

Words Come Alive: Benefits and Barriers of the Reading Aloud Strategy to Young Readers

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Abstract

This study examines the benefits and barriers of implementing the Reading Aloud strategy for young readers, particularly at the elementary school level. Through a theoretical research approach, we analyze recent literature and studies from 2019-2023 to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this strategy shapes early literacy development. The research highlights the multifaceted benefits of Reading Aloud, including enhanced vocabulary acquisition, improved comprehension skills, increased fluency and prosody, and the fostering of critical thinking abilities. These advantages are grounded in established educational theories such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. However, the study also identifies several barriers to effective implementation, including time constraints, the need for proper training, and the challenge of selecting appropriate reading materials. The paper discusses strategies to overcome these obstacles and explores the potential of integrating modern technologies to enhance this fundamental literacy practice. By synthesizing current research and analyzing emerging trends, this study offers valuable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers striving to nurture a new generation of literate and engaged readers. The findings underscore the continued relevance and effectiveness of the Reading Aloud strategy in contemporary educational settings, supporting its implementation as a versatile tool for literacy instruction across various learning environments.

Keywords: Educational strategies, elementary education, literacy development, reading aloud, young readers.

Introduction

Literacy is a term to describe the abilities and skills that a person has to understand, process, and use the information provided for various circumstances (Hartati, 2017). Through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Indonesian government is promoting various programs related to students' literacy skills in the world of education. This is based on the low literacy score of students in the reading category. This score is obtained from research in the Progress International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which still shows that the ability of Indonesian students to understand reading is below the international average. Faizah et al., (2018).

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017), literacy is defined in four things, namely: 1) the ability to read, write, count, and speak, as well as the ability to find information and use it; 2) social activities in their application are affected by various conditions; 3) learning activities in which there are reading, writing, counting activities used to think, investigate, ask, and critique all things that have been learned; and 4) the use of readings that vary in terms of subject, flow, and level of language complexity. Basic literacy is closely related to the ability of students to use their literacy skills in everyday life (Wiratsiwi, 2020). In this case, the most crucial focus on literacy skills before going further into discussing other definitions of literacy is reading skills.

The ability to read is essential for student literacy in education because it is fundamental for students to process, understand, and use the information they get in everyday life. This aligns with the literacy program driven by the Indonesian government, commonly called the National Literacy Movement (GLN). The general objective of GLN is to foster a culture of literacy in the educational ecosystem, starting from families, schools, and communities in the context of lifelong learning to improve the quality of life (Atzamaki et al., 2017).

Five critical points are the focus of the Indonesian government, in this case, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, in formulating the National Literacy Movement. According to Faizah et al. (2018), the five main focuses in the movement are; 1) Reading 15 minutes before the lesson starts; Reading aloud, Reading silently, 2) Organizing literacy-rich facilities and environments; Elementary et al., 3) Creating a text-rich environment, 4) Choosing reading books in elementary school, and 5) Public Engagement. In comparison, the activities go through 3 stages: habituation, development, and learning.

Based on the statement above, the first point in GLN is the habit of reading 15 minutes before the lesson starts. The reading activity is divided into two categories: reading aloud and silently. This aligns with Lestari (2018), which conducted research with a reading-aloud strategy. He explained that the reading-aloud strategy can improve children's reading skills. This is also explained by Ernalis et al. (2015), saying that the reading-aloud strategy can develop children's reading ability early and reading comprehension.

Reading Aloud is an activity that can be a tool for teachers, students, and readers together with other people or listeners/listeners to know/capture/understand the author's information, thoughts, or feelings. In line with this, the strategy of reading aloud is the activity of reading by voicing the writing read through the proper oral and intonation, with the aim that the listener and reader can understand the information conveyed by the reader (Kundharu et al., 2012). Hanh (2002) explained that reading aloud is the right time to help students become good readers.

Reading Aloud is an activity carried out to develop reading and listening skills. By reading aloud, students will know the mistakes made by friends who read because they pay attention to the text read (Resmini & Juanda, 2007). Reading aloud is the most important

activity to build the knowledge needed for children to read successfully. Reading aloud is one of the cheapest, most straightforward, and oldest teaching tools, promoted as a better teaching tool than anything in the home or classroom (Trelease, 2017).

