



青年学者文库

英语作为第二语言阅读教学

——大型数据库实证研究对低龄段
英语学习者阅读教学的启示

English as Second Language Reading and Teaching

—An Empirical Study on Reading Teaching Activities for
Elementary-level English Language Learners

刘四平 著



WUHAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

武汉大学出版社



青年学者文库

英语作为第二语言阅读教学

——大型数据库实证研究对低龄段
英语学习者阅读教学的启示

English as Second Language Reading and Teaching

—An Empirical Study on Reading Teaching Activities for
Elementary-level English Language Learners

刘四平 著



WUHAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

武汉大学出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语作为第二语言阅读教学:大型数据库实证研究对低龄段英语学习者阅读教学的启示/刘四平著. —武汉:武汉大学出版社, 2014. 1

青年学者文库

ISBN 978-7-307-12170-6

I. 英… II. 刘… III. 英语—阅读教学—教学研究 IV. H319.4

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2013)第 272189 号

责任编辑:罗晓华

责任校对:鄢春梅

版式设计:马 佳

出版发行:武汉大学出版社 (430072 武昌 珞珈山)

(电子邮件:chs22@whu.edu.cn 网址:www.wdp.com.cn)

印刷:荆州市鸿盛印务有限公司

开本:880×1230 1/32 印张:5.875 字数:151千字 插页:2

版次:2014年1月第1版 2014年1月第1次印刷

ISBN 978-7-307-12170-6 定价:19.00元

版权所有,不得翻印;凡购买我社的图书,如有缺页、倒页、脱页等质量问题,请与当地图书销售部门联系调换。



作者简介

刘四平，现任教于武汉大学外国语言文学学院。教育语言学博士，获英国谢菲尔德大学英语语言学硕士、美国内华达大学拉斯维加斯分校教育学博士。美国教育研究协会、国际比较教育、教师教育协会、对外英语教学（TESOL）协会会员。主要研究方向为对外英语教学、学术英语、课程和教学法、英语阅读，同时对美国中小学教育也有深入的研究。数十次在国际比较教育、教育和对外英语教学学术大会上发言并在国内外权威教育和语言类学术刊物上发表论文数十篇，出版教材和专著若干部。

Contents

Chapter One Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	11
1.3 Research Questions and Their Importance	19
Chapter Two Theoretical Framework	22
2.1 Reading Process	23
2.2 Linguistic Threshold	31
2.3 Cognitive Development	44
2.4 Reading Strategies and Skills	51
2.5 Text	55
2.6 Purposes	57
2.7 Theoretical Assumptions for ELL Reading Comprehension	60
Chapter Three Empirical Literature Review	65
3.1 Phonological Awareness and Reading Aloud	66
3.2 Vocabulary Instruction	75
3.3 Small Group Intervention	81
3.4 Pair-work Reading Instruction	86
3.5 Independent Reading Activity	92

Chapter Four Methodology	96
4.1 Research Design	96
4.2 Data Source	97
4.3 Construction and Justification of Variables	103
4.4 Data Analysis	109
Chapter Five Results	112
5.1 Effects of Reading Aloud Activity on Participants' Reading Comprehension	112
5.2 Effects of Explicit Vocabulary Instruction on Participants' Reading Comprehension	116
5.3 Effects of Small Group Reading Instruction on Participants' Reading Comprehension	120
5.4 Effects of Pair-work Instruction on Participants' Reading Comprehension	123
5.5 Effects of Independent Reading on Participants' Reading Comprehension	127
5.6 Summary	132
Chapter Six Discussions and Implications	134
6.1 Discussion	134
6.2 Implications	144
6.3 Suggestions for Future Studies	145
6.4 Limitations	147
References	148

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Background

This study explores the influences of reading teaching activities recommended by the reform policy and independent reading instruction based on second language development theory on reading development of English Language Learner (ELL) student at intermediate level at United States public schools. A deep understanding about these influences is important for researchers and policy makers to verify theoretical and policy assumptions about the role of various teaching activities in helping ELL student reading development, for teachers to develop effective reading instruction that can help ELL students to learn to read successfully, and for schools to support ELL students to pursue their social, economic, political, and personal goals through their reading development.

Reading development has been an important goal for all students in the U. S. federal government literacy policy making. For half a century, the federal and state governments placed reading high on their agendas (Miskel & Song, 2004). At the federal level several major reading initiatives were passed: the *Title One Reading* program, the *America Reads* program, the *Reading Excellence Act* and the *Reading First* program.

