

READING FLUENCY COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH SPECIFIED AND NON-ENGLISH SPECIFIED TEACHERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDYNoureen Akhtar Malik¹, Dr. Malik Amer Atta², Dr. Asif Jamil³, Muhamm Aziz⁴**Original Article**

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was, “reading fluency competence of English specified and non-English specified teachers; a comparative study” The main research question was, “What was the reading fluency competence of English specified teachers” This Study to explore the competencies of Elementary Teachers in Reading Fluency was of Survey type. All elementary teachers of four categories i.e. PSTs, ESEs, ESTs and SESEs of Punjab who teach English to elementary level respectively was the population for this survey type study. Sampling was done from two Districts i.e. Bhakkar and Gujranwala. For sampling purpose stratified random sampling method was used. The sample shaped as following. Total sample of elementary teachers was 200, among those 100 teachers were taken from each district. 25 teachers of each category were taken containing 13 female and 12 male teachers of each category. The DVIP consisted of 14 points i.e., qualification (academic and professional), designation, age, length of service, gender, locale, posting place, subject which they like to teach, subject they have to teach, residence, trainings and literary taste etc. the data collected through DVIP was further used for analysis. For validation of Research Instrument expert opinion was taken from Subject Matter Experts. It was made sure that both seen and unseen paragraph was of equal difficulty and according to level/ standard of Grade 4th and 7th. So the present study concluded that English subject specified teachers at Elementary level performed better in all three factors of reading fluency than Non English subject specified teachers.

Keywords: Reading Fluency, Competence, Comparative, Language, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one strand of literacy and essential life skill; it is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It is one of the four macro skills to develop an effective communication in language learning.

Reading skill can be described as “skill that is automatically once learnt, such as decoding and strategies, techniques deliberately employed to support comprehension, such as summarizing” (O'Brien & Cook, 2015).

Fluency is the ability of the reader to read words accurately and quickly, which depend upon the type of reading, the reader's familiarity with the words, and the amount of practice reading text. Fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly, expressively, with good phrasing, and with good comprehension. (Rasinski, 2006).

Reading Fluency is often confused with reading skill, although reading fluency is an important component of reading skill which is itself a vast, complete and effective skill containing various components but unfortunately ignored in recent times. The Literacy Dictionary defines reading fluency as “freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension in silent, or the expression of ideas in oral reading; automaticity”.

Reading Fluency is like a bridge which takes a reader to complete understanding of what writer wanted to say in written text through effortless reading of any text with appropriate speed, accuracy, chunking, proper expression

and prosody in order to ensure comprehension. Koondher (2015) believes that "reading is continuous, interactive and dynamic process, where learners may build their new knowledge on the previous knowledge".

As the above definition suggests that reading fluency is not an end itself, it's a mean to an end. This complex skill contains in itself three factors i.e. Accuracy, Rate, Prosody (McCardle & Chhabra, 2003).

Accuracy refers to the percentage of words a reader can read correctly in given text, it is the ability to recognize or decode words correctly. "Reading accuracy is consequently the automatic process of interpretation and integration of appropriate expressions or phrases during the reading process with a minimal use of required resources in the aim of communicating meaning in a text" (Ivy Panda, 2020, January 26).

Reading Fluency Rate is also called Automaticity, which is the number of words reader reads per minute beside fluent identification of individual words. Rate is directly connected with recognition of words, if a reader frequently sight words given within a text, his/her reading rate will be better. Basically rate is reading at reasonable rate (Ehari & McCormick, 1998).

Prosody refers to the appropriate use of intonation and phrasing in reading. It involves paying attention to punctuation signs like commas and periods, assigning stress to individual words within a sentence, raising or lowering voice to match the meaning of the text.

It is a linguistic term which explores the musically rhythmic and tonal aspects of words uttered. It refers to variations in pitch (intonation), stress patterns (syllable prominence), and duration (length of time) that takes towards expressive reading of a text (Allington, 1983). "Prosody is the melody of our language. Some anthropologists have even claimed that our melodious speaking manner is possibly served as the origin of music itself" (Simpson, Oliver, & Fragaszy, 2008).

