

A comparison of the guided reading method and the cloze method and their effects on reading comprehension

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of an empirical investigation into the effects of two teaching strategies on the reading and comprehension levels for Japanese English language learners (ELL) at the university level. The two teaching strategies compared were the guided reading method and the cloze method. The results showed an overall improvement in comprehension levels when either the guided reading method and the cloze method were used.

Keywords

Guided reading, cloze method

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”

Albert Einstein (n.d.)

Introduction

There is a famous proverb that I believe is false, the one claiming “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Most of us learn early in life how powerful a tool language is and how it can be used for good or ill. Language has the ability to enlighten and delight us, but it also can inflict psychological injury. It is also as central to our social interactions as it is to our cognitive pursuits. It is the responsibility of the teacher to guide students in such a way that they can make the most of the power of the spoken word. This

is not an easy task, given that we live in an ever-changing environment to which we as educators must adapt. EFL classroom environments have been shifting from predominantly teacher centered classrooms to more student interactive classrooms. Two methods characteristic of this transformation are the guided reading method (Fountas & Pinnell 1996), which is a tactic used to teach reading in small groups, while providing individual coaching, and the cloze method that is based on written texts, which have purposefully selected words omitted and replaced by blanks. To me it was interesting to compare the two methods in order to study the students' ability to plan what to say or write, and to organize what is heard and read. With this in mind, I conducted a trial comparing both methods. The following sections outline the teaching methods, the classroom context, the study design, and the analysis of the data collected.

Teaching Methods

Guided reading

With guided reading the class begins by having students sit in groups of two or four, based on the similar English language abilities of the students. As a class they scan through the article (looking at pictures) while predicting what the story is about. All the students are asked to read the story out loud but not in unison, having each student read at their own pace. While the students read the teacher walks around to identify any common pronunciation mistakes that are being made. If there are any words or phrases that need to be practiced the teacher models and leads appropriate choral practice after the whole class finishes reading. The students then pair up and take turns reading and explaining the story to each other. There are two preset goals to this approach. The first is to have the students use only English when interacting in the classroom, and second the students need to use English to “...obtain, process, construct, and provide subject-matter information in spoken and written form.” (Harrell & Jordan 2008: 222)

Cloze Method

The cloze method is based on the idea of teaching composition with some of the text missing. Students are first placed in groups of 2–4 students based on their reading abilities. The class is given a cloze handout and asked to work with their group members to fill in the blanks with an appropriate answer. The class as a group checks the answers, and discusses any problems they may have had with the handout. Students are then asked to silently read their stories with blanks and fill in the blanks with the best word. Students in the group then take turns reading a section of the story with the words they filled in. They must explain to the group how they decided on the word that they selected. Using cloze the cloze method helps students figure out unknown words based on the context of the sentence. This kind of practice helps students gain a better understanding of the text that is being read (Hinkel, 2006). An example of the table used can be found in the appendix.

Study Design

The participants were divided into two classes. Class A had 30 students and class B had 28 students. Each week classes A and B would rotate with regards to the way they were taught. Class A used the cloze method for the odd numbered weeks and the guided reading method on even numbered weeks. Class B followed the opposite rotation so that every week each method was implemented with one of the classes.

The study consisted of two phases

1. Teaching approach

- 1.1 Students using the guided reading method formed groups. At their own pace they read the story that was given to them. A mini-lesson was conducted based on the needs of the students. Students took turns reading the story to their group members. The group members worked together to summarize the story and build comprehension.
- 1.2 Students using the cloze method formed groups based on their reading ability. The teacher handed out a cloze worksheet (all four types of cloze

techniques were used; traditional, syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic). The group members worked together to complete the worksheet. As a class we corrected the worksheet. The students were all given a story that had blanks that they had to fill in. All students did this individually. After that, members of the group took turns reading parts of the story with their chosen word. Each student needed to explain to the group either why or how they came to the conclusion that they did.

2. Test

At the end of the lesson all students were given a comprehension test based on the story that was read during the class. The test consisted of ten questions, and the goals were to determine how much information was learned and to see if there was a difference in test scores based on the teaching method that was used in the class.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the class the students practiced vocabulary and comprehension as a class. This was done by either the guided reading method or the cloze method. The class was conducted using one of the two methods, and at the end of the class a comprehension test was administered. The test papers were collected and the scores were recorded. The test scores of both teaching methods were compared to see if there were any differences.

