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ABSTRACT

A study determined if regular listening to oral reading by the teacher affected fourth-grade students' level of comprehension. Subjects were 47 students from an elementary school in central New Jersey. Twenty-five students were read to for 30 minutes daily for 8 weeks in addition to their regular classroom reading instruction. The remaining 22 students received their regular classroom reading instruction. Pre- and post-tests were given using the Ginn level Eleven Reading Test. A student questionnaire was administered at the outset of the study to determine interest in reading. Results indicated that students exposed to oral reading scored higher in reading comprehension tests than students not exposed. (Contains 23 references and 4 tables of data. An appendix presents the questionnaire, pre- and post-test data for the control and experimental groups, and questionnaire results from the control and experimental groups.) (RS)

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READING ALOUD TO FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

by

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*Accepted
3/27/95
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for the Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if regular listening to oral reading by the teacher affected fourth grade students level of comprehension. Forty-seven students from an elementary school in central New Jersey participated in the study. Twenty-five students were read to for thirty minutes, for eight weeks, in addition to their regular classroom reading instruction. The remaining twenty-two students received their regular classroom reading instruction. Pre- and post-tests were given using the Ginn Level Eleven Reading Test. A student questionnaire was administered at the outset of the study to determine interest in reading. The results indicate that students exposed to oral reading scored higher in reading comprehension tests than students not exposed.



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The development of ability reading has been a major concern for many years. According to the authors of Becoming A Nation of Readers, "Reading is a basic life skill. It is the cornerstone for a child's success in school, and indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost." (1984, p. 1).

Reading aloud has been whole-heartedly endorsed by the Commission on Reading in Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985), as well as many other noted researchers. Reading aloud to children builds the desire to read (Kimmel and Segel, 1988). Children learn that exciting stories come from books and that reading for pleasure is worth including in their leisure activities. One important educational advantage of reading aloud is what the listener automatically picks up about written language.

In two research studies, Durkin found that having been read to regularly was one factor all early readers had in common (Michner, 1988). Reading aloud to children will promote reading interest and increase independent reading for intermediate grade students (Chambers, 1973) and (Kimmel, 1983).

Educators assume that once children know how to read,

there is no longer a need to read orally to them. Since permanent reading habits develop between the ages of ten and twelve, it is crucial that educators do everything possible to instill a love and respect for reading in students during that time period (Lamme, 1976) and (Sloan, n.d.).

In order for reading aloud to be universally accepted by educators, teachers must be firmly convinced of its legitimacy and be able to defend it to skeptical parents, supervisors, and administrators (Trelease, 1989). Hearing books read aloud by an enthusiastic teacher is an important motivating factor in helping children become readers (Huck, 1979). Teachers influence children by interacting with reading material to increase comprehension (Rumelhart, 1984).

Reading aloud affects our students' reading competencies in important ways. When students hear a story they often are motivated to read it themselves. It stimulates and expands their interests and appreciation of certain types of literature (Smith, 1989). Reading aloud affects the full range of language processes. It helps students discover similarities and differences between oral and written language. It also aids in sharpening their speaking and listening skills.

While reading aloud improves reading and listening skills and expands use of oral language, it also motivates students to read (Butler, 1980). The motivation to read can overcome learning problems in some cases. Dorothy Butler (1975) describes how Cushla taught herself to read despite the prognosis that she would be severely retarded. This was the outcome of her parents reading to her up to fifteen books a day.

To add to the information available about the affect of reading aloud to children and provide evidence for teachers a variety of studies need to be undertaken. One of these is whether regular listening to teacher's oral reading would increase reading comprehension and enhance the desire to read for students in the fourth grade.

Hypothesis

Regular listening to teacher's oral reading will increase reading comprehension.

Procedure

In order to confirm or reject the hypothesis set forth in this thesis, an eight week study was conducted in a suburban school district in central New Jersey.

A questionnaire (appendix A) was distributed to forty-seven (47) children in two fourth grade classes at the start of the study. The children were told that they may elect to keep the responses to the questionnaire anonymous.

Both groups of subjects were administered, as pre and post-test, the Ginn Level Eleven Reading Test to measure any discernible changes in reading comprehension.

The experimental and control samples continued to receive the daily classroom reading.

In addition to the daily classroom reading, the experimental sample was exposed to read aloud sessions from fiction, non-fiction, folklore, and poetry selections for five, thirty-minute sessions per week for eight weeks. Open discussion about each selection would close each session. Questions were generated by the twenty-five students involved in the read aloud program.