The topic of following research contains another important term 'Competence', which is indeed a vast term, which relates to having strong grip over different knowledge disciplines, realization that values and attitudes are important when person lives in a society and ambition of a person to live an effective and fruitful life in society. Competence is best described as a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values attitudes and desires which leads to effective, embodied actions in the world (Deakin Crick, 2008).

According to Rasinski (2012) a growing number of studies demonstrate that fluency is a major concern for students in Grades 4, 5, in middle school and in high school (Rasinski et al., 2005). The of reading fluency has attracted the attention of an enormous number of researchers for quite a long time, as they understood its impact on other reading skills particularly comprehension (Rasinski et al., 2005).

Fluency is the gateway to understanding in addition state reading process involves two separate but highly interrelated areas, word identification and comprehension. It has been conclusively proved that difficulties with automatic word recognition substantially affect a reader's ability to comprehend efficiently what they are reading (Rasinski, 2006).

Reading fluency refers to efficient, effective word recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text. Fluency is manifested in accurate, rapid, expressive oral reading and is applied during, and makes possible, silent reading comprehension. It is been unfortunate that despite the growing evidence of the importance of fluency in reading, its perceived importance among literacy scholars and educators has been on the decline.

Moreover, the same respondents also indicated strongly that reading fluency should not be considered a hot topic in reading. This disconnect may be due to the way reading fluency is commonly assessed and taught in many schools and in many commercial instructional programs aimed at teaching fluency (Rasinski, 2012).

Recently, there has been increased attention to reading fluency. The individual factors of

fluency and the relationships of fluency to comprehension have been of an area of interest. Although speed and accuracy in reading have long been considered hallmark components of fluency, appropriate expression is now considered an additional defining component. Appropriate expression refers to using prosodic features of language, such as emphasis, pitch changes, pause placement and duration, and phrasing in accord with syntactic structure so that text is translated aloud with the tonal and rhythmic characteristics of everyday speech (Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl, 2004).

Reading fluency is composed of 3 main components: **speed, accuracy, and prosody.** **Rate/Speed.** Fluent readers read at an appropriate rate of speed for their age or grade level (usually measured in words per minute or wpm).

Accuracy - Fluent readers have highly automatic word recognition, and the skills to sound out unfamiliar words; less fluent readers make frequent mistakes, have poor word recognition, skip words, substitute similar-appearing words, and struggle with unfamiliar words.

Prosody – Fluent readers use prosody (pitch, stress, and timing) to convey meaning when they read aloud; non-fluent readers typically use less expression, read word by word instead of in phrases or chunks, and fail to use intonation or pauses to mark punctuation (e.g. periods, commas, and question marks), (Linda Balsiger).

Problem statement

As teacher is considered to be a role model in every aspect of academic life. Student tries to imitate everything of a teacher and the way he/she speaks or read text within a class always attracts students so teachers need to know how a subject should be taught to students properly. In language teaching how to read fluently is most negligible aspect especially in Pakistan. Here more stress is on the fact that students should be fluent readers but no attention is given to the fact that what is the competence of our teachers when it comes to reading fluency particularly at elementary level. There appears to be a threshold language proficiency level teacher

needs to have reached in the target language in order to be able to teach effectively. A teacher who has not reached this threshold level of proficiency will be more dependent on teaching resources (e.g., textbooks) and less likely to be able to engage in improvisational teaching (Medgyes, 2001).

Elementary level in formal schooling is the most crucial in student's life because at this point he/she is becoming familiar with the initial sounds and structures of the English language; here competence of teacher specially the language teacher plays an important role. But few questions arise at this point. Do the teachers possess the competence to read text fluently themselves other than text books of the grades which they are teaching? Do they exactly know which factors make up the concept, reading fluency? Do they know how reading fluency takes toward better understanding of text? Do they have any knowledge about phonic system of English language?

The Reading Fluency Competence of elementary teachers who holds Master's degree in English and those who possessed Master's degree in subjects other than English was compared in this study. Data was collected to explore the comparison of English specified and Non- English specified Elementary Teachers in three factors of Reading Fluency i.e. Rate, Accuracy and prosody. T-test for independent sample was applied to find out the differences on three factors of reading fluency i.e. Rate, Accuracy and prosody with respect to subject specification.