Analysis

Group A used the cloze teaching method for weeks 1, 3, and 5, while Group B used the guided reading teaching method during weeks 2, 4, and 6. In all cases the scores showed similar results irrespective of the teaching method used, as depicted in figure 1 below.

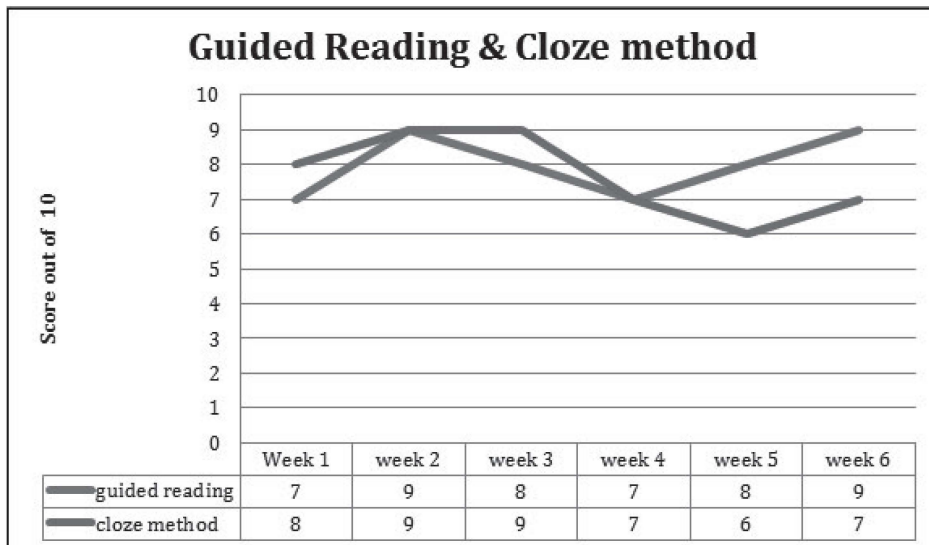


Figure 1: Comparison of average test scores

One possible reason for the results is that both of these methods help the students to comprehend the concepts of the reading passage. The purpose of this research has been to see if either of these methods would help ELL students to better their reading comprehension skills. Even though both methods take slightly different approaches, the goal of helping students better understand stories has been accomplished.

Conclusion

Learning a language is a difficult task, with many students giving up or not reaching their potential in the learning process. It is important for educators to develop methods and procedures that will facilitate the students of today. The success of future generations is directly connected to the educators' ability to motivate the students in such a way that they learn, and retain information more efficiently. In this study I used two groups of students. Each group was taught using the guided reading method and the cloze methods on a rotating weekly basis. The students were then taught using one of the two methods. The results showed that over the six-week period of the study all students scored high scores on the test, and that neither method engendered overwhelmingly better test scores than the other. Students respond differently to different

methods of teaching. Also, individual students may have their own unique way of demonstrating the knowledge acquired and absorbing the information that is imparted. Therefore, to aid this process of demonstrating knowledge, I suggest an instructor adopt whichever technique that assists the students in retaining the information and increasing their understanding. I have found that using both the guided reading method and the cloze method helps English language learners in their understanding of reading passages. This would appear to be demonstrated by their high-test scores. Learning how to accommodate your teaching style to the challenges that your students are facing will help you be successful in many different classroom situations.

Appendix

Type of Cloze	Definition	Example
Traditional	Leave out words selected randomly.	I went for a walk to the I wanted to a I watched carefully but I was to be
Syntactic	Structure words are deleted.	I went a to the sea. wanted see dolphin. I watched carefully I was be disappointed.
Semantic	Content words are deleted.	I went for a walk to the I wanted to a I carefully but I was to disappointed.
Graphophonic	Some letters are deleted.	I w..... for a w..... to the s..... I wanted to see a d..... I watched c..... but I was to be d.....

(Gibbons, 1993)

Notes

1. There are four different types depending on the approach you want to take. Combining or using all four different types is also feasible and encouraged.
2. One way to make the task a little easier is to have a list of the vocabulary words that are used in the exercise written on the bottom of the page.

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