

The Effects of Classroom Oral Reading on Adolescent Japanese EFL Learners' Grammatical Proficiency

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Abstracts

This study investigates the effects of classroom oral reading on Japanese junior high school EFL learners' grammatical proficiency. The participants are three cohorts at a junior high school in Tokyo. The cohorts were taught the same set of grammar items, but one cohort did oral reading in almost every lesson. The results seem to suggest that while oral reading was effective in learning basic and frequently used items, it was not as effective for relatively complex and less frequent ones.

Keywords

Grammar Teaching, Young Learners, Oral Reading

1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine whether learners' grammatical proficiency could be improved through classroom oral reading, i.e., through reading written texts aloud.

2 Procedure

2.1 Participants

The participants were three groups of students (hereafter referred to as Groups A, B and C) at a private junior high school called Shiba Junior High School (hereafter SJH) in Tokyo. Almost all the students in the three groups started to learn English at SJH, and they did so at different times (they belonged to different cohorts of students, Groups A, B, and C, who entered the school in 2010, 2009, and 2008 respectively), but they went through the same syllabus. Their performance was assessed twice: at the end of their first and second years.

2.2 Method

2.2.1 Target Grammatical Items

At SJH, the annual syllabus for each cohort is fixed. The main grammar points listed in the syllabus for the first-year students were *be*-verbs, basic verbs, basic adverbs, basic prepositions, the present and past tenses, the present and past progressive tenses, interrogative sentences, *wh*-interrogatives, auxiliary

verbs (*can*, *may*, *must*), comparatives, superlatives, the existential *there*, countable and uncountable nouns, and the determiners of English. The items listed on the second-year syllabus are auxiliary verbs (*will*, *shall*), tag-questions, the five basic sentence patterns, *to*-infinitives, negative questions, conjunctions, comparatives, superlatives, the present perfect tense, the passive voice, relative pronouns and gerunds.

2.2.2 Grammar Teaching

Each grammar item was presented through grammatical analyses of example sentences in the textbook named *BirdLand Junior English I* (Yoshida, 2008a) and *BirdLand Junior English II* (Yoshida, 2008b). Grammar exercises were constantly provided; they were selected from an exercise book attached to the textbook.

2.2.3 Reading

All the three groups were made to read one reading passage per one textbook chapter. The length of the passages varied from 30 to 160 words. For the first-year learning, Groups B and C read the same set of ten passages. Group A read twelve passages, including six passages which Groups B and C also read. During the second-year learning, Groups B and C read the same set of eleven passages, but Group A read twelve passages, five of which were the same passages that Groups B and C also read.

2.2.4 Oral Reading in Group A

Group A was offered less time for grammar analyses to set aside a certain amount of time for oral reading. The oral reading was done in almost every class with the example sentences in the textbook and the reading passages, approximately for five to ten minutes per each 50-minute lesson.

2.3 Test

The study analyzed the results of the school's annual English review tests which covered the previous year's grammar points covered in the three groups after their first year of learning (hereafter

Test 1; full score was 90) and after the second year of learning (hereafter Test 2; full score was 60). The same questions were used in Tests 1 and 2 for the three groups.

3 Results

The results of Test 1 and 2 are in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: The Results of Test 1

	N	M	SD
Group A	287	69.9	9.5
Group B	283	65.8	14.2
Group C	304	65.9	13.4

Table 2: The Results of Test 2

	N	M	SD
Group A	282	47.0	7.4
Group B	281	45.6	9.2
Group C	303	46.8	8.1

The results of Test 1 were Group A (n=287, M=69.9, SD=9.5), Group B (n=283, M=65.8, SD=14.2), and Group C (n=304, M=65.9, SD=13.4). A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance on Test A indicated that there was a significant difference among the three groups ($\chi^2(2) = 12.85, p < .001$). A supplemental Scheffe's test (with alpha less than .05) revealed that Group A performed better than the other two groups did. The results of Test 2 were Group A (n=282, M=47.0, SD=7.4), Group B (n=281, M=45.6, SD=9.2), Group C (n=303, M=46.8, SD=8.1). A Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance on Test 2 indicated that there was no significant difference among the three groups ($\chi^2(2) = 2.05$). The integrated line charts for Test 1 and 2 are shown in Figure 1 and 2.

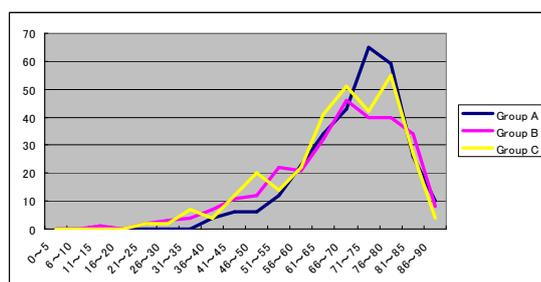


Figure 1: Integrated Line Chart for Test 1

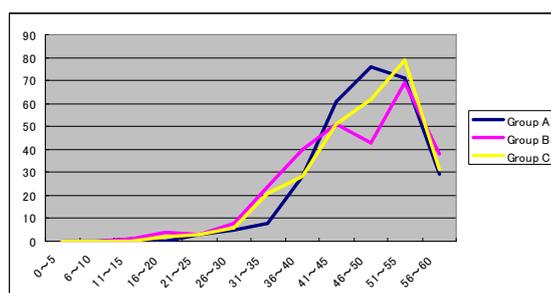


Figure 2: Integrated Line Chart for Test 2

4 Discussion

The aforementioned outcomes of the analyses of Tests 1 and 2 could suggest that although Group A's first-year oral reading was effective, it was not as effective in their second year of learning. Let us consider the reasons for this result.

4.1 Frequency of Appearance

The difference in the effectiveness of Group A's oral reading between the first year and the second year would be attributed to the difference in the frequency of the exposure to the target grammar points. Namely, the grammar points taught in the first year were such basic ones that many of them could have appeared relatively frequently in various instances in both the example sentences and the reading texts throughout the year, whereas the items in the second year seem to have appeared in more specific contexts and hence less frequently. For example, it is possible to assume that grammar points such as *be*-verbs, negative sentences, and interrogative sentences appeared frequently throughout the first year.

4.2 Degree of Complexity

It could be hypothesized that the difference in question was also due to the difference in degree of linguistic and/or conceptual complexity between the grammar points in the first year and those in the second year. That is to say, the grammar points in the first year were basic and hence comparatively more straightforward than those in the second year. For instance, the structures required in an interrogative or negative sentence may have been conceptually simple enough for the first year students. Oral reading may have contributed to the reinforcement of the students' understanding of the grammar points. On the other hand, items in the second year such as the structure of clause embedding in the use of relative pronouns may have been so conceptually complex that oral reading may not have had the same effect.

References

- Yoshida, K. (ed). (2008a). *Birdland junior English I*. 6th Edition. Tokyo: Buneido.
- Yoshida, K. (ed). (2008b). *Birdland junior English II*. 7th Edition. Tokyo: Buneido.