Research objectives

1. To compare the reading fluency competence of English specified and non-English specified teachers.

Research Questions

1. What was the reading fluency competence of English specified teachers
2. What was the reading fluency competence of English non-specified teachers
3. What type of difference is present in competence of English specified and non- English specified teachers in sub factors of reading fluency?

Research Hypotheses

- H₀:** There lies significant difference between reading fluency competence of English specified and non- English specified teachers.
- H₀₁:** There lies significant difference between reading fluency competence of English specified and non- English specified teachers regarding Rate
- H₀₂:** There lies significant difference between reading fluency competence of English specified and non- English specified teachers regarding accuracy
- H₀₃:** There lies significant difference between reading fluency competence of English specified and non- English specified teachers regarding prosody

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**Sample Break up:****Distribution of sample in each District**

Category of teacher	Sample size	Male	Female
PSTs	25	12	13
ESEs	25	12	13
ESTs	25	12	13
SESEs	25	12	13
Total	100	48	52

Research Instrument

The DVIP consisted of 14 points i.e., qualification (academic and professional), designation, age, length of service, gender, locale, posting place, subject which they like to teach, subject they have to teach, residence, trainings and literary taste etc. the data collected through DVIP was further used for analysis. The DVIP was used to gather demographic information about each participant in this research. To assess elementary Teachers on reading Fluency two reading paragraphs were taken. Two seen paragraph were taken from text books of 4th grade and 7th grade. One Para was taken from A-Z reading Rocket Reading Fluency Assessment Paragraphs.

For validation of Research Instrument expert opinion was taken from Subject Matter Experts. It was made sure that both seen and unseen paragraph was of equal difficulty and according to level/ standard of Grade 4th and

Research Design

This Study to explore the competencies of Elementary Teachers in Reading Fluency was of Survey type.

Research Population

All elementary teachers of four categories i.e. PSTs, ESEs, ESTs and SESEs of Punjab who teach English to elementary level respectively was the population for this survey type study

Sample of the study

Sampling was done from two Districts i.e. Bhakkar and Gujranwala. For sampling purpose stratified random sampling method was used. The sample shaped as following. Total sample of elementary teachers was 200, among those 100 teachers were taken from each district. 25 teachers of each category were taken containing 13 female and 12 male teachers of each category.

7th. To assess elementary Teachers on reading Fluency two reading paragraphs were taken. Two seen paragraph were taken from text books of 4th grade and 7th grade. One Para was taken from A-Z reading Rocket Reading Fluency Assessment Paragraphs. For validation of Research Instrument expert opinion was taken from Subject Matter Experts. It was made sure that both seen and unseen paragraph was of equal difficulty and according to level/ standard of Grade 4th and 7th.

Procedure of the study

Elementary Teachers were asked to read selected paragraphs, first the unseen para and then the seen para in one minute. The elementary teachers were scored in line with international standards specially following Tim Rasinski (2012) fluent readers rubrics for assessing prosody and Hasbrouck & Tindal Reading Fluency Standard Table for assessing Rate (WRCM) and Accuracy

(percentage of word read correctly). The three factors were scored in following ways:

Rate: Following formula was used to calculate Rate of each Participant in Seen and unseen paragraph.

$$\text{Total Words Read} - \text{Errors} = \text{Word Read Correctly Per Minute.}$$

Accuracy: Accuracy is percentage of words read correctly. This factor was determined by using following formula,

$$\text{Words read correctly/total words} * 100$$

Prosody:

Prosody is the most complicated factor of reading fluency to be assessed. Tim Rasinski's Fluent Readers Rubrics (2012) with little modification was used for assessing prosody (Attached in Annex.4). The rubric was based on 5 points i.e. Expression & Volume, Phrasing & Intonation, Smoothness, Stress and Pace. This rubric followed Likert Scale ranging from 1 (lowest score) to 4 (highest score).

