The Effect of Digital Fluency-Building Tools on the Development of L2 Reading Fluency and Comprehension Skills

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Abstract: *This study sought to investigate the effect of a digital fluency-building tool called AceReader on the development of reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, 60 male students of Mellat Language Institute in Rasht, Iran were randomly selected via administration of a Preliminary English Test. Then, the selected participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. Pretest of reading comprehension was administered to the experimental and the control groups to assess their knowledge of reading competence (in terms of comprehension and fluency) before the treatment. Next, the treatment started and experimental group was exposed to teaching with AceReader and control group was exposed to the traditional methods of teaching reading comprehension. Finally, posttest of reading comprehension was administered to participants of both groups at the end of treatment to assess possible difference of performance of the experimental and control groups. The collected data were then processed through statistical analysis of t-test. Findings revealed that, (a) speed reading practice via doing intensive reading activities had produced any statistically significant effect on the development of reading fluency and comprehension among Iranian EFL learners, (b) using AceReader, a digital fluency-building tool, had produced any statistically significant effect on the development of reading fluency and comprehension among participants, and (c) there is a statistically significant difference between the effects of reading via intensive reading activities and using the digital fluency-building tool on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. This study can be used by language teachers, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, and language learners.*

Keywords: *Acereader, Reading, Fluency, Comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a valuable source of input and plays an important role in the process of language learning. It helps students gain information, broadens their knowledge, and assists them in achieving their academic goals. Reading is a complex cognitive activity that is indispensable for adequate functioning and for obtaining information in the contemporary society (Shang, 2010). Chamot (2004) defines reading skill as a "process that involves the activation of relevant knowledge and language skills to get information" (p. 15). Chastain (1988) also argues that "reading is the activation of relevant knowledge and language skills to get information in order to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another" (p. 216).

Inadequate text comprehension skills have been shown to be an issue particularly for readers with a language minority background who do not speak the majority language at home. In several countries, these readers have been shown to perform worse on reading comprehension tests in the majority language than their monolingual peers (Trapman, Gelderen, Steensel, Schooten, & Hulstijn, 2014). The most important reason for this difference is assumed to be language minority students' lower linguistic knowledge levels in the majority language (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2010; Trapman et al., 2014).

Because a text is never fully explicit, local and global text understanding requires a reader to make inferences to fill the gaps in a text at the local and global level. For example, when reading the two sentences "Peter parked the truck. He locked the door", a bridging inference is required for local understanding: the reader has to infer that the door is the door of the truck. Gaps may also need to be filled at the global level; for instance, in a text where the topic of a text is not mentioned explicitly and left for the reader to infer (Kintsch & Rawson, 2005).

An individual's working memory capacity has also been proposed as a cause for differences in sentence comprehension success: a low working memory capacity may serve as a processing bottleneck (Seigneuric, Ehrlich, Oakhill, & Yuill, 2000). Inference skill plays a role both at the local and global level of text understanding, namely to fill in the information left implicit in the text. Proficiency in inference skill has been argued to depend on differences in adequate text-based construction, reader goals, working memory capacity and general knowledge (Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005).

Apart from metacognitive knowledge and reading strategies, another proposed addition to the simple view of reading is fluency in lower-order processing (word and sentence level processing). Under the assumption that working memory capacity is limited for all readers, several researchers have argued that fluency in lower-order processes is also essential, in addition to the successful execution (accuracy) of these processes (Perfetti & Hart, 2001).

Generally, reading is an influential skill required to learn and influence educational outcomes, proper employment, and personal development. Striving readers who do not know how to read in school are more likely to be unemployed, earn low incomes, and exhibit poor health as adults.

Actually, knowledge about reading strategies (metacognitive knowledge) has been identified as an important contributor to text comprehension in addition to linguistic knowledge. Knowledge about reading strategies is associated with the application of reading strategies intended to improve comprehension of the word, sentence, and text level. At the word level, for example, knowledge about reading strategies may be applied to infer the meaning of unknown words. At the next level, knowledge about reading strategies and text structure may lead a reader to direct his attention to headings or titles to infer the global structure of a text (Trapman et al., 2014).

One of the most discussed issues in reading process is the impact of the kinds of strategies students have to read beyond what is stated in the text (Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012). Oxford (2011) stated that strategies are problem-oriented actions and techniques that are utilized in order to achieve comprehension. The strategy is also considered as a goal-directed action which can be conscious, unconscious or automatic. Therefore, reading strategies have been defined as "specific, deliberate, goal-directed mental processes or behaviors, which control and modify a reader's efforts to decode a text, understand words and construct the meaning of a text" (Anastasiou & Griva, 2009, pp. 283-284).

According to Cogmen and Saracaloglu, (2009), the use of reading comprehension strategies (RCS) enhances reading comprehension and overcomes comprehension difficulties at both the word and sentence level. The use of RCS also has been found to be important, especially for those EFL learners who wanted to achieve high levels of English language literacy and success in academic reading (Malcolm, 2009). Such findings suggest that if readers use RCS when they read, they can facilitate their comprehension. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how EFL readers manage complexities in learning appropriate RCS in the English a medium of instruction (EMI) setting in their attempt to develop their L2 reading comprehension.

