



L2 English Reading Fluency in Korean Elementary Schools: Analyses of National English Curriculum and Textbooks

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Reading fluency (RF) is considered one of the crucial factors for successful reading. However, in S. Korean context, it has been less acknowledged and thus little delivered particularly in elementary school level. This study investigated the national English curriculum and authorized textbooks for Korean elementary schools in terms of RF. The national curriculum is investigated in accordance with the classification of the lower- and higher-level reading processes. Next, in order to examine the textbooks, 10 years of RF empirical studies were reviewed; reading texts and activities of the textbooks were then compared to those of the empirical studies which played a role as guidelines for reading texts and activities for RF in Korean Elementary School level. The analysis of the national curriculum revealed its bias towards the higher-level reading process without first developing students' RF, and the comparison of the textbooks and the empirical studies demonstrated insufficient text and reading activities to develop RF of young learners. Based on the findings, several suggestions, implications for teachers and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: L2 reading fluency, Korean elementary school, National English Curriculum, English textbook, reading material

Introduction

Reading fluency (RF) refers to the ability to read text rapidly and accurately with appropriate intonation and phrasing (NICHHD, 2000). For the last few decades, a huge body of research has shown that fluency is one of the crucial factors that determines successful reading (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NICHHD, 2000; Rasinski, 2014; Samuels, 2006). However, relatively few studies have been conducted in English as a foreign language (EFL) context including S. Korea (Chae, 2016). Particularly, RF research with elementary school students is scarce.

Instruction of RF in Korean Elementary schools (KES) has rarely been delivered due to the lack of acknowledgment of RF along with the spoken language biased English curriculum (Lee, 2020). The communication-oriented Korean national English curriculum with its heavy emphasis on speaking is a reaction against the dissatisfaction over the grammar translation method. However, similar to many other EFL contexts (Abdulkader, 2019; Butler, 2011; Humphries & Burns, 2015; Orafi & Borg, 2009) its arguably problematic implementation (Han, 2016; Jin & Yoo, 2019) has resulted in a neglect of reading texts which are sources of input.



Many Asian countries face similar situations. For example, Lekwilai (2014, p. 100) argued that “Today, reading instruction in the Thai EFL curriculum has been a struggle. The first reason is that many Thai EFL students lack reading practice. The second reason is that fluency instruction is not recognised as one of the reading components, and therefore is not implemented in the reading curriculum.” Similarly, RF is not acknowledged as a goal to achieve for language learning in Asian countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, and Kazakhstan (Chang & Millet, 2015; Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2008; Iwata, 2020; Tusmagambet, 2020). This study, therefore, aims to analyse the national curriculum and authorized textbooks for KES students to identify areas which require rectification and/or supplement so that they could help students develop RF.

Reading Fluency

What is Reading?

Reading does not only concern the decoding of texts but also the understanding of meaning. In other words, reading includes two components: decoding and comprehension. The process around decoding is referred to as lower-level reading process including word-recognition, syntactic parsing, and semantic-proposition encoding (Grabe, 2009). Word recognition is the most critical part of the lower-level reading process and involves the interaction of several processes: orthographic, phonological, semantic, and syntactic processes (Perfetti et al., 2001; Perfetti, 2007). On the other hand, the process of comprehension is referred to as higher-level reading process (Grabe, 2009). According to Silva and Cain (2015), the higher-level process of reading is divided into two levels: Lower- and higher-level comprehension skills. Lower-level comprehension skills refer to foundational language skills such as vocabulary and grammar, whereas higher-level comprehension skills involve the skills to comprehend the explicitly stated information of text (i.e., literal comprehension) and implicitly stated information (i.e., inference) (Silva & Cain, 2015). Table 1 shows the lower- and higher-level reading processes which incorporates the ideas of Grabe (2009), Perfetti (2007) and Silva and Cain (2015) and this study will discuss the reading processes based on this classification.

TABLE 1
Lower- and Higher-level Reading Processes

| | comprehension | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Word recognition | Lower-level comprehension | Higher-level comprehension |
| word | sentence | text |
| Orthographic process | Semantic process | Literal comprehension |
| Phonological process | Syntactic process | Inference |
| Lower-level reading process | | Higher-level reading process |

What is Reading Fluency?

As shown in the table 1, the reading process moves from word recognition to comprehension of the text. However, it is fairly common that learners who have acquired word recognition ability read very slowly resulting in poor comprehension even when they can recognise every word in the text (Rasinski, 2014). This can be accounted for by the lack of RF, which is ‘the essential link between word recognition at one end of the spectrum and reading comprehension at the other’ (Rasinski, 2014, p. 4).

