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Story-Listening and Guided Self-Selected Reading:

Short-Term Results from Indonesia

Ken Smith[1]

Beniko Mason[2]

Stephen Krashen[3]

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[1] Lecturer, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Kaohsiung, Taiwan.
[2] Professor Emerita, Shitennoji University Junior College, Osaka, Japan.
[3] Professor Emeritus, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California USA.

Abstract

Mason and Krashen (2020) introduced the world to Story-Listening and Mason (2019) did the same for Guided Self-Selected Reading. These two methods attempt to provide optimal input (Krashen and Mason, 2020) for language students. This study, the second in a series of studies conducted during a summer program in Surabaya, Indonesia with university English language acquirers, examined the impact of a three-week course using Story-Listening (SL) and Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR) on English language proficiency. The study considered how much input students received in-class in the form of SL and GSSR, input through GSSR outside of class, as well as efficiency rates. We concluded that substantial language acquisition occurs in a short-term course when optimal input is provided.

Key Words: Story-Listening, Guided Self-Selected Reading, optimal input, proficiency, efficiency rate

Introduction

Reviews of studies of self-selected pleasure reading show that we have to wait a while before impressive gains in competence in literacy and language can be observed (Krashen, 2004). After one semester of sustained silent reading, readers typically do not outperform comparisons on measures of literacy development, but the differences are generally significant at the end of the second semester (see K. Smith, 2006 for an exception in an EFL context).

In this study, we examine the amount of acquisition occurring after approximately 30 hours of class-time with additional time devoted to reading outside of class. To our knowledge, no study has examined the results of Guided Self-Selected Reading (Mason, 2019) combined with Story Listening (Mason and Krashen, 2020) with second language acquirers after such a short exposure.

In this study, we attempt to provide intermediate acquirers of English with "optimal" input (Krashen and Mason, 2020), that is, input hypothesized to provide the most efficient and pleasant path to language acquisition. There are four characteristics of optimal input: comprehensible, compelling, rich, and abundant. When optimal input is described as *comprehensible* this does not mean that every word and every grammatical marker is fully comprehensible (Krashen, 2013). The second characteristic of optimal input is that it is extremely interesting, or *compelling* (Krashen, Lee, and Lao, 2017), which of course does not mean that every phrase or sentence is equally interesting. The third characteristic is that input should be *rich*, containing language, description, and detail that makes the input more comprehensible and interesting. The fourth proposed characteristic of optimal input is that the input be *abundant*. In other words, for acquisition to occur, multiple exposures to initially

unfamiliar aspects of language are necessary, enough to insure the presence of these aspects of language (i+1) and enough for their acquisition.

Story-Listening and Guided Self-Selected Reading have been shown to provide optimal input (e.g., Mason, Smith, and Krashen, 2020; Mason and Krashen, 2017). In Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR), teachers help less advanced students find books that are interesting and comprehensible for them, that meet the requirements for optimal input.

Three main questions arose prior to conducting this study: (1) whether participants would be able to adapt to an approach based on the Optimal Input Hypothesis, an approach that does not require output, conscious learning of grammar, nor correction, (2) whether participants would willingly and even enthusiastically read during a short-term summer program that also includes elements of meeting and interacting with other university students throughout Asia. In other words, would participants do the reading they were encouraged to do, and (3) would observable gains be shown on valid and reliable measures of language proficiency that were used with previous studies involving SL and GSSR, i.e., what effect would "optimal input" have on language proficiency?

To clarify, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions.

RQ 1: Will participants accept a course fully focused on optimal input-based methods of SL and GSSR?

RQ 2: Will participants read if access to books, (i.e. graded readers) are provided for them?

RQ 3: Will comparable verifiable gains in effectiveness and efficiency of the methods over much less time be observed on tests that have shown gains with previous SL and GSSR research studies?

