

WHICH IS MORE DIFFICULT, LISTENING OR READING?

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Abstract

In today's world, there are many texts we read or listen to. Regardless of how texts are presented, listening, and reading skills are equally important in everyday life. More attention is paid to developing reading skills, less to listening skills. There has been little comparative research on reading and listening comprehension of L1 texts. Children's listening skills in L1 develop before school, but reading skills are mainly developed at school. Previous studies shows that listening comprehension is better until the age of 13-14, and only then do both skills reach the same level. Therefore, special education teachers recommend that children with reading difficulties should listen to long texts rather than read them. In any case, teachers must pay attention to the development of both skills at school. The objective of our study was to find out whether 4th-graders understand the meaning of texts better by reading or listening to it, and if one skill is better or worse developed, what is the level of the other.

Keywords: *Text comprehension, listening skills, reading skills.*

1. Introduction

The modern information society has created an overabundance of both spoken and written texts. The ability to understand different texts is important for navigating social interactions and achieving personal goals (OECD, 2019). The text comprehension problems can contribute to learning barriers and academic failure (Cain, 2010). The concept of text has expanded: texts are no longer only traditional printed texts, but also various other materials that require reading, listening, and viewing skills (Castek, 2016). If people talk about understanding the text, most often they mean understanding the printed text (e.g., Oakhill et al., 2015; Reutzel, 2016) and excluding much of the text that is received by listening instead. Even the school is more concerned with developing the understanding of printed texts, especially in older classes, while the conscious development of listening skills is given less attention (Arueve, 2022; Diakidoy et al., 2005). It is crucial to promote the student's ability to understand texts, emphasizing both listening and reading skills to prevent learning difficulties.

2. Text comprehension

The acquisition of the mother tongue is based on listening. This, in turn, is a prerequisite for other language skills: speaking, reading, writing. The child learns to listen from birth by himself, but reading skills must be taught to children. The ability to understand oral texts provides the basis for both reading and understanding what they read in the future (Fisher & Frey, 2014). However, understanding oral and written text is not the same – understanding oral text does not guarantee understanding of written text, even if it is the same language (Cain, 2010).

Lund (1999), Diakidoy et al. (2005), and Brown & Brown (2011) have found that listening tasks yield the best results in terms of explaining the overall comprehension and synthesis of a text. Readers perform better on tasks requiring factual knowledge and they can recall more details because the text is fixed and they can go back to the text, whereas listeners must construct the text while listening and find help from other sources, but they are better able to grasp the gist of the text (Diakidoy et al., 2005). Listening comprehension outperforms reading comprehension up to age 13-14; later, reading comprehension outperform listening comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

The objective of our study was to find out whether 4th-graders understand the meaning of texts better by reading or listening to it, and if one skill is better or worse developed, what is the level of the other. The article seeks an answer to the question of whether students in 4th grade have equally developed the reading and listening skills needed to understand the text and if one skill is better or worse, what their relationship is.

3. Methodology

We conducted tests to get answers to our research questions. We tested 4th-grade pupils who were 10-11 years old. They studied in two different classes. There were 46 pupils in total, 25 boys and 21 girls.

To find out whether pupils understand the text in the same way when they read and listen, two texts were chosen that were as similar as possible. To exclude the possibility that students are already familiar with the texts, which could affect their comprehension, the two texts were selected from the non-fiction book "No way", written by Peter Ernits (2014). The book contains stories about little-known animals; therefore, it could be assumed that 4th-grade students would have no prior knowledge of the topic. We assessed the difficulty of the texts with the readability index Lix (Björnsson, 1968; Puksand, 2004). The texts selected for the study were of similar difficulty (see Table 1). One class read the text 1 and listen to the text 2 and the other class read the text 2 and listen to the text 1.

Table 1. Comparison of texts.