According to Chamot (2004), the use of reading strategies was also determined by language proficiency levels. Studies have revealed that less competent L2 students employ a relatively limited range of strategies, for example, poor readers display lower-level text processing skills and engage in 'bottom-up' strategies (Geladari, Griva, & Mastrothanasis, 2010).

Researchers also suggest that gender plays an important role in the number of strategies used in language learning, particularly in reading comprehension among adult learners (Saengpakdeejit, 2014; Taki & Soleimani, 2012). Lee (2012) for example, found that females tend to be more active strategy users than their male counterparts. These studies suggest that gender is also one of the contributing factors that may impact the use of RCS. There is also convincing evidence that reading instruction plays an important role in RCS use to enhance students' reading comprehension in primary, secondary and tertiary levels (e.g., Akkakoson, 2013; Raissi & Roustaei, 2013).

Reading comprehension deficits can be found in many different types of populations, both developmentally and in adults. Based on the simple view of reading, a deficit in reading comprehension is the result of a specific problem in one of the two skills involved in reading comprehension (that is decoding or linguistic comprehension) or a combination of deficits in both skills.

Accordingly, reading comprehension is a complex process that involves components, processes, and factors with the aim of finding better ways of improving it among learners. In other words, reading comprehension is an interactive process of finding meanings from a text (Meniado, 2016). Researchers supported this view and stated that reading comprehension is a series of cognitive activities that include a lot of dimensions like the understanding of words and their meanings, mindful reaction, and integration. Given this, developing an effective pedagogical method that aims to teach L2 reading strategies effectively, in terms of fluency building in L2 reading, to EFL learners is a must that continues to demand attention and exploration.

One of the most famous courseware aiming to harness L2 reading comprehension and fluency skills is AceReader. AceReader is an award-winning software program designed to increase learners' reading speed, comprehension, and fluency. It is the only program that uses time-tested, patented, and research-based technology that also has a 20-year proven track record. It is sophisticated and is yet fun, and it is very simple to use. It is primarily designed to assess and improve reading skills; however, it also includes fun eye/brain games, vocabulary exercises, memory exercises and SAT/ACT prep exercises. Content includes interesting themed, educational material in the areas of American History, Earth, and Space Science, Famous People, Fun Facts and General Knowledge.

AceReader provides a blend of activities and challenges that engage students with educational and interesting content that require actual reading. Students engage in activities that help them break bad reading habits, such as reading word-by-word and re-reading sentences. Once these habits are overcome, their potential to read faster and with better comprehension can be realized. AceReader comes with over 1,000 reading comprehension tests that are themed and leveled. Each time a test is taken, students' speed and comprehension scores are logged. Students can monitor their own scores. Teachers can monitor all students' scores. With the comprehension tests and the viewing of test results, students have a greater sense of their strengths and weaknesses concerning reading and teachers are able to focus more individually on their progress. Many readers read too fast and don't comprehend; others read too slowly. With AceReader, no longer does a teacher have to address fluency if that is not the challenge to a student.

According to the previous studies about the importance of using technology-enhanced learning environment which includes a minimum of one-hour instruction training period in a lab setting per week with a reading practice program, the researcher thinks that using a digital fluency-building tool like AceReader could be a good way to develop L2 reading fluency and comprehension skills. Such applications could enhance teaching for ELT practitioners and language learners by categorizing different methods and practices for developing fluency and comprehension skills.

Literature Review

Phenomenal advances in technology in the second half of the last century in the fields of computers and telecommunication have made tools available for the educators to assist them in the teaching and learning process (Idrus & Ismail, 2013). They can design pedagogically informed tasks to help create a learning environment that is characterized by appropriate difficulty levels, feedback, and the link to previous knowledge, interactivity, conduciveness, innovation, and positivity (Li, 2013).

Teachers need training and continuous technical support in employing these capabilities to the maximum advantage of the learners (Hashemi & Aziznezhad, 2011). Technology on its owns offers no magical solutions, and its success depends upon how teachers are prepared to use it (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012). A meta-analysis of 84 studies by Slavin et al. (2008) spanning three decades and involving over 6000 participants reported significantly large mean effect size in favor of technical assistance.

Computer-assisted cloze practice helps to promote reading comprehension. It has also been found beneficial in silent reading approach and in both intensive and extensive reading approaches. Feedback is an important aspect of the learning process. Computers have been found valuable tools to provide instant and incessant feedback (Potocki, Ecalle, & Magnan, 2013).

Researchers have explored the potential of computers in keeping the record of the choices of strategies made by readers while interacting with the text. It might give teachers clues to the critical areas where help is needed so they might plan their instruction, accordingly. A shift from paper reading to screen reading also has been a concern of the educators (Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009; Liu, Chen, & Chang, 2010).

Numerous studies were conducted to evaluate how reading from screen might affect reading comprehension. There seems to be a consensus that it makes no difference to reading comprehension whether readers read on paper or screen (Sun, Shieh, & Huang, 2013; Wright, Fugett, & Caputa, 2013). These findings favor digital reading in an indirect way because the digital texts can be presented with multiple annotations which are readily accessible. This feature of digital texts gives it an immense advantage over paper texts.

Although general vocabulary knowledge and knowledge of connectives are related, the predictive value of knowledge of connectives on top of general vocabulary knowledge indicates that eighth graders score differently for these types of knowledge, and that those differences matter for expository text comprehension. Crosson and Lesaux (2013) found that knowledge of connectives predicted English text comprehension uniquely for primary school readers (fifth graders), above and beyond word reading fluency and general vocabulary knowledge.