RF involves two primary components: automaticity in word recognition and appropriate use of prosodic features (Kuhn et al., 2010; Rasinski, 2014; Taguchi et al., 2016). Automaticity is viewed as processing with no or minimal attention assuming that humans have a limited cognitive capacity for information processing (e.g., LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), and the common features of automaticity are speed, effortlessness, autonomy and unconsciousness (Kuhn et al., 2010). The ability to read with

prosody, that is, with appropriate expression and intonation with phrasing is another essential component of RF (Schrieber, 1980).

How then does RF develop? Many argue that it is through reading practice such as repeated reading (Lionetti, 2004; Lubua, 2016; NICHHD, 2000) and extensive reading (Chang & Millet, 2015; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Repeated reading is a method devised by Samuels (Taguchi et al., 2016), in which students reread a short passage multiple times until they reach a satisfactory level of fluency and repeat the procedure with a new passage (Samuel, 1979, cited in Schreiber, 1980), while extensive reading is an approach to reading that focuses on understanding of general meaning and fluency; level of text is lower than learners' linguistic proficiency and a large amount of text is read with ease (Grab, 2009). It should be noted that the aim of this study is to analyse the curriculum and textbooks, not to investigate the effectiveness of these reading practices, though such investigation will indeed be interesting to pursue in future research.

Why is L2 Reading Fluency important?

Reading in a new language is challenging in that L2 reading instruction begins before L2 learners have acquired sufficient L2 linguistic knowledge and oral proficiency. Although L2 readers can draw on their prior literacy experience while beginning L1 readers cannot (Koda, 2005), only after they cross a linguistic threshold, can L1 reading ability be transferred to L2 reading contexts (Alderson, 2000). According to Grabe (2009), six-year-old children at the onset of formal reading instruction know orally 5,000 to 8,000 words while L2 readers with the same number of words would be considered quite advanced. In addition, L1 readers also have a large store of implicit knowledge of morphology, syntax and sound combinations, in contrast, L2 readers have none or little. As such, L1 and L2 readers' starting points to learn to read are hugely different.

However, despite the complex process of L2 reading, instruction of reading in KES has been delivered without any systematic guidance (Lee, 2005). According to the national curriculum (MOE, 2015), it appears that students' reading and writing skills are considered to be developed automatically as their oral linguistic proficiency develops, which is a persistent but unsupported belief in EFL contexts (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2008) as word recognition skills and oral language proficiency develop independently (August et al., 2002). In this sense, it is worthwhile investigating the national curriculum and textbooks which often confine English language teaching as a foreign language in Asian countries (Lin, 2014).

Therefore, this study aims to dissect the current provision of reading instruction particularly from the RF perspective through analysing 1) the national English curriculum and 2) authorized textbooks in KES level. There has been a body of studies that investigated Korean national English curriculum and textbooks in terms of phonics or reading in general; however, no research has been conducted in terms of RF. The national curriculum is investigated in light of the classification of the lower- and higher-level reading processes indicated earlier and reading text and activities of textbooks are analysed by comparing with those of 10 years (2010-20) of empirical studies on RF with KES learners. Based on the analyses, we offer suggestions on how Korean national curriculum and textbooks should be revised to reinforce the reading instruction to develop RF.

Methodology

As noted above, firstly, the national curriculum is investigated in accordance with the classification of the lower- and higher-level reading processes. Next, in order to examine the textbooks, 10 years of RF empirical studies were reviewed; reading texts and activities of the textbooks were then compared to those of the empirical studies which played a role as guidelines for reading texts and activities for RF in KES level.

National English Curriculum

Korean national curriculum for elementary school level has been revised 4 times since 1995 when it was initially developed. For this study, reading instruction sections for 5th and 6th grades of current curriculum revised in 2015 is analysed from the RF perspective.

Empirical Studies on RF

To obtain relevant studies, we undertook a search on the Research Information Sharing System (RISS) database run by Korea Education and Research Information Service, where doctoral theses and master's dissertations, journal articles, books and research reports produced in and out of Korea can be accessed. For selection of studies, a set of criteria was applied. Firstly, participants are KES students without any disability. Secondly, students engage in a program to improve RF for a certain period. Thirdly, the purpose of the study is to examine the effect of the intervention regarding RF. Lastly, the study has been published since 2010.

The search was carried out using a key term, *elementary school English RF* and it yielded 36 journal articles and 84 graduate theses; after applying our criteria, 3 journal articles and 11 dissertations were selected. In the same way, with a search term, 'elementary school English RF' in Korean, we added 4 dissertations which met our criteria. In sum, we identified 18 studies. It is worth highlighting that the limited number of studies on this topic show that RF is an under-researched area in the Korean context.

