

## **The Impact of Reading Fluency on Comprehension among Sudanese EFL learners**

Dr. Abdelrahman Mohammedain Abdelrahman - Assistant Professor –  
University of Eli mam El mahadi

Dr. Ahmed Ismail Mahmoud Ismail- Assistant Professor – University of Eli  
mam El mahadi Elmahadi

### **Abstract**

This study aims at investigating the influence of reading fluency on comprehending a text. Fluency in reading refers to appropriate reading speed, accurate word recognition, appropriate phrasing, and appropriate expression when reading orally. The descriptive method is used to achieve the study. The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) is used to investigate the student's ability in reading fluency by measuring the influence of the strategies of reading and its influence on the text understanding. Then the Assessing Fluency Chart is applied to check the rate of fluency among students and its effect on understanding the text. The sample of the study consists of 25 male and 25 female students selected randomly from a total population of 410 students enrolled at the University of Elimam Elmahadi English department in the second semester of 2016. However, after applying the measure of reading fluency ,the following results was found : reading without fluency is one of the main reasons for students' learning difficulties in understanding of what they read. Fluency in reading is essential and crucial factor for the EFL learners to become a successful reader and strongly correlates with reading comprehension. However, the researcher also found that when students moved to new passages, their initial readings of those new pieces were read with higher levels of fluency and comprehension than the initial readings of the previous passage. The study

recommends that EFL students should be encouraged to practice reading fluency to enhance their understanding of what they read.

### المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تقصى دور القراءة بطلاقة فى استيعاب و فهم النص. تشير الطلاقة الى القراءة السريعة، الدقيقة و معرفة الكلمات و الجمل و التعابير عند القراءة الشفهية. استخدم المنهج الوصفى لاجراء الدراسة. استخدمت حصة تطور القراءة بطلاقة لاكتشاف مقدرات الطلاب فى التحدث بطلاقة و ذلك عن طريق قياس اثر القراءة بطلاقة فى استيعاب و فهم النص. طبق جدول قياس القراءة بطلاقة لقياس اثراها على فهمهم للنص. تكونت عينة البحث من 25 طالب و 25 طالبة اختيرو عشوئيا من مجموع مجتمع البحث الذى كان عدده 410 طالب مسجلين لدى جامعة الامام المهدي كلية الاداب قسم اللغة الانجليزية. بعد تطبيق مقياس القراءة بطلاقة توصلت الدراسة الى النتائج التالية: ان القراءة من غير طلاقة تودى الى صعوبات لفهم ما يقرأه الطلاب، القراءة بطلاقة هى عنصر اساسى لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية حتى يقرأ بنجاح ايضا من ضمن النتائج التى توصل اليها الباحث ان قراءة النصوص بطلاقة و لاول مرة تفهم اكثر من فراءتها من غير طلاقة و فى مرات سابقة. من اهم التوصيات يستحسن لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ان يمارسوا ويتدربوا على القراءة بطلاقة لتحسين فهم ما يقرأه.

## **1- Introduction**

Reading fluency is the ability to read a text aloud quickly, smoothly, naturally, and automatically. The ultimate goal of fluency is to read silently and concentrate on comprehension rather than decoding individual words. If readers labor to decode each word, they lose the ability to comprehend or enjoy what they are reading. According to Panya Lekwilai (2011p:92), fluency remains a foreign concept in many language instructional contexts. While much traditional reading instruction focuses on word identification strategies to foster comprehension, fluent reading instruction is often dismissed by instructors. Despite the fact that fluency was introduced by Ellington back in 1983, it was the National Reading Panel's identification of the five reading components that triggered interest in fluency (Ellington, 2006). Recently, researchers agree that fluency in reading is a key to becoming a successful and competent reader (Rasinski & Padak, 2000; Taguchi, Takayasu- Mass & Gorsuch, 2004; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006). Among several instructional strategies used to develop learners' fluency is Readers' Theater (RT).

Fluency in reading is becoming an important element of every reading programme. , specially for secondary schools and undergraduate university students Who struggle in reading Roxanne ,F. Holly, B. and Paige, C( 2005p: 1) said that reading fluency is one of the defining characteristics of good reader i.e. the important feature of a good reader is to read fluency. And lack of fluency is a common characteristic of a poor reader. Differences in reading fluency not only distinguish good reader from poor one, but a lack of reading fluency is also a reliable predictor of reading comprehension problems.