Furthermore, the finding that text structure inference skill has unique predictive value for expository text comprehension, controlling for general vocabulary knowledge, seems to indicate that general vocabulary knowledge alone is not sufficient to infer text structure while reading. More specifically, metacognitive knowledge and knowledge of connectives seem to be the crucial components that enable text structure inference: when taking these types of knowledge into account, text structure inference skill was not uniquely related to expository text comprehension. This finding concurs with other studies that have advanced knowledge of connectives and metacognitive knowledge as key components to text structure inference skill (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980).

Better text structure inference skill is also likely to improve expository text comprehension. In many intervention studies, it has been shown that training students to focus on text structure and words that signal text structure has led to better memory and understanding of text ideas (Wijekumar, Meyer, & Lei, 2013). Meyer (1985) has shown that expository texts are often structured in a particular top-level structure (e.g., problem-solution, causation, description, etc.). Instead of building a list-like representation of a text that makes no distinction between important text information and details, the reader capable of inferring text structure will process and store text information according to the inferred structure (Meyer et al., 1980). In

other words, better text structure inference skill will result in better understanding of what the text is actually about and of which text parts are important or less important.

Although significant correlations between fluency and comprehension have been established for intermediate students in other studies, these correlations were low, and language skills and metacognitive knowledge had better predictive value for text comprehension. These results underscore that knowledge factors are crucial for comprehension at the intermediate level while reading fluency seems to have reached a level beyond which individual differences play a substantial role. Only when time to read is restricted and readers do not have enough opportunity to compensate for relatively inefficient reading processes, fluency could play a role at the intermediate level (Walczyk, Wei, Grifith-Ross, Goubert, Cooper, & Zha, 2007).

But even in these kinds of time-constrained situations, we expect fluency to play a minor role, as opposed to knowledge because the relationship between fluency and comprehension has been shown to decrease with age and reading experience (Yovanoff, Duesbery, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2005).

According to Sezgin (2002), the classroom environment enriched with multimedia software increases students' level of academic success. Similarly, Aktumen and Kacar (2003) have determined that using a computer and an internet connection in the classroom increases students' success. On the other hand, some research shows that there are no positive effects of using technology in the classroom on students' academic success (Dunleavy & Heinecke, 2008). Aktas, Alioglu, and Vardar (2007) determined that the academic success of students using information and communications technology is lower.

Given that the findings of studies examining the contributions of CALL or TELL courseware to L2 pedagogy have been far from conclusive, as some favor and some other disfavor their use in language learning, the present study aims to compare the effects of a digital fluency-building tool called AceReader with that of a conventional method (speed reading practice via intensive reading activities) on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, the following questions are addressed in the present study:

1. Does speed reading practice via intensive reading activities produce any statistically significant effect on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?
2. Does speed reading practice through using AceReader, a digital fluency-building tool, produce any statistically significant effect on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension among Iranian EFL learners?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the effects of reading via intensive reading activities and using the digital fluency-building tool on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian EFL learners?

Method

The present study employed a true-experimental design, which required randomization, administration of a pretest, treatment, and finally a posttest of L2 reading comprehension ability to the study groups. The Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to homogenize the participants in terms of the level of language proficiency. Initially, the random sampling of the students at Mellat Language Institute in Rasht was done using the SuperCool Random Number Generator software[1].

Next, the participants randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental, and they sat for a pretest. The purpose of pretest administered before the treatment is to find the possible primary differences between the level of reading competence (in terms of comprehension and fluency) of the treatment and comparison groups. Both groups were given five short reading texts to read for comprehension. Then, they asked to answer the multiple-choice items based on the text they had read. All the tests had been derived

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[1] http://www.softpedia.com/get/Others/Miscellaneous/SuperCool-Random-Number-Generator.shtml

from AceReader application. The students' answer sheets then collected for correction and statistical analyses.

For analyzing the reading speed, Jensen (1986) recommended that L2 readers seek to "approximate native speaker reading rates and comprehension levels in order to keep up with classmates" (p. 106) and also suggested that 300 words per minute are the optimal rate. This rate was supported by Nuttall (1996), who stated that "for an L1 speaker of English of about average education and intelligence... the reading rate is about 300 words per minute. (p. 56)" Accordingly, the students' score was analyzed by this criterion.

Next, the students in the experimental group received a type of program instruction that was chosen from the intermediate level of the application. The researcher used the digital fluency-building tool (AceReader) in reading sessions. Students were given eight passages in this process. They learned how to use AceReader program in enhancing reading passages. The Participants in the study divided into two groups, and both groups received the same passages per session; however, the experimental group used a digital fluency-building tool (AceReader) during the reading sessions, while the control group received those passages in the paper form. After eight weeks of treatment, the researcher administered a posttest to compare the experimental and control group achievements in reading comprehension and fluency.

Participants

The participants in this study were 60 male students at the intermediate level of language proficiency who studied at Mellat Language Institute in Rasht and the age range of participants was between 16 and 18 years old. These 60 participants were chosen from an initial group of 200 students with a PET test which showed that all the participants are at the same level of proficiency.