Results

The tables below represent the results of data gathered during the eight week study described under procedure.

As can be seen in Table I, the experimental sample scored higher, but was more varied in their achievement at the outset of the study. The mean difference of 4.8 on the Ginn Comprehension test was found to be significantly below the .01 level.

Table I

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t between the samples comprehension scores.

PRE-TEST	MEAN	STD DEVIATION	t
Experimental	16.4	4.89047	3.53
Control	11.6	4.37154	

Significance <.01

Table II shows the data on the results of the Ginn Comprehension test.

Table II

Mean, Standard Deviation, and t between the samples comprehension scores.

POST-TEST	MEAN	STD DEVIATION	t
Experimental	20.8	3.02765	6.33
Control	13.2	4.83964	

Significance $<.005$

The experimental sample scores rose 4.4 points, from 16.4 pre-test to 20.8 post-test, while the control sample had a rise of only 1.5 points.

Additionally, the experimental sample scores also fell within a smaller range than the Pre-test (as viewed by the decrease in the Std. Deviation) showing that the sample was more closely at the same level in terms of achievement. Moreover, the control sample scores were spread over a greater range than at the time of the Pre-test (greater Std. Deviation).

Because the samples achieved significantly differently at the outset, further analysis was required.

Table III shows the mean gains of each sample as a result of instruction. The data indicate that the experimental sample achieved more (2.71 points) as a result of instruction and that this difference was significant below the .02 level.

Table III

Mean gains from Pre-test to Post-test on the Ginn Comprehension test.

	MEAN GAIN	STD DEVIATION	t
Experimental	4.44	4.17413	2.58
Control	1.73	2.79765	

Significance <.02

Questionnaire results are as follows:

	YES		NO			
	Con	Exp	Con	Exp		
1. Do you like to read?	91%	100%	9%	0%		
2. Do you read for pleasure?	55%	100%	45%	0%		
3. Does anyone read aloud to you?	77%	88%	23%	12%		
If yes, do you like to be read to?	77%	72%	4.5%	24%		
If no, would you like to be read to?	14%	4%	4.5%	0%		
4. Do you think being read to is only for little children?	0%	4%	100%	96%		
5. Do you think reading is only a school activity?	0%	8%	100%	92%		
6. Would you like your teacher to read aloud to you?	91%	76%	9%	24%		
	<u>Every Day</u>		<u>Sometimes</u>		<u>Never</u>	
	Con	Exp	Con	Exp	Con	Exp
7. How often do you read?	55%	44%	55%	56%	0%	0%
8. What are you doing when someone is reading to you?						
A. Close my eyes to picture the scene	Con 86%	Exp 64%				
B. I just listen without thinking anything	Con 14%	Exp 36%				

9. What kind of books do you like to read?

A. Mystery	Con 77%	Exp 84%
B. Adventure	Con 77%	Exp 76%
C. Funny	Con 63%	Exp 60%
D. Other	Con 50%	Exp 64%

10. Who is your favorite author?

The responses to this question were numerous. I will only list the most popular authors among both fourth grade classes.

R.L. Stine (named most often)

E.B. White

Judy Blume

Beverly Cleary

C.S. Lewis

Ann M. Martin

The findings according to the responses on the questionnaire indicate that most children enjoy having someone read aloud to them. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the students' interest toward reading. It also served as a guide for the researcher to use in the selection of books read to the experimental sample.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether reading aloud to fourth grade students would lead to increased reading comprehension. All evidence which was tested and evaluated permits the acceptance of the hypothesis that increases in comprehension would result for students being read to.

The results of this study suggest that improvements in students' reading comprehension can be achieved without a great deal of time, money, and effort. The students involved in the read aloud program were enthusiastically waiting each day for the read aloud time to arrive.

Reading aloud to children should be inserted into the daily classroom schedule. The implementation of a quality story time experience requires that resources be made available to teachers. The resource that appears most critical is easy access to carefully selected children's literature. Every classroom needs to be saturated with books and every classroom needs a library.

Allowing children the opportunity to hear their favorite books read to them improves comprehension. Easy access to their favorite books can lead to a love of reading that will last a lifetime.

READING TO CHILDREN: RELATED RESEARCH

Most teachers in primary grades regularly read stories aloud to their students. In the intermediate grades, however, the practice tends to slacken, perhaps because teachers don't believe that students will benefit from hearing stories as they did when they were younger.

We read to children for many reasons. As teachers, we read aloud to our students to explain and provide information about the world. We want them to be curious and inquisitive and see language as entertaining and stimulating (Trelease, 1985).