According to Slavonic, 1991. Cited in Roxanne ,F. and others when learners struggle to learn sounds –symbol relationship through intervention and become accurate decoder , their lack of fluency emerges the text hurdle they face on their way for reading proficiency , Ioreges et al. (2001p: 1 Tororgeson , Risotto , Alexander 2003. This lack of fluent reading is a problem for poor readers because they tend to read in a labored disconnected fashion that make comprehension of the text difficult , if not impossible.

In Sudan's secondary and basic education , fluency is not recognized in language instruction, which is evident by the absence of research addressing reading fluency. There are, however, several studies that focus on strategies to improve reading skills. Nonetheless, poor reading ability is found in students at all educational levels from primary schools to universities. Researchers also found that even Sudanese postgraduate students are having difficulties in reading when they continue their studies abroad . The problem lies upon the fact that Sudanese students do not frequently read English texts outside class. The only time that students read in English is in the classroom where teachers will direct them to read, help them make sense of the text, and complete reading exercises. Some students may eventually manage to comprehend the text, but they may not be motivated to read any other text unassigned by teachers, let alone reading English books in their free time for pleasure. Given that reading is like any other skill that needs practice in order to become fluent, most Sudanese students are not fluent readers due to the fact that they lack practice.

This paper will discuss the characteristics and the importance of fluency, as well as the role of practice as an instructional method to develop fluency. Finally, a reflection of fluency instruction and the application to the Sudanese reading curriculum will be discussed.

## 2- The question of the study

**This study attempts to answer the following questions:**

- 1- What is the impact of reading fluency on comprehending a text?
- 2- How to teach students reading fluency to overcome the problems of struggling readers and to provide them with Method, Materials, and Evidence?
- 3- Why fluency is important?

## 3- The hypotheses of the study

**This paper hypothesis the following:**

- 1- Reading fluently helps students to comprehend a text.
- 2- The Sudanese syllable doesn't equipped with satisfactory strategies of reading fluency.

## 3- Literature review

### 3-1 What is fluency?

According to Timothy V. Rasinski, cited in Maria Driend & Barbara Mechler, ( 2008) reading fluently is the he ability of readers to read quickly ,effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression. It is much more than mere accuracy in reading.

Fluent reading comprises three key elements: *accurate* reading of connected text at a conversational *rate with appropriate prosody* or expression. Hudson, Mercer, & Lane,( 2000:14)

Reading fluency is a **multifaceted skill** that requires the orchestration of many different processes and subskills. Brenitz, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001; Wolf & Katzir- Cohen, (2001:15)

Fluency is the ability to read effectively, and it involves three components: reading rate, accuracy, and prosody (Rasinski, 2000; Richards, 2000).

*Reading rate* refers to the speed at which children read, to read fluently,

children need to read at least 100 words per minute, a rate most children reach by third grade. Children's reading rate continues to grow, and by the time they are adults, they will read from 250 to 300 words per minute. Of course, both children and adults vary their reading speed depending on what they are reading, its difficulty level, and their purpose for reading, but excessively slow reading is often a characteristic of unsuccessful readers.

Accuracy is the second component of fluency. To read fluently, children need to instantly and automatically recognize most of the words they read. They need to know the 100 high-frequency words and other common words and have sounded out phonetically regular words so many times that these words, too, have become automatic.

Usually, children encounter a few words that they do not know, but they use word identification skills to quickly identify those words and continue reading. When children have to stop and decode words in every sentence, their reading will not be fluent.

The third component, *prosody*, is the ability to orally read sentences expressively, with appropriate phrasing and intonation. Dowhower (1991) describes prosody as "the ability to read in expressive, rhythmic, and melodic patterns" (p. 166). Children move from word-by-word reading with little or no expression to chunking words into phrases, attending to punctuation, and applying appropriate syntactic emphases. Fluent readers' oral reading approximates talking, and for their reading to be expressive, children have to read quickly and recognize automatically most of the words they are reading.