Texts	Number of words	Number of sentences	Mean length of sentences	Percent of long words	Readability index Lix
Text 1	438	42	10.4	37.2%	48
Text 2	417	43	9.7	39.6%	49

To assess text comprehension, 7 questions were compiled for both texts according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). Questions 1 and 2 corresponded to the remembering level of Bloom's taxonomy, questions 3 and 4 to the understanding level, and questions 5, 6, and 7 to the analysis level. Questions 1 to 6 were multiple-choice questions. The student had to choose one correct answer from four options, question 7 was open-ended. In total, the student was able to get a maximum of 15 points.

4. Results

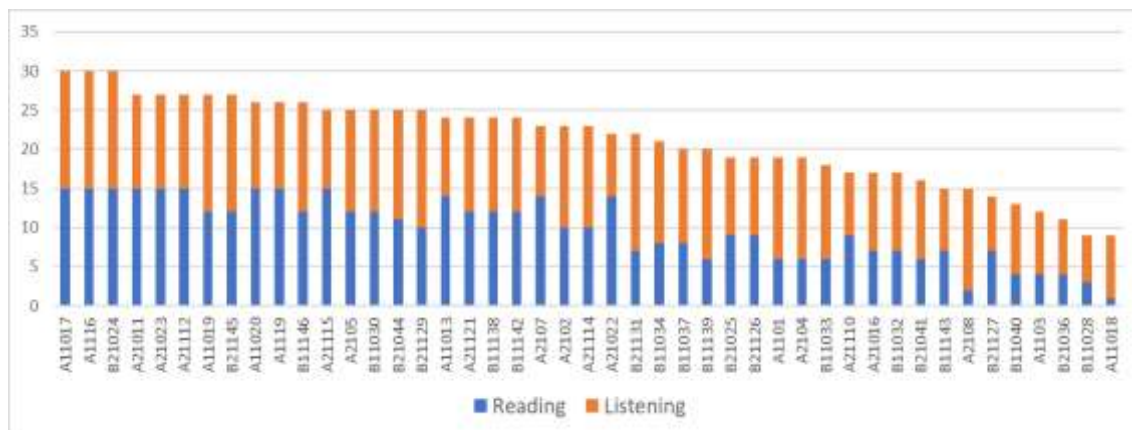
In the results, we compare students reading and listening skills and look at the reading and listening skills of students with low and high text comprehension results.

4.1. Results of reading and listening tasks

Students understood the text better by listening to it. The reading task scored an average of 9.65 points (64.35%), while the listening task scored an average of 11.46 points (76.38%). The minimum text comprehension score was 1 point for reading and 6 points for listening, a maximum of 15 points for both. The standard deviation (4.15 vs 2.53) suggests that there is a larger difference between the reading scores than listening scores.

Figure 1 summarises the points obtained in each respondent's reading and listening task. The maximum score was achieved by 3 students (2 girls and 1 boy). 7 students, including 3 boys and 4 girls, scored below 15 points – they had low results in both the reading and listening tasks. Most students performed better on the listening test than on the reading test.

Figure 1. Reading and listening scores by pupils.



Both boys and girls understood the text better by listening (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of girls' and boys' results.

