learner exposure to new words through reading" (p.3). Additionally, Koc-

sis (2012) affirms "reading has become an indispensable language skill not only in an individual's mother tongue, but preferably also in its acquired foreign language" (p. 1). Kocsis maintains that as reading involves both language and content, this is why it simply must be part of a regular English lesson.

In introducing learning activities into classes of English as a second language, Susser and Robb (1990) considered that

extensive reading benefited students' language learning. Day and Bamford (2002) presented ten principles for applying ER in the English language classroom, the most important being encouraging English language learners to read as much as possible and to read for fun. In addition, Chio points out that much research has been conducted which has supported the effectiveness of ER for second language development (2012). Holyday (as cited in Kocsis, 2012, p. 2) argues that reading is undoubtedly a vital component of effective language development, even more, language learners inevitably learn about language and content when they start learning a language. Therefore, advancing ER at primary school stage is sufficiently justified.

Nevertheless, as young learners' reading practices are influenced and consequently shaped by the context (Pan and Pan, 2010), in the country in which this research occurred, apart from the ER principles described by Day and Bamford (2002), there are other factors that need to be taken into account in order to achieve adequate provision, such as low reading context (INEGI, 2019), beginning level competence and few opportunities to read in the target language. Accordingly, age is a fundamental element and it is never too early to consider children's exposure and introduction to a foreign language (Cortina Perez and Andugar, 2017). Thus, a specific proposal of reading aloud was designed and applied during five 30-minute sessions in the supplementary English classes of one group of beginning English students.

If we discover that one group of young learners in a reading aloud project demonstrates favorable attitudes toward reading, then we can explain this by putting in causal variables such as reading amuse-

ment and reading comprehension. Exploratory research thus allows for limited generalization, based on the presence, or partial presence, or shared causal mechanism (Reiter, 2017). Hernandez et al. (2014) and Creswell (2014) point out exploratory studies are likely to develop interventions for gathering inferences and suggestions.

This study pursues to answer the following research questions:

1. How much does the reading aloud project help students to develop their English reading skill?
2. How much do young English language learners enjoy the readings and feel motivated to keep reading?

The current paper reports on an exploratory study on a proposal for developing children's English learning by reading aloud.

Method

Due to the necessity of investigation on the area of language learning and the relevance to explore second language acquisition, the aim of this paper is to explore a reading aloud project with beginning young learners' feedback at the English classroom to illustrate comments and proposals to improve English reading and language learning. Thus, the report in this paper aspires to become of a larger study designed to build a foundation of English reading and ER in the English classes.

Design

In order to study the role of teachers' reading aloud in students' process of learning English, following Creswell (2014) and Hernandez et al. (2014), the design of the research is exploratory. A rubric evaluation was designed, collected and pro-

cessed to address open-ended questions more deeply than quantitative data alone.

Participants

The present study, which was conducted at Children's Languages Center of an English Teaching Faculty in a public university in Mexico, involved one English composition class where the reading aloud project was integrated. This research was conducted with 21 primary students - 10 males and 11 females with an age range from 7 to 11. Table 1 shows the number students by age and gender. Students came from different primary schools for the 3-month supplementary English classes.

All the participants were enrolled in a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level A1 English language course. All of them attended elementary school and took English language lessons as an extra activity. Therefore, no prior English experience was required. This particular condition made them suitable participants for this project because all had the same background and this study was the first time they had listened to reading aloud in English.

Table 1. *Distribution by Age and Gender of Research's Participants*

Age	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
7	3	2	5
8	4	3	7
9	2	4	6
10	1	2	3
Total	10	11	21

Research procedure

Three times per week for two hours, by three months, young learners enrolled in the same beginning English class. In compliance with their English classes, the five-session treatment was implemented in weeks 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 of the 15-week period. Each reading aloud project session lasted for 30 minutes.

According to Kowasary, (2013) and Pinter, (2006) reading aloud is a strategy that allows learners to become more familiar with literacy, specifically, to introduce readings as an agreeable experience and getting understanding, a Reading Aloud Project was designed under the following structure:

- Greetings and welcome. Researchers expressed short phrases to welcome students and invited them to greet each other.
- Pre-reading. Students' attention was enriched by enjoying the story. Students were able to raise their hands if they did not understand. To promote class attention and reading understanding, influenced by Shin's (2006) children's learning suggestions, visual aids were applied.
- Reading. Teacher-researcher reading aloud leisurely in an appropriately voice intonation and facial expressions. Accordingly to the reading, main images of characters were introduced and stayed in view for children. Appendix 2 details the titles, countries and authors of the readings for each session.
- Post-reading. Students' feedback by an evaluation rubric (see Appendix 1) with three variables: reading enjoyment,

reading understanding and further English reading.

