



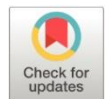


## Reading aloud technique as a resource to develop reading skills in EFL

*La técnica de lectura en voz alta como recurso para el desarrollo de la competencia lectora en EFL*

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**Palabras****claves:**

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**Keywords:**

accuracy,  
pronunciation,  
fluency,  
reading skills,  
reading aloud

**Resumen**

**Introducción.** La lectura en voz alta es una técnica que se ha utilizado en diferentes ámbitos para mejorar la comprensión lectora. **Objetivo.** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo conocer el impacto de las técnicas de lectura en voz alta con estudiantes universitarios que tomaron clases de inglés como requisito para continuar con sus estudios para obtener un título universitario. **Metodología.** Fueron estudiantes que aprobaron el nivel A2 de inglés y deben llegar a un B1 al final del semestre. Fueron 28 los estudiantes que participaron en este estudio y tuvieron que leer textos durante un periodo de siete semanas. El instructor les proporcionó un texto cada semana y ellos tuvieron que utilizar una aplicación, grabar su voz mientras leían el texto en un periodo de tiempo y enviarlo para recibir una retroalimentación. El rendimiento de los estudiantes se recogió y analizó mediante el uso de una rúbrica durante todo el proceso. Se utilizó la prueba de Wilcoxon para examinar los resultados del pretest y del posttest, ya que sólo había un grupo que participaba en el estudio. Al final, los resultados de la rúbrica fueron organizados y analizados estadísticamente. **Resultados.** Los resultados mostraron que había una diferencia significativa después de utilizar la técnica de lectura en voz alta en el desarrollo de las habilidades de lectura de los estudiantes. **Conclusiones.** La técnica de lectura en voz alta debe ser utilizada como una estrategia para mejorar el desempeño de la lectura en el idioma inglés a nivel universitario.

**Abstract**

**Introduction.** Reading aloud is a technique that has been used in different settings in order to improve reading comprehension. **Objective.** This study aimed to understand the impact of reading aloud techniques with college students who took English class as a requirement to continue with their studies to get a college degree. **Methodology.** They were students who passed the English level A2 and aimed to reach a B1 at the end of the semester. There were 28 students who participated in this study and they had to read texts for a period of seven weeks. The instructor provided a text each week and they had to use an application, record their voice while reading the text within a period of time and send it to receive a feedback. The students` performance was collected and analyzed through the use of a rubric during the whole process. The Wilcoxon test was

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used to examine the results of the pretest and posttest since there was only one group who participated in the study. At the end, the rubric results were organized and statistically analyzed. **Results.** The findings showed that there was significant difference after using reading aloud technique in students reading skills development. **Conclusions.** Reading aloud technique should be used as a strategy to improve reading performance in the English language at a college level.

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## Introduction

Assessing English reading fluency is a process that involves a series of steps and elements that will guide students to improve fluency and provide teachers with some evidence about what works during reading instruction. Tompkins(2006) mentions that fluency in reading involves students' reading speed, word recognition and correct intonation while they are reading. Teachers can promote different activities and apply strategies that will support students' improvement in their reading fluency. Guided repeated oral reading or independent silent reading are types of reading that could help students to improve fluency in reading. Norton(2007) considers that the main objective when teaching reading is to encourage students to read fluently while they are recognizing words and at the same time comprehend them. In other words, fluency is an element that is essential while promoting reading comprehension in class. Norton states that guided repeated oral reading is an opportunity for students to repeat texts with the correct intonation and pitch which can lead to increase vocabulary knowledge and improve reading comprehension. The more students read, the more they improve fluency and automaticity.

