



Reviewing the Effectiveness of Reading Aloud Technique in EFL Context: Is it Better than Silent Reading?

Yona Dwi Tirta Syafitri¹, Vira Budiarti², Tatum Derin³

¹Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 28265

¹Email: yonasyafitri88@gmail.com

²Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 28265

²Email: virabudiarti@gmail.com

³Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 28265

³Email: t.derin@unilak.ac.id

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Abstrak

Reading Aloud (RA) technique seems to give a new level of emphasis on reading. In 2015, Pimanmas Ninsuwan experimented this technique on twenty English as Foreign Language (EFL) university students of Thailand and found that while fast learners are faster in understanding the context than slow learners who are less able, even primary English level students gain a better grasp of what they read if they do it aloud than silently. RA is not quite a discovery, but the paper's significant contribution to the field is its visible improvement on Thai students' English reading comprehension from June to August 2014, during a time when Thailand is going to join ASEAN, thus entering international relations where English is essential in communication. This paper is interested in reviewing it because the seemingly simple technique has numerous benefits not limited to decreasing students' intimidation on difficult and unfamiliar words, provoking them to understand and analyse what they read, training not just their reading skill but also their listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: *Reading Aloud (RA) technique, silent reading technique, Thailand, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), communication*

INTRODUCTION

Pimanmas Ninsuwan is a full-time lecturer of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok, Thailand, with Business English Bachelor and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Masters. It's possible that her interest in language education and sociolinguistics is what got her to conduct a 3-month-experimental study to improve Thai university students' English proficiency in light of Thailand joining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Entitled *'The Effectiveness of Teaching English by Using RA Technique Towards EFL*

Beginners,' her paper researches the impact reading aloud (RA) gives to beginner English students of Thailand, with the sample size of twenty. This present article reviews it after noting that RA is different than regular reading, as reading is a passive ability while RA is visibly an active ability done mainly by the students, while during normal reading activities the teacher or lecturer is the ones who mostly do it.

Primary classrooms commonly use RA to introduce literacy to their students (Barrentine, 1996). For example, in the United States, the practice of RA to young learners in a classroom setting has been

thought to be an essential instructional strategy up to this day (Christenson, 2016). This is because it further proves that reading strategies improve reading comprehension skill (Gilakiani & Sabouri, 2016; Azizifar *et al.*, 2015).

RA is probably the sole technique in English Language Teaching (ELT) not explicitly associated with any of the modern teaching methods as there is no reference to RA in Howatt (1984), a highly recognised library of ELT history. It's only a few years later that first-language teaching uses RA to help children match sounds with the written language symbols. They do it in two ways, which is combining the sounds of single or clusters of a letter, and decoding the whole word to the children (Coren & Eysenck, 1990; Eysenck & Keane, 1990; Rayner *et al.*, 1989). Scholars characterise RA by the clear articulation and recognition of words (Mojsiewicz, 2019), flexibility in rate, volume and tone, adequate phrasing and effective use of pauses. They also noted that most classes developed these inadequately.

The purpose of the author is writing this article to find out does RA technique help learners to gain more understanding in English reading comprehension and perform better in a test. Because most Thai students cannot be counted as successful language learners, for they cannot speak English as well as they are expected to (Prathomchaiwat, 2013). It's true what the writer said; this also happens in Indonesia because English is a compulsory subject for secondary school. Unfortunately, despite studying English for six years in junior and senior high school, many Indonesian students still exhibit low proficiency in English upon senior high school graduation (Marcellino, 2015; Larson, 2014; Imperianti, 2012; Lie, 2007). One of the most recent research even dishearteningly concluded that 75% of Indonesian students from a sample size of 44 English

students, were not fluent in reading and could not catch the writer's message while RA, having difficulty in intonation and stress of words during pronunciation and articulation (Jufri, 2019). RA is still currently contested as an excellent way to improve, at the very least, students' reading skill (Sudiati, Hanapi, & Bugis, 2018; Carioli & Peru, 2016), and engagement in understanding and appreciating literature (Rao, Newlin-Haus, & Ehrhardt, 2016).

METHODS

The authors reviewed Ninsuwan's paper using the library research method, which collects data from various secondary sources to form an understanding of the content of the article (Arikunto, 2010). This qualitative research relates ideas, perceptions, opinions, and truth or facts which cannot be measured by numbers (Sulistyo-Basuki, 2006). This present article aims to formulate the full picture of the usage of RA.

The subjects of Ninsuwan's paper were 20 students out of 200 who undertook an intensive English course from June to August 2014, and one teacher assigned to provide pre-test work assignments based on reading tests of students' initial knowledge, which the teacher then examined the recorded scores. Afterwards, Ninsuwan grouped the students to use self-learning or RA technique, and the teacher observed to gather data. Ninsuwan inductively analysed the data to provide meaning, find the relevant information and get the conclusion (Syah, 2006). Qualitative descriptive research typically use this series of steps.

FINDINGS

The title of this article is interesting by using the word RA for learning English techniques because the techniques or skills for learning English are

infamously known to consist only of these four, namely reading, speaking, writing, and listening. As it stands out, the article has a better chance of gaining a broad audience of readers.