Instruments

The instruments of this study consisted of: (a) a proficiency test which was one of the versions of Preliminary English Tests, as a test of overall language proficiency, (b) five short reading passages each followed by 3 or 4 multiple-choice questions derived from AceReader application as the pretest of L2 reading comprehension, (c) another five short reading passages each followed by 3 or 4 multiple-choice questions derived from AceReader application as the posttest of L2 reading, and (d) AceReader.

The Language Proficiency Test (PET). The English language proficiency test used in the study for homogenizing the participants is a sample of the Preliminary English Test (PET) adopted from "Objective PET" by Hashemi and Thomas (2010), Cambridge University Press. PET is one of the standardized tests among the series by Cambridge ESOL. The reading model consists of five Parts (35 questions). Part one begins with questions 1 to 5 (multiple choice), Part two from questions 6 to 10 (matching descriptions), part three from questions 11 to 20 (true/false), part four from questions 21 to 25 (multiple choice), and part five from question 26 to 35 (multiple choice). Writing consists of three parts (7 questions). The PET will be administered to 200 participants. According to Europe's Common European Framework of Reference, students who get the scores between 41 to 50 scores will categorize in intermediate-level of learning proficiency. Based on the criterion score of PET exam, 60 participants who get the score in this score range will be selected to participate in the main study.

The pretest and posttest of L2 reading. The purpose of the pretest administered before the treatment is to find the possible primary differences between the reading competence level of the treatment and comparison groups. Both groups were given five short reading texts to read for comprehension. Next, they will be asked to answer the multiple-choice items based on the texts they had read. All the passages and tests will be derived from the digital fluency-building tool called AceReader. There will be 20 questions for each exam, and the scores will be obtained by the learners on these tests together with the scores for their reading speed rate will then analyzed and subjected to a test of statistical significance.

AceReader. AceReader is a powerful instructional tool designed to assess, improve and monitor the reading speed, fluency, as well as the comprehension of language learners. Students should spend 15 to 20 minutes a day on about five or six brief activities, depending upon which version you are using. The publisher

recommends that students work through lessons at least three times per week. One vision-training activity has graphics that flash on different parts of the screen to help train peripheral vision. Another one flashes two words that are separated horizontally by some space. The user needs to identify whether or not the words are identical. This helps readers learn to scan quickly across the line.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was conducted in February 2019. The participants in this study were 200 intermediate male learners who studying EFL at Mellat Language Institute, Rasht, Iran. To make sure of their homogeneity, all the participants sat for the PET exam. Next, an independent-samples t-test was employed to find any possible initial differences between the performance scores of the participants in the treatment and comparison groups. After making sure of the homogeneity of the groups with respect to their L2 reading ability, the treatment group received treatment on their reading ability for eight sessions.

As for the experimental group participants, harnessing the students' reading fluency skills and also their reading comprehension ability was made possible by teaching them some effective fluency-building strategies as suggested by the application itself. The parent (or in some cases the student) could select from three different modes: The course mode, menu mode, and reading mode. The course mode probably made the most sense for most children and teens. It was presented a series of activities in a set order and makes the entire program super simple to use. The parent/administrator could set the course to require students to complete each activity before moving on or else allow students to occasionally skip something.

There were many customization controls in the admin section. The experimental group students could override normal settings including the reading speed that was set to work from the baseline determined by the initial assessment. They could change the font size and color, require completion of all activities before the student can proceed, lock multiple users out of any other student accounts, and much more. Affirmations were limited to "Congratulations! You Won!" after successful completion of a game. The program did not slow students down with cartoon animations and continual affirmations (e.g., "Good job!" or "Great work!") after each activity as do so many other programs. The student could have access to the "Course Mode", "Menu Mode" and "Test Results" tabs.

So, the experimental group received eight training sessions (each session= 1 hour) on how to learn fluency and reading comprehension through the aid of AceReader application. Posttest which administered after the treatment sessions was consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. In fact, another version of the reading test was used to examine the participants' fluency and reading comprehension after the interventions. Finally, all the collected data analyzed using the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and through independent and paired samples t-tests.

Results

In this study, the researcher has formulated three research questions and correspondingly he has proposed three null hypotheses. As it was mentioned before, to make sure of learners' homogeneity, all of them sat for PET. In order to show that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups, students whose scores were between 41 to 50 were selected as intermediate EFL students. With the aim of selecting a homogenous sample, 200 EFL learners were selected, and 60 students who had gained scores in the range of 41-50 out of 100 on the PET exam were selected for the main study. These sixty learners were assigned to the experimental and control groups. After that, both groups sat for a pretest to examine the possible initial differences between their level of reading comprehension and fluency. The result of the pretest was entered into the SPSS datasheets. The results are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Pretest Scores

	Experimental group	Control group
N	30	30
Minimum	25	33
Maximum	52	50
Mean	42.43	42.53
Std. deviation	6.312	4.761
Variance	39.840	22.671

As can be seen, the table shows the minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, as well as the variance of the scores in both groups. The scores are very close for both groups. In addition, it can be seen that the participants had delivered a lackluster performance on the test. Finally, at the end of the process, the participants sat for the posttest. The scores on the posttest were entered into the SPSS data view tab. Table 2 shows the data of the posttest.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Posttest Scores

	Experimental group	Control group
N	30	30
Minimum	48	47
Maximum	83	81
Mean	69.27	63.27
Std. deviation	7.817	8.820
Variance	61.099	77.789

As it is shown in the table, the mean score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group. It means that learners who had worked with the AceReader application achieved better reading comprehension and fluency, and because of this, they could gain better scores on the posttest.