The 18 studies are analysed with respect to 1) which reading texts are used and 2) how reading instructions are implemented. Reading texts are analysed according to type, length, and difficulty level of text. To investigate implementation, the amount of reading text and reading activities are studied. For length of the text, word token, word type and type-token ratio (TTR) are calculated through a website for word counting (<http://wordcounttools.com>). (Longer text tends to have lower TTR. However, in this study, most passages have around 100 words token; therefore, Standard TTR is not calculated.) To determine the text difficulty level, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is employed to compare readability by word and sentence length between text in the studies and those in textbooks.

Textbooks

There are 5 kinds of textbooks (5 volumes) for each 3rd to 6th grade (8-12-year-olds) that are authorized to be in line with the national curriculum so that English teachers can choose a textbook more suitable for their students. For the analyses, we scanned reading instruction sections of 10 volumes (5 for each 5th and 6th grade) page by page in line with the selected empirical studies. Regarding types of text, we employed Togeby's (2014) three text types: Practical texts, Factual prose, and Literature (Imaginative), and one more type, Semi-literature (Imaginative) was added for more accurate categorising. 'Factual prose' corresponds to non-fiction, 'Literature (Imaginative)' to fiction, and 'Practical texts' refers to practical writings such as diary, letters, advertisement, etc. 'Semi-literature (Imaginative)' refers to well-known stories which are rewritten, greatly simplified and revised by the publisher. Table 2 shows the details of the textbooks. Textbooks for 3rd and 4th grades are excluded because there is no text but only word and sentence in reading section.

TABLE 2
5 Kinds of Textbooks for 5th and 6th Grade

| Authors | Title | Publisher |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Ham. et al. (2020) | Elementary School English 5 / 6 | Chunjae |
| Lee. et al. (2020) | Elementary School English 5 / 6 | Daekyo |
| Park. et al. (2020) | Elementary School English 5 / 6 | Donga |
| Choi. et al. (2020) | Elementary School English 5 / 6 | YBM |
| Kim. et al. (2020) | Elementary School English 5 / 6 | YBM |

Results

National English Curriculum

Korean national English curriculum sets out how English language teaching should be conducted at schools, and its body part consists of contents, achievement standards and how to teach and assess to achieve the standards for four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) at each stage. In the case of elementary school level, 3rd and 4th grades are grouped as the first stage and 5th and 6th grades as the second stage.

First, table 3 details the contents of reading skills for 3rd to 6th graders. In 3rd and 4th grades, reading is limited to the comprehension of words and sentences, and in 5th grade, students begin to read a text. The number of new words taught in each stage was indicated in the additional guide to contents, that is, about 240 words for 3rd and 4th graders and about 260 words for 5th and 6th graders (MOE, 2015). Table 3 demonstrates that a large part of contents is about higher-level reading process such as comprehension and inference (in bold typeface) although prosodic features which is one component of RF (in bold and italic typeface) is indicated.

TABLE 3

Contents of Reading Skills for KES (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 7)

| Key concept | Knowledge | Contents | | Function |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| | | 3 rd and 4 th grade | 5 th and 6 th grade | |
| Spelling | To understand the letter-sound correspondence | -Capital and small letter -letter and sound of the word | -Capital and small letter -Sound and spelling of word <i>-Accent, rhythm, and intonation</i> | Distinguishing Application |
| Word and sentence | To understand word and sentence | -Word, clause, and sentence | -Word, clause, and sentence | Comprehension |
| Detailed information | To understand the detailed information of the text | | -Pictures, graphs -Themes of the text on daily life | Comprehension |
| Main idea | To understand the main idea of the text | | -Summary and purpose of the text | Comprehension Inference |

Second, in accordance with the contents, 4 achievement standards of reading skills for 5th and 6th graders are as follows:

- (1) *Students can read short and simple sentences with an English accent, rhythm, and intonation.*
- (2) Students can obtain detailed information from a short passage with visual information such as pictures and graphs.
- (3) Students can obtain detailed information from a short and easy passage, topic of which is about daily life of students.
- (4) Students can get the main idea such as summary or purpose of a short and easy passage.

(MOE, 2015, p. 26)

Third, the guidelines on how to teach reading skills provide little instruction on fluency building practice. The following guidelines are for 5th and 6th grade teachers:

- Use various reading materials so that students have an interest in them and follow pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.
- Take care so that students do not read aloud in a mechanically repeated way.
- **When students read a short and easy text, provide them with activities to demonstrate they**

understand the detailed information of the text such as true/false questions or quizzes or completing a task.

- **For effective improvement of students' reading ability, help them make use of learning strategies when they read a text.**
- **When students read for understanding of the text, provide them with activities such as making synopsis, arranging the sentences according to the order of events, writing notes about the text.**
- Make use of plays or games appropriate to the level of the students to raise the effectiveness of the lesson.
- Integrate reading activities into other language skills to help students' acquisition of the language.