Aside from the title, this article has a suitable method for conducting research using qualitative descriptive because the author has made research on students by way of independent learning in groups. Qualitative descriptive method is a viable choice as it uses the principles of independent learning and action research (Yin, 2009; Bullogh & Pinnegar, 2001).

Ninsuwan's article helps readers who have difficulty in learning English, especially in EFL students. Since reading is part of the generalised language skill, reading is a significant part of children English learning, and it is a vitally important aspect of the human learning process (Linse & Nunan, 2005). Knowing the techniques presented in this article can make classes perform better in helping children articulate and recognise words because they both produce and hear the sounds (Zamuner *et al.*, 2018). In other words, to read, one must be able to decode (sound out) printed words and to comprehend what she/he reads since the aim of reading is comprehension. Nevertheless, knowing how to pronounce written words correctly does not mean that someone can read (Chen, 2003).

In the findings section, the authors get two results of reading techniques, namely by RA and independent learning techniques. Here the author tested the students, proving that the results of the RA score were higher than the independent learning techniques. However, the results are probably not highly reliable because there was a limited time to do the tests, affecting the judgment in terms of effectiveness and quantity.

In the discussion section, Ninsuwan claimed RA technique could be an excellent benefit for learners who use

English as a foreign language and also for the beginners. This article is stronger because it also presents that teachers are benefited by the secure teaching method that engages students much better than teaching using typical reading. Desirable characteristics of language teachers have been described in the literature as having not only a profound competence in the target language but a set of personal qualities like sensitivity, warmth and tolerance (Vadillo, 1999), and teaching using RA significantly helps teachers develop these three qualities. In an investigation of the characteristics of good language teachers, Brosh (1996) found the desirable attributes of an effective language teacher to be: having knowledge and command of the target language; being able to organize, explain, and clarify, as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students; being fair to students by showing neither favoritism nor prejudice.

So, in general, this article is very suitable for students learning English as EFL beginners. The flow is effortless to understand, plus the reader quickly understands the language used by the writer. Although, a minor misgiving of Ninsuwan's article is its lack of conclusion section. While not wrong in itself, this article seems to aim for an audience of primary teachers or fresh graduates, who would typically go straight to the conclusion section of research articles.

ANALYSIS OF RA TECHNIQUE

A glaring problem in the article is how the research was never justified turned out to be not validated by some experts. It turns out that after looking at several articles about the technique of learning English by RA, there are articles serving as 'devil advocates'. Although RA receives considerable emphasis in EFL studies, it has become discouraged by methodology specialists and some EFL

teachers. This makes the article not fully effective because sticks to one perspective.

Not to mention, the author's goals vary and are spread out, but the clear goal is fortunately delivered by the title, and the purpose has been answered. The two research questions in the discussion could be delivered again as suggestions for further research, since research journals offer insight for practitioners including teachers and lecturers in implementing the techniques or protocols discussed or experimented, similar to how Hu & Gao (2017) offers major contribution into reading research field with their review on studies using reading-aloud, or sometimes also called as think-aloud, protocols to investigate the solutions to its limitations. The probable problems in the implementation of RA include unclear reactivity and veridicality, incompleteness due to late reaction time, and problems of accuracy. The solutions they suggested are numerous, such as providing demographical information in the lesson plan design that also take reactivity and validity into consideration, viewing RA as part of self-regulated reading process than the entirety of the learning process, training the students before actually administering RA into the official curriculum by clear demonstration and practice yet also avoiding over-demonstration and over-practicing, and discouraging students from justifying or explaining their behaviors that may not be appropriate when one is speaking.

CONCLUSION

This experimental research article tries to 'bite more than it can chew' and ends up being messy in channelling its purpose and explanation. One must commend how great it is to analyse and present the effectiveness of prior learning and the design of one's research in ways that ordinary readers will understand, linking methods to previous English

learning techniques with clear seminal and contemporary context. So regardless of inconsistent flow, the content of this article is valid, though not well debated or advocated by other perspectives. The findings brought the conclusion that RA, or more specifically, this article's take on RA, emphasises the techniques' effects onto the students and little to the teacher. This article will be stronger if the writer adds the impact of implementing RA for the ones who teach it. So far, it only alludes to how teaching might be better because RA is more engaging than usual reading activity.

The article might also provide more depth if it connects RA with a standard English subject, such as narrative or recount text types. These texts are characterised by the frequent occurrence of certain communicative elements (e.g. direct speech and dialogues) and might be a match with RA technique. The proper oral production of the communicative features may help EFL learners to realise the feelings, mood, and emotions of the characters in the text, thus facilitating their overall comprehension of the text, and enhance their appreciation of narratives. Recent research discovered supported this fact, discovering that RA interferes with sentence recognition memory if the speakers use clear speaking style rather than conversational style (Keerstock & Smiljanic, 2019). This may still be a work in progress as some EFL teachers express less preference to taking culture's influence on language into account to their lesson plan development (Demirbaş, 2013).

Besides using RA techniques for students, the teacher should also invest more in educational programs to improve their English skills so they can contribute to an effective teaching and training process. As the primary source of language available for students, teachers as the ones with better knowledge and skill in language can help students

overcome their difficulties at communicative skills and maximise their learning strategies too.

Overall, Ninsuwan's article has done an excellent job proving that RA increases not just students' reading skill, but also listening and speaking in an engaging way.

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