As it is always advisable for the educational practitioners to choose reading material to ensure frequent learner exposure to target words (Chio, 2012), and according to student's age, children's literature was selected for reading aloud. According to Kowasary (2013), working with literature opens up new approaches for language and literary learning. He claims that in an L2-context, literature enables stronger intellectual and emotional entanglement than entirely referential language learning materials. Literature is the way through which people, around the world, at all times contact each other to collect the gathered wisdom of human experience. Literature has the ability to take readers out of their world into other worlds (Khatib and Mellati, 2012).

The criteria to select the literary texts to be used in the reading aloud project English classes should take into account the motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students. As likely to promote young learner enthusiasm through the reading, the following five masterpieces from children's literature were selected:

- The Girl and the Star
- The Dolphin and the Prophet
- The Little Match Girl
- The Cat in the Hat
- The Three Brothers and the Magic Apple

Data collection

To collect the participants' feedback on reading aloud suitability, the students were asked to fill a rubric after each session. To meet the explicit goal of this proj-

ect, as Pinter (2006) suggests, single items were adopted about the main variables effectiveness: Enjoying reading, reading comprehension and further English reading. See Appendix 1 for the rubric used.

The information obtained was organized by two exploratory variables, enjoying reading and reading comprehension. According to Chastain (as cited in Turkan et al., 2017), to make enjoyable is a learning ability taken by the learner. In respect to reading comprehension ability, Pinter (2006) states that reading is a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another.

Results

Results demonstrate that the reading aloud project had positive effects on young English language learners, since it was a great experience by itself. First, the reading aloud project showed a gradual increase in the recognition of its effect in reading comprehension, enjoying reading, and further English reading because the scores of each item sections increased until the end. In the first session, 71% of the participants mentioned that they understood the reading, in the second session 81% of them had a clear idea about the text, in the third and fourth sessions 85% of the kids comprehended the reading, and in the last session 95% of them understood the text. This data demonstrates that it is important English teachers who work with kids need to include ER in their English language program.

Focusing on the reading aloud project's scores, these changes may suggest that once the English students became familiar with it, reading aloud project not only

received greater acceptance but at its fullest extent was even thought of as having a good effect on learning English. Such a result might in turn suggest whether more or less reading aloud project be more or less suitable for students.

In Figure 1, we can see the number of students who were absolutely delighted to listen the different readings. In this case percentage increased from 85% in the first session to 95% in the last one.

In the section dedicated to exploring students' intention to read on their own, the results showed an increase from 76% in the first session to 85% in the fourth and fifth sessions (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The overall results obtained in this research reveal that young learners who are exposed to reading-aloud sessions im-

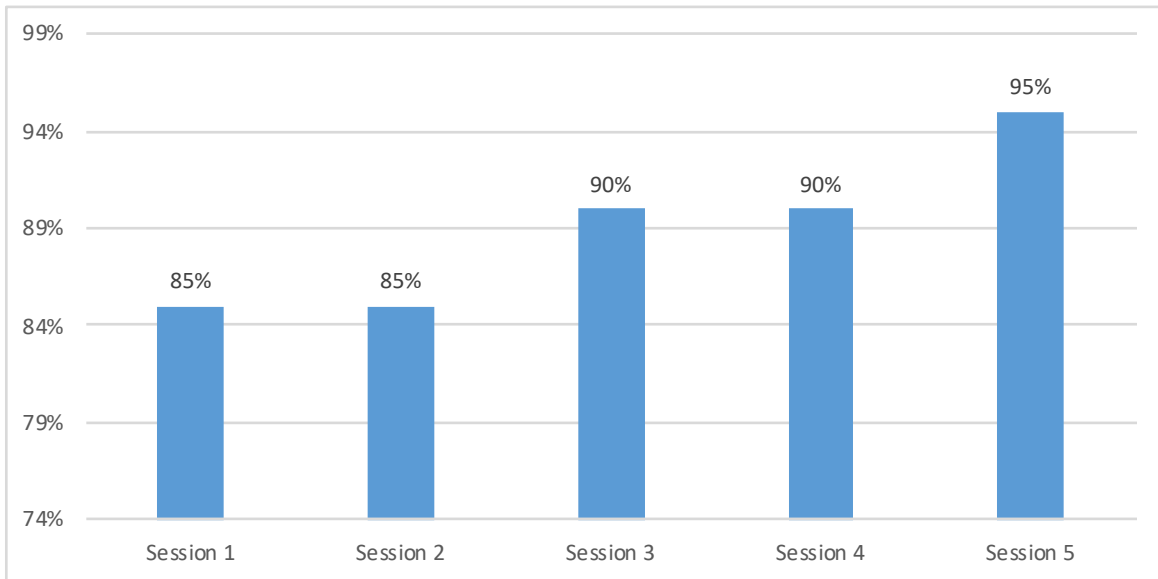


Figure 1. Number of Students who selected 'enjoyed a lot' after each session.