Fluency is basically one of the key points to consider in a reading process. Teachers can assess reading and keep in mind this component since it is essential to promote comprehension, pronunciation and speaking. Tompkins(2006) states four components that can help teachers to assess reading fluency. Speed, automaticity, paraphrasing and prosody are those four elements that can define if a student is fluent in reading. So, teachers need to focus their teaching practices on the development of those elements and pay much more attention when students are having difficulties with one of them. The author also mentions that students denote a problem in fluency when they read slowly, word by word or when they repeat the same word more than once and still have problems in pronunciation or do not remember the word. Additionally, students' fluency is not evident when they can not decode single words or they invent and guess words sounds. These are the principal characteristics that students can demonstrate their deficiency on fluency in the reading. process. For that reason, teachers have to provide more practice

opportunities so students can surpass those problems. Teachers can find out students' fluency problems only when they listen to them reading or speaking. For example, Gibson(2008) argues that teachers can perceive pronunciation or connections between a grapheme and a phoneme problem when they listen to their students their reading aloud tasks.

Students' reading fluency may be affected by different factors and reading instruction can be difficult if these problems are not addressed correctly. Gibson(2008) concludes that students whose first language is not English may try to apply their reading strategies in the target language. This means that they are convinced that they are useful in all languages or probably they did not develop strategies since their native language reading process is different. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that reading in English requires a good connection between graphemes and phonemes. Gillingham(2018) differentiates a phoneme as the smallest part of spoken sound as well as a grapheme is the smallest unit in writing. To illustrate, a letter can comprise more than one phoneme in some cases for that reason there are 44 phonemes in the English language, whereas a grapheme are printed symbols. To reiterate, second language phonology is an ability which has to be developed in order to understand and produce sounds in that language. In English, a sound is important to acquire reading skills (Freeman & Freeman , 2014) and reading aloud texts according to students needs or English level can help them to develop reading fluency (Gibson, 2008). Based on different studies in oral reading fluency, Aldhanhani and Abu-Ayyash (2020) conclude that there are some highlights that impact on students reading fluency. For example, repeated reading improves students' accuracy, word recognition and speed. In this context, reading aloud (RA) technique will be discussed and how this technique affects students' reading fluency in an EFL setting.

Reading aloud can be beneficial for those students who are learning a new language. In this context, it is essential to analyze how reading aloud strategy works in different settings based on educational research. Huang (2010) concludes that not all teachers rely on reading aloud technique since they consider it is demanding, but, it is an important part in English language learning because it is a phonic language. According to this author, reading aloud encourage students to practice pronunciation and improve oral skills because students try to repeat texts or words while they try to imitate sounds. Moreover, reading aloud improves other parts of the language such as grammar and vocabulary comprehension.

Reading aloud involves a process and different considerations to be used during instruction. For example. not only teachers who read aloud for their students is beneficial for struggling readers but also students have to read aloud a variety of texts which should be familiar for them (Norton, 2007). Instructors must choose the text correctly if they want to promote RA in classes. Ceyhan and Yıldız (2021) argue that interactive reading

aloud should be modeled. In other words, teachers have to provide the texts to be read and provide an example which means that the teacher should read considering pronunciation, rate, and intonation. The researchers conducted an experiment to demonstrate the impact of interactive reading aloud strategy on second graders. They concluded that students were more motivated and they could comprehend more their reading tasks while their fluency also improved. Another important question that arises from RA techniques is the amount of time the students or instructors uses to promote reading aloud. Research demonstrates that reading aloud benefits lower proficiency readers and language learners. Furthermore, a ten-minute period is enough if teachers want their students to keep reading aloud; on the other hand, 20 minutes works if teachers want to provide feedback and help students to pronounce difficult words and the results in a study with students from second and fourth grade concluded that students who were exposed to a 20-minute session got better results in the post test (O'Connor et al., 2013). There is also some research evidence that help language instructor to understand the impact of RA in reading instructions and keep in mind all the considerations if they decide to use in class. According to Mehmood and Kassim(2019) study, reading aloud helped students to increase their interest in learning more while they develop listening, speaking and reading skills. They conducted a comparative study with college students who were exposed to two reading strategy: reading aloud and silent reading. They reached to the conclusions that RA strategy is more effective since students demonstrated a better reading comprehension. Additionally, students concluded that this strategy was helpful because they were able to understand unfamiliar words and improved their confidence. Heo(2017) states that RA helped students to develop their phonological process.