Reading aloud affects our students' reading competencies in important ways. When students hear a story they often are motivated to read it themselves. It stimulates and expands their interests and appreciation of certain types of literature.

According to the Commission on Reading in Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), "reading aloud is the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in

learning to read" (p.23). Comments on the positive connection between reading aloud to students regularly have been reported by many researchers. There is research evidence and testimony to the value of reading to young children (Chomsky, 1972; Cochran-Smith, 1984; McCormick, 1977; Teale, 1984). Austin and Morrison's (1963) survey of reading instruction reported that primary-grade teachers tended to plan a read-aloud time for their classrooms but did not consider this story time part of "reading instruction." Intermediate-grade teachers, by contrast, did not feel they had enough time during the school day for reading aloud.

Other investigations yielded similar findings. In 1971, Hall reported the extent and types of literature experiences provided by classroom teachers. Hall found that fewer than half of the teachers (48%) responding to his survey read to children on a daily basis and that 76% of the teachers did not seem to plan their literature program. Hall's frequency are similar to Langer, Applebee, Mullis, and Foertsch's (1990) analysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress data base in which 57% of the surveyed

fourth-grade teachers reported reading to their students daily.

Even young children may not be involved in daily story time. Morrow's (1982) investigation of literature activities in preKindergarten and kindergarten classrooms revealed that teachers, on average, read only 12 stories in a 4-week period.

Anderson et al. (1985) recommend that reading aloud should continue throughout the elementary grades (p.51). Unfortunately, many teachers and parents stop reading aloud as soon as children begin to read on their own.

Good literature gives children a perspective from which to evaluate the books they read by themselves. Their comprehension also improves as their vocabulary and information about the world expands. Reading aloud affects the full range of language processes. It helps students discover similarities and differences between oral and written language, sharpening their speaking and listening skills and their understanding of narrative structure. Writing is affected positively because reading aloud

provides them with opportunities to use their imagination and exposes them to different literary styles.

While reading aloud improves reading and listening skills and expands use of oral language, it also motivates students to read (Butler, 1980). Reading aloud is particularly effective for less proficient readers in improving their language skills. In one read aloud program conducted after school for ten weeks, reluctant readers in 3rd and 4th grade became more interested and their reading skills improved (Howell & Sylvester, 1983).

Chall and Snow (1982) wrote that a major problem confronting educators today is the decline of the acquisition of further literacy beyond grade four. Holbrook, (1985) cites a national assessment which shows a decline in reading proficiency and interest in reading beginning at grade four, and she suggests that reading aloud to students may be one solution to reverse that decline and promote further literacy. Chambers (1973) and Kimmel (1983) summarize the need to read aloud to children by theorizing

that it will promote reading interest and increase independent reading for intermediate grade students, as it apparently does for younger children.

Reading aloud to children gives them a feeling that reading is important, fun, and informative, while exposing them to a wide variety of experiences they can later use to interpret the words they will decode (Rosenblatt, 1978; Walker & Kuerbitz, 1979).

Reading aloud to students also helps them become better writers. A study found that third graders who had been read to regularly improved significantly in the maturity of their written sentence structure when compared with a control group (Michener, 1985). Further, additional reading appears to be as important as or more important than additional writing practice (DeVries, 1970; Stotsky, 1983).

Another study done on the effects of listening to oral reading was done by Maryellen S. Cosgrove in 1988. The study measured how listening to oral reading by teacher three times a week for twelve weeks effected reading comprehension, attitudes toward reading, and time spent on

reading. The sample consisted of two hundred twenty-one fourth and sixth grade students in six different, and diverse school systems in Connecticut. Pre and post-test of the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading and the Degrees of Reading Power Test results indicated significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The attitudes toward reading and reading comprehension of students exposed to listening to oral reading by a teacher is greater than those students not exposed to the listening experience.

Another study by Morrow, Strickland, Feitelson and Iraqi (1990) examined the value of reading aloud to twelve Israeli Kindergarten classes. The experimental group was read to for fifteen minutes each day, while the control group used the time period for a language program. After five months individual tests of listening comprehension and picture telling demonstrated that the children who had been read to scored higher than the children not exposed to reading aloud. The tests indicated a greater language maturity and a stronger sense of story structure when retelling a story.