Then, in order to check whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups, an independent samples t-test was employed. Table 3 below shows the results of the independent- samples t-test reported for the pretest scores of both groups.

Table 3. Results of the Independent Samples T-test Reported for the Pretest Scores

Groups	N	Mean	T value	P value
Experimental	30	42.43	0.69	0.945
Control	30	42.53		

As can be seen, the p-value is larger than 0.05, suggesting that there is no statistically significant difference between the pretest scores of the two groups and that the learners' initial level of reading competence in both groups was almost the same. After that, paired-samples t-tests were run between the pretest and posttest scores of both groups in an attempt to measure the amount of their progress over the course of the study. The result of the tests is illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Results of the Paired-samples T-test Reported for the Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	N	Mean difference	T value	P value
Experimental	30	26.833	14.380	0.000
Control	30	20.733	10.467	0.000

As shown in the table, the p-value reported for statistical significance of the mean difference of the two groups of experimental and control are lower than 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, it can be contended that there is a statistically significant difference between the participants' level of L2 reading competence before and after the tests in both groups separately. The implication is that both groups made significant progress over the course of the study, albeit the experimental group obtained a higher gain relative to that of the control group. Accordingly, the first and second null hypotheses rejected.

An independent-samples t-test was also run between the posttest scores of the two groups to show the significance of the differences, if any, between the experimental and control groups at the end of the study. The result of the independent-samples t-test is summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Results of the Independent Samples T-test Reported for the Posttest Scores

Groups	N	Mean	T value	P value
Experimental	30	69.27	2.789	0.007
Control	30	63.27		

According to this table, the p-value is lower than 0.05. It means there is a statistically significant difference between the effects of reading via intensive reading activities and that of using the digital fluency-building tool on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. This provides convincing evidence for the rejection of the null hypothesis of the study. The mean difference is in favor of the experimental treatment, suggesting that building L2 reading fluency through AceReader had proved comparatively more effective in improving the comprehension of L2 texts among the participants.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the results of the present study, the researcher drew three conclusions. The first conclusion is that speed reading practice via doing intensive reading activities had produced any statistically significant effect (but the amount of gain was not comparable in size relative to that obtained by the experimental group) on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. In line with this, Koko (2001) stated that teachers need to identify the best ways of motivating students so that they can develop interest in learning. Habits are formed by extensive trail and experiences. The implication is that acquiring good study habits comes by means of regular repeated processes (Asagwara, 2000). This confirms the opinion of Tobin and Copic (1982) who found out that learners achieve more when they become more proficient in reading and reasoning. They also opined that the use of schedules, time allocation and sleeping schedules can also enhance effective intensive reading. Intensive reading was also noted to make students to jot down important points they come across while reading which enhances their ability to recall this points when needed.

To start with, reading is said to be the act of understanding the meaning of a written or printed word (or symbol) or the act of obtaining knowledge or information through books, magazines, journals etc. One must read with a purpose which is, to understand. A student who forms the habit of reading performs better than those who do not read but rather prefer to spend their time on non-profitable things that cannot promote their educational attainment/performances. In addition, the use of proper scheduling, time allocation and sleep timing can also enhance effective reading. Furthermore, Asagwara (2000), assumed that study attitude can be summed up to mean strategies that a learner adopts in the process of acquiring knowledge, ideas, skills and experience.

Before one begins to think about the process of studying, one must develop a schedule. If one does not have a schedule or plan of studying, such person will not have a way of allocating valuable time when other activities come up unexpectedly. A good and well thought-out schedule can be a life-saver. Consequently, lack of strict adherence to the issue of time schedule may lead young children/students to devoting inadequate time to

study and thereby resulting to failure. Students should use a good schedule, and maximize their time in doing essential academic work. "This is the ability of the student to plan and apportion limited available study time to different subjects of study. An adequate time allocation and distribution is very essential for an effective and efficient study for success" (Benwari & Nemine, 2014, p. 94).

The second point to be concluded is that speed reading practice through using AceReader, a digital fluency-building tool, had produced any statistically significant effect on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. A study conducted by Moran et al. (2008) on the impact of technology and reading performance in the middle-school grades revealed that using technology can have a positive effect on reading comprehension. Soe et al. (2000) also showed that computer applications can play a significant role in teaching and learning reading comprehension. There are many benefits of using technology in education, however, there are also downsides to consider and plan for. Schools, teachers and principals have the difficult challenge of finding the balance with technology. It should be a priority to decide how and when technology can and should be used to enhance the learning (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Moratelli and DeJarnette (2014) stated that, "Technology in the classroom can serve as an educational tool for both teachers and students" (p. 587). The great thing about having access to technology in schools is the way in which students can receive information. Instead of relocating a class to a computer lab, having access to technology such as iPads in the classroom can offer more flexibility and differentiated instruction (Moratelli & DeJarnette, 2014). Teachers have the ability to access endless amounts of curriculum content online to use with their students, and much of which is free resources (Rosen, 2010). Russel and Sorge (1999) argued that, "Integrating technology into instruction tends to move classrooms from teacher-dominated environments to ones that are more student-centered" (as cited in Pitler, 2007, p. 3). Supporters of technology in the classroom stress the purpose of integrating technology in the classroom is not to "teach with technology" but rather to use technology to bring content to students in a more powerful, interesting and personalized way (Rosen, 2011).