In addition, a study conducted in a setting where English is taught as a foreign language in a secondary school, 20 students and 5 teachers who participated in the research demonstrated that RA helped them to improve their comprehension reading skills, difficult words pronunciation and students' confidence (Sajid, 2021). This study demonstrates the impact on students reading fluency since they have improved pronunciation of difficult words and when they pronounce them correctly fluency is also affected in a positive way. Moreover, Adrián (2014) states that RA support students' pronunciation, stress and intonation since the researcher conducted a study to understand students' opinions and compare the influence of reading texts aloud in their word stress, intonation and sound articulation. The results provided evidence that students improved their pronunciation and the tests results revealed that students got better grades after being exposed to the technique. This study confirms that reading skills are developed when students have the capacity to read fluently, recognize words and understand what they read (Norton, 2007).

Reading aloud techniques can be performed during a class or outside it. It will depend on the class organization. Some authors state that the teacher can read aloud while students



are following the text while there is also another option where students can practice this technique independently. It will depend on the lesson objectives. Teachers need to choose carefully the texts and decide whether they want to read for their students or have their students reading aloud. Additionally, reading aloud or silent reading are two options that teachers can have in their instruction. Ninsuwan (2015) states that using RA can help students to improve their pronunciation. The researcher led a study and applied RA technique towards students who were learning English as a foreign language at a beginning level and the results indicated that students felt more confident when they had to pronounce particularly unfamiliar words. What is more, the study was developed with college students with diverse language backgrounds.

Studies about RA have been conducted in different settings, children and adult learners, or based on students' English level. Heo (2017) mentions that RA technique should not be limited to children only but this technique can also work with students from high school or college. Yu (2015) conducted a study with ninety-one college students who considered that reading aloud tasks helped them to improve their vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation. On the other hand, only upper level students got better results in grammar and reading comprehension. Muhaimin (2019) found in his study that reading aloud is effective to promote students reading fluency since they improved their pronunciation accuracy and fluency after the implementation of reading aloud. Furthermore, Aldhanhani and Abu-Ayyash (2020) underline the importance of including reading aloud practices in an English curriculum. All this information is useful since teachers have to consider all the factors that are linked to the use of RA strategy in class instruction.

Different authors suggest that RA help students to practice their speaking skills; however, Gabrielatos (2002) states that RA strategy only provides students the opportunity to practice their text without any effort since they are reading words that are written in texts. In other words, students and teachers have to understand that reading aloud probably is not a good option to promote speaking practice in English since students are not producing anything or they are not thinking while speaking. Furthermore, Jafari (2013) mentions that silent reading is more beneficial for those students who enjoy working autonomously because the conclusions of his study suggested that students enjoy better by practicing silent reading. Güler also confirms in his study that students' comprehension does not differ if they are using silent reading or reading aloud strategy. Al-Qahtani (2016) found out that poor readers do not perform well in reading comprehension for different reasons and one of them is that they pay more attention to read aloud a text rather than comprehend it (Güler, 2013). Reading aloud can be a good strategy to improve pronunciation; but, this strategy could not be the solution to help students to understand texts (Gabrielatos, 2002).

**Methodology.** There were 29 participants in this study. They were college students that had already finished their third English level which corresponds to a level A2 within the Common European Framework of References of Languages (CEFR). Students were provided with texts related with biographies of famous people. Jafari (2013) suggests that selecting texts according to students’ interests is relevant. For this reason, readings about famous people were selected because this type of texts contains common vocabulary which can be familiar for students. Then famous people biographies contain important information about recognized people that students have probably been exposed before and they could have some background knowledge.

