The Relationship Between the Ability to Read Aloud and Reading Comprehension in Beginning EFL Reading

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The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension in beginning EFL reading. While many studies examined various topics related to elementary English education, researchers have paid little attention to the investigation of the reading process of elementary school EFL learners. Given the paucity of research in beginning EFL reading, the present study attempted to focus on elementary school EFL learners' reading behavior by exploring whether relationships exist between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension. It was hypothesized that if a beginning EFL reader is able to read aloud well, then he/she can comprehend the text successfully. The results of the correlation analysis indicated the strong and statistically significant relationship between the ability to read aloud and the ability to comprehend. Consistent with much L1 reading research evidence, the results confirmed that the ability to read aloud is highly correlated with the ability to comprehend in the case of beginning EFL readers as well. On the basis of the findings, a few pedagogical implications are discussed. Understanding EFL learners' early reading development will not only better assist educators in meeting the needs of beginning EFL readers, but also may help us to reconsider and re-envision what we understand about learning English as a foreign language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the apparent de-emphasis on the teaching of reading in elementary school English education, based on the national curriculum, reading has occupied too narrow a place as compared to the enormous role that it may play in developing children's overall English abilities. While learning to read in the target language, a learner is likely to be exposed to a variety of vocabulary, sentence structures and expressions, thereby enhancing the process of language learning as a whole. Thus, as Cohen (1990) advocates, skillful reading can accelerate language learning by allowing for one more channel of communication and for an important source of input.

In reality, however, teaching spoken language overshadows teaching reading in the elementary English classroom. Also, while many studies examined various topics related to elementary English education, researchers have paid little attention to the investigation of the reading process of beginning EFL readers. Although it is important to understand the spoken English language development of elementary school students, greater efforts should also be directed toward understanding their early English reading development. Accordingly, there is a great need for research that focuses on the beginning reading performance.

Today, the prevalent view in the field of L1 reading is that there is a reciprocal or interactive relationship between phoneme awareness and early reading skill, with gains in one area leading to gains in the other (Ehri, 1992). Despite research evidence from L1 studies that provide unequivocal support for the critical role of phonemic awareness in learning to read (Adams, 1990), many L2 researchers have tended to ignore this area.

As Koda (1994) points out, foreign language reading debates since the mid-1980s have been dominated by 'top-down' approaches, that emphasize making meaning over the lower level skills of word recognition or letter-sound links. Consequently, most EFL reading research has centered on the relatively higher-order skills of discourse organization and the interpretation of continuous text, and on some other factors related to reading such as teaching methods, home environment, and so on.

A survey of pertinent literature has revealed only a few research studies related to Korean EFL/ESL young readers. Dong-Ho Kang's (2000) study, which was conducted qualitatively in an ESL context, examined how young L2 readers construct intertextual meaning and how to relate their conceptions or beliefs about reading to their intertextuality. Kim and Hall (2002) examined the role of an interactive book reading in developing pragmatic competence among Korean children in an EFL context. Kyung-Sook Cho and Soon-Young Seo's (2001) study investigated the effects of reading aloud to children on interest in reading and vocabulary acquisition in elementary EFL classes. Among various factors that influence children's reading

One study worthy of note is that of Dong-Han Lee and Se-Jong Lee’s (2001) study. They explored the effects of phonics on the improvement of reading skills for elementary school students. The findings showed that children in the experimental group, who received lessons through phonics with emphasis on short and long vowels, improved significantly their ability to read English words and sentences. Although Jung-Sook Kim (1999) also examined the importance of low-level reading skills, in particular word recognition skills, for elementary school students learning to read English, there lacks research that investigated Korean beginning EFL learners’ reading behavior.

Given the paucity of research in beginning EFL reading, the present study attempted to focus on beginning EFL learners’ reading behavior by exploring whether relationships exist between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to determine whether, and to what degree, relationships exist between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension.

If a beginning EFL reader is able to read aloud well, then he/she can comprehend the text successfully. To put it another way, the better one reads aloud, the better one is likely to comprehend the text. Thus, it can be hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between these two variables. To test this hypothesis, the study addressed the following research question: Are there relationships between the ability to read aloud and the ability to comprehend in beginning EFL reading?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Review of related literature indicates that this can be the first study in the field of beginning EFL reading to investigate the connection between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension. Due to the scarcity of literature concerning beginning L2 reading, the study draws on the current body of L1-based research studies on theories of word recognition and the role of phonemic awareness in learning to read.

