
Research Article

Miscues in Reading Aloud: Insights into Proficient and Less Proficient Readers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the miscues that were frequently produced among good readers and poor readers. This study was limited to six students of 11th-grade students in Babun Najah Islamic Boarding School using the purposive sampling method. This is a descriptive qualitative study using the concept of miscue analysis from Argyle (1989) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018). The students' reading activity was conducted in English. The findings revealed that the miscues were frequent among all readers, but substitution and hesitation were the most common miscues among the subjects, with 340 (63%) and 82 (15%) occurrences, respectively. Other miscues included repetition (58 occurrences, 11%), correction (41 occurrences, 8%), insertion (17 occurrences, 3%), and omission (2 occurrences, 0%). These results highlight the prevalence of miscue patterns across different reading proficiency levels. Finally, this study will be useful as a reference for an alternative teaching strategy for English learning, especially in the course of reading.

Keywords

EFL students; Miscue analysis; Reading aloud

Introduction

Reading has been a core component of English Language Teaching (ELT) since elementary school. Despite years of learning, many students struggle with reading fluency even after 12–13 years of learning English. Reading is the process of interpreting information from written text (Grabe, 2009) and serves as a fundamental tool for language learning and knowledge acquisition (Irkinovich & Izatullaevna, 2022; Sharma & Singh, 2005). Fluent reading involves multiple component skills and is essential for academic success (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Reading difficulties arise when a reader's knowledge does not align with the text, affecting both weak and proficient readers.

Mahmud and Gopal (2018) emphasize that when students deviate from expected pronunciation while reading aloud, it is considered a miscue rather than an error. Arisandi and Wachyudi (2017) and



Goodman (1978) argue that "miscue" is a more appropriate term than "error" in educational contexts. Miscues occur when a reader alters a word unexpectedly, affecting meaning but still attempting to understand the content. Mahmud and Gopal (2018) define miscue analysis as a tool for assessing word-level oral reading accuracy by identifying these deviations, which helps evaluate fluency and comprehension.

Reading aloud is widely used to improve pronunciation and fluency. Huang (2010) and Huszti (2008) highlight its role in pronunciation improvement, while Gibson (2008) and Kontra (2006, cited in Huszti, 2008) note that students benefit from improved spelling, intonation, and word flow. Frequent practice is essential for fluency development, while limited exposure hinders progress (Kusumawardani & Sri Suwarti, 2022).

This study examines common reading miscues among 11th-grade students at Babun Najah Islamic Boarding School, a bilingual institution in Banda Aceh that emphasizes English and Arabic. Miscue analysis is employed to assess students' English reading fluency in this bilingual environment. The school was selected for this research due to the researcher's prior collaboration with the institution, and the students already have experience and understanding of reading while studying in school. By analyzing the miscues of both proficient and struggling readers, the research seeks to provide insights for improving reading fluency. The central research question is: *What types of miscues do proficient and struggling readers frequently produce?*

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches ELT research on reading processes. Practically, it helps students improve fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary as teachers can apply these findings to enhance reading instruction, while future researchers can build on this study to further explore reading fluency challenges.

Types of Reading

Reading is commonly classified into silent reading and reading aloud (Brown, 2001; Hassan et al., 2020). Silent reading allows learners to process text at their own pace, improving comprehension and confidence (Hopkins, 1997; McCallum et al., 2004). Reading aloud enhances engagement, motivation, and literacy development (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011) while helping teachers assess pronunciation and fluency (Huszti, 2009).

Miscue in Reading

Miscues are natural parts in oral reading that occur when a reader's linguistic and conceptual understanding does not fully align with the text (Goodman, 1973; Mahmud & Gopal, 2018). Rather than viewing them as errors, researchers consider miscues as insights into a reader's processing strategies (Paulson & Mason, 2007). These differences, such as word substitutions, omissions, or repetitions, help teachers assess reading challenges and fluency (Hoffman & Baker, 1981). Miscues often result from a lack of prior exposure to specific words or sentence structures, leading students to rely on guessing strategies, background knowledge, or contextual cues to interpret meaning (Hernauly et al., 2021).

Types of Miscues in Reading

Argyle (1989) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018) identify six common types of miscues:

1. **Substitution:** Replacing a word. (e.g., "We work in a big company" → "We working in a big company")
2. **Omission:** Skipping words. (e.g., "They work in a big company" → "They ... in a big company")
3. **Correction:** Self-correction. (e.g., "She meets a plate of rice" → "She eats a plate of rice")
4. **Repetition:** Re-reading words. (e.g., "He saw the hunter" → "He saw saw the hunter")
5. **Insertion:** Adding extra words. (e.g., "He goes to work" → "He goes for his homework")
6. **Hesitation:** Pausing before a word. (e.g., "She studied hard" → "She studied / hard")



Wang et al. (2024) found just four kinds of miscues, with the exception of insertion and hesitation. In his research, he demonstrates the distinguishing features of the unique English as an additional language process of two non-Roman alphabetical language readers. Only two bilingual readers are included in his study, with the first speaking Mandarin and the other speaking Korean. The findings revealed that all readers made the same error when reading in their first language or in English.