Method

Participants

Participants were 11 university students who were intermediate acquirers of English as a foreign language from the following five countries: Malaysia (3), Indonesia (3), South Korea (3), the Philippines (1), and Japan (1). Participants in this study were students in an English class given in Indonesia, who had no previous exposure to optimal input-based methods, including Story-Listening and Guided Self-Selected Reading. The focus of the course was on listening to stories and guided self-selected reading. While it is possible participants may have experienced extensive reading in the past, none of them had any exposure to a pure optimal input approach before. Eight of the eleven participants came to class every day. The three Indonesian students were absent three out of ten days of class. One other student from South Korea, due to periodically feeling unwell, was dropped from this study.

Measures

A cloze test was used to attempt to answer the questions presented above. Participants were given a reading passage written at the sixth-grade reading level with 100 words removed for them to supply. The same test had been used in previous studies (e.g., Mason, 2004) and was used as both a pre- and post-test. Test-retest reliability was r = .87 and acceptable word scoring was used.

Treatment

In every class, students listened to two stories, each 30 to 40 minutes long, told using the Story-Listening technique (Mason and Krashen, 2020) and also listened to an instructor read one of the stories that the other instructor had told to the class, then chose a book with the help of the instructors and read silently in class. Participants were provided with nearly 250 graded readers and some books for young adults. Books were displayed in the classroom.

Outside of class, students read books from the collection provided that they had selected by themselves or with suggestions from the instructors. Students recorded the total amount of time they read each day outside of school, and also recorded pages read, along with the titles of the books. The students were all guided to read starting from the simplest books in the collection: 200-headword level graded readers. Some students progressed rapidly, moving to the next level of graded readers in one or two days, while others took longer to move to the next level. The instructors helped students select appropriate books. When students finished a book, or decided to stop reading it, they chose a new one. There were no comprehension questions asked and no form-focused exercises based on the language used in the books.

Results

Table 1 presents the time dedicated to reading done in class and at home, as well as time dedicated to Story-Listening (SL) and listening to stories read aloud for each of the eleven participants.

Table 1: Time (hours) Dedicated to Reading, Story-Listening, and Listening to Stories Read Aloud

Name	Home	Class	Total Time Spent Reading	SL	Read Aloud	Total Input
Donna Mae (Philippines)	30.6	10	40.6	14	4	58.6
Kumaran (Malaysia)	21.7	10	31.7	14	4	49.7
Vanaasha (Malaysia)	24.4	10	34.4	14	4	52.4
Sunic (Malaysia)	13.7	10	23.7	14	4	41.7
Felicia (Indonesia)	5.0	7.5	12.5	10.5	3	26.0
Karina (Indonesia)	3.6	7.5	11.1	10.5	3	24.6
Natalia (Indonesia)	6.1	7.5	13.6	10.5	3	27.1
Iseul (Korea)	2.7	10	12.7	14	4	30.7
Seongwon (Korea)	3.5	10	13.5	14	4	31.5
Yunji (Korea)	4.7	10	14.7	14	4	32.7
Asumi (Japan)	4.8	10	14.8	14	4	32.8

Note: Three Indonesian students missed three days of class. Thus, in-class reading, SL, and Read-Aloud were all less.

Table 2 presents pre- and post-test scores for each participant as well as overall means.

Table 2: Cloze: Pre- and Post-test Scores

Name	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Donna Mae (Philippines)	61	64	3
Kumaran (Malaysia)	63	67	4
Vanaasha (Malaysia)	72	65	-7
Sunic (Malaysia)	58	69	11
Felicia (Indonesia)	48	56	8
Karina (Indonesia)	50	60	10
Natalia (Indonesia)	58	65	7
Iseul (Korea)	57	57	0
Seongwon (Korea)	40	43	3
Yunji (Korea)	53	60	7
Asumi (Japan)	29	37	8
Total	589	643	54
Mean	53.54	58.45	4.9
Standard Deviation	11.69	10.06	5.15

Table 3: Efficiency: Gains per Hour

	Total Read	Total Input
Total	223.3	407.8
Mean	20.3	37.1
Gains/Hour	0.24	0.13

If we consider only time spent reading, participants gained a mean of .24 points per hour. If we include all input: reading, story listening, and hearing stories read out aloud, participants gained less, a mean of .13 points per hour. In a previous study using the same cloze test, EFL students who participated in reading for three semesters averaged .10 points per hour from reading alone at home (Mason, 2004) considerably less than participants in the current study.