1. Theories of Word Recognition

Text comprehension begins with recognizing words, i.e., decoding of words, processing of those words in relation to one another to understand the many small ideas in the text, and then, both unconsciously and consciously, operating on the ideas in the text to construct the overall
meaning encoded in the text (Pressley, 2000). It is clear that word recognition is the first step on the road toward reading comprehension, that is, construction of meaning, which is the ultimate goal of reading activity.

Getting the meaning of the text is facilitated when the reader can easily recognize the individual words on the page. Furthermore, not surprisingly, well-developed word recognition skills in the primary years also predict good comprehension in the later elementary grades (Juel, 1988). Thus, one way to develop comprehension abilities is to develop word recognition skills during the primary years.

Since the definition of the meaning of the term ‘word recognition’ is sometimes disputed, Hoover and Tumen’s (1993) definition of the term was used in the study. According to them, ‘word recognition’ means ‘to recognize an English word in print, be able to pronounce it, and give its meaning.’

Three different hypotheses have been developed in an attempt to describe how word recognition takes place. One hypothesis, which we will call the direct-access hypothesis, states that readers can recognize a word directly from the printed letters. That is, the visual pattern is sufficient to let you locate information about the meaning of the word in semantic memory (Seidenberg, 1995).

Another hypothesis, the phonologically mediated hypothesis, or the indirect-access hypothesis, states that we must translate the ink marks on the page into some form of sound before we can locate information about a word’s meaning (Perfetti, 1996). It can be noted that this process is indirect because — according to the hypothesis — we must go through the intermediate step of converting the visual stimulus into a phonological (sound) stimulus. Many studies support the indirect-access hypothesis, suggesting that visual stimuli are often translated into sound during reading (e.g., Seidenberg, 1995; Stothard & Hulme, 1996).

The third hypothesis, the dual-route hypothesis, states that we sometimes recognize a word directly through the visual route, and we sometimes recognize a word indirectly through the sound route (Perfetti, 1999). In other words, the reading process can be flexible, depending on the skill of the reader and the difficulty of the word. At present, the dual-route hypothesis seems like a wise compromise (Matlin, 2002).

According to Matlin (2002), there is agreement in the recent reading research literature that whereas beginning readers would be especially likely to sound out the words, using indirect access, skilled or experienced readers would generally tend to recognize the words directly from print. In this respect, it is frequently noticeable that children even move their lips when they read, but skilled readers do not.

Many L1 researchers studying beginning reading assume that if children can decode words in the text that they are reading, they will understand them (Gough & Tumen, 1986). An extension
of this line of reasoning is that word-level decoding is a critical bottleneck in the comprehension process, that if the reader cannot decode a word, he/she cannot comprehend it (Pressley, 1998).

Comprehension involves a number of lower order (i.e., word-level) and higher order processes (i.e., processes above the word level) specific to reading. For beginning readers, however, getting the words right becomes more important than making sense. Every unfamiliar word becomes a major obstacle to be identified before going on reading. Accordingly, word recognition is an essential part of the overall reading process, and a basic skill for a beginning EFL learner to learn to read. In other words, the acquisition of word recognition skills will lead to the major essential development in learning to read in the target language.

2. The Role of Phonemic Awareness in Learning to Read

Numerous studies demonstrate that children with high phonemic awareness have superior reading skills (Adams, 1990). That is to say, the children who are able to identify sound patterns in a word also achieve better reading comprehension. At the same time, these studies claim that word sounds may be especially important when children begin to read.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the term, ‘phonemic awareness.’ According to Harris and Hodges (1995), ‘phonemic awareness’, which is sometimes called ‘phonological awareness’, refers to the awareness of the constituent sounds of words in learning to read. Since phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably in the field of L1 reading, this study also considered these two terms interchangeable assigning the similar meaning.

Carnine (1977) showed that beginning readers who can phonologically recode print have a big advantage in reading unfamiliar words. In this connection, a large number of correlational studies support the existence of a causal link between a child’s phonological awareness and his/her progress in learning to read (Goswami, 2000). Simply put, children’s phonological skills play a crucial role in their reading development.

Based on extensive evidence from several studies on the relationship between phonemic awareness and beginning reading, Blachman (2000) states that children's performance on measures of phonemic awareness is a powerful predictor of future reading achievement. Also, Alderson (2000) suggests that there is a growing consensus among reading researchers that all reading requires what is called ‘early phonological activation.’ That is, readers typically identify the sound of words as part of the process of identifying their meaning.