Miscue Analysis

Goodman (1969) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018) introduced miscue analysis to assess the reading process by comparing observed responses to expected text. This method identifies both strengths and weaknesses in a reader's fluency and comprehension. Mikulec (2015) states that miscue analysis helps evaluate how readers use strategies to understand text. According to Kinasih (2012), this process involves having readers read aloud, recording their responses, and analyzing miscues to identify reading challenges.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine frequent miscues made by proficient and struggling readers that impacted their reading fluency. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of students' reading skills. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2017), is a method that is used to investigate and comprehend the significance that individuals and groups attribute to social or human issues. while Aspers and Corte (2019) describe it as an iterative process that refines distinctions through closer examination

This study was conducted at Babun Najah Islamic Boarding School, a private Islamic boarding school in Gampong Doy, Banda Aceh. The participants were 150 eleventh-grade students, divided into six classes with 25–30 students each. The students' first language is not English, it is either Acehnese or Indonesian. Purposive sampling was used to select six participants, three proficient and three struggling readers, based on teacher recommendations and Rasinski's (2004) reading fluency assessment.

Data was collected through recorded transcriptions of students' reading tests. The test material, sourced from the school textbook *Talk Active* (Kurniawan & Ament, Unit 4: Social Issues, p. 65), was chosen following Read.Write.Plus (2020) guidelines, ensuring a passage of 200+ words at level 1. Participants, recruited with teacher assistance, completed a reading test in a controlled setting. A brief conversation was held beforehand to reduce anxiety, and each student had a maximum of five minutes to read aloud. Sessions were recorded using a phone recorder, as suggested by Gay et al. (2012), with the entire process lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Two rooms were prepared: one for waiting and the other for testing. The researcher provided each participant with a reading passage while using a duplicate for miscue coding. To minimize pressure, the test was ungraded. Analysis involved listening to recordings and categorizing miscues using a miscue analysis sheet based on Putri (2005), Argyle (1989), and Mahmud and Gopal (2018) (see Tables 1 & 2). Miscues were classified by type, script, and frequency, with findings transcribed and analyzed to assess reading fluency.



Table 2. Instrument sheet

No	Line	Script	Miscue	Types of Miscue						Total Miscue
				S	C	O	R	I	H	

Notes:

1. S: Substitution miscue
2. C: Correction miscue
3. O: Omission miscue
4. R: Repetition miscue
5. I: Insertion miscue
6. H: Hesitation miscue

Table 1. Coding System (Argyle, 1989)

Coding system	
Omission	the <u>old</u> tree
Insertion	the old ^ tree
Hesitation	the /old / tree
Substitution	^{Dray} the old tree
Repetition	the old <u>tree</u>
Correction	^{Tray} the old tree

Results

The data presented below illustrate the miscue occurrences among eleventh-grade students at Babun Najah Islamic Boarding School while reading aloud. This study categorizes the students into two groups: proficient and struggling readers. The miscue analysis follows the framework of Argyle (1989) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018), which identifies six types of miscues: substitution, omission, correction, repetition, insertion, and hesitation.

A total of 540 miscues were recorded across six participants, with proficient readers producing 199 miscues and struggling readers producing 341 miscues. Each participant exhibited all six types of miscues, as detailed below:

Substitution Miscues

Substitution miscues were the most frequent errors observed. Proficient readers made 124 substitution miscues (62%), while struggling readers made 216 (63%). These miscues occurred when students replaced words with phonetically similar alternatives, which often did not significantly alter the meaning of the text.

Extract 1 (taken from p.1)

- ER (expected response) : “.....the opposite ('apəzət) effect
- OR (oral response) : “.....the opposait ('apəsait) effect.....”

Here, the reader substituted "opposite" with "opposait", preserving the overall meaning despite incorrect pronunciation.

Hesitation Miscues

Hesitation miscues were the second most common, occurring when students paused before a word, possibly due to recognition or comprehension difficulties (Husztai, 2008). Proficient readers exhibited 27 hesitation miscues (14%), while struggling readers displayed 55 (16%).

Extract 2 (taken from p.6)

- ER: “.....how else do they learn”
- OR: “.....how else / do they learn”

Here, the pause between "else" and "do" indicates hesitation as the reader attempted to process the next word.

Repetition Miscues

Repetition miscues were the third most frequent type, appearing when students reread words or phrases. Proficient readers produced 22 repetition miscues (11%), while struggling readers produced 36 (11%).

Extract 3 (taken from p.2)

- ER: “.....get at least some exposure.....”
- OR: “.....get at least some expo exposure.

In this case, the reader initially hesitated on "expo" before repeating "exposure", ensuring correct pronunciation.