Individual Variation

Inspection of the scores revealed that nearly all the participants could be categorized into one of two groups. In Group A (Table 4) were three students who read a great deal but whose gains per hour were small. In contrast, the six students in Group B (Table 5) read less than average but gained at a much greater rate. As is clear from the raw data, Group A spent significantly more time reading ($t = 6.46$, $p = .0003$), read more pages ($t = 4.81$, $p = .002$) yet Group B made significantly greater gains per hour ($t = 6.31$, $p = .0004$).

Table 4: More Reading, Smaller Gains

Group A	Gains/Hour	Total Hours Read	Total Pages Read
Donna Mae	0.074	40.6	1512
Kumaran	0.13	31.7	1017
Vanaasha	-0.2	34.4	1234
Mean	0.001	35.6	1254.3

Table 5: Less Reading, Larger Gains

Group B	Gains/Hour	Total Hours Read	Total Pages Read
Sunic	0.46	23.7	557
Felicia	0.68	12.5	386
Karina	0.35	11.1	303
Natalia	0.55	13.6	865
Asumi	0.54	14.8	240
Yunji	0.49	14.7	299
Mean	0.51	15.1	441.6

The variation in amount of reading and in gains per hour was significantly different, with Group A gaining significantly less but reading more, and Group B gaining more per hour but spending less time reading.

It is our observation that the three students in Group A were very enthusiastic about the reading they had done and were eager to do more. In the morning, before class started, they were eager to tell the instructors about the books that they read the previous day and asked for recommendations as to which books they should read next. Their level of enthusiasm was a pleasant surprise to their teachers.

The amount of reading that participants reported suggests that students were clearly experiencing pleasure reading in English. Even the group that read less, Group B, read an average of over 440 pages, more than 20 pages per day. Over the duration of the study, a little more than two weeks, the entire group read 6413 pages, an average of 583 pages per student, and read for 223.3 hours, an average of 20.3 hours per student.

The books that the instructors recommended with a brief introduction about their content were both interesting enough and obviously comprehensible for the participants. Because the course was designed for "beginners" we did not expect students with higher levels of English proficiency. Because of this, we did not supply the class with higher level graded readers or unsimplified books. For some, those in Group A, the books that they were reading were largely below their level, that is, they did not contain enough language at the i+1 level. Given continued guidance in the form of GSSR, access to larger numbers of books, the time, space, and opportunity to read in class, our prediction is that students will read. Even lower proficiency students can read twenty pages per day when they are given guidance and time to read in class. Results show even in this non-ideal environment of reading just twenty

pages per day over a short duration of time, i.e., 15 days, improvement in proficiency can be observed.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that English as a second or foreign language students can make excellent progress at beginning stages of a GSSR program even if they did not experience optimal input in the past. It appears that students will accept a pure input-based method with neither output activities nor error correction included and will read the books made available to them all the while showing evidence of progress in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency on tests. In a course that was designed and prepared for "beginners," students of higher proficiency levels still made progress using optimal input-based methods. Perhaps gains would have been greater for Group A had higher level graded readers, i.e., rich input, been supplied. The finding that more reading lead to smaller gains among more proficient students should be further investigated and replicated to see whether this was an anomaly or not. However, what seems to be clear from this study is that when optimal input is provided through Story-Listening and Guided Self-Selected Reading, substantial language acquisition takes place.

Compared to Mason (2004), the efficiency rate from reading in the current study was stronger (.24 vs. .10). Had time spent in class for Mason (2004) been included in that study, the efficiency rate would have been even weaker as participants in that study were also taking six additional classes per week using an audio-lingual based approach. In 2004, the idea of optimal input, i.e., comprehensible, compelling, rich, and abundant i+1, had yet to be unveiled. It has now. We encourage language teachers and researchers to further explore the potential of optimal input.

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