Studies of beginning L1 readers reveal that phonological-recoding skill is a key ingredient for learning to read words (e.g., Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991; Castle, 1999; Foorman et al., 1998, and others). Share, Jorm, Maclean, and Matthews (1984) claim that phonemic awareness
and letter knowledge are the strongest predictors of beginning reading achievement. Gough and Tunmer (1986) supports this view by asserting that children who cannot phonologically recode do not become skilled readers. Further, Adams (1990) states that phonemic awareness has been shown to be a more potent predictor of reading success than intelligence, vocabulary, or listening comprehension.

Although the exact relationship of phonemic awareness to reading acquisition has been the subject of much L1 reading research, as Saches and Angela (2001) acknowledge, there is limited phonemic awareness research related to children learning English as a foreign language. Since there is consensus that phonemic awareness is essential for developing reading ability, to understand how exactly it is related to L2 reading acquisition is worthy of investigation.

In addition, although researchers have investigated the relationship between phonemic awareness and beginning reading, none of the instruments in previous studies assessed comprehension. That is, the relationship between phonemic awareness and comprehension in beginning reading was not explored. Therefore, the current study attempted to assess comprehension along with the ability to read aloud. Can children who possess high levels of phonemic awareness do better at reading comprehension than children with low levels of this skill?

III. METHOD

To explore the relationship between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension in beginning EFL reading, three instruments were used: a questionnaire, an oral reading test, a free-recall protocol. Firstly, for the purpose of gathering background information on the participants a questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of each experiment. Secondly, children were asked to read the text aloud, while trying to understand its meaning. Their reading alouds were recorded on the cassette tape. Lastly, after the participants read the text, free written recall was used to assess comprehension. Each participant was tested individually, reading the text aloud, and writing the free-recall protocol in Korean.

1. Participants

With the approval and cooperation of their homeroom teacher, 17 sixth graders participated in this study. The participants were 14 female and 3 male students. They were from one elementary school in a moderately sized city in the southern part of Korea. The participants were randomly selected from one class. On the basis of the information gathered from the
questionnaire, most of the participants were considered to be beginning readers of English.

Since the 7th national curriculum requires elementary students to learn approximately at least 340 and at most 500 English words for four years, sixth graders' vocabulary is assumed to range from 300 to 450 words. Therefore, the amount of vocabulary indicates that they are able to read only easy and simple English texts.

The information on each participant's background was obtained through a questionnaire (see Appendix A) distributed at the beginning of each reading session. Their background information revealed that their experiences of English study, in terms of length and exposures, were very limited.

Of the seventeen participants, five children started to learn English before the third grade: three from kindergarten, one from the first grade, and another one from the second grade. Twelve students began to learn English from the third grade at school for the first time. That is, they were never formally exposed to English before they received the English lesson in the third grade at school. The average length of English study was four years. Eighty percent of the participants were attending private English institutes at the time of this study. Most of the participants rarely had opportunities to read English storybooks either at home or at school.

2. Procedures

All the procedures were conducted individually, and were carried out in single sessions that lasted for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes in a quiet room outside the classroom. A quiet and separate room was chosen in order to obtain a good tape recording. At the beginning of each session, the participants were verbally informed that they were participating in a study to investigate the elementary school students' ability to read in English. There was no practice session.

The participants were informed that they were going to read aloud a short and simple English text. After reading aloud, they would be asked to write down in Korean what they could recall about the text. In addition, through the verbal instructions, they were advised to try to understand the meaning of the text while reading aloud. The participants were told to have as much time as they needed for reading aloud and writing the free-recall protocol.

To sum up, data collection was divided into the following sections. In the first section, prior to reading the text aloud, the participants were individually asked to fill out a simple background questionnaire. In the second section, the participants were asked to read aloud a short and simple English text. In the third section, they were asked to write down, in Korean, everything that they could remember about the text.

Right before they read aloud, they were advised not to feel nervous about the fact that their
reading alouds would be audiorecorded. Also, they were instructed to read as loudly and clearly as possible. The participants were informed that there was no time limit for reading aloud, and no assistance was provided during the task. When a participant paused at an unknown word, or hesitated to read a word aloud, the researcher waited for about up to 30 seconds. And then, the researcher encouraged him/her to keep reading without providing any assistance. On the average, it took three to five minutes to read the text aloud. After the reading aloud was finished, the text was collected.