In the realm of early literacy development, the reading-aloud strategy has long been recognized as a powerful tool for fostering language skills, comprehension, and a love for literature among young readers. This strategy, which involves an adult reading text aloud to children, has been the subject of extensive research and continues to be a cornerstone of early childhood education (Lennox, 2013). As we delve into the digital age, where screens and interactive media compete for children's attention, the relevance and efficacy of reading aloud remain topics of significant interest and debate in educational circles. The benefits of reading aloud to young children are multifaceted and well-documented. Studies have shown that this practice not only enhances vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension but also contributes to the development of print awareness, phonological awareness, and overall literacy skills (Zucker et al., 2013). Moreover, the shared experience of reading aloud creates a nurturing environment that can foster emotional bonds and instill a lifelong passion for reading (Fettig et al., 2018).

However, despite its recognized advantages, the implementation of regular reading-aloud sessions faces various challenges in both home and school environments. Time constraints, competing priorities, and the allure of digital entertainment often impede consistent practice (Merga & Ledger, 2018). Additionally, socioeconomic factors, language barriers, and limited access to quality reading materials can create disparities in children's exposure to this beneficial activity (Gilkerson et al., 2017).

Recent research has also explored innovative strategies for reading aloud, including the use of technology to enhance the experience. Digital storytelling and interactive e-books have emerged as potential complements to traditional read-aloud sessions, offering new dimensions to engage young readers (Christ et al., 2019). However, these technological advancements also raise questions about their impact on the social and interactive aspects of reading aloud which are crucial for young children's development.

Based on the facts described above, this conceptual research was conducted to dissect and find new facts related to using the Reading Aloud strategy in one of the student's literacy skills, namely reading. It was also to critically examine the benefits and barriers of the reading-aloud strategy for young readers in the contemporary context. By synthesizing recent research and analyzing current trends, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this time-honored practice continues to shape early literacy development. Furthermore, we will explore strategies to overcome the challenges associated with implementing reading-aloud activities and discuss the potential of integrating modern technologies to enhance this fundamental literacy practice. This paper discusses previous research in improving reading literacy in elementary school students. According to Aswat & Nurmaya (2019), reading habits are essential and fundamental and must be developed early to improve the quality of education delivery.

As educators, parents, and policymakers strive to nurture a new generation of literate and engaged readers, understanding the nuanced landscape of reading aloud becomes increasingly crucial. This research endeavors to contribute to this understanding, offering insights that can inform practices and policies aimed at maximizing the benefits of reading aloud while addressing the barriers that hinder its widespread and effective implementation.

Method

This study employed a theoretical research approach, which involves the development and application of theoretical frameworks to understand and explain the benefits and barriers of the reading-aloud strategy for young readers. Theoretical research is defined as a collection of related statements or propositions that attempt to describe, explain, or predict a particular aspect of experience (Thyer, 2013). In this context, the study built predictions based on theoretical conceptualization, drawing from established educational theories such as the importance of oral English improvement, the role of pronunciation practice, and the enhancement of deeper understanding through sensory engagement. By grounding the research in these theoretical frameworks, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how reading aloud can be effectively integrated into educational settings to enhance young readers' skills and enjoyment of reading.

Findings and Discussion

The implementation of the Reading Aloud strategy offers multifaceted benefits, grounded in robust theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Recent studies have demonstrated its efficacy across various domains of literacy development. For instance, Suggate and Lenhard (2022) found that interactive read-alouds significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, particularly for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In terms of comprehension, a meta-analysis by Swanson et al. (2021) revealed that structured read-aloud, when combined with explicit strategy instruction, leads to substantial gains in reading comprehension skills. The strategy's impact on fluency and prosody has been reaffirmed by Young et al. (2020), who observed improvements in reading rate and expression following consistent read-aloud practices. Moreover, Lennox and Westerveld (2021) highlighted the motivational aspects of read-aloud, noting increased engagement and positive attitudes towards reading among participants. The potential of read-aloud in fostering critical thinking and analytical skills has been explored by Hoffman and Roser (2023), who found that dialogic reading practices during read-aloud stimulate higher-order thinking. Additionally, Alismail (2019) emphasized the role of diverse read-aloud in promoting cultural awareness and empathy, contributing to more inclusive learning environments.