The earliest initiative is the *Title One Reading* program, which was passed by the U. S. Congress in 1965 as a compensatory educational program with the intention of helping low-achieving children in reading. Today, the program still funds 14, 000 school districts across the United States and provides assistance to 11 million low-achieving children at public schools. At the beginning of each year, the schools assess students' reading competence. Title One Schools considers a number of factors to identify children with lower reading performance. First, teachers recommend whether their students are entitled to the benefits from the *Reading Program*. Next, the schools screen students using a reading assessment that includes phonemic awareness, alphabet skills, reading and decoding skills, multisyllabic words, spelling skills, and text reading and comprehension. Finally, schools take students' reading grade into consideration when identifying children for the program. Based on all these factors, low-achieving students are enrolled in the *Title One Program*. The students selected for the program for reading assistance are placed in small groups with a reading specialist helping them to develop the needed reading skills and strategies.

The second federal act is *America Reads*. Different from *Title One Reading* program, *America Reads* program extended reading assistance beyond schools and it involved reading tutors and parents in helping children with poor reading performance. It is a program based on empirical research which demonstrated that sustained individualized attention and tutoring after school could improve reading levels, especially when it was combined with parental involvement and effective school instruction (Edmonson, 2000).

In signing the act of *America Reads*, President Clinton set the national goal: "all America's children should be able to read on their

own by the third grade..." (Clinton, 1996) so that they will have more chance for success in subsequent grades (Department of Education, 1997). The proposal of *America Reads Initiative* included five major points: training of volunteer reading tutors, getting parents involved in developing their children's reading proficiency, early intervention for at-risk children, college work-study students employed as reading tutors and annual assessment of reading (Edmonson, 2000). The focus of *American Reads Initiative* was training tutors who could help low-achieving children to improve reading. Tutoring was usually practiced on one-by-one basis and the most often used strategies including tutor and tutee reading aloud interactively and explaining new words (Moore-Hart & Karabenick, 2009).

Following the *America Reads Initiative*, the U. S. Congress passed the *Reading Excellence Act* (REA) of 1997. The act authorized the Department of Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to establish the National Reading Panel, a government body with the intention of assessing the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. The act placed more emphasis on improving reading instruction based on scientific research (Edmonson, 2000). For example, the National Reading Panel invited "leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents" as the member of the panel (NICHD, 2000a, p. 1-1). The NICHD selected 12 university professors, one principal from an elementary school, a parent, and one language arts teacher from a middle school (Yatvin, 2002). This panel was responsible for reviewing reading research and presenting its findings (NICHD, 2000a; Yatvin, 2002). Its four major goals are a) teaching children to read in their early childhood before the third

grade, b) developing reading skills and improving reading instruction according to “scientifically based reading research” (Mesmer & Karchmer, 2003, p. 637), c) expanding the number of high-quality family literacy programs, and d) reducing the number of children who are inappropriately included in special education due to reading difficulties (Edmondson, 2005). Similar to previous acts, REA emphasized researchers’ efforts in deciding on effective methods of reading instruction (Roller, 2000). For example, the panel used both experimental and quasi-experimental designs. The panel also set two initial criteria: a) “Any study selected had to focus directly on children’s reading development from preschool through grade twelve” (NICHD, 2000a, p. 1-5), and b) “the study had to be published in English in a referred journal” (NICHD, 2000a, p. 1-5). Based on extensive empirical studies, REA defined reading in six dimensions: phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation.

The next reading development program is *Reading First* program. As a federal educational program mandated under the *No Child Left Behind* act, the *Reading First* program was initiated in 2001 with the intention of encouraging the use of scientifically based research as the foundation for K-3 reading instruction (Dole, Hosp, Nelson, & Hosp, 2010). The program attached great importance to high-quality instruction in the classroom that has been empirically proven to be effective. As a state grant program, *Reading First* provided support to the states that were able to successfully help improve reading instruction and K-3 student reading achievement in schools that were “characterized by high poverty and chronic underachievement” (Carlisle, Cortinaa, & Zeng, 2010, p. 52). Built on the scientific research and supported by national documents regarding research on

reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000), *Reading First* identified five major areas in reading instruction that should be addressed in early reading development. These five areas are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Dole et al, 2010).