And then, each participant was asked to provide a written recall of the text and to write it in Korean. For writing the free recall protocol, there was also no time limit. Most of the participants needed no longer than ten minutes to complete the free recall task. During data collection, the researcher sat beside the participant recording the reading aloud with a tape recorder. As the child read aloud, the researcher kept a running record of errors made, and took notes on his/her reading behavior that required close attention and examination.

3. Text

The reading material used in the reading aloud was chosen in consideration of their knowledge or levels of vocabulary, and syntax as well as the content. At the discourse level, the continuous text, which is composed of connected sentences, was used for the purpose of providing participants with contextual reading activity, in which they could decode words in context, not in isolation.

The text, "What Do You Like?" (see Appendix B) was selected from Literacy Place: Hello! (Scholastic, 2000), which was designed to be used as an English textbook for first graders in the U.S.A. The genre of the passage is personal narrative. Although the original text contained the pictures that illustrate the main elements of the text, the pictures were omitted in the text that was used for the study.

The text was retyped in the letter size of 13-point on a sheet of A4-size paper. With regard to the letter size of the text, during the pilot study the homeroom teacher suggested that the letter size, 13-point, might be suitable for the elementary school student. The typescript of the text was presented to the participants.

This selection was composed of 22 simple sentences, in which 97 words were used. The longest sentence contained 7 words, whereas there are two words in the shortest sentence. Most of the words in the text can be found in the elementary school English textbooks, which were written for the 7th curriculum. In addition, the spelling patterns of the words in the text were assumed to be sufficiently familiar to the participants as beginning EFL readers.

In the study, the original text was used after making a few alterations in consideration of
students' unfamiliarity with some lexical items and expressions. To illustrate, for the ease of reading the main character's name, 'Jan' was switched to 'Lisa,' which was assumed to be more familiar to the students since they had already encountered the name in their English textbooks. In addition, 'The man plays a drum. I like to play, too' were replaced by 'I like to play the piano, too.' Lastly, 'rat-a-tat-tat' and 'pat-a-cake' were deleted. These were the only changes made for the purposes of the study.

4. Assessing Reading Aloud

Reading happens all alone, up inside our heads. As a way of understanding the reading process in action, children's oral reading may provide teachers with information that can be useful to identify their sources of difficulties. Reading aloud was chosen because it is one of the common and reliable procedures to measure beginning reading ability (Masden, 1983). According to Paris (2002), customary assessments of beginning reading often focus on the child's abilities to read text orally, to answer questions about the text, or retell it.

One positive feature of observing children read aloud is the insights afforded about children's reading strategies. For example, listening to children read can show what they do when they encounter an unknown word, how they sound it out, how they look back in text. A second asset of oral reading assessment is that teachers can diagnose difficulties that children have with sounding out unfamiliar words. In assessing students' reading behaviors, misreadings, or the kind of errors, a student makes when reading aloud is one significant behavior that can indicate his/her reading ability. Participants' reading alou ds were assessed through errors they made while sounding out the words in the text.

Based on the scoring method (see Appendix C) devised by the researcher, the reading alouds were scored while listening to each participant's taped recording. Each word in the text carried equal weight and was given one point. That is, one point was awarded for each correct reading aloud of each word in the text. Each misreading, or error was scored incorrect. Self-corrections were accepted. That is, if the student corrected his/her own misreading, he/she received one point for a correct reading aloud of a word. In addition, skipping, a pause or hesitation that took longer than 30 seconds was counted as an error. The scoring was based on the number of correct items. Accordingly, the total number of the reading aloud scores was 97 points.

5. Scoring Procedures for Free-Recall Protocols

Reading comprehension was assessed by the free-recall protocols (see Appendix D), which were written in Korean. Since in the written recall protocol, there is no tester interference that
could manipulate the reader’s comprehension of the passage, test-takers respond openly and freely (Bernhardt, 1983). The free-recall protocol was scored using a system adapted from Jung-Sook Kim (2000). The scoring system (see Appendix E) awards one point for each information constituent recalled.