According to Pikulski and Chard (2005), fluency is a bridge between decoding and comprehension. Fluent readers are better able to comprehend what they read because they can identify words easily (LaBerge & Samuels,

1976; Perfitti, 1985; Stanovich, 1986). Children who are not fluent readers often read hesitantly, in a word-by-word fashion and with great effort. These less successful readers spend too much mental energy in identifying words, leaving little energy to focus on comprehension. Readers do not have an unlimited amount of mental energy to use when they read, and they cannot focus on word recognition and comprehension at the same time. So, as children become fluent readers, they use less energy for word recognition and focus more energy on comprehending what they read.

The continuum chart on page 000 shows the grade-level milestones that most children reach as they become fluent readers.

By third grade, most children have become fluent readers. They have acquired a large stock of high-frequency words that they can read accurately, and they have developed word-identification strategies, including phonic analysis and syllabic analysis, to use to figure out unfamiliar words. But some children continue to read slowly, in a halting manner and without expression. They do not read fluently, and they exemplify some of these characteristics:

- Children read slowly.
- Children cannot decode individual words.
- Children try to sound out phonetically irregular words.
- Children guess at words based on the beginning sound.

Post high-frequency words on word walls.

Teach high-frequency words in minilessons.

Practice reading and writing high-frequency words through reading and writing workshop and other literacy activities.

Introduce key words before reading, and teach other words during and after reading.

Model word-identification strategies during read-a-louds and shared reading. Teach children through minilessons to use phonic analysis, analogies, syllabic analysis, and morphemic analysis word-identification strategies.

Use words from reading selections as examples in minilessons on word-identification strategies.

Encourage children to apply word-identification strategies to both reading and spelling.

### **3-2 Fluency and High-Frequency Words**

*“Many children—perhaps as high as 40 percent—spend so much time figuring out the words that they cannot fully attend to the message.”*

Definitions of fluency change over time. “Fluency refers to the ability to identify words rapidly so that attention is directed at the meaning of the text” (CIERA, *Every Child a Reader (Topic 4)* 2). This definition does not necessarily include comprehension. However, recent conceptualizations around fluency extend beyond word recognition to include comprehension processes (Samuels, “Reading Fluency: Its Development and Assessment” 167). That is, to be fluent means to be able both to read smoothly, without hesitation, and to comprehend.

### **3-3 How Important Are High-Frequency Words?**

*“Reports on children who do not master this core group of 100 high-frequency words until Third Grade*



*and go on to become good readers are  
infrequent.”*

“Proficient readers recognize the vast majority of words in texts quickly, allowing them to focus on the meaning of the text. Since approximately 300 words account for 65 percent of the words in texts, rapid recognition of these words during the primary grades forms the foundation of fluent reading” (CIERA, *Every Child a Reader (Topic 4)*1). Children continue to expand sight-word recognition in Grades 2 and 3. However, it is crucial that the base—at least the 100 most frequent words—be established in Grade 1. (See Chapter 2, BLM 32:

High-Frequency Sight Words (End of Grade 1)). It is essential that children do a great deal of reading and writing to support automatic sight-word recognition.

### **3-4 Fluency and Automaticity**

Some children can read with automaticity and even with expression but still have limited comprehension. Children must be taught to monitor their comprehension and to know how and when to introduce effective strategies to support comprehension. (See *Fix-up Strategies*, page 450.)

### **3-5 Vocabulary Development and How to Promote Reading fluency**

Current research shows that when a learner reads the same passage over and over, the number of word recognition errors decrease, reading speed increases, and oral reading expression improves.

Consequently, reading comprehension improves. Research also indicates that a student’s fluency highly correlates with his/her scores on standardized reading comprehension tests.

These four steps promote reading fluency in the classroom by Wendy C. Ward, M.A.T.(2005:1)

**1. Motivation:** It is essential to motivate students to want to read. To accomplish this, teachers must provide frequent opportunities for students to listen to stories and read to others. Reading material that sparks students' individual interest is more likely to encourage them to want to read. Including different genres of reading material in the classroom reading experience is fundamental to building students' interest.

**2. Practice:** Provide plenty of time for students to practice reading and do repeated readings of the same stories or passages. It is a good idea to use tape players and have students record themselves. *Choral reading* (everyone in the class reads together) and *partner reading* (one student reads with another) will also spice up the reading routine

**3. Modeling:** Teachers should model fluent reading every day and encourage students to practice doing the same. Students who struggle with basic decoding skills may benefit from *echo reading* where the teacher reads a short 3-5 word phrase and students echo the same phrase. By using this method, the teacher is modeling and allowing emerging readers to practice, all at the same time. This is an effective way of increasing students' confidence levels, as well.