Finally, the third conclusion is that there is a statistically significant difference between the effects of reading via intensive reading activities and using the digital fluency-building tool on the development of L2 reading fluency and comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. A traditional belief in L2 learning is that students cannot read until they have acquired a certain amount of the L2 whether measured in amount of time, exposure to grammatical components, or vocabulary acquisition. Laufer (1997) argues that "no text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary" (p. 20). In another perspective, supporters of technology in the classroom recognize that technology has the ability to completely differentiate and engage learning for all students, thus leading them down path to success (Pitler, Hubbell, & Kuhn, 2012).

Wright (2001) claimed that using technology with young children is simply developmentally inappropriate and that there are very few instructional benefits. Opponents of technology would prefer to have students interacting with hands-on materials, creative play and experiments, rather than using electronic devices (Wright, 2001); the way in which students learn to think critically and collaboratively is not through an electronic device, rather it is through dialogue with one another. Students need the opportunity to exchange view-points, ideas and ask questions about different topics in a face-to-face real life type of setting. The integration of technology in school has inhibited the conversations students need to accelerate their learning (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

According to Schacter and Fagnano (1999), "Applied effectively, technology not only increases student learning, understanding and achievement but also motivates students to learn, encourages collaborative learning, and helps develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills" (as cited in Pitler, Hubbell & Kuhn, 2012, p. 3). Technology has the incredible power to change the classroom and impact the way in which students learn and gather information (Blagojevic, Brumer, Chevelier, O'Clair & Thomes, 2012).

Using a digital fluency-building tool like AceReader can make a real impact on learners. It could assess, improve and monitor reading speed, fluency and comprehension. Teachers and students discuss the questions in different parts of application. It is a great way to present and practice reading texts and it has many positive results for the classes. It helps students to get engaged in reading text to comprehend better.

The findings of this study revealed that teaching and practice of fluency-building reading strategies with AceReader can improve EFL learners reading ability significantly. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, teachers can bring about new insight into teaching reading more effectively. The positive answer to the main research question addressed in this study implies that using AceReader in an EFL classroom improves the reading ability of language learners. Therefore, improving the learners' thinking ability should be considered in designing courses and also in the techniques used by EFL teachers.

The teachers working in the field of EFL should specify more time and effort in teaching reading skills to their learners. EFL teachers would also need to change their attitude toward teaching English. Enhancing the learners' thinking ability can have a great impact not only on their language learning but also their whole academic success.

In addition, instead of using short, edited, or created texts, Swaffar and Arens (2005) argue that students actually need challenging reading tasks which will help them not only to understand the language being used but also the content and they give examples of each. Authentic materials or texts are a key component of a literacy approach to teaching reading. Swaffar and Arens (2005) define authentic materials as "texts written for or spoken to native speakers of that language" (p. 18) versus "materials written only to teach language" (Maxim, 2002, p. 20).

A literacy approach to teaching reading would logically promote reading acquisition and comprehension, but it also improves traditional components of L2 acquisition. As stated previously, L2 vocabulary knowledge can have an impact on L2 reading ability, but in fact they both positively affect the other; the more one's reading improves, the more one's vocabulary improves and the more one's vocabulary improves, the more one's reading improves (Grabe & Stoller, 1997).

Reading classes should not be passive ones in which students pick the answers straight from the text without understanding. Instead, they should always be asked to be active. As students learn this process, they have a chance to participate in each of the drills, and improve their ability to perform each of them which helps to improve their ability to read, they should be able to take on more of the responsibility themselves. Another important issue is for teachers' trainers while preparing prospective teachers for their career is teaching them how to succeed in leading their learners to deal with reading problems.

In all different learning situations, in general, and EFL learning contexts, in particular, effort should be made to create a positive and stress-free atmosphere in which learners can easily express themselves and talk to their teachers and peers. Falloon (2013) pointed out that the scholarly studies that are available concentrate on qualitative accounts that address factors such as student engagement and motivation, cost effectiveness, increased administrative efficiency supported by "paperless" systems, advantages of computer technology that delivers "anytime, anywhere" learning.

Suggestions for Further Research

It is suggested that researchers should do more research in the area of digital fluency-building tools like that of AceReader and its effect on reading comprehension ability. It is hoped that this study could have shed some light on TEFL, and especially, on improvement of reading comprehension ability and chances of further research in this regard. This study was quite limited in terms of participants. To make the study more generalizable, it is suggested that this study should employ a larger group of students and include a more diverse group of students. The participants of this study were all adult EFL learners; further studies can be done with participants of other age groups, for instance young children or teenagers, to analyze the impact of using AceReader on their language learning.

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Appendixes

Pretest of L2 Reading

Passage 1:
Objects in space give off electromagnetic waves Human eyes; however can only see the visible part of the spectrum. We need telescopes to see objects that are far away. We also need them to see the other parts of the spectrum. This includes radio, infrared, ultraviolet, and X-ray waves.