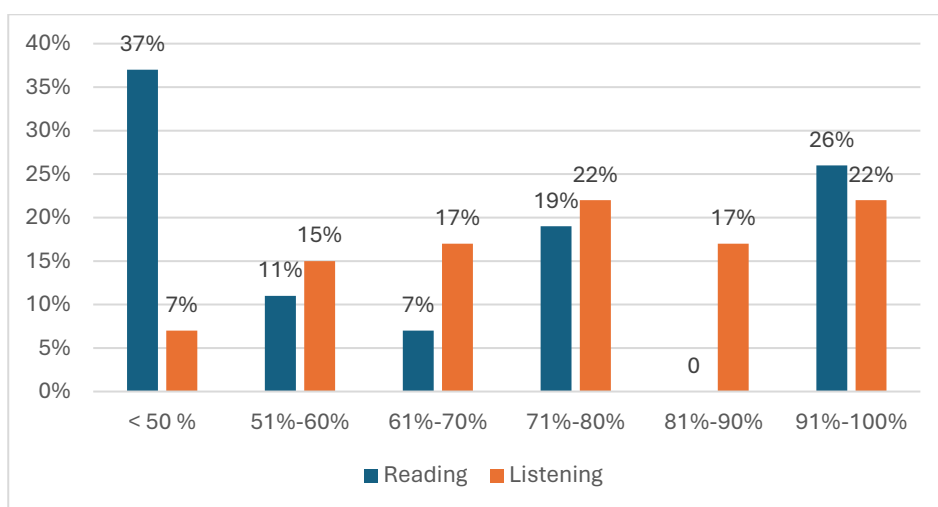
	Reading score (%)	Listening score (%)
Girls	61.59	76.51
Boys	66.67	76.27

When text comprehension on listening were relatively similar in both genders, while reading revealed differences. The girls' performance on the reading task was lower than the boys' performance. Different previous studies (e.g. OECD, 2023) show that girls read better than boys, so in our study, we can justify the superiority of boys with a small sample size.

4.2. The reading and listening skills of students with low and high text comprehension

In our study, we also wanted to find out the relationship between listening and reading skills among students with low and high text comprehension. Figure 2 shows the results of the student reading and listening test by percentage range.

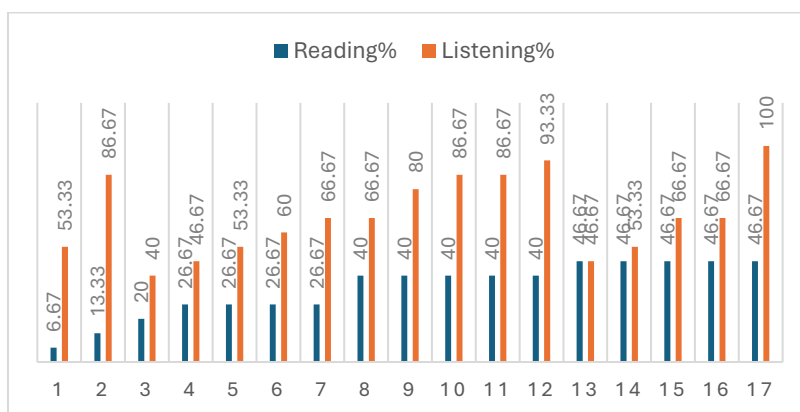
Figure 2. Distribution of the results of reading and listening tasks between 10-percent performance ranges.



In the reading task, 37% of the students had a reading score below 50% and 26% of the students scored above 90%. In the listening task, 3 (7%) students scored below 50% and 10 (22%) respondents scored above 90%.

Pupils with a reading score below 50 percent were defined as low achievers (see Figure 3). There were 17 (37%) poor readers. Only one poor reader scored the same on the listening task, while all the others had a better listening score. 6 poor readers scored 80% or more on the listening task, indicating good listening skills. Among the weak readers, there were 9 girls and 8 boys.

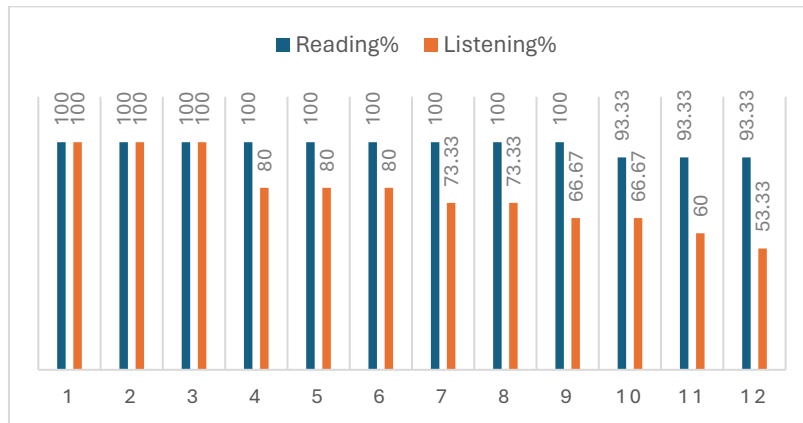
Figure 3. Comparison of reading and listening test results of low achievers.