(MOE, 2015, pp. 27-28)

Overall, the guidance for 5th and 6th grade teachers emphasises activities for the understanding of text, which is higher-level skills (in bold typeface) and provides no activities for RF such as repeated or extensive reading. Despite the achievement standard no. 1 above, there is no instruction on how the standard can be achieved. The above shows that reading instruction by the national curriculum is heavily biased towards higher-level reading process and provides none or little for RF. The implication of this is discussed further in the discussion section.

Empirical Studies on RF

Reading materials of the 18 empirical studies were analysed with respect to 1) text type, 2) length, difficulty level, 3) amount of text, and 4) reading activities as noted. A full list of the studies is in table 4, arranged by their participants' grade, showing the text used in the studies.

TABLE 4
Text of the 18 Studies

| Grade | Study | Total number of texts used (number of texts per student) and text title/source | Duration (Week) |
|-------|--------------------|---|-----------------|
| 3 | Hong. (2013) | 1(1) story (Peter Pan) | 6 |
| 3 | Nam. (2018) | 5(5) stories (David Goes to School et al) | 24 |
| 3 | Seo. (2016) | 3(3) stories (Hop on Pop et al) | 14 |
| 3 | Seong. (2013) | 10(7) stories (I'm the Biggest Thing in the Ocean et al) | 12 |
| 3 | Song. (2017) | 1(1) story (Little Red Riding Hood) | 4 |
| 4 | Kang. (2017) | 8(8) stories (One Moose, Twenty Mice et al) | 8 |
| 4 | Lee. (2018) | 16(16) texts from "Reading A to Z (https://www.readinga-z.com)", Level A, B, C | 8 |
| 4 | You. (2016) | 27(6) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level AA, A, B, C, D | 8 |
| 5 | Kang. (2018) | 18(6) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level A, D, G | 6 |
| 5 | Choi & Lee. (2015) | 7(7) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level B, C, D | 12 |
| 5 | Chun. (2010) | 4(4) stories (Goldilocks and the Three Bears et al) | 10 |
| 5 | Hong. (2015) | 9(9) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level D, E, F | 6 |
| 5 | Lee. & Lee. (2015) | 12(12) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level C, D, E | 8 |
| 5 | Yu. (2014) | 15(15) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level B, C, D | 10 |
| 6 | H. Lee. (2014) | 16(8) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level E, F | 8 |
| 6 | M. Lee. (2014) | 20(10) texts from "Reading Juice for Kids", Book 3, 4 | 5 |
| 6 | Lee. & Ha. (2013) | 15(10) texts from "Reading A to Z", Level E, F, G | 10 |
| 6 | Seo. (2014) | 16(16) children's poems (Magic Hand et al) | 16 |

Interestingly, in most of the studies with 4th to 6th graders, texts from “Reading A to Z” were used. It is because 9 of the studies were conducted under the supervision of or with one researcher, Lee Yoon who used “Reading A to Z” in her research to contend that RF needs to be adopted in Korean national English curriculum (Choi & Lee, 2015; Lee & Ha, 2013; Lee, 2018).

Speaking of type, in all the studies with 3rd graders, stories were used and texts from “Reading A to Z” in 9 studies consisted of about 72% of fiction and about 23% of non-fiction. Texts from “Reading Juice for Kids” are all non-fiction, and in one study, poems were used.

Table 5 indicates the mean length and difficulty level of text of each grade, which is calculated by randomly selected texts from each study. For example, 8 texts from each level of “Reading A to Z” are selected and in this way 97 texts from the total of 187 texts are calculated. In Chun’s (2010) study, participants read a fourth of a story for each lesson and finished the story over 4 lessons, and we calculated the length of a fourth of a story. Seo’s (2014) study is excluded in this calculation because children’s poetry is relatively much shorter than prose.

TABLE 5
Mean Length and Difficulty Level of Text of the Studies

| Grade | Word Token (Total number of words in a text) | | Word Type (Total number of distinct words in a text) | | TTR (Type/Token Ratio) | | Flesch-Kincaid Grade level | |
|-------|--|-------|--|-------|---------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| 3 | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | | 1.76 | 1.56 |
| 4 | 51.28 | 22.15 | 21.74 | 7.56 | 38.06 | 3.86 | 1.47 | 1.56 |
| 5 | 78.68 | 34.64 | 32.47 | 17.06 | 41.02 | 3.24 | 2.32 | 0.83 |
| 6 | 101.82 | 34.81 | 48.89 | 19.21 | 47.65 | 3.74 | 2.46 | 0.85 |

Table 5 details the length and difficulty level of text. Mean word token from 4th to 6th grade ranges between 50 and 300 which agrees with Dowhower’s (1989) recommendation. Some studies with 3rd graders are excluded as numbers of words read in a lesson were not indicated in the studies. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level ranges between 0.83 and 1.56 although most studies took text that contains 90 to 95% of words which students can understand (Rasinski, 2003 in Lee & Lee 2015).