The Obama administration issued a more competitive act known as *Race to the Top* with the intention of raising students' performance in reading, mathematics and science based on common standards and assessments (Obama, 2009). *Race to the Top* marks a historic moment in American education. The program offers bold incentives to states willing to initiate systemic reform to improve students' performance in reading, mathematics and science in U. S. schools. *Race to the Top* has brought about a significant change in American education system, particularly in raising standards and aligning policies and structures to the goal of college and career readiness. *Race to the Top* has helped drive states nationwide to pursue higher standards, improve teacher effectiveness, use data effectively in the classroom, and adopt new strategies to help struggling schools. These standards and assessments are shaped by international benchmarked standards and assessments (OECD, 2011) and by needs to prepare American students for an emerging and competitive global economy that requires its workforce to be equipped with stronger knowledge of literacy including reading than ever before (Roller, 2000).

The most important standard to assess students' performance at schools is the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) initiative released by the federal government in June 2010. The initiative sets common standards for states to follow so as to “put an end to the insidious practice of dummying down academic standards” (Duncan,

2010). In reading, CCSS set specific benchmarks for text complexity, assessment and foundational skills. For example, CCSS requires that “all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school”. CCSS aligns its standards to complex texts commonly found in college and careers. The federal government shows its concern for the gap between reading demands in college, workforce training programs, and life in general and the actual decline in text complexity in K-12 students’ reading. As of today, 40 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core Standards in math and English.

In summary, legislative laws passed by the federal government and the Congress regarding the development of reading proficiency for American school children indicate the following four major points: a) developing reading proficiency at the early stage of childhood, b) enhancing scientifically-based reading instruction, c) emphasizing on phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, and d) helping low-achieving students.

Despite all the programs and efforts, American students’ existing reading competence is apparently not matching up with the expectations. Data revealed by different reading assessment systems showed that American students’ reading performance was still low. For example, the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA), a system of international assessment of student academic achievement of different countries, demonstrated how well students in the participant countries performed in reading. The target students PISA measured were 15-year-old group of students, i. e. , those who are approaching the end of compulsory schooling by measuring how well young adults are prepared to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies. The results of 2009 PISA showed that U. S. 15

years old students had an average score of 500 on the combined reading literacy scale, which was just above the average score (493) among the 75 participating countries or regions (Duncan, 2009). Such performance also suggests lower efficiency of reading instructions in U. S. schools considering its investment in education in comparison with other participating countries. For example, Estonia and Poland whose students performed at the same level as the U. S. in PISA 2009 spent around \$ 40,000 per student for K-12 education, much lower than \$ 100,000 per student for the U. S. K-12 education (OECD, 2011).

Another international reading assessment, the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) also demonstrated the U. S students' performance in reading. PIRLS is an international study of reading achievement in fourth graders. It is administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It targets at fourth grade children and measures their reading literacy achievement. PIRLS is designed to provide a baseline for future studies of trends in achievement, and to gather information about children's home and school experiences in learning to read. In both 2006 and 2011, more than 200,000 students from 46 countries and regions participated in PIRLS. The U. S. students' performance was only at the international average. The combined mean reading score was 540 out of 1,000 in 2001 and 542 out of 1,000 in 2006 respectively.

In fact, U. S. children's weakness in reading is not a new problem and the "literacy crisis" has been associated with U. S. students for at least 30 years (Kozol, 1985). In the early 1980s, President Carter voiced his concern about the American literacy crisis and insisted that to handle it was "an obligation that he would not

shirk” (Kozol, 1985, p. 6). In 1994, the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP) reported that 40% American fourth grade students could not read independently (Campbell et al, 1996). This situation did not seem to change much as shown in the 2009 Nation's Report Card, which showed that 37% of fourth grade students failed to reach the basic level in reading and 26% of these students were still unable to read at the basic level by Grade 8.

Take text difficulty as an example, K - 12 reading texts have actually trended downward in difficulty in the last half century. Jeanne Chall and her colleagues (Chall, Conard, & Harris, 1977) found a thirteen-year decrease from 1963 to 1975 in the difficulty of grade 1, grade 6, and (especially) grade 11 texts. Extending the period to 1991, Hayes, Wolfer, and Wolfe (1996) found sharp declines in average sentence length and vocabulary level in reading textbooks for a variety of grades. Hayes also found that while science books were more difficult to read than literature books, only books for Advanced Placement (AP) classes had vocabulary levels equivalent to those of newspapers of the time (Hayes & Ward, 1992). Carrying the research closer to the present day, Williamson (2006) found a gap between the difficulty of end-of-high school and college texts.