For the purpose of this study, an information constituent was defined as the minimal unit that carried meaning or made a semantic contribution within the sentence. To take an example, a noun phrase that contained a modifier (e.g., 받 하늘) was broken further into separate information constituents (e.g., 받 하늘) by assigning one point for the modifier. In addition, the scoring system considered some of the particles of the Korean language as minimal information constituents. There are numerous particles with diverse functions that occur directly after noun phrases in Korean. Some of them have been called ‘postpositions’ in that their functions are parallel to those of prepositions in English, but they are postposed rather than preposed. Others have also been called ‘case markers’.

Whereas postpositions have clearly definable semantic properties, the sole function of case markers is to define grammatical relations such as subject and direct object (Song, 1988). Accordingly, in the scoring system, while postpositions were considered as minimal information constituents, the nominative and accusative case markers were not categorized into information constituents but were included as a part of the head noun.

Usually, most researchers who have used free-recall scoring methods divide the text into idea units and then weight propositions according to their level of importance in the text. However, for this study, in order to take faithful account of sentences and even a word that the participants recalled, the scoring system divided each sentence into minimal information constituents, each of which was awarded the same point value. Hence, it assigned one point for each word. The total point of free recall scores was 79.

In order to check the reliability of the scoring system of free-recall protocols, the scoring was performed by two raters, one of whom was the researcher. Another rater was a graduate student who was an elementary school teacher. The correlation of scores by the two raters was checked by reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha), which reached more than 0.95.

6. Data Analysis

Two scores were obtained for each member of the sample, one score for a reading aloud and one for a free-recall protocol. Due to the different numbers of total points of reading aloud scores and free-recall protocol scores, the two scores were converted to percentage correct scores to yield to a statistical analysis. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation test was performed to determine the degree of relationship between the ability to read aloud and the
ability to comprehend.

7. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted one week before the experiment in order to:

1. refine experimental procedures, measure the approximate time for each task, examine the clarity of directions; and

2. determine the text in consideration of participants' limited vocabulary.

There were ten sixth graders who were from the same classroom. In the pilot study, three texts with the different level of difficulty in terms of syntax and vocabulary were used. One of the three texts was presented to each participant. The text used in the study was finally chosen on the basis of their performance on the tasks as well as of their homeroom teacher's opinion on the texts. In accordance with the homeroom teacher's suggestion, the letter size of the text was switched to 13-point in bold type from 11-point. No procedural change was made as a result of the pilot study.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data from participants' reading alouds and free-recall protocols were collected. Scoring of the reading aloud and of the free recall protocols was done using the scoring systems devised by the researcher. The reading alouds were scored by the researcher while listening to each participant's taped recording based on the scoring method. The free recall score was assessed from the free recall protocols written by the participants immediately after reading the text aloud.

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations of reading aloud scores and free recall scores, both of which were transformed into percentages.

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<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Means and Standard Deviations of Reading Aloud and Free Recall Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Aloud</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Recall</td>
<td>17</td>
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The results of the correlation analysis that addressed whether the ability to read aloud was related to reading comprehension are shown in Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.792, p< .01) indicated the strong and statistically significant relationship between the ability to read
aloud and the ability to comprehend. That is, there was a positive and significant correlation between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Correlation Between Reading Aloud and Free Recall</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Aloud and Free Recall</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

** Correlation is significant at p < .01 (the 0.01 level (2-tailed))

The robust correlation coefficient means that a student with a high score on reading aloud is likely to have a high score on reading comprehension. The statistically significant correlation allows us to predict the high degree of relationship between the ability to read aloud and the ability to comprehend. Accordingly, the relationship between the two variables can be established. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the strong relationship between these two variables does not mean that the ability to read skillfully caused better reading comprehension, or vice versa. At best, significant results of this study only mean that both variables are correlated.

The results of the study are expected. Consistent with other literature in the field of L1 reading research, the results showed that like in beginning L1 reading, the ability to read aloud is highly correlated with reading comprehension in beginning L2 reading as well. That is to say, children who are able to read aloud well demonstrated better comprehension of the text. Accordingly, the present study also confirms the prevalent view that performance on reading aloud can be a good predictor of reading comprehension.

The participants read the text without any aid from the researcher. Some, who lack confidence, read too slowly and hesitantly, or had trouble reading many of the words in the text while taking frequent long pauses. Children halted on a word because they were unable to sound it out and unable to guess a word with those letters. A few children read haltingly like a syllable-by-syllable reader.

In some instances, children's word substitutions resembled the printed words closely (e.g., 'white' for 'write,' 'red' for 'read,' and 'money' for 'many') showing that participants were attempting to use orthographic memories of print words. Besides, their free-recall protocols confirmed that they understood the meanings of those words as they sounded out. That is, they read words by connecting salient visual cues in the word with the word's pronunciation and meaning.

