



Examining the Reading Aloud Speeds of the Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Having a critical role in both academic and social lives, reading fast and comprehension are necessary skills for today's individuals. The factors affecting these skills of adolescent learners are needed to examine. With an intention to provide significant results to the literature, this study aimed to examine if there is a difference between the secondary school students' reading aloud speeds and the variations as the type of the text, their gender, and their classroom levels. 40 students, of whom were 20 girls and 20 boys, from a secondary school attended to the study. They varied across the classroom levels as well. Accordingly, 10 of those students were 5th, 10 of them were 6th, 10 of them were 7th, and 10 of them were 8th graders. In order to collect data, a narrative text (a story) and an informative text (an essay) were utilized to test the students' reading aloud speeds. The findings were obtained through the standard deviation calculations. Accordingly, the study revealed that the reading speeds of the secondary school students change according to the text type, their gender and classroom levels.

Key words: Reading, Reading fast, Reading aloud speed, Factors affecting reading speed, Story, Essay.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study contributes to existing literature by examining if there is a difference between the secondary school students' reading aloud speeds and the variations as the type of the text, their gender, and their classroom levels.

1. Introduction

Reading is an action carried out to be able to gain knowledge. Reading which is a language skill utilized by physical and mental components has been defined differently: While according to Ozdemir (1990) reading skill is a mental activity ensuring the comprehension and interpretation of the printed words, it is the vocalization of the written and printed symbols compliance with certain rules according to Rozan (1982) and Sever (2004). Whereas (Harris & Sipay, 1990) have defined reading skill as the interpretation of the written language in a meaningful way, Smith and Dechant (1961) have pointed out that reading is the process embodying the recognition and perception of the cognitive interpretation process. To sum up, reading skill is a physical and a mental process comprising the perception, understanding, comprehension and interpretation.

Reading skill enabling the comprehension skills of human beings has been acquired at the start of primary school. In the primary school years, reading strategies such as reading aloud, reading silently, timed reading are applied to increase the speed of reading skill. On the other hand, it is known that the process of gaining knowledge through reading has been intensified since 4th grade, and consequently more efficient reading and comprehension practices are common in use. Also, improving reading skill practices are proceeded in secondary school. In the 5th grade, reading aloud must be followed at one-third in ratio and this ratio should be decreased in the following grades (Aytaş, 2005). Both reading fast and comprehending what has been read are necessary skills today's individuals should have, which is an essential factor enabling students' achievement in not only social but also academic lives. Students, who read fast, comprehend correctly, interpret and use the language efficiently as well as with a rich variety of vocabulary, learn more easily in every field and achieve at steady and highest levels.

Reading aloud can be defined as the vocalization of perceived and comprehended words or phrases according to their semantic and phonetic features through speaking organs as well as reading a written material to the audience within a hearing tone (Aktas & Gündüz, 2002; Oz, 2011). Reading aloud which is pronouncing the vocabulary aloud while reading a text has a pivotal role in one's both daily and academic lives. Reading aloud is known as an important reading strategy in the acquisition of reading with fluency skills (Okur, 2013; Yılmaz, 2018). Particularly it underpins the first reading and writing practices during the primary school years. Reading aloud practices are implemented for the reasons which are to determine students' reading improvements, to ensure students acquire a standard speaking skill, to build a foundation for reading silently and to develop students' interpersonal skills. In reading aloud, it is essential to maintain students pronounce correctly and read with fluency. It also contributes to the improvement of students' speaking skills. Reading with accuracy compliance with pronunciation rules have great contributions to speaking with accuracy and proficiency as well (Cifci, 2000; Ozbay, 2009).

It is vital to read the material compliance with the characteristics of language as well as with accuracy in reading aloud. How great attention is given to speaking, reading needs that much attention also. In reading aloud, listeners are also motivated and enjoy. Some complex ideas and feelings can be understood easily through engagement with reading aloud also. At the same time, the language of the text read, its easiness to understand and fluency give enjoyment to listeners, which contributes to students' listening skill improvement and helps them become a good listener (Kavcar, 1995). According to Güneş (2007), reading aloud generates the functions of the brain's several parts. Therefore, it has many effects on the improvement of students' language skills and their mental activities. The studies indicate that students should engage in reading a text aloud once a day at least.