In terms of the amount of text, average number of texts read by a student per week in the studies with 4th to 6th graders is about 1.24, which is calculated by dividing number of texts per student by the duration (week). All the studies with 3rd graders and Chun’s (2010) study with 5th graders are excluded in this calculation because relatively much longer stories (about 200-300 words) were read over weeks in these studies.

When it comes to reading activity, in most studies, activities for repeated reading were utilized such as shared reading, choral reading, echo reading, paired reading, timed reading, etc. With these common reading activities, a number of additional activities were carried out. For example, participants read patterned text and found repeated phrase (Kang, 2017) or performed a Reader’s Theatre (Song, 2017) or a play reading aloud with various voices acting like an actor (Hong, 2013). It is noticeable that no study employed extensive reading to help participants to enhance RF.

Apart from the above descriptive statistical analyses, it is noteworthy that the lower the participants’ reading level, the more pattern the reading passages contain. This explains why the TTR goes higher with grades. Particularly studies with 3rd graders emphasised the importance of text with pattern (Nam, 2018; Seo, 2016; Seong, 2013). For example, Nam pointed out that “this study... discussed how to utilize the sentence structure and pattern of picture books to enhance RF” (2018, p. 10). This issue will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Textbooks

Reading materials from 10 textbooks for 5th and 6th graders are analysed with respect to 1) type, 2) length, and difficulty level of text, 3) amount of text and 4) reading activities in the same way as the empirical studies.

As for types of text, in textbooks for both grades, Practical text type was most frequently used (53% and 45% respectively), which is a distinguishing feature from the text of the studies (table 6 and 7).

Looking into 5th grade textbooks, two YBMs preferred Semi-Imaginative Literature while the other three Practical text. In the case of 6th grade textbooks, across all publishers, the rate of Factual Prose type increased from 5% to 27% and the rate of Imaginative Literature type also increased by 9% although the rate of Practical text type is still high. It is assumed that the reason why Practical text type was preferred is because short and easy passage about daily life is presented in the achievement standard of reading in the curriculum. Moreover, in the additional guide of the achievement standards, more specific types of text such as advertisement, brochure, memo, and card message are suggested so that students can practice getting detailed information from the text. However, compared with the type of passages used in the empirical studies, it is clear that little fiction and non-fictions were used.

TABLE 6
Text Types of Passages from 5th Grade Textbooks

| Publisher | Factual Prose | Literature (Imaginative) | Semi-Literature (Imaginative) | Practical texts | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Chunjae | 1 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 14 |
| Daekyo | 3 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 16 |
| Donga | 0 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 18 |
| YBM-Choi | 0 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 13 |
| YBM-Kim | 0 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 14 |
| Total | 4 | 8 | 24 | 40 | 75 |
| Percentage | 5 | 10 | 32 | 53 | 100 |

TABLE 7
Text Types of Passages from 6th Grade Textbooks

| Publisher | Factual Prose | Literature (Imaginative) | Semi-Literature (Imaginative) | Practical texts | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Chunjae | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 14 |
| Daekyo | 5 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 16 |
| Donga | 7 | 4 | 0 | 7 | 18 |
| YBM-Choi | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 13 |
| YBM-Kim | 1 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 14 |
| Total | 20 | 14 | 7 | 34 | 75 |
| Percentage | 27 | 19 | 9 | 45 | 100 |

As for length and difficulty level of text, every reading passage (mean 15 passages) from each textbook are counted, and then the means of 5 textbooks are calculated (table 8 and 9). Mean word token in 5th grade is 64.68, and 82.60 in 6th grade, 17.92 points larger; however, TTR, and Flesch-Kincaid Grade level are similar. Compared with text from the empirical studies, the word token is 14.00 points smaller in 5th grade and 19.22 points smaller in 6th grade let alone in 4th grade. However, the studies' text has lower TTR than that of textbooks (21.37 and 15.57 points respectively) because most texts of the studies have many repeated words and sentence patterns so that young learners can read with ease. In other words, textbooks' passages may be more difficult for students to read despite the shorter length. Speaking of the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level, texts from both studies and textbooks are at similar level, from 2.00 to 2.46.

