

READING WHILE LISTENING ON MOBILE DEVICES: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ENHANCE READING

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ABSTRACT

This poster session will describe a study that took place at a university in the United Arab Emirates. The study included a reading app that was downloaded onto each student's individual mobile device. Students could read while listening to the stories. The primary goal of the study was to determine how, if at all, listening while reading in a potentially ubiquitous manner impacted their reading ability, particularly fluency and rate. The study was mixed method and included in ABBA design as well as qualitative questions. Data is still being analyzed.

KEYWORDS

Reading app, reading ability, second language.

1. INTRODUCTION

This poster session will highlight a research study on the impact that mobile devices potentially have on reading fluency in a second language context (specifically the United Arab Emirates). The poster will be divided into several key areas: previous research on reading using mobile devices, trends in reading fluency, reading issues related to the population, the methodology and some of preliminary results. The study took place at a university in the UAE with students who were enrolled in a pre-session English program.

2. BACKGROUND

Much of the research on using mobile technologies to enhance reading has focused partly and often primarily on motivation (Hsu, et al., 2013; Wang and Smith, 2013). An exception to this, is a study by Hsu, Hwang and Chang (2013) who researched reading on mobile devices with English as a Second Language learners in Taiwan. Their study included a personalized learning system that catered to the students' preference and level. The reading comprehension of the experimental group increased in comparison to the control group. Even though this aspect of the study is positive, it is difficult to generalize the results to other populations such as the one under investigation.

Although the central issue in this paper is reading comprehension, the focus is less on the aforementioned reading skill and more on a specific reading component that is essential to reading comprehension namely reading fluency. The rationale of this focus is that a large body of research has shown that the higher-level processes that influence and determine effective comprehension do not become fully operational until the reader has acquired a reasonable level of fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). In other words, in order for a college student to read a text and achieve adequate comprehension, she should be able to read the text in question effortlessly and accurately.

Over the past decade, fluent reading has been recognized as a central component of skilled reading. This surge of interest is partially due to the identification of fluency as a major component for optimum reading development by organizations such as the National Reading Panel, the National Institute for Literacy, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy through the Partnership for Reading and to a broader reconsideration of the role of oral reading in the development of skilled reading (Rasinski, 2006). In recent years, instructional methodologies have been developed that are aimed at achieving reading fluency.

Reading fluency can be fostered through a process called assisted reading (Rasinski and Hoffman, 2003). Reading fluency can be fostered through a process called assisted reading (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Assisted reading, also called Listening while reading (LWR), involves having the student read silently while simultaneously listening to a fluent rendition of the reading passage. The auditory version of the reading can be performed by a fluent adult reader or by the utilization of various technological devices. Of interest to this paper is the investigation of the effect of assisted reading, specifically listening while reading (LWR), on reading comprehension on Arab learners of English as a Second language..

Academia and educators alike continue to grapple with areas germane to reading literacy in the Arab world. For one, there is a need for quality scholarly articles that explore aspects of reading such as reading strategies, the process of developing reading skills, reading rate, reading comprehension, and other relevant topics. One of the reasons why it is difficult to have a clear understanding of the true nature of reading in the Arab world is that reports often combine all Arab countries into one category or the studies are fragmented with one study conducted in one place, while other areas are not researched. This is not necessarily true. The region is vast and differs greatly even within the same country. What is true in one country or region may differ from another depending on factors such as demographics. The reasons for these disparities are not entirely clear.

3. METHODOLOGY

We used a commercial reading program that has an app on multiple platforms. The app allows students to listen while reading. There were several reasons for choosing this particular program: a) it has a rich collection of levelled books; b) it includes tests that allow to establish a baseline and monitor students' progress; c) it allows students to listen and read simultaneously. Even though the books in this program were geared towards young learners, the fact that they provided clear and interesting illustrations along with the reading text, and that their length allowed them to be read in one class period made them an adequate choice for the intervention. Using children literature to further adult literacy is a method that has been used in the ESL/ELL classroom and that has yielded positive results (Horwitz & Worthy, 2007).

Teachers and students alike are able to choose the learners' reading level based on results from pretests that screens for rate, accuracy and comprehension. The study was mixed method and included an ABBA quantitative design as well as qualitative questions. Eighty-eight students participated in the study as did four teachers. We had four experimental groups. Two groups read while listening for the first part of the semester and the other group read without listening. They swapped strategies mid-semester. We frequently tested students throughout the semester and at the end we interviewed both students and teachers. Our research questions included the following: (1) To what extent does reading on a mobile App impact the reading skills of ESL students enrolled in a university foundation English class in the UAE? (2) To what extent does reading while listening using a mobile app affect reading fluency development of ESL students enrolled in in a university foundation English class in the UAE? (3) What are students past experiences with reading? (4) Which types of text are students most interested in reading? (5) In which ways do students use technology for reading? (6) What are the benefits and challenges to using the iPad for reading?

4. PROJECTIONS

Most of the data analyzed thus far does not indicate a significant difference between the two experimental groups. However, as shown in previous research qualitatively students are motivated by the possibilities afforded to learning on mobile devices. We also asked students some background information about their reading habits and experiences with reading at a young age. We will include any findings that we have in the poster as well.

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