Reading aloud has several benefits: The student who reads aloud gives attention to reading, concentrates on reading, comprehends better and interprets, which eventually increases the student's confidence and builds self-control over his/her reading and comprehension as well as self-guidance. Besides, some activities about the text read aloud help students comprehend the text better and improve their speaking skills. Some activities such as pointing out the feelings and ideas of the text differently, acting the text out, dramatizing it, using facial expressions and gestures in reading can be done. Students at all school levels (primary, secondary and even high school) should be encouraged to read aloud frequently. Since both eyes and ears are active in reading aloud, it increases the comprehension and assists learning besides memorization to occur swiftly (Aktas & Gündüz, 2002; Beyreli, Çetindağ, & Celepoğlu, 2010; Lane & Wright, 2007).

There are some concerns needed to be taken in reading aloud: After the education of literacy, students should not be allowed to use their body language such as hand, arm, and head movements inappropriately. Students should be encouraged not to use their local dialects in reading and speaking. Teacher should introduce the correct and appropriate intonation in reading aloud, and also s/he should use Turkish language efficiently while reading aloud as a model. The texts to be read should not include unknown vocabulary as much as possible. Before reading aloud, adequate time should be given to students so that they can comprehend the text easily and they should be allowed to read it silently at first. Teacher reading aloud not only becomes a role-model but also helps them focus on the text, and consequently enables them to enjoy the text, which has been read effectively. Teacher should present the ideas and feelings in the text by dramatizing it and motivating students. By doing this, student recognizes and comprehends the ideas and feelings in the text easily. The needed feedback on student's reading should be given after s/he finishes reading. Moreover, students' vocabulary should be enriched through reading aloud strategy (Celik, 2006; Yılmaz, 2018).

According to Maviş (2005) reading speed is a specific unit of time which is the between the start of read a text with comprehension and finishing it. The common technique to test reading speed is the number of the word per minute read with comprehension. Reading fast, which is reading more words with comprehension in a specific unit of time, is needed because of the reasons such as accommodating ourselves to the world, catching up with the improvements, and having achievements etc. Reading fast can be influenced by the factors such as the type of the text, the purpose of reading, language and mental developments or physical environment etc. (Akyol, 2013; Kurudayıoğlu & Soysal, 2015; Ozbay, 2009). The typical reading rate is 150 words per minute (Korkmaz, 2008).

Additionally, according to Gray (1975), student increases his/her rate in the first three years after acquiring literacy. This rate can rise from 60 wpm to 160 wpm. However, reading aloud rate might decrease in the following years.

As stated by Baştuğ and Akyol (2012), the reading rate is obtained through the following steps: the total number of words per minute read by a student is calculated and the number of mispronounced words is subtracted from the total number. Consequently, the number of words read correctly by students is detected. Reading fast is as important as reading with accuracy, which is a prerequisite for reading with fluency and reading comprehension.

On the other hand, Akçamete (1999) points out that it is not so effective to detect only the number of letters or words per minute for reading rate. To test the reading rate, the followings below should be regarded:

- The time of the start is noted down before reading aloud.
- The text is read.
- The time of finishing the text is also written down. The duration is indicated by seconds.
- The number of words in the text is divided by the duration of reading, and the reading rate is calculated. The result is multiplied by 60.
- The result of the multiplication is the number of words per minute.

The factors affecting the reading rate can be listed as follows (Ruşen, 2016):

- The easiness or sophistication of the text to be read,
- The reader's vocabulary knowledge,
- The readiness and cultural level of the reader,
- The reader's reading comprehension skills,
- The reader's eye health and his/her education for improving eye movements.

However, the factors affecting the reading rate negatively can be arrayed as follows (Dilligil, 2004; Imrak, 2006; Kondu, 2008):

- Reading with a high-pitched tone and subvocalization,
- Reading the words one by one or reading with syllabification,
- Focusing on details and regression,
- Reading passively,
- The anxiety of not comprehending the text when read fast.
- Lack of education on eye movements,
- Cultural background, lack of grammar or vocabulary education,
- Concentration problems.