TABLE 8
Mean Length and Difficulty Level of Passages from 5th Grade Textbooks

| Publisher | Word Token | Word Type | TTR | Flesch-Kincaid Grade level |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Chunjae | 58.29 | 32.29 | 56.57 | 2.55 |
| Daekyo | 75.25 | 46.63 | 62.81 | 2.37 |
| Donga | 65.83 | 41.61 | 63.56 | 2.41 |
| YBM-Choi | 72.23 | 43.46 | 60.92 | 1.33 |
| YBM-Kim | 51.79 | 35.29 | 68.07 | 1.36 |
| Mean | 64.68 | 39.86 | 62.39 | 2.00 |
| SD | 8.68 | 5.29 | 3.74 | 0.54 |

TABLE 9
Mean Length and Difficulty Level of Passages from 6th Grade Textbooks

| Publisher | Word Token | Word Type | TTR | Flesch-Kincaid Grade level |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Chunjae | 75.93 | 46.14 | 61.71 | 2.31 |
| Daekyo | 89.44 | 55.69 | 63.06 | 2.83 |
| Donga | 88.78 | 55.83 | 63.44 | 2.57 |
| YBM-Choi | 87.15 | 48.00 | 55.08 | 1.98 |
| YBM-Kim | 71.71 | 46.00 | 64.50 | 2.22 |
| Mean | 82.60 | 50.33 | 61.56 | 2.38 |
| SD | 7.33 | 4.49 | 3.36 | 0.29 |

The amount of text a student reads a week is about 0.39 text. (15 texts divided by 38 weeks; as Korean textbooks do not provide differentiated reading passages, all students read the same 15 texts for a year). Compared with the amount of the reviewed studies' text which is 1.24, significantly smaller amount of text is provided.

As for follow-up activities, all of 5 kinds of textbooks provide strikingly similar activities. For check of ability to extract detailed information, true/false questions or quizzes or matching sentences with pictures, or completing a task are used. For overall understanding of text, making synopsis or arranging the sentences by the order of events or filling blanks of sentences are used. It is not surprising because these are the activities listed on the curriculum guidelines on how to teach reading skills. Meanwhile, only in two textbooks, students are provided with opportunities to practice reading a short sentence (YBM-Kim) or song lyrics (Donga) with an English accent, rhythm, and intonation as indicated in the achievement standards in the curriculum. In addition, all textbooks exploit games to have students read a certain number of sentences repeatedly; however, the reading materials for games are limited in sentence level. Therefore, it is necessary and desirable to develop reading activities for RF in text level.

In sum, the comparisons between the text in the empirical studies and that of the textbooks revealed four main features of the text in the textbooks:

- 1) Practical text type is too dominant while authentic stories are sparse.
- 2) TTR is relatively high, which seems to be because fewer repeated words or pattern are used.
- 3) Significantly smaller amount of text is provided.
- 4) Most reading activities are related to checking comprehension of the text while little activities to develop RF are used.

Discussion

Based on the analyses, we discuss shortcomings of the current Korean national English curriculum and textbooks in terms of RF and make suggestions accordingly.

National English Curriculum

The analysis of the national curriculum from the RF perspective has shown that reading instruction by the curriculum is heavily biased towards higher-level reading process and provides none or little for RF. Although it is evident that efficient reading process combines aspects of lower- and higher-level processing and the ultimate goal of reading is to comprehend the meaning of the text, it is important to note that word recognition plays a crucial role in the lower-level processes and can be carried out reasonably well without higher-level processes; however, it is not possible for reading comprehension to take place without word recognition (Nassaji, 2014; Perfetti, 2007). In this respect, implementing a fluency building program at earlier stages of language learning rather than waiting until learners acquire a

higher level of language proficiency is important (Baker et al., 2008; Burns et al., 2017; Council et al., 2016). Therefore, the curriculum needs to adopt the notion of RF and provide appropriate and timely guidelines to English teachers and material developers.

Text Type of the Textbooks

From the results, two major features have been found regarding Practical text and Semi-Literature. First, Practical text is too dominant. Since the national curriculum took the communicative approach in language teaching, there has been a neglect of literature despite its numerous benefits as young learner's reading text. Most of all, as children are naturally appealed to stories, literature can provide a motivating and meaningful context for language learning (Ghosn, 2002); in other words, literature has its potential as a source of engaging texts (Tomlinson, 2013). Providing materials that interest young learners is crucial to successful language learning. In this regard, this issue is related to a number of Korean research which have reported that textbooks' reading passages are not interesting for teachers to teach with and for students to read (Park, 2016; Seo & Lee, 2017; Seo, 2018). The authors of the empirical studies also pointed out that textbooks' reading texts are inappropriate for RF development (Choi & Lee, 2015; Y. Lee, 2018). Practical text does have its place as a reading text for young learners; however, owing to the potential usefulness of literary texts, textbooks developers should consider incorporating them.