Correction Miscues

Correction miscues, where students misread a word but then self-corrected, were observed 17 times among proficient readers (9%) and 24 times among struggling readers (7%). These errors indicate an awareness of mispronunciations and an effort to maintain accuracy.

Extract 4 (taken from p.2)

- ER: “.....until they are 15 or 16.....”
- OR: “.....until they are ('fifti or 'siksti) 15 or 16.....”

Initially, the reader misread "15 or 16" as "50 or 60" before recognizing the error and correcting it.

Insertion Miscues

Insertion miscues, where students added extra words not in the original text, were less frequent. Proficient readers made 8 insertion miscues (4%), while struggling readers made 9 (3%).

Extract 5 (taken from p.5)

- ER: “.....from reading books that are full.....”
- OR: “.....from reading books that there are full.....”

Here, the reader inserted "there", likely attempting to clarify the sentence structure.

Omission Miscues

Omission miscues were the least frequent, with only one occurrence per group (1%). These errors involved skipping words, sometimes affecting sentence meaning.

Extract 6 (taken from p.2)

- ER: “.....in the first place.....”
- OR: “.....in.....first place.....”

In this case, the reader omitted the article "the", though the overall meaning remained clear.

These findings provide insights into the frequency and distribution of miscues among different proficiency levels. The next section will discuss the implications of these results on previous research and pedagogical applications.

Discussion

This study analyzed the reading miscues of six eleventh-grade students from Babun Najah Islamic Boarding School, categorized as either proficient or struggling readers. Using the miscue analysis framework by Argyle (1989) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018), six miscue types were identified: substitution, hesitation, repetition, correction, insertion, and omission.

A total of 540 miscues were recorded, with substitution being the most frequent (340 occurrences), followed by hesitation (82), repetition (58), correction (41), insertion (17), and omission (2). Substitution, where a reader replaces a word with another of similar pronunciation, was the most common miscue for both proficient (124 cases, 62%) and struggling (216 cases, 63%) readers. Although these errors altered pronunciation, they often retained meaning, suggesting that students relied on phonetic similarities when decoding unfamiliar words.

Hesitation was the second most frequent miscue, with proficient readers making 27 cases (14%) and struggling readers making 55 (16%), often due to difficulty in word recognition (Huszti, 2008). Repetition miscues occurred when students reread words or phrases, observed in 22 cases (proficient, 11%) and 36 cases (struggling, 11%), often as self-monitoring strategies. Correction miscues, where students initially misread a word but then self-corrected, appeared in 17 cases (proficient, 9%) and 24 cases (struggling, 7%), reflecting an awareness of pronunciation accuracy but initial uncertainty. Insertion miscues, where extra words were added, were less frequent (8 for proficient, 4%; 9 for struggling, 3%), while omission miscues, where words were skipped, were the least common (one case per group, 1%).

These findings align with Putri (2015) and Mahmud & Gopal (2018), who also found substitution to be the most frequent miscue, suggesting that readers often substitute words while maintaining meaning. However, Arisandi & Wachyudi (2017) found mispronunciation to be the most common, highlighting how miscue patterns vary among learners. Notably, the results challenge the assumption that higher academic achievement reduces reading miscues, as both proficient and struggling readers exhibited similar patterns. This supports Wahyuni (2022), who emphasizes correct pronunciation as crucial for fluency and intelligibility, reinforcing the importance of consistent practice in reading aloud. Additionally, Putri (2015), cited in Kern (1988), notes that reading difficulties in EFL learners stem from both linguistic limitations and reading habits, stressing the role of regular exposure to English in improving comprehension and fluency.

In conclusion, the study highlights substitution miscues as the most prevalent among EFL learners and underscores the need for targeted reading interventions. Despite being categorized as proficient or struggling, all students displayed similar miscue patterns, emphasizing the importance of pronunciation-focused instruction in EFL learning. Knowing those miscues would help teachers and educators understand their students' process in reading, and tailoring pronunciation-focused interventions would also help students to elevate both reading proficiency and spoken English skills.

Conclusion

This study found that proficient readers produced a total of 199 miscues while struggling readers produced 341 miscues. Among these, substitution miscues were the most frequent in both groups,

comprising 62% of miscues in proficient readers and 63% in struggling readers. Conversely, omission miscues were the least frequent, occurring in only 1% of the total miscues for each group.

These findings confirm that all six types of miscues identified by Argyle (1989) and Mahmud and Gopal (2018) were present in both groups, indicating that even proficient readers frequently make errors in oral reading. The minimal differences in miscue distribution between proficient and struggling readers suggest that reading fluency does not solely depend on academic performance but also on pronunciation practice and reading habits.

The study highlights the importance of miscue analysis as a tool for identifying reading difficulties and improving fluency. Understanding the types of errors students make can help educators tailor pronunciation-focused interventions to enhance both reading proficiency and spoken English skills. Future research could further investigate strategies to minimize substitution miscues and enhance pronunciation accuracy among EFL learners.

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