It is important to note that 6th graders' reading behavior manifested a strong reliance on memory to recognize words rather than on letter-sound correspondence rules. It can be assumed
that those substitutions might have occurred due to students’ familiarity with the words ‘white’ and ‘red’ rather than with ‘write’ and ‘read.’ The findings of this study indicated that they were not able to perform systematic letter-sound processing, and therefore the student’s ability to recognize words was taxed when visually similar words were confronted in text (e.g., ‘white’ for ‘write,’ ‘red’ for ‘read,’ ‘money’ for ‘many’).

These findings support Ehri’s (1998) assumption that in the partial alphabetic phase, beginning readers commit printed words to memory by forming connections between one or more letters in a printed word and the corresponding sound(s) detected in the word’s pronunciation. The children might remember the word ‘red’ by connecting the beginning and ending letters (r and d) with the corresponding sounds (/r/ and /d/) in their memory.

According to the background information, which was gathered at the beginning of each session, a few students who were unable to read aloud well have extremely limited vocabularies and no experiences of reading English storybooks. When some children did not recognize words, they did not attempt to sound out, and stopped reading or refused to say anything until prompted to try to call the word or to continue reading. In this case, having only scant experience of reading English print words the children looked at the word, probably did not know it orally, and had no strategy for guessing how to read it. In some instances, a few children skipped words when printed words were unfamiliar to them.

Many participants had trouble sounding out words that are not phonemically regular (e.g., mice), and that have more complex consonant units (e.g., night). When they encountered unfamiliar words in the text, they tried to use their limited letter-sound knowledge to recode by sounding out ‘mice’ and ‘night’ as [mis] and [nit] respectively. As Marsh, Friedman, Welch, and Desberg (1981) suggested, when beginning readers first read new words, reading by analogy to known words is more advanced than reading by sequential decoding. That is, beginning readers attempt to use grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) correspondences rather than processing larger chunks. Therefore, the evidence from this study supports Marsh et al.’s view by showing that some subjects read ‘mice’ as [mis], and ‘night’ as [nit] decoding letters sequentially.

To take another example, after three attempts to sound out, one participant managed to read ‘stars’ using her letter-sound knowledge. Reading by sequential decoding, she sounded out [st~] at her first attempt, then [star~] at her second attempt, and finally [stars] at the third time of sounding out.

It was, however, somewhat surprising that several students had difficulty decoding the word ‘cake’, in which ‘a’ sounds /ei/, rather than /a/. The assumption is that even though ‘cake’ is a very familiar word orally to children, they were not exposed to the word in print, and thereby unable to identify or recode phonologically the word correctly. Furthermore, in a few cases, participants mispronounced ‘cat, mat, hat’ as [kat], [mat], [hat] instead of [kæt], [mat], [hæt]’
showing their insufficient knowledge about some letter-sound patterns.

One interesting phenomenon to note of some children's reading behavior is that they tended to ignore, and thus omit the plural marker, 's' while sounding out nouns. Since this tendency is frequently noticeable among even adult Korean EFL readers, it can be assumed that their L1, Korean, may interfere with reading in English from the beginning stage of learning to read in English. The Korean language does not have an agreement system comparable to the English language. Number is not systematically present in Korean as grammatical categories. Thus, the English plural marker, 's' may be easily overlooked or deleted in the reading of English text.

In summary, although a stronger understanding of letter-sound relationships was demonstrated by some children, many participants showed an insufficient understanding of letter-sound associations. Also, the children who had high levels of phonemic awareness skill, i.e., the knowledge about letter-sound relationships, did better at understanding the text they read.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The current study seeks to throw light on the teaching of reading in elementary school English classrooms by investigating beginning EFL learners' reading performance. For that purpose, the present study proposed to investigate the relationships between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension in beginning EFL reading.

The results demonstrated that the ability to read aloud was positively and significantly correlated with reading comprehension. Although this study has a relatively small sample size, the robust and significant correlation makes it possible to predict that there exists a true relationship between the ability to read aloud and the ability to comprehend in beginning EFL reading.

The findings of this study have a few valuable pedagogical implications for implementation of effective reading instruction in elementary school English classrooms. First, the results demonstrated that performance on reading aloud is a good predictor of performance on reading comprehension. Accordingly, the ability to read aloud can be a valid measure of the overall reading ability of EFL beginning students.