Reading aloud has also been used as an alternate method of teaching vocabulary. A study done by Linda Fondas (1992) explored the effect reading aloud to students, combined with guided discussion before, during, and after the reading would have on the development of vocabulary. The participants of the study were first grade students. The experimental group listened to five books over a ten week period. A selected group of vocabulary words unfamiliar to the students were used as the test words. Pre and post-tests were administered to measure the amount of new vocabulary the experimental group acquired from listening to the same story being read several times. The results demonstrated that children exposed to reading aloud, discussion and other related activities had a greater knowledge of vocabulary than the children that were not.

Reading storybooks to kindergartens for the development of vocabulary has been proven to be an effective method of expanding vocabulary knowledge. A study done by Claudia Robbins and Linnea C. Ehri (1994) of thirty-three native English-speaking kindergarteners from a middle- to lower-middle public elementary school supports the theory that listening to stories at least twice and hearing

unfamiliar words repeated in the stories will expand vocabulary recognition. In the study, kindergarteners listened to a story twice and then completed a multiple-choice vocabulary test assessing their knowledge of eleven unfamiliar target words occurring in the story. Comparable words not appearing in the story were included as controls in the test. The results of the study found that 5- and 6-year-old nonreading kindergarteners could acquire new vocabulary from listening to stories.

A study done by Jack Christmas (1993) of second grade students in a rural Georgia school also resulted in positive results of reading aloud to children. The objectives of the study were to improve the students' reading comprehension, word reading, and auditory vocabulary. The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was used to measure any changes in reading ability. Test results indicated a 38.5% increase in auditory vocabulary, a 46.5% increase in reading comprehension, and a 43.6% increase in word reading. The program designed by Christmas included daily oral reading in the classrooms by teachers and enrollment in the Read Aloud Club at the school. Parents of the children enrolled in the club also agreed to read aloud on a daily basis.

In 1993 a study was done on reading aloud practices in classrooms by Hoffman, Roser, and Battle. A survey was developed to investigate the frequency of reading aloud practices, the literature used during the sessions, the amount of time spent on the activity and the children's responses during the sessions. The study found that some primary teachers planned a read aloud time, while intermediate grade level teachers felt they did not have the time to engage in the activity. The study suggests that reading aloud to students will augment vocabulary, comprehension and motivation.

Lydia T. Boutwell and Kim S. Sistrink (1993) investigated the effects of guest readers on reading attitudes of second- and fifth-grade children in the Meridian (Mississippi) schools. The results of their studies found significant differences (.05) between pretest and posttest. Gains in mean reading scores also improved as a result of the eight week program. The students were first tested with the Boutwell-Benton Reading Attitudes Inventory. Then, the students were visited each week, for eight weeks, by a guest reader. Local television personalities, school personnel, former teachers, and parents were among the

guest. The guest were chosen by Boutwell and Sistrunk. The teacher and the guest selected a book. Follow-up activities such as art, creative writing, role playing, games, and reinforcement of basal reading skills were used. After the eight week period, the same test was re-administered to determine if a change occurred in students' attitudes toward reading.

Numerous studies have concluded that reading aloud to pre-primary and primary age children has influenced their attitude toward reading and meliorated their reading comprehension. However, limited research is available on effects that reading aloud has to children in the intermediate grade. Additional research would be desirable.

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APPENDIX

CONTROL GROUP: Pre-test; Ginn Level Eleven Test 11/94

Twenty-four Comprehension Questions

Student	# Correct	# Wrong
1.	17	7
2.	10	14
3.	18	6
4.	10	14
5.	15	9
6.	14	10
7.	10	14
8.	20	4
9.	17	7
10.	2	22
11.	7	17
12.	11	13
13.	9	15
14.	7	17
15.	11	13
16.	10	14
17.	9	15
18.	10	14
19.	7	17
20.	11	13
21.	17	7
22.	13	11

CONTROL GROUP: Post-test; Ginn Level Eleven Test

Twenty-four Comprehension Questions

Student	# Correct	# Wrong
1.	20	4
2.	13	11
3.	18	6
4.	14	10
5.	20	4
6.	15	9
7.	18	6
8.	19	5
9.	20	4
10.	4	20
11.	10	14
12.	14	10
13.	15	9
14.	4	20
15.	13	11
16.	12	12
17.	10	14
18.	10	14
19.	6	18
20.	12	12
21.	14	10
22.	10	14

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: Pre-test; Ginn Level Eleven Test

Twenty-four Comprehension Questions

Student	# Correct	# Wrong
1.	17	7
2.	21	3
3.	19	5
4.	7	17
5.	20	4
6.	22	2
7.	23	1
8.	14	10
9.	16	8
10.	21	4
11.	20	4
12.	6	18
13.	18	6
14.	14	10
15.	10	14
16.	13	11
17.	19	5
18.	16	8
19.	18	6
20.	14	10
21.	17	7
22.	18	6
23.	6	13
24.	20	4
25.	21	3