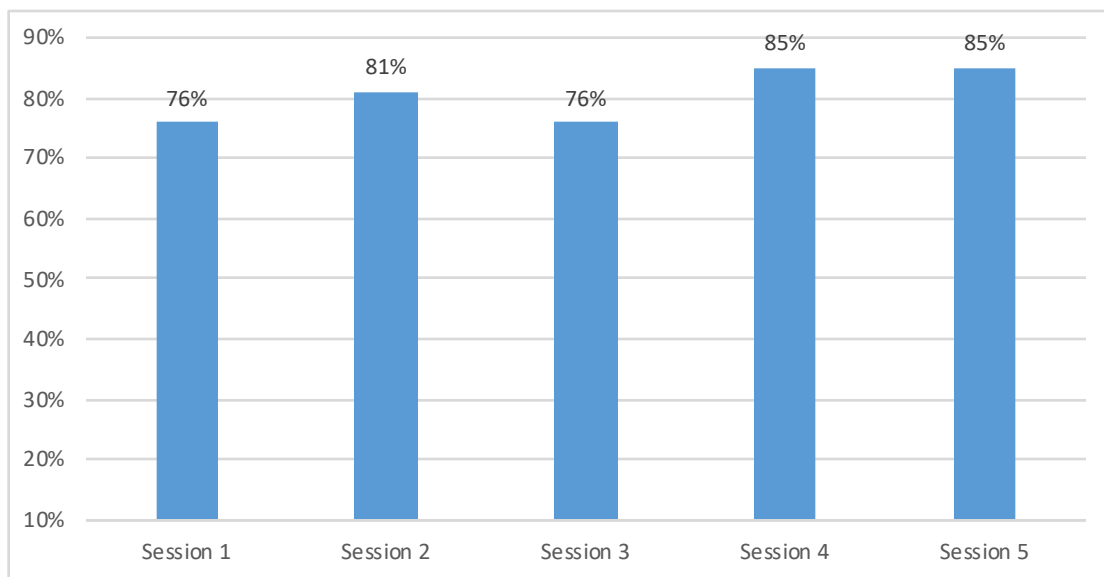


Figure 2. Number of students who indicated 'intention to read further' in English after each session.

prove their English skills meaningfully. Based on the participants responses, it can be stated that most students perceived this activity as a great technique to learn English and an excellent tool to help them to understand a written text. It is relevant to mention that at the beginning of this study a few students understood what was the reading about; however their level of comprehension increased every session. The fact is that only after experiencing reading aloud project did students show a stronger understanding. This finding further supports the legitimacy of practicing reading aloud helping young learners to become English readers.

Another important issue found in this study is that students felt very comfortable while they were listening to their teacher reading in English. In other words, it can be said that this activity caught young learners' attention and made them get interested in reading. Results also reveal that participants were very delighted with the texts and they did not feel that they spent energy and made a great effort to learn a new language.

Finally, this study showed that reading-aloud in a language classroom promotes enthusiasm about reading texts in English and participants would like to keep practicing this activity in their future English language courses. It can be said that this project was a meaningful experience for young learners who had basic English knowledge and it can be reinforced through other ER activities that allow them to read by themselves, to read in a foreign language and read a wide variety of books of different genres.

Language teachers of young children have a much broader responsibility than mere teaching of a language system; they need

to take into account the education of the whole child when planning their teaching program. Reading meaningful and amusing children's literature texts could be expected to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. Enjoying this project's approach not only gives children plenty of opportunities to experiment with the language, but also it builds on children's confidence toward the foreign language (Kowsary, 2013).

This was a first-step research in which managing a beginners' English class reading aloud was developed to build a foundation for English reading and ER in Mexico. This study supports that ER produces a stress-free atmosphere in class where students are not afraid of using the language and allows students to increase reading in different formats - because young learners can handle, check, explore and choose the text - it is the best approach in this kind of context.

Limitations

Owing to logistical and practical constraints, this study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the number of participants was small and instructional practices gleaned from one sample group of students are not sufficient to draw exhaustive conclusions about the tasks that English teachers typically enact across various contexts. Second, a clear limitation of this study due to the practical constraints is the short duration of the treatment, only 30 minutes per class over five separated weeks.

Conclusion

In this paper practitioners' concerns about teacher reading aloud in a foreign language in beginning English classes con-




text have been explored. Maintenance and development of reading strategies may facilitate English language development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Evaluation Rubric with three variables: reading enjoying, reading understanding and further English reading.

		
1 Point	No Point	No point

Evaluation Rubric

Reading Enjoying		
Enjoyed very much	Partially enjoyed	Not enjoyed
		
Reading comprehension		
Understanding	Partial understanding	No understanding
		
Further Reading English		
Further reading	Reading sometimes	No reading
		

Appendix 2. Titles, countries and authors of the readings for each session.

Session	Reading Title	Country	Author
Session 1	The Girl and the Star	England	Anonymous
Session 2	The Dolphin and the Prophet	Turkey	Anonymous
Session 3	The Little Match Girl	Denmark	Hans Christian Andersen
Session 4	The Cat in the Hat	USA	Theodore Geisel
Session 5	The Three Brothers and the Magic Apple	Mexico	Anonymous