There was a process that students had to follow in order to complete each reading aloud assignments. First, students were suggested to look for an application that could allow them to record their voice; however, the teacher provided the application called Vocaroo as an option. Then each week students have to record their voice by reading the biography which was chosen by the teacher. As an extra resource, students were also provided with the original recording of the text so they could check the pronunciation and then record themselves. This study took place during the academic period from May to August 2021 in an Ecuadorian context and due to the pandemic issues, college students were attending online classes. Students had to read and record themselves the biography one per week during seven weeks. Each week they received some feedback and their pronunciation mistakes were underlined so they could improve in the next recording. After they recorded their voice they sent it to the teacher who graded based on a rubric and all the recording were graded out of 10. The rubric that was used to grade and provide feedback to the students was elaborated by the teacher (See table 1)

**Table 1**

*Reading aloud rubric*

	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Fair (1)
Accuracy			
Rate			
Expression			
Phrasing			
TOTAL			

Accuracy is relevant in reading aloud assessment because students are graded according to their errors. In other words, reading accurately means that there are no mistakes while reading which makes possible to understand what the reader is saying without any effort. Rate is related with the number of words that the Student read correctly which also define fluency. It is common to rate reading by recording how many words the Student read per minute. Expression, on the other hand, is the ability to intonate and to know punctuation. Finally phrasing refers to the ability of reading long phrases smoothly.

### Results

This was a pre-experimental research since there was only one group (N= 28) of students who took part in this study. There was a grade assigned for the first assignment through the use of a rubric as a tool to assess students reading aloud task. Students were also evaluated during the treatment and in each week, they got a grade according to their rubric results. At the end, the data collected from the first and last reading aloud rubric provided some insights related with reading aloud technique to promote the development of reading skills. The information was analyzed quantitatively with SPSS free version software. Wilcoxon sign rank test was used to analyze the data. It means that there was not a normal distribution and it was a non-parametric test.

Students results in the pretest and posttest are presented in the following chart (See table 2)

**Table 2**

*Students' grades in Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test*

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
After reading strategy - Before reading strategy	Negative Ranks	1 <sup>a</sup>	11,00	11,00	-3,906 <sup>b</sup>	,000
	Positive Ranks	22 <sup>b</sup>	12,05	265,00		
	Ties	5 <sup>c</sup>				
	Total	28				

a. After reading strategy < Before reading strategy

b. After reading strategy > Before reading strategy

c. After reading strategy = Before reading strategy

The results show that there is a significant difference in their reading skills development since they the statistical test value is  $Z=-3.906$  and  $p < .000$ .



As the p value is less than 0.05 it is clear that the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that reading aloud technique improves students’ reading skills. The mean of both tests demonstrated that the difference was significant and students got better results in the posttest (See table 3)

**Table 3**

*Difference between the pretest and posttest mean*

		Before reading strategy	After reading strategy	Difference
N	Valid	28	28	28
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		6,32	8,68	2,3571
Std. Deviation		2,405	1,389	2,51240
Variance		5,782	1,930	6,312

The mean in the pretest was 6.32 while in the posttest was 8.68 which means that the difference is 2.3571. Students improvement was important and they could improve their gradings at the end of using reading aloud technique.

**Conclusions**

- Developing reading in an English class is challenging since it requires more than just reading words. Reading involves different elements such as pronunciation, intonation, rate, text comprehension and fluency. Additionally, students need to be motivated when they start reading in other language. Reading in English is different other languages such as Spanish. The phonemes may different in some cases and comprehension may be affected if they are not read correctly. Reading aloud technique can provide the opportunity to practice reading and at the same time improve skills. For instance, this study demonstrated that students’ accuracy, rate, expression and phrasing improve through the application of this RA.
- English teachers should try to use different techniques to help students start reading while they enjoy it. Considering the results of this study, one of the reasons of this significant change in the mean of the pretest and the posttest is the exposition to reading aloud texts. As it was stated, students at the beginning had problems and their audios improved significantly in the process.
- Different authors suggest that RA is the process where teachers read for the students and they follow with their texts; while others also advice to ask for students to read aloud in class. However, in this case the students used the

technology and they worked independently to complete the task which was a recording with their reading aloud. It is important to mention that students always need clear instruction and feedback. For this reason, the strategy as applied in a period of time where students also received observations to their pronunciation.

- As this study was carried out with college students with a level A2 and the technique was also tested to check accuracy, rate, phrasing and expression, it would be important to conduct more studies where the researchers can check reading comprehension. Students not only need to read but they also need to understand what they read which is the main objective of reading skills development.

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