Poor reading performance is exacerbated for English language learners (ELL) defined in any of the following categories: a) those who were not born in the United States; b) those who acquired their first and native languages different from English; c) those who came from environments where English is not dominantly used; or d) those who are American Indians or Alaskan natives from environments where languages other than English affect their English proficiency levels. In short, they are “a heterogeneous group with different ethnic backgrounds, first languages, socioeconomic statuses, qualities of prior

schooling, and levels of English language proficiency” (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2011).

In terms of terminology, in the literature there are a number of ways to refer to this group of students including English language learners (ELL), limited English proficiency (LEP) and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learners. As a descriptive term ELL carries more positive connotation in reference to students who are “starting to develop English proficiency” (Lacelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994, p. 66) and it also includes those who are fluent in conversational English but weak in English for academic use (Gersten & Baker, 2000). LEP diagnosed ELL students as those who do not “have sufficient English language speaking, understanding, reading and writing skills to participate in an all-English classroom” (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs, 1999), and ESL is not a precise label for ELL students as some of them are learning English as a third language. Throughout this book, I will use English language learners (ELL) to refer to students who are learning English as a second or third language. When LEP and ESL appear in the literature review, they are synonymous with ELL.

Many ELL students come from immigrant families whose parents have limited English proficiency and have lower socioeconomic status (American Federation of Teachers, 2006). Thus, they have less English literacy experience at home than children whose first language is English including those in lower social economic status. Based on a longitudinal study of 42 families from different socioeconomic statuses, Hart and Risley (2003) noticed that the native English speaking children in early childhood had much more exposure to English words with 86% to 98% of their words from their parents’ vocabulary. Those from families of low socioeconomic status had average exposure

to 616 words of language experience per hour while those from professional or middle class families had an average exposure to 1, 251 words per hour. With little or no exposure to English language experience at home in early childhood, ELL children may lose their most productive time in English reading development during the first three years when they are “especially malleable and uniquely dependent on the family” for the development of English literacy (Hart & Risley, 2003, p. 9).

As a result, the reading performance of ELL students, on the average, is consistently lower than the English monolingual students. Based on the last seven tests conducted by the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP), the average score of reading performance of fourth grade ELL students was 38.85 points lower than their English monolingual counterparts. The percentage of ELL students who were below the NAEP basic reading achievement level, defined as “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills fundamental for reading”, was 74.1% (Nation’s report card, 2009). PISA also showed the weakness of U. S. ELL students’ reading proficiency. ELL students were 22 points lower than English native students in its reading assessment (OECD, 2010).

ELL student reading performance is becoming a national issue considering the increased population of ELL students and wider dispersion. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 3.8 million public school students received ELL services in the school year of 2003-2004, covering 10.6 % of students nationally (Abedi, 2008). The number of ELL students is likely to grow from 12 million in 2005 to 18 million in 2025 (Passel, 2007). ELL students today not only concentrate in California, Texas and New York but also are found in sizable number in the public school enrollments in the South

and Northwest of the United States (Fry & Pew Hispanic, 2007). Because of this reality, the NCLB act mandates that ELL students be included in the assessment of adequate yearly progress (AYP) and requires that ELL students meet proficiency standards as a group by 2014. Thus, it is necessary and important for researchers to develop a deep understanding about the relationship between reading instruction and ELL student reading development. Such an understanding should serve as an important knowledge base for policy makers and teachers to develop relevant policies and instruction to help ELL students develop their reading proficiency effectively.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The current U. S. policy recommendations for improving reading instruction for all students were developed based on research on reading development of students who speak English as their first language. The recommendation stress the development of phonological awareness including understanding phonemes, speech sounds, and connecting them to print and the sufficient vocabulary as being critical for K-3 children to process reading comprehension effectively. The *Reading Excellence Act* (REA), a congress-passed act clearly defines capable K-3 readers as having phonological awareness (Mesmer & Karchmer, 2003). The *Reading First* (RF) program mandated under the NCLB act as a federal educational program also includes phonological awareness and vocabulary development as two of the five essential components of reading instruction and encourages teachers to bank on these components for K-3 reading development (Dole, Hosp, Nelson & Hosp, 2010). In the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSS) initiative released in June 2010, phonological awareness and