According to Baran (2008) those students who are able to read fast have the qualifications below:

- They have the habit of reading.
- The students with a habit of reading have a rich vocabulary knowledge, express themselves efficiently, and interact with effective communication.
- They have adequate time for not only their assignments but also other activities as they read fast.
- Since they read fast and comprehend, they solve more problems not only for the preparation of the exams but also in the exams, which increases their self-confidence.
- The students with reading fast skills live achievements consistently in their both academic and social lives.

In order to increase students' reading speeds, first of all, it is required that students should gain a habit of reading. Teaching how to use their eye movements, they can expand their focal range. They are supported with the practices and the materials such as books, texts etc. regarding the reading purpose.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The study adopted the case study from qualitative methods. The case study is a design in which an in-depth analysis of a case or an event in its natural setting is developed and the data is collected in a systematic way (Davey, 2009; Yıldırım & Simşek, 2013). The results obtained through the case study indicate the reasons why that case or event has occurred in that way as well as the considerations to be taken in further studies.

2.2. The Aim of the Study

This study has aimed to understand if there is a significant difference between the secondary school students' reading speeds and the variations as the type of the text, their gender, and their classroom levels. In order to address this aim, the followings have been intended to reach in the study:

- To determine the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th graders' number of words per minute in reading texts in the forms of story and essay.
- To determine if the secondary school students' reading aloud speeds change according to.
- The text in the form of a story.
- The text in the form of an essay.
- The students' gender.
- The students' classroom levels.

2.3. Data Collection

The participants of the study were 40 students from Mehmet Akpınar Secondary School during the fall of the 2018-2019 academic years, of whom were 20 girls and 20 boys. They varied across the classroom levels as well. So, 10 of those students were 5th, 10 of them were 6th, 10 of them were 7th, and 10 of them were 8th graders.

2.4. The Instruments

The narrative and informative texts utilized in the study were selected from the texts used in the secondary school course books regarding the average word numbers they included. The texts in the Turkish course books were reviewed in order to determine the texts to be implemented in the study. An informative text and a narrative one, which are used in all the classroom levels, were selected, and then, it was consulted to two Turkish teachers for their expert opinions. By regarding the expert opinions, these texts were decided to use in the study. Accordingly, the narrative text in the form of a story named as “Emine Teyze’nin Çilek Reçeli” and the informative text in the form of an essay named as “Güler Yüz” were utilized in the study.

The data of the study were gathered in the Turkish courses by the researcher, in which each student read aloud the texts one by one. The researcher used a timer for a minute, and she recorded the student’s reading. After that, the researcher examined the recordings, and she measured the number of words per minute read correctly by each student.

2.5. Data Analysis

The findings on the changes between the reading aloud rate of the participants and the variations as the type of the text, gender and classroom levels were obtained by measuring the standard deviations. After obtaining the students’ wpm scores, the researcher displayed them in the tables by considering the type of the text, gender and classroom levels. Then, interpretation and discussions on these tables have been presented.

3. Findings

3.1. The WPM Scores of the Girls and Boys in the 5th, 6th, 7th And 8th Grades in the Story and Essay.

Table-1. The WPM scores of the girls and boys in the 5th grade in the story and essay.

5 th Grade	The wpm scores in the story	The wpm scores in the essay
Girls		
1.	103	118
2.	140	148
3.	120	121
4.	108	145
5.	108	108
Boys		
1.	138	134
2.	136	142
3.	99	91
4.	122	122
5.	94	79

According to the [Table 1](#), the highest wpm score of the girls in the 5th grade is 140 in the story while the lowest score is 103. Regarding the essay, the girls’ highest wpm score is 148 and the lowest score is 108. The girls in 5th grade have scored the highest wpm in the essay compared to the story. The boys’ highest wpm score is 138 in the story, and the lowest wpm score is 94. On the other hand, in the essay, the highest wpm score is 142 and the lowest wpm is 79. Hence, the boys in the 5th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the ones in the story. These findings indicate that both the girls and boys in the 5th grade have read more words correctly in the essay.