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: Post-test; Ginn Level Eleven Test

Twenty-four Comprehension Questions

Student	# Correct	# Wrong
1.	20	4
2.	22	2
3.	20	4
4.	20	4
5.	21	3
6.	22	2
7.	24	0
8.	17	7
9.	18	6
10.	24	1
11.	21	3
12.	24	1
13.	24	1
14.	16	8
15.	14	10
16.	17	7
17.	23	1
18.	24	0
19.	23	1
20.	18	6
21.	23	1
22.	20	4
23.	17	7
24.	24	0
25.	24	0

CONTROL GROUP: DIFFERENCE TEST OF PPE AND POST-TEST
 TWENTY-FOUR COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

STUDENT #	POST	- PRE	= DIFFERENCE
1.	20	17	3
2.	13	10	3
3.	18	18	0
4.	14	10	4
5.	20	15	5
6.	15	14	1
7.	18	10	8
8.	19	20	-1
9.	20	17	3
10.	4	2	2
11.	10	7	3
12.	14	11	3
13.	15	9	6
14.	4	7	-3
15.	13	11	2
16.	12	10	2
17.	10	9	1
18.	10	10	0
19.	6	7	-1
20.	12	11	1
21.	14	17	-3
22.	10	13	-3

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: DIFFERENCE TEST OF PRE AND POST TEST
TWENTY-FOUR COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

STUDENT #	POST	- PRE	= DIFFERENCE
1.	20	17	3
2.	22	21	1
3.	20	19	1
4.	20	7	13
5.	21	20	1
6.	22	22	0
7.	24	24	0
8.	17	14	3
9.	18	16	2
10.	24	21	3
11.	21	20	1
12.	24	6	18
13.	24	18	6
14.	16	14	2
15.	14	10	4
16.	17	13	4
17.	23	19	4
18.	24	16	8
19.	23	18	5
20.	18	14	4
21.	23	17	6
22.	20	18	2
23.	17	6	11
24.	24	20	4
25.	24	21	3

1) Do you like to read?	YES		NO	
	91%		9%	
2) How often do you read?	EVERYDAY	SOMETIMES	NEVER	
	45%	55%	0%	
3) Do you read for pleasure?	YES		NO	
	55%		45%	
4) Does anyone read aloud to you? If yes, do you like to be read to? If no, would you like to be read to?	YES		NO	
	77%		23%	
	77%		4.5%	
	14%		4.5%	
5) Do you think being read to is only for little children?	YES		NO	
	0%		100%	
6) Do you think reading is only a school activity?	YES		NO	
	0%		100%	
7) Would you like for your teacher to read aloud to you?	YES		NO	
	91%		9%	

8) What are you doing when someone is reading to you?	Do you close your eyes to picture the scene?	Do you just listen to the person reading without thinking anything?
	86%	14%

9) What kind of books do you like to read?	MYSTERY	ADVENTURE	FUNNY	OTHER
	77%	77%	63%	50%

10) Who is your favorite author?	
AUTHOR	NUMBER OF TIMES NAMED
R L. Stine	6
Judy Blume	6
E.B. White	4
Beverly Cleary	4
Charles Dickens	2

1) Do you like to read?	YES		NO	
	100%		0%	
2) How often do you read?	EVERYDAY	SOMETIMES	NEVER	
	44%	56%	0%	
3) Do you read for pleasure?	YES		NO	
	100%		0%	
4) Does anyone read aloud to you?	YES		NO	
	88%		12%	
If yes, do you like to be read to?	72%		24%	
If no, would you like to be read to?	4%		0%	
5) Do you think being read to is only for little children?	YES		NO	
	4%		96%	
6) Do you think reading is only a school activity?	YES		NO	
	8%		92%	
7) Would you like for your teacher to read aloud to you?	YES		NO	
	76%		24%	

8) What are you doing when someone is reading to you?	Do you close your eyes to picture the scene?	Do you just listen to the person reading without thinking anything?
	64%	36%

9) What kind of books do you like to read?	MYSTERY	ADVENTURE	FUNNY	OTHER
	84%	76%	60%	64%

10) Who is your favorite author?	
AUTHOR	NUMBER OF TIMES NAMED
R.L. Stine	13
Judy Blume	5
E.B. White	3
Beverly Cleary	1
C.S. Lewis	1
A. Martin	1
L. Sachar	1