Second, Semi-Literature text does not appear to meet the need and interest of students. According to Oller (1983), stories should have logic, causality, and meaningful conflicts for students to comprehend and to be engaged with. However, most Semi-Literature texts in the textbooks have loose logic and little conflicts as they were written with the limited expressions which are supposed to be taught in a certain unit. For example, as seen in figures 1 and 2, even the touching story, "The Last Leaf" turns into an awkward and boring story with loose logic when someone says, "Go straight and turn right at the post office" which is one of the key expressions of the unit. Therefore, more authentic stories relevant to young learners need to be developed.

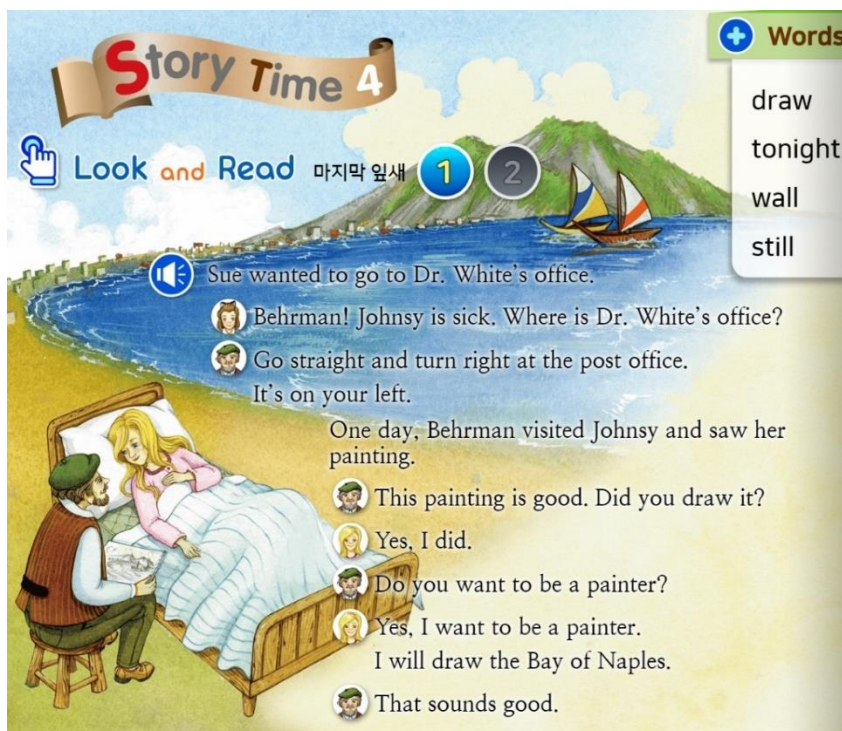


Figure 1. Excerpt 1 from a 5th grade textbook (Lee et al., 2020, p. 184).



Figure 2. Excerpt 2 from a 5th grade textbook (Lee et al., 2020, p. 185).

TTR of Text and Text for 3rd and 4th graders

The results have shown that TTR of textbooks' text is relatively higher than that of empirical studies and TTR of the empirical studies goes higher with grades. Although TTR is not about sentence pattern, in the case of this study which investigates reading materials for young learners, it turned out that low TTR is closely related to repeated patterns of the text. In addition, it is notable that results of the studies with 3rd and 4th graders show improvement of RF with patterned texts. These results imply that not only word and sentence can be read by 3rd and 4th graders when provided with appropriate texts such as patterned texts. Kwon and Park's (2014) research that utilized 12 patterned books for 4th graders to develop learners' literacy noted that the feature of "repetition" from patterned books enables students who are in an early stage of reading to read without great difficulty and to have a sense of achievement. The authors also reported that students paid attention to the relationship between sounds and letters through reading patterned phrase repeatedly (Kwon & Park, 2014). Therefore, patterned books could be an appropriate reading material for young students to develop RF as well as literacy.

Providing a text with scaffolding (e.g., pattern and repetition) can help learners at earlier stages to read the text (Stahl & Heubach, 1997). In fact, beginning reading a text without any scaffolding in 5th grade has been problematic that many students in the Korean context have found reading difficult when confronted with a text for the first time (Seo, 2018). Providing text from the first year is fairly normal around the world according to Rixon (2011) who investigated the textbooks from 10 countries where elementary school students learn English as a second/foreign language. In Rixon's (2011) study, students in all the other countries read sentences or short texts from the first year they begin to learn English except S. Korea. Therefore, patterned text for Korean 3rd and 4th graders needs to be developed and be provided.