Galileo built the first visible light telescope in 1609 It was a refracting telescope. That means it used a convex lens, a piece of transparent glass whose middle is thicker than its edge. The lens gathers large amounts of light and focuses it onto a small area.

Isaac Newton built the first reflecting telescope in 1668. It was also a visible light telescope It worked on the same idea of gathering and focusing light. However it used a mirror instead of a glass lens. This makes the telescope lighter and easier to use The largest visible light telescopes today are of this type.

    1   A refracting telescope uses a
        A. convex lens.
        B. concave lens
        C. convergent lens

    2   The first reflecting telescope was built in
        A. 1609
        B. 1668

    C. 1706

3   A reflecting telescope uses a
        A. glass lens
        B. visible lens
        C. mirror

4   Who built the first telescope?
        A. Aristotle
        B. Isaac Newton
        C. Galile

Passage 2:

"It seems that God brought me to Earth with a mission to play soccer" Who said this? His name is Edson Arantes Do Nascimento but he is better known to soccer fans as Pele An average-sized man. he had great speed and balance on the field and tremendous control over the ball. He aiso had the ability to shoot powerfully and accurately with either foot, and with his head too. Some people say he was the greatest soccer player who ever lived.

Pele was born in Tres Coracos; Brazil to a very poor family. As a child, he earned money by shining shoes. In his spare time his father who had been a professional player taught him the sport He was discovered at the age of 11 by one of the country's top players and brought to Sao Paolo to play professionally. He was an instant hit. In his first game he scored a goal right away amazing the fans. And he just got better with time.

Pele played in four World Cups with Brazil's National Team And at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden, he stunned everyone by scoring six goals himself including two in the championship game. It helped Brazil win its first ever World Cup by a score of 5-2 He was only 17 years-old at the time, but he was already becoming a legend Seeing his potential,

Pele has won a number of awards for his work both on and off the field He received the 1978 International Peace Award, and in 1980: he was named athlete of the century. In 1993, he was inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame. He has also done extensive work for children's causes through UNICEF.

    1   Pele was discovered at the age of
        A.   11.
        B.   15.
        C.   18.

    2   He played in…………..World Cups with Brazil's National Team.
        A.   three
        B.   four
        C.   six

    3   Pele had the ability to
        A.   shoot powerfully and accurately with either foot.
        B.   play an entire game without a penalty.
        C.   unite others into a coordinated team.

    4   In 1980, he was named athlete of the……………
        A.   year

    B. decade.
    C. century.

Passage 3:

Earth has an atmosphere. Not every planet does. It is the air around us. The layers form a "blanket." They protect us from the Sun. They also protect us from the cold of space.

Air contains many parts. It has nitrogen, oxygen, and small pieces of dust Animals breathe oxygen. They get rid of carbon dioxide. Plants breathe carbon dioxide and get rid of oxygen. We find both in the air. We also find small amounts of other things. These can be natural or man-made

The atmosphere is held in place by the pull of the Earth's gravity. It extends to about 1,250 miles above the surface of the planet.

  1   The layers of the atmosphere form a
    A. blanket.
    B. cushion.
    C. pillow.

  2   The atmosphere is held in place by...
    A. the Sun.
    B. gravity.
    C. movement.

  3   Plants breathe...
    A. nitrogen.
    B. oxygen.
    C. carbon dioxide.

  4   Not every planet has a[n]
    A. Surface
    B. Atmosphere
    C. star.

Passage 4:

Everyone gets the hiccups. We don't always know what causes the event, but we do know something about the sound it makes. We make the "hie" sound when our diaphragm muscles spasm. This changes our normal breathing pattern.

When you take more air into the diaphragm it expands as a result. Your mouth and throat try to prevent the air from coming back up It becomes almost a tug-of-war between the two systems When the rush of air hits your vocal cords though, your muscles contract in response That forces the air out - the hiccup.

People have tried many different things to "cure" the hiccups. Some say tilting your head forward will work. Others recommend taking a spoonful of sugar. Still others think a fright will calm you down enough for them to stop You can choose any way you want

  1   With hiccups, we don't always know
    A. how the sound is produced
    B. how our breathing changes.
    C. what causes the event

2   The diaphragm muscles....
   A.   contract.
   B.   spasm
   C.   expand

3   The rush of air hits your
   A.   mouth and tongue
   B.   vocal cords.
   C.   teeth.

4   Some people say tilting your head…
   A.   forward
   B.   backward
   C.   sideways

Passage 5:

The Solar System is the name we give to our Sun and the planets that orbit it The Sun is at the center Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and Neptune is the farthest away Pluto used to be considered a planet, but it has gone through several name changes over the years Today, it is thought to be too small to be a true planet, but that may change again The inner planets are Mercury. Venus, Earth and Mars They all have rocky surfaces The outer planets are Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. They may or may not have a solid core; however they all have layers of gas around them Pluto is also a rocky body It may be a captured asteroid It has at least five of its own moons All the planets, except for Mercury and Venus have at least one moon orbiting them. In between Mars and Jupiter is the main asteroid belt. There are thousands of small, rocky bodies in this region Some people think that these may be part of a planet that broke up because of Jupiter's enormous gravity. Others feel that they are part of a planet that never formed for the same reason. There is another region of asteroids beyond Pluto called the Kuiper Belt It contains many more bodies than the asteroid belt. It may also serve as the origin for comets.