Discussed earlier, one positive feature of observing children's reading aloud is the insights afforded about children's reading behavior or strategies. That is, through listening to children's oral reading, teachers can gather information on what they do when they encounter an unknown word and how they sound it out. Another asset of observing students' oral reading is that teachers can diagnose difficulties that children have with reading unfamiliar English words.

Secondly, from the beginning of reading instruction in elementary school English classrooms,
the children should be taught the sounds of the letters and given instruction about the
toachances between sequences of letters and their sounds in words. Phonics training, i.e.,
letter-sound correspondence instruction, is needed for children to achieve appropriate levels of
phonemic awareness that is a basic skill for learning to read English, and this should not be left
to chance. It is important for children to get meaning from text. Yet, at the same time, children
need to understand the relationship between the alphabet, the letters, and the sounds since
English is far from predictable as far as its letter-sound relationships are concerned.

The 26 letters of the English alphabet have approximately 41 to 44 phonemes, depending on
the dialect (Ehri & Nunes, 2002). This means that unlike the Korean alphabet, English does not
have one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. The irregular letter-sound
relationships of English are likely to cause a grave difficulty or confusion especially to
beginning EFL readers.

Phonics instruction can be a proper method for teaching reading in beginning EFL reading
classrooms. As reviewed earlier, the research evidence from Dong-Han Lee and Se-Jong Lee’s
(2001) study supports this view. In this connection, Adams (1990) strongly claims that the
probability of success in early reading is promoted by teaching students the letter-sound
relationships, with plenty of practice in sounding out words.

The value of phonics instruction consists in enhancing children’s ability to make explicit
connections between the printed alphabet symbols and the sound segments in words.
Accordingly, the goal of the phonics instruction is to enable the children to build their
knowledge of letter-sound relationships, using them effortlessly to identify unfamiliar words, so
that they could rapidly become independent readers free to concentrate on the message of the
text (Connelly, Johnston, & Thompson, 2002).

As suggested by numerous L1 reading studies, teaching phonics is helpful in aiding children
to develop basic reading skills (Ericson & Juliesbá, 1998). Direct phonics instruction about the
rules of English orthography, that is, the correspondences between letters and sounds, can
facilitate developing children’s ability to identify unfamiliar regular words using these rules. At
the same time, they should be given the ample opportunity to practice these rules on isolated
words and words in text.

Thirdly, every teacher of young beginning EFL readers should know why such instruction is
important, and how and when to provide it. Teachers may need to understand the processes
children use to decode or read words and thereby to improve their ability to teach reading.
Understanding these children’s early reading development will not only better assist educators in
meeting the needs of beginning EFL readers, but also may help us to reconsider and re-envision
what we understand about learning English as a foreign language.

In addition, it is necessary to deepen teachers’ knowledge about phonemic awareness and
thereby to improve their ability to teach reading. If phonemic awareness is essential for developing reading ability, sound teaching and learning experiences for children would lay the foundation for proficient reading. Explicit, systematic instruction, starting with high-utility vowels and consonants, enables children to learn how words work and gain a sense of control and confidence in their reading growth.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will give teachers a window on the reading process of EFL beginning readers. Admittedly, due to the small sample size and the simple research design, the present study is not without limitations. Thus, the study calls for further, large-scale research with more numbers of participants to draw a valid generalization on the relationship between the ability to read aloud and reading comprehension. The results of such investigation can provide important suggestions for the teaching of reading in elementary school English classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