Amount of Text

The total amount of textbooks' text for a student per week (0.39 text) is significantly smaller than that of reviewed studies (1.24 texts). It has long been argued that the amount of written English in Korean textbooks is insufficient to develop students' reading skills (Kim, 2014; Park, 2016). In reality, Woo (2016) who surveyed 100 elementary school English teachers reported that 48 teachers spend less than 10 percent of teaching hours on reading, 28 teachers spend 11 to 20 percent, 22 teachers spend 21 to 30 percent, and only 2 teachers spend more than 30 percent despite their acknowledgement of the importance of reading.

When compared with textbooks from other countries, shortage of Korean textbooks is glaring. For example, Korean students are supposed to learn up to 500 words for 4 years of elementary school while Finnish students learn about 786 words only in the first year (Kim & Park, 2017). The number of words taught in KES level has been limited to around 500 words since national curriculum was initially developed. Even in the third revision of curriculum when the mandatory teaching hours per week was extended from 1 hour to 2 hours for 3rd and 4th graders and from 2 hours to 3 hours for 5th and 6th graders, the total taught words were marginally increased into 520 words (MOE, S & T, 2008). In the latest revision in 2015, it returned to 500 words with the same teaching hours (MOE, 2015). In respect of the amount of word and text, the national curriculum and textbooks need to be reconsidered.

Reading Activities

Reading activities in textbooks from the results are mostly about comprehension check of the text. There are little activities helping students improve RF as in reviewed studies, which should be dealt with when RF instruction is introduced in the curriculum. Looking into the activities of the empirical studies may shed light on which activities are necessary and effective to develop learner's RF on each level. To this end, activities are categorised into four kinds in table 10. According to their reading level, students need to be provided with a range of engaging, developmentally appropriate reading activities.

TABLE 10
Four Kinds of Activities for RF from the Studies

| Focus | Activity | Study | Note |
|----------------------|--|---|--|
| literacy and fluency | Finding repeated phrase. | 3 studies (Kang, 2017 et al.) | All three studies are with 3 rd and 4 th graders |
| | Finding the same rhyme. | | |
| | Reading after the teacher (echo reading) | | |
| prosodic reading | Marking pausing points | 2 studies (Kang, 2018 and Nam, 2018) | The fact that only two studies used these activities seems to show that prosodic reading is less acknowledged than automaticity as a component of RF. (See [Rasinski 2014] for a discussion of RF components.) |
| | Guided reading | | |
| | Drawing intonation lines | | |
| | Shadow reading | | |
| automaticity | Reading acting like an actor | 18 studies | All studies utilized at least one of these activities. |
| | Recording | | |
| | Echo reading | | |
| | Choral reading | | |
| | Paired reading | | |
| Etc. | Cloze reading | 5 studies (Kang, 2017 et al.) | These were employed to prevent boredom from repetition or to make the reading more meaningful. |
| | Timed reading | | |
| | Reading games in pair/group | | |
| | Reader's theatre | | |
| | Role play | | |
| | Reciting poems | | |

Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the national English curriculum and authorized textbooks for Korean elementary school level in relation to reading fluency (RF). Our analyses have revealed an insufficient focus and guidance on the development of RF, and we hereby offer suggestions.

Suggestions

First, with a reform of the national curriculum, providing 3rd and 4th graders with text should be considered. Patterned text may scaffold reading a text for young learners. Second, the amount of word and text taught in each year should be largely increased. Third, authentic literary texts should be incorporated instead of predominant practical texts. Last, a range of reading activities for RF other than comprehension check should be developed. However, it is important to note that the prerequisite for the above is an overall reform of the national English curriculum which determines English language teaching in S. Korea. Therefore, it is urged that the curriculum takes a new approach to reading instruction by giving more weight to lower-level reading process and by developing RF.

Implications for Teachers

Although the curriculum and textbooks may confine the language teaching in classrooms, teachers can still help students develop their RF. For example, teachers can take advantage of repeated reading with the textbook text by employing various reading activities such as paired and timed reading and readers' theatre (Lee, 2014; Song, 2017; You, 2016). The other way is that teachers can give students opportunities to try and enjoy story books which are provided by school and/or community libraries. Given the elementary students' low proficiency, however, it is advisable for teachers to direct their reading passages and to give practice using activities such as quizzes (Fields, 2017).

Directions for Future Research

For the analysis of the textbooks, 18 empirical studies on RF were examined. However, none of them employed extensive reading, a time-tested reading program considered to develop RF (Grabe, 2009; Kuhn et al., 2010). Therefore, further research with extensive reading for RF is required. Furthermore, in order for the curriculum to take a new approach, research with a broader perspective is needed, for example, on how to strike a balance between spoken and written language and between receptive and productive skills particularly in an elementary school level and in an EFL context.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the editors of Asia TEFL and the anonymous reviewers for their kind help and constructive feedback. Their input has helped improve the clarity of our paper.

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(Received March 17, 2021; Revised August 20, 2021; Accepted September 18, 2021)