**4. Help:** Teachers should assist in developing self-correction skills by encouraging students to listen to themselves read and monitor their own reading. After reading a selection, teach students to ask themselves, "Did what I just read make sense?" It is also important for teachers to demonstrate

to students how to utilize illustrations, graphs, and captions to help make sense of what they are reading.

### **2.10. Summary**

To sum up this section, studies have demonstrated that various forms of media can be helpful for the ESL students' reading fluency development. Several researchers have discovered how media can function as a source and motivational tool for informal L2 acquisition learning. Television, music, chatting and seeking information on the internet all contribute to exposing adolescents to the English language since a vast amount is communicated in English.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4-1 The research design**

This research is descriptive analytical one in which the impact of reading fluency on EFL student's comprehension is investigated by using the roses of measuring the student's fluency and then to observe its influence on comprehending a text. Student's fluency is measured through the following procedures as has been mentioned by Maria Driend & Barbara Mechler, (2008: 33-34)

- Assess fluency regularly and systematically
- Use formal or informal measures
- Establish baseline data
- Monitor progress
- Calculating Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) (5A)

- NAEPs' Oral Reading Fluency Scale (5B)
- Multidimensional Fluency Scale (5C)
- Oral Reading Rubric (5D)
- Retelling Rubric (5E)
- Scale for Assessing Fluency (5 F&G)

Assessing Fluency Charts: 5A-5G

The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) by Timothy Rasinski, Susan Homan, Marie Biggs(2008) is used to be discussed with the students to measure the influence of the strategies of reading and its influence on the text understanding

#### **4.2.Sample**

The sample of the study consists of 25 male and 25 female students selected randomly from a total population of 410 students enrolled at the University of Elimam Elmahadi English department in the second semester of 2016.

#### **4.3.Instrument**

The FDL employs short reading passages (poems, story segments, or other texts) that students read and reread over a short period of time. The format for the lesson consists of ten statements that helps the students to master reading fluency. The FDL is adapted by the present researcher (appendix (I). After **The Fluency**

**Development Lesson (FDL)** is employed by having short reading passages (poems, story segments, or other texts) that students read and reread over a short period of time. Then the Assessing Fluency Chart is applied to check rate of fluency among students and its effect on understanding the text.

#### **4.4 Analysis Results and Discussion**

The process of analysis was easily accomplished by the researcher as all of the readings were clear measured by using “Calculating Student Fluency” and its influence on reading comprehension that yielded the following results:

The results of the study show that the most frequently Reading fluency related to the positive and better understanding of the text. There is a statistically differences between male and female learners in their use of language learning strategies of fluency . Furthermore, the results also show differences between students’ level of proficiency and their use of strategies that help them to understand the text.

#### **4-5 Discussion**

In our quest to discuss the effect of reading fluency on comprehension there are a lot of variables that related such as readers, curriculum and materials. Students work on individual reading skills until a certain level of proficiency in reading fluency is achieved, at which time they work on the next reading skill, with little attention give to how these various parts come together in real life reading. We see this mechanization of the reading process beginning to be applied to a great hope in reading – reading fluency. Much too often we have seen the answer to that question about the

relationship between fluency and understanding a text. It is observed that in the study the students, mostly influenced by reading fluency in understanding a text.

Reading fluency has been identified as a key component in reading and learning to read. Moreover, a large number of students who experience difficulty in reading manifest difficulties in reading fluency. The keys to the development of reading fluency include modeling fluent reading for students and providing students repeated reading practice of written passages, while at the same time providing assistance and coaching in the repeated reading. Rather than have students involve themselves in a mechanistic form of repeated readings for which the main goal is reading fast, we feel that a more authentic approach to repeated readings and fluency development is called for, especially for readers who struggle to understand the meaning of a text. Not only does such an approach to fluency instruction work, as the field based research we have summarized in this article demonstrates, the use of strategies of reading development can help a lot in enhancing it which is reflected in the understanding of a text.