__________________________ 초등학교 ( )학년 ( )반 이름 ________________

1. 성별: 남자 ( ) 여자 ( )
2. 가장 좋아하는 과목은?
3. 가장 홍미를 느끼지 못하는 과목은?
4. 책 읽기를 좋아하나요?
   ① 매우 좋아한다 ( ) ② 좋아하다 ( ) ③ 그저 그렇다 ( ) ④ 싫어하다 ( )
   ⑤ 매우 싫어하다 ( )
5. 어떤 책 읽기를 좋아하나요?
   ① 동화 ( ) ② 소설 ( ) ③ 만화 ( )
   ④ 기타(무엇인지 자세히 적어보세요: ________________)
6. 읽을 책은 어디에서 구하나요?
   ① 집 ( ) ② 학교 ( ) ③ 학원 ( ) ④ 친구 ( )
7. 영어 공부는 언제 시작했나요?
   ① 유치원 전 ( ) ② 유치원( ) ③ 초등학교 1학년 ( ) ④ 초등학교 2학년 ( ) ⑤ 초등학교 3학년 ( )
8. 영어 과외(학원, 학습지, 개인교습)를 받아보았나요?
   ① 예 ( ) ② 아니오 ( )
   ※ 위의 질문에 '예'라고 답한다면 얼마동안 영어 과외를 받았나요? (__년__개월)
9. 영어 공부하기를 좋아하나요?
   ① 매우 좋아한다 ( ) ② 좋아하다 ( ) ③ 그저 그렇다 ( ) ④ 싫어한다 ( )
   ⑤ 매우 싫어한다 ( )
10. 자신의 영어 실력이 얼마나고 생각하나요?
    ① 아주 잘한다 ( ) ② 잘한다 ( ) ③ 그저 그렇다 ( ) ④ 못하다 ( )
    ⑤ 매우 못한다 ( )
11. 가장 자신 있는 영어 기능의 순서를 메겨보세요.
   들기 ( ) 말하기 ( ) 읽기 ( ) 쓰기 ( )
12. 앞으로 가장 잘하고 싶은 영어 기능의 순서를 메겨 보세요.
   들기 ( ) 말하기 ( ) 읽기 ( ) 쓰기 ( )
13. 영어 이야기책을 읽어보았나요?
    ① 예 ( ) ② 아니오 ( )
   ※ 위의 질문에 '예'라고 답했다면, 지금까지 읽어 본 영어 이야기책은 얼마 되나요?
    ① 많이 ( ) ② 여러 권 ( ) ③ 한두 권 ( )
APPENDIX B

Text

What Do You Like?

I am Lisa.
I like many things.
I like my cat.
I like mice, too.
We like to play on the mat.
I like the drums.
I like to play the piano, too.
I like hats.
Big hats. Little hats.
I like lots of hats.
I like cakes.
I like to make cakes.
I like to read.
I like to write.
I like lots and lots of books.
I like to see the moon.
I like the stars, too.
I like the sky at night.
I like many things.
What do you like?

APPENDIX C

Reading Aloud Record

Name

What____ Do ____ You____ Like____?

I____ am____ Lisa____.
I____ like____ many____ things____.

I____ like____ my____ cat____.
I____ like____ mice____, too____.
We____ like____ to____ play____ on____ the____ mat____.
I like the drums.
I like to play the piano, too.

I like hats.
Big hats, Little hats
I like lots of hats.

I like cakes.
I like to make cakes.

I like to read.
I like to write
I like lots and lots of books.

I like to see the moon.
I like the stars, too.
I like the sky at night.

I like many things.
What do you like?
Total points: (  ) 97

APPENDIX D
Free Recall Protocol

이름: ____________________  No. _______

※ 지금 읽은 글의 내용을 기억하는 데로 되도록 날말 하나라도 더 많이 적어주세요.
APPENDIX E
Free Recall Scoring System

Subject ___

Title: 너는 ___ 무엇을 ___ 좋아하니?

Sentence 1: 난 ___ 라서 ___ 야 ___
Sentence 2: 난 ___ 많은 ___ 것을 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 3: 난 ___ 내 ___ 고양이를 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 4: 난 ___ 끼 ___ 도 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 5: 우리 ___ 차리 ___ 위에서 ___ 노는 걸 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 6: 난 ___ 드럼 ___ 음 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 7: 난 ___ 피아노 ___ 치는 것 ___ 도 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 8: 난 ___ 모자 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 9: 큰 ___ 모자 ___ 작은 ___ 모자 ___
Sentence 10: 난 ___ 많은 ___ 모자를 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 11: 난 ___ 케이크 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 12: 난 ___ 텀 ___ 만드는 것을 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 13: 난 ___ 책읽기 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 14: 난 ___ 글쓰기 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 15: 난 ___ 많은 ___ 많은 ___ 책 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 16: 난 ___ 달 ___ 많이보는 것을 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 17: 난 ___ 별 ___ 도 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 18: 난 ___ 밤 ___ 하늘 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 19: 난 ___ 많은 ___ 것을 ___ 좋아해 ___
Sentence 20: 난 ___ 무엇을 ___ 좋아하니? ___

Total points: ___

Applicable levels: elementary education, EFL beginning level
Key words: EFL reading, oral reading, phonics, reading comprehension, reading development, reading instruction

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