Researcher personally visited different schools of both Districts i.e. Bhakkar and Gujrenwala. From every school Elementary Teachers of categories ESES, PSTs, SESEs and ESTs were first asked to fill demographic questionnaire. Afterward each participant was asked to read out the unseen paragraph first and then the paragraph taken from related text book i.e. text books of 4th and 7th class. ESEs and PSTs read seen paragraph from class 4th while ESTs and SESEs read seen paragraph from textbook of class 7th respectively. Each participant was given one minute to read. Recording of reading of each participant was

taken. Each participant was scored on rubrics of prosody on the spot on both seen and unseen paragraph. If some point was missed in scoring due to some distraction, it was scored afterward by listening recordings. Rate and Accuracy were determined with help of above mentioned formulas.

Categorization of Factors of Reading

Fluency:

Rate

After calculating Rate of both paragraphs, percentage of both paragraphs was taken. Percentages were categorized into different values to determine grading of teachers in reading Fluency with respect to Rate (WRCM). For categorization Hasbrouck & Tindal Reading Fluency Standard Table was used (Attached in Annex.3) because this table has lowest grade wise word rate in comparison with other international fluency rate tables. As English is not mother tongue of Pakistanis, it is target language in Pakistan, hence this table most suited Pakistani standards in English Language. This table was bit modified so as to avoid overlapping in scores.

Reading Rate chart

Grade	WRCM(Rate)
1	23 -53
2	54-89
3	90-107
4	108-123
5	124-139
6	140-150
7	151-160
8	161-180

The table shows that Elementary Teachers having read (23-53) words correctly per minute fall into Grade 1, (54-89) word fall in grade 2, (90-107) words fall in grade 3, (108-123) word fall in grade 4. This categorization was used for further analysis.

Accuracy

After calculating Accuracy (percentage of correct words read) of both paragraphs, average Accuracy of both paragraphs was calculated. Average Accuracy was categorized to determine the grades of teachers in reading fluency with respect to Accuracy. The average scores of accuracy were categorized in line with Hasbrouck & Tindal Reading Fluency Standard Table with little modifications according to requirements of present study.

Accuracy chart

Grade	Accuracy(percentage of word read correctly)
1	23-51%
2	52-70%
3	71-90%
4	91-100%

The table shows that Elementary Teachers having percentage of correct word read per minute i.e. accuracy (23-51%) fall into Grade 1, (52-70%) fall in grade 2, (71-90%)fall in grade 3, (91-100%) fall in grade 4 . This categorization was used for further analysis.

Prosody:

After adding rubric scores of prosody of both paragraphs separately, average of both scores were taken and recoded to determine the level of elementary teachers in reading fluency with respect to prosody. The rubrics used for assessing prosody had five sub factors; each sub factor has four further points having highest value of 4 and lowest value 1 to assess the teachers. So all sub factors collectively have total score of 20. So the average of these scores were categorized for determining elementary teacher's level of prosody, a factor of reading fluency.

Table.4 Prosody level table

Level	Scores of prosody
Poor	0-5
Satisfactory	5.1-10
Moderate	10.1 – 15
Good	15-20

The table shows that Elementary Teachers having scored between 0-5 on prosody rubric were "Poor", between 5.1-10 were "Satisfactory", between 10.1-15 were "Moderate" and 15.1- 20 were "Good" in reading Fluency with respect to prosody. This categorization was used for further analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Independent Sample T-Test for exploring competence of English and Non English teachers and senior teachers and newly recruited teachers in Reading Fluency.

Table: Comparison of English Teachers and Non-English Teachers on Prosody

Accuracy	N	Mean	S.D	t-calculated	t-tabulated	d.f	P-value
English Teachers	39	3.4872	.68333	6.59		197	.000
Non-English Teachers	160	2.2875	1.08383				

Above mentioned table shows the comparison between teachers who were English subjected specified and those who were not English subject specified teachers on prosody, a factor of reading fluency.

The table shows that English subject specified teachers (n=38) has mean score=3.48 while Non English Teachers (n=160) have mean score=2.28, Values of t for independent sample are (t=6.59, df=197, p=.000) which shows that there lies significant difference between English teachers and Non English teachers in prosody. So it is concluded that English teachers performed significantly better than those teachers who were not English Subject specified teachers in prosody, a factors of reading fluency.