Pupils who scored below 50 percent on a listening task were counted as having poor listening skills. There were only 3 students with low listening skills (students 3, 4, and 13 in Figure 2), but their reading scores were also low. Among the students with low listening skills, there were 1 girl and 2 boys.

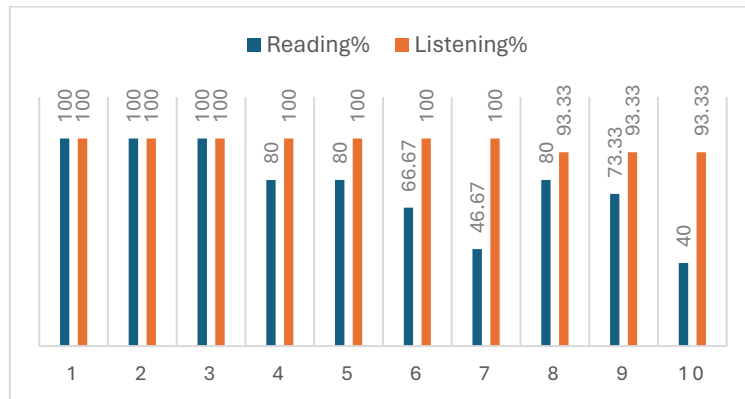
Students with a score of more than 90 percent were designated as good readers (see Figure 4). There were 12 good readers based on the results. 3 good readers also performed a listening task on the maximum points. 3 good readers had a listening task score of 80%, while others had a listening task score of less than 80%. One good reader had a listening task score of just over 50%, but no one had a reading score of less than 50%. Among the good readers of the sample, there were more boys: 5 girls and 7 boys.

Figure 4. Comparison of good readers' reading and listening scores.



Students with good listening skills included students with a listening score of more than 90% – there were 10 such students (see Figure 5). Among students with good listening skills, there were 5 students with average reading results and as many as 2 students with reading scores below 50%. Among students with very good listening skills, boys and girls were equal.

Figure 5. Comparison of good listeners' reading and listening scores.



Among students with good listening skills, there were 5 students with average reading results and 2 students with reading scores below 50%. Among students with very good listening skills, boys and girls were equal.

5. Conclusions

We can conclude that for 4th graders, listening is easier than reading. More students found listening to tasks more pleasant. Students who liked listening more received significantly fewer points for reading tasks than for listening tasks. The listening task was considered more difficult by 43% of students, while for 57% of children, reading was more difficult. Students who found listening more difficult received the same number of points for both assignments.

The individuals who struggle with reading proficiency are not necessarily lacking in listening skills. The findings revealed that those with challenges in reading demonstrated notably higher scores in listening tests, with some even achieving excellent results. While a small number of students exhibited poor

performance in listening tests, their reading test scores were even lower, suggesting the possibility of more severe learning difficulties for this subgroup.

Analysis of the reading test responses revealed that students did not use the opportunity to go back to the text and look for the correct answers in the text, and therefore they chose answers that seemed logical, chose only partially correct answers, or wrote answers that had no connection with the text. Reasons for this kind of performance include poor inferencing and linking skills, inadequate comprehension tracking skills, lack of awareness of reading strategies, and the ability to use these strategies. Therefore, pupils also need more teaching of reading and listening strategies.

4th-grade students who demonstrate a good comprehension of listening texts, emphasizing the need to prioritize the instruction of reading strategies. Teachers must remember that a student struggling in reading may be good at listening. Consequently, teachers should develop reading and listening skills in all classes, not just primary classes.

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