## **Conclusion**

Fluency in reading is the key element to effective reading. Reading with appropriate rate, accuracy, phrasing and expressions can foster comprehension of the text. However for many young and struggling readers at all ages, repeated readings seems to be an essential method for achieving fluency. Jay Samuels' (1979) seminal work on the method of repeated readings found that when students orally practiced a piece of text they improved on their reading of that text – rate, accuracy and comprehension. Such an accomplishment is to be expected. However, the researcher also found that when students moved to new passages, their initial readings of

those new pieces were read with higher levels of fluency and comprehension than the initial readings of the previous passage, even though the new passage was as difficult or more challenging than the previous piece. Since Samuels work, other studies have demonstrated the value of repeated readings as an instructional tool for reading fluency and, because reading fluency is related to text understanding, to reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). So, fluency can be achieved through frequent reading practices like repeated reading and other techniques that were mentioned previously throughout the study. .

## References

- 1-Brenitz, 2006; Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins, 2001; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, (2001:15) **Fluency: The Essential Link to Building Comprehension**,<http://www.sde.ct.gov>
- 2- Chalmers, Patricia. (2003). **Developing Fluent Readers. Retrieved January 7, 2005, from Public Schools of North Carolina, School Improvement Division** Web site:  
<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/schoolimprovement/effective/briefs/>
- 4- Duke and Pearson 2001, **1Reading Comprehension: Strategies That Work**
- 5- Hudson, Mercer, & Lane,( 2008) **Fluency: The Essential Link to Building Comprehension**,<http://www.sde.ct.gov>
- 6- Maria Driend & Barbara Mechler, ( 2008) **Fluency: The Essential Link to Building Comprehension** ,<http://www.sde.ct.gov>

- 7- Panya Lekwilai, 2014) **Reader's Theater: An Alternative Tool to Develop Reading Fluency among Thai EFL learners**, ( PASAA) Volume 48 *Mae Fah Luang University*.
- 8- Timothy Rasinski, Susan Homan, Marie Biggs(2008) Teaching Reading Fluency to Struggling Readers – 8- Method, Materials, and Evidence, Accepted for Publication Reading and Writing Quarterly Spring 2008
- 9- Wendy C. Ward, M. (2005) **Developing Fluent Readers in the Classroom**© 2005 Super Duper® Publications. All rights reserved. • [www.superduperinc.com](http://www.superduperinc.com)

### Figure 1

#### **The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) by Timothy Rasinski, Susan Homan, Marie Biggs(2008)**

The FDL employs short reading passages (poems, story segments, or other texts) that students read and reread over a short period of time. The format for the lesson is:

1. Students read a familiar passage from the previous lesson to the teacher or a fellow student for accuracy and fluency.
2. The teacher introduces a new short authentic text *with voice* (meant for rehearsal and performance) and reads it to the students two or three times while the students follow along. Text can be a poem, segment from a basal passage, or literature book, etc.



3. The teacher and students discuss the nature and content of the passage.
4. Teacher and students read the passage chorally several times. Antiphonal reading and other variations are used to create variety and maintain engagement.
5. The teacher organizes student pairs. Each student practices the passage three times while his or her partner listens and provides support and encouragement.
6. Individuals and groups of students perform their reading for the class or other audience.
7. The students and their teacher choose 3 or 4 words from the text to add to the word bank and/or word wall.
8. Students engage in word study activities (e.g. word sorts with word bank words, word walls, flash card practice, defining words, word games, etc.)
9. The students take a copy of the passage home to practice with parents and other family members.
10. Students return to school and read the passage to the teacher or a partner who checks for fluency and accuracy.

## **Figure 2**

### **Assessing Fluency Chart**

- **Calculating Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) (5A)**

• **NAEPs' Oral Reading Fluency Scale (5B)**

• **Multidimensional Fluency Scale (5C)**

• Oral Reading Rubric (5D)

• Retelling Rubric (5E)

• **Scale for Assessing Fluency (5 F&G)**

**Assessing Fluency Charts: 5A-5G**

- **Calculating Student Fluency**

<b>Total Number of Words Read</b>	<b>Number of Errors Words</b>	<b>Word Correct Per Minute (WCPM)</b>
---	---------------------------------------	---

**If a student reads 69 words per minute and has 7 errors, the student reads 62 words correct per minute.**