Comparison of English Teachers and Non-English Teachers on Accuracy

Accuracy	N	Mean	Std.d	t-calculated	t-tabulated	d.f	P-value
English Teachers	39	64.96	8.87	0.79	1.96	197	.003
Non-English Teachers	160	61.23	12.44				

Above mentioned table shows the comparison between teachers who were English subjected specified and those who were not English subject specified teachers on Accuracy, a factor of reading fluency. The table shows that English subject specified teachers (n=38) has mean score= 64.96 while Non English Teachers (n=160) have mean score=61.23, Values of t for independent sample (t=0.79,d.f=197, p=.003) which shows that there lies significant difference between English teachers and Non English teachers in Accuracy. So it is concluded that English teachers performed significantly better than those teachers who were not English Subject specified teachers in Accuracy, a factors of reading fluency.

Comparison of English Teachers and Non-English Teachers on reading Rate

Accuracy	N	Mean	Std.d	t-calculated	t-tabulated	d.f	P-value
English Teachers	39	77.32	10.57	0.80	197	.001	
Non-English Teachers	160	71.89	14.80				

Above mentioned table shows the comparison between teachers who were English subjected specified and those who were not English subject specified teachers on Rate, a factor of reading fluency. The table shows that English subject specified teachers (n=38) has mean score= 77.32 while Non English Teachers (n=160) have mean score=71.89, Values of t for independent sample (t=0.80,d.f=197,p=.001) which shows that there lies significant difference between English teachers and Non English teachers in Rate. So it is concluded that English teachers performed significantly better than those teachers who were not English Subject specified teachers in Rate, a factors of reading fluency.

Findings:

1. The finding is that there lies a significant difference (t=6.59, d.f=197, p=.000) between English specified and Non English specified teachers in prosody, a factor of reading fluency. English specified teachers (n=39) had mean score (3.4872) while Non English specified Teachers (n=160) had mean score (2.2875).
2. The finding shows that there lies a significant difference (t= 0.34, d.f=197, p=.003) between English specified and Non English specified teachers in reading accuracy, a factor of reading fluency. English specified teachers (n=39) had

mean score (64.95) while Non English specified Teachers (n=160) had mean score (61.24).

3. The finding shows that there lies a significant difference (t=0.80, d.f=197, p=.001), between English specified and Non English specified teachers in reading rate, a factor of reading fluency.

Discussion

Reading Fluency is the most confusing skill as majority of the teachers take it as reading skill, some take it as a reading of text rapidly or fast while others have no idea about it. This confusion still prevails in teachers although lots of research work has been done on it,

which shows that reading fluency is a most important factor of reading skill. But in countries like Pakistan where English is taught as target language, reading fluency is totally neglected and teachers do not give attention to its importance. It is a common observation that here in Pakistan Reading of text is only taught to the extent of word meanings into Urdu, getting answers of questions and to some extent dictation, reading is not taught as skill (British Council PEELI report, 2008).

Teachers teaching English to Elementary classes' i.e. from grade 1st to grade 8th are totally unaware of concept of reading fluency. That's why first section of findings of present study clearly indicates that how poor teachers' standards are in all three factors of reading fluency. Majority of teachers performed below average on international reading rate and accuracy standards, although these standards were bit modified on the plea that English is not our native language but a target language.

Few of the teachers were able to attain 3rd or 4th grade, the remaining teachers received scores that placed them at beginners' level in English, which also shows very alarming situation in terms of reading Fluency of teachers who are themselves responsible for teaching reading fluency to their students. Prosody which is most crucial aspect of reading fluency, the performances of the teachers were eye opener not only for teachers themselves but for department of education, teachers training academies, course/syllabus/textbook developers and policy makers. Teacher is the pivot around which whole development of student revolves but if this pivot does not know its focal point how can student become a good tool (Sabiha Mansoor, 2004).

It is observed during the course of present study that Elementary Teachers were totally unaware of the concept of reading Fluency, even they did not know about the three factors of reading fluency, prosody was an alien term for most of them. Even when teachers were asked to read the given paragraphs, hesitation, halting, pauses, fear, anxiety, confusion, shyness etc. were found except