Table-2. The WPM scores of the girls and boys in the 6th grade in the story and essay.

6 th grade	The wpm scores in the story	The wpm scores in the essay
Girls		
1.	104	137
2.	130	140
3.	106	114
4.	135	161
5.	109	134
Boys		
1.	109	134
2.	138	161
3.	113	121
4.	111	108
5.	130	131

As seen in the [Table 2](#), in the story, the highest wpm score of the girls in the 6th grade is 135 and the lowest score is 104. In the essay, the highest score is 161 and the lowest wpm is 114. The girls in the 6th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. The boys in the 6th grades have scored the highest as 138 wpm while the lowest as 109 wpm in the story. In the essay, the highest wpm score is 161 and 108 is the lowest wpm. As similar to the girls, they have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. According to these findings, the girls and boys at the 6th grade have read more words in the essay.

Table-3. The WPM scores of the girls and boys in the 7th grade in the texts in story and essay.

7 th Grades	The wpm scores in the story	The wpm scores in the essay
Girls		
1.	172	182
2.	154	175
3.	157	161
4.	177	169
5.	170	154
Boys		
1.	140	96
2.	101	102
3.	156	183
4.	115	114
5.	119	95

According to the Table 3, in the story, the highest wpm score of the girls in the 7th grade is 177 and the lowest score is 154. In the essay, the highest score is 182 and the lowest wpm is 154. The girls in the 7th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. The boys have scored the highest as 156 wpm while the lowest as 101 wpm in the story. In the essay, the highest wpm score is 183 and 96 is the lowest wpm. As similar to the girls, the boys in the 7th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. According to these findings, the girls and the boys in the 7th grade have read more words in the essay.

Table-4. The WPM scores of the girls and boys in the 8th grade in the story and essay.

8 th Grades	The wpm scores in the story	The wpm scores in the essay
Girls		
1.	111	122
2.	138	158
3.	145	141
4.	120	133
5.	113	133
Boys		
1.	157	159
2.	107	108
3.	142	127
4.	157	154
5.	143	139

According to the Table 4, in the story, the highest wpm score of the girls in the 8th grade is 145 and the lowest score is 113. In the essay, the highest wpm is 158 and the lowest wpm is 122. The girls in the 8th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. The boys have scored the highest as 157 wpm while the lowest as 107 wpm in the story. In the essay, the highest wpm score is 159 and 108 is the lowest wpm. As similar to the girls, the boys in the 8th grade have read more words correctly in the essay compared to the story. According to these findings, the girls and boys in the 8th grade have read more words correctly in the essay.

3.2. The Average Wpm Scores of the Secondary School Students According to the Type of the Text and their Gender.

Table-5. The average wpm scores of the secondary school students according to the type of the text and their gender.

	Girls (The Average Wpm Score)		Boys (The Average Wpm Score)	
	Story	Essay	Story	Essay
5.	115.8	128	117.8	113.6
6.	116.8	137.2	120.2	131
7.	166	168.2	126.2	118
8.	125.4	137.4	141.2	137

According to the Table 5, in the story, the average wpm scores of the girls in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades tend to rise, there is a fall in the 8th grade compared to the wpm scores in the 7th grade. On the other hand, in the essay, the girls' average wpm scores appear to be rising from 5th to 8th grade. There seems to be a difference between the average wpm scores of the girls and the type of the text, and the tendency of rising in the essay has not been detected in the story.

As seen in the Table 5, while reading the story, a rising in the average wpm scores of the boys from 5th to 8 grades has been detected. In the essay, the average wpm scores have risen in 5th, 6th and 8th grades, however, there is a fall in the 7th grade. There appears to be a difference between the average wpm scores of the boys and the type of the text, and the rising in the average wpm score in the story has not been detected in the essay.