1   The inner planets are
   A.   Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Pluto.
   B.   Venus, Earth, Jupiter, and Mars
   C.   Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars

2   The inner planets all have....
   A.   rocky surfaces
   B.   atmospheres.
   C.   moons.

3   Some scientists believe that Pluto is a
   A.   planet.
   B.   captured asteroid
   C.   moon

4   There is another region of asteroids beyond Pluto, called the
   A.   Oort Cloud
   B.   Kuiper Belt
   C.   Minor Asteroid Belt

Posttest of L2 Reading

Passage 1:
Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence? Five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army and another had two sons captured Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships in the Revolutionary War They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the cause

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well-educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

   1   How many men signed the Declaration of Independence?
      A.   36
      B.   46
      C.   56

   2   Twenty-four of the signers were
      A.   doctors
      B.   congressmen.
      C.   lawyers

   3   Five signers were captured by the
      A.   Indians.
      B.   Revolutionary Army.
      C.   British.

   4   If the signers were captured, the penalty would **be....**
      A.   torture
      B.   death.
      C.   prison.

Passage 2:
Thanksgiving and the Pilgrims seem to go together just like Christmas and Santa Claus. The truth is though, that the Pilgrims never held an autumnal Thanksgiving feast. They did have a feast in 1621 after their first harvest, and it is this feast that people often refer to as "The First Thanksgiving" The feast was never repeated, though, so it can't be called the beginning of a tradition, nor was it termed a "Thanksgiving Feast" by the Pilgrims themselves.

In fact, to these devoutly religious people, this day of thanksgiving was a day of prayer and fasting and it would have been held any time that they felt an extra day of thanks was called for Nevertheless the 1621 feast has become a model for our own Thanksgiving celebration.

   1   A day of thanksgiving for the pilgrims was a day of prayer and
      A.   feasting.
      B.   fasting
      C.   harvesting

   2   The Pilgrims were what kind of people?
      A.   Religious

    B.   Hard-working

    C.   Festive

3   In which year was the "First Thanksgiving" held?
    A.   1621
    B.   1721
    C.   1821

4   When was the feast held?
    A.   After prayer
    B.   After fasting
    C.   After the harvest

Passage 3:

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord A rope around his neck was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head The slack fell to the level of his knees Some loose boards laid upon the ties supporting the rails of the railway supplied a footing for him and his killers - two private soldiers of the Federal army directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed He was a captain A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support." that is to say vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest - a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view Doubtless there was an outpost farther along The other bank of the stream was open ground - a gentle slope topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loophole for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway up the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators - a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of their rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the budge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him In the code of military etiquette, silence and fixity are forms of deference

1   A man stood on a railroad bridge in northern ……..
    A.   Alabama
    B.   Alaska.
    C.   Altoona

2   A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle…….
    A.   in the position known as "unslung"
    B.   in the position known as "support."
    C.   in the position known as "unnatural"

3   The railroad ran straight way into a forest for a hundred……
   A.   feet.
   B.   yards
   C.   meters.

4   In the code of military etiquette,............... are forms of deference.
   A.   respect and honor
   B.   formality and attention
   C.   silence and fixity

Passage 4:

Echo was a beautiful nymph. She was a favorite of the hunting goddess Diana and attended her in the chase But Echo had one major failing She was fond of talking, and she always tried to have the last word.
One day, the goddess Juno was seeking her husband, who. she had reason to believe, was amusing himself among the nymphs. Echo knew that if Juno discovered him there, the nymphs would be punished. Echo with her glib talk, managed to detain the goddess till the nymphs made their escape. When Juno learned what had happened, she passed sentence upon Echo in these words: "You shall forfeit the use of that tongue with which you have cheated me except for that one purpose you are so fond of - reply. You shall still have the last word, but no power to speak first."

   1   Echo was a beautiful …
      A.   nymph
      B.   fairy
      C.   centaur

   2   She was a favorite of the goddess   .
      A.   Juno
      B.   Diana
      C.   Athena

   3   Echo had one major failing   …
      A.   She always tried to have the first word
      B.   She always tried to have the last word
      C.   She couldn't protect the goddess in the hunt.

   4   Juno passed sentence upon Echo, saying that she would …
      A.   never be able to speak
      B.   never have the last word
      C.   have no power to speak first

Passage 5:

On September 6, 1620, 110 people set sail from Plymouth. England for the New World on a ship called the Mayflower Aboard were 44 pilgrims who called themselves the "Saints" and 66 others, whom the pilgrims called the "Strangers." The trip took 65 days, and since there was the danger of fire on the wooden ship the food could not be cooked but had to be eaten cold. Many passengers became sick, and one person died by the time land was sighted on November 10. The long trip led to many disagreements between the Saints and the Strangers. As a result, after land was sighted, both sides held a meeting and worked out an agreement called

the Mayflower Compact. This agreement guaranteed equality and unified the two groups. Together, they called themselves the Pilgrims.

1   The Mayflower Compact guaranteed…………
   A.   freedom
   B.   equality
   C.   victory

2   In what year did the Mayflower sail?
   A.   1580
   B.   1620
   C.   1650

3   The Mayflower carried 66……………
   A.   Pilgrims.
   B.   Saints
   C.   Strangers

4   The trip took …………………………………days.
   A. 6
   B. 60
   C. 65