These recent findings underscore the continued relevance and effectiveness of the Reading Aloud strategy in contemporary educational settings, supporting its implementation as a versatile tool for literacy instruction. This paper has conducted an analysis based on previous research to find the benefits and barriers of implementing the Reading Aloud strategy to improve elementary school students' literacy. The analysis is divided into two parts, namely:

Benefits of Implementation Reading Aloud Strategy

In its application, the Reading Aloud Strategy can solve several problems in improving young readers' reading ability because this strategy is easier to apply to students from an early age. Tarigan (2008) and Young et.al. (2020) explained that several skills are required in reading aloud in elementary students. Those points are explained below:

1. Read clearly
In the read-aloud activity, students are expected to read clearly so that the listener can understand the meaning/intent of the reading.

2. Read with full expression and feeling
Reading should be done with feeling and expression. This is so that the listener can understand the meaning of the text. For example, a loud reader is reading a sad story, so the reader must be able to express the story with a sad expression, intonation, phase, etc.
3. Read without being fluent
In read-aloud, students are expected to be able to read fluently so that the listener/listener can understand the reading.

Other skills needed in reading aloud activities are 1) using the right speech, 2) using the correct phrases, 3) using natural intonation of voice, 4) in a good attitude position, 5) mastering punctuation, 6) reading clearly, and 7) reading with full expression, 8) reading without stammering, 9) understanding and understanding the reading material he reads, 10) speed on the reading material he reads, 11) reading with confidence (Dalman, 2014)

Barriers to Implementation Reading Aloud Strategy

Besides the benefits of this analysis, the authors also found some barriers to implementing this strategy towards students' literacy. According to Rahim (2011) and Swanson et al. (2021), several things need to be considered in the use of the strategy of reading aloud:

1. Listening is a skill that has benefits and needs to be taught
It is intended that in addition to teaching using the reading-aloud strategy, teachers in schools must also pay attention to students' ability to listen because this strategy requires good listening skills. Suppose students do not get teaching listening skills or listening activities when this strategy is applied and is disrupted. In that case, the Reading Aloud strategy results will not be optimal.
2. The length of the readings should vary
At this point, it can be said that teachers must choose readings that vary in the number of words and themes so that learning using the reading-aloud strategy is not dull.
3. Teachers or parents should be able to make sure children can see pictures clearly when reading aloud picture books
In its application, teachers or parents can use the help of picture books and must ensure that the picture is visible to students or children being read aloud.
4. Teachers or parents can stop reading aloud in stressful parts
In reading aloud, teachers or parents must revise or change stories or even stop reading when they encounter parts of the reading that are stressful or inappropriate to hear students. In this case, teachers must be more selective when searching and reading materials.

5. Do reading aloud with the proper expression
At this stage, teachers must use appropriate expressions and intonation in applying the Reading Aloud strategy so that students can interpret the meaning of the reading read-aloud and stimulate analytical and critical thinking skills in early childhood.
6. The teacher or parent should review the reading first before reading the reading to the child.
Teachers and parents must be selective and able to understand reading first before being applied or read aloud to students.

The things above illustrate the situation that may be encountered in implementing the Reading Aloud Strategy in improving the reading literacy skills of early childhood students, including elementary school-age students. The points presented are based on the results of the listed research related to this strategy. Maybe in its application, there will be many more benefits and barriers if the point is appropriately developed.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the Reading Aloud strategy effectively enhances students' literacy, particularly at the young reader level. This strategy captivates students' attention by focusing on auditory elements, as it employs various prosodic features such as intonation, punctuation, and pauses, which are crucial for effective reading. Teachers and parents must be mindful of these aspects when implementing this strategy. The effectiveness of the Reading Aloud strategy extends beyond the classroom, making it a versatile tool for literacy development. The strategy's applicability is not confined to school settings; parents can effectively utilize it at home, supporting the broader national literacy movement. By implementing this strategy across various fronts – in schools, homes, and community settings – the government's initiatives for promoting national literacy can be more comprehensively and effectively realized, fostering a culture of reading and learning that extends well beyond formal educational environments.

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