Shortly, the Table 5 displays the difference between the average wpm scores and the types of the text. The rise in the girls' average wpm scores while reading the essay have not been detected in reading the story, which is quite opposite considering the boys' average wpm scores. The boys' average wpm scores have risen in the story, however, any rise has not been observed in the essay.

3.3. The Average Wpm Scores of the Secondary School Students According to their Classroom Levels.

Table-6. The average wpm scores of the secondary school students according to their classroom levels.

Classroom levels	The average wpm scores in the story	The average wpm scores in the essay
5.	116.8	120.8
6.	118.5	134.1
7.	146.1	143.1
8.	133.3	137.2

According to the Table 6, the average wpm scores of the secondary school students appear to be rising in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades considering both of two text types. However, there seems to be a fall in the 8th grader's average wpm scores.

4. Discussion and Results

This study has aimed to investigate if there is a difference between the secondary school students' reading speeds and the type of the text, their gender, and their classroom levels. In order to address this aim, the study was conducted and the following results have been obtained:

Both the girls and boys in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades have read more words correctly in the essay. The girls' wpm scores have indicated a difference considering the type of the text and the rising tendency in the essay has not been detected in the story. On the other hand, by indicating a difference between the boys' wpm scores and the type of the text, the rise in the story has not been detected in the essay. Consequently, there is a difference between the secondary school students' reading speeds and the type of the text. The girls' average wpm scores have risen in the essay, but any rise has not been observed in the story, which is quite opposite regarding the boys' average wpm scores. The boys' average wpm scores have risen in the story however, any rise has not been detected in the essay. Considering the classroom levels, a rising in the wpm scores of 5th, 6th, and 7th graders has been seen in the both of the text types, but 8th graders' wpm scores have fallen compared to the previous class level.

Whereas 5th graders' highest wpm score is 116 in the essay, and 120 in the story, the 8th graders have scored 137 in the essay and 133 in the story. By regarding these findings, the reading speed appears to be changing according to the classroom levels, which agrees with the results of the study named "Determination of Reading Comprehension Levels of Fourth Grade Students in Terms of Some Variable" by Değirmenci Gündoğmuş (2018). According to this study, it was found out that 4th graders read the informative texts in a shorter time than the narrative texts. Moreover, in the study by Blommers and Lindquist (1954), there is a significant difference between the type of the text and the reading speed, and reading comprehension level. The reading speed has a tendency of fall in the informative texts, which disagrees with the result of this study.

While the reading speed has increased depending on the classroom levels, it has decreased in the 8th grade by considering 7th grade. In their study on the reading speed, Stanovich, Nathan, and Zolman (1988) state that the reading speed has a tendency in rising with the chronological age and particularly in the 5th grade, this occurs faster. On the other hand, Carver (1989) points out that each individual has his/her own reading level however, the wpm increases about 10-20 words with the chronological age after acquiring the literacy. In this study, the average wpm scores have increased in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades. Although this finding seems to have an agreement with the studies mentioned earlier, there is a fall in the wpm scores of the 8th graders, and this result disagrees with the studies.

The boys' average wpm scores in the informative and narrative texts have indicated a change considering the classroom levels in contrast with the girls. The girls' wpm scores in the informative text are higher than the boys'. Similarly, Armut and Türkyılmaz. (2017) have revealed that the variation as the gender has an impact on the students' reading with fluency. Another study by Armut (2017) has indicated that the girls outperform the boys in reading with fluency. These studies support the result of the study. Nevertheless, not only (Sahin, 2011) but also Keskin (2012) have reached that the gender does not have any impact on the reading speed and reading with accuracy. This study's result disagrees with these studies indicating the variation of the gender's no an impact role.

As a conclusion, the study has concluded that there is a difference between the secondary school students' reading speeds and the type of the text, their gender and their classroom levels.

5. Implications

This study might be conducted with different students at primary, high school and university by using different kinds of texts. The further studies on the reasons of the decrease in the 8th graders' wpm scores might be examined. The activities to increase the students' wpm scores can be done. In order to encourage students to achieve reading aloud effectively, more example reading activities by the classroom and Turkish can be suggested. Additionally, listening as well as reading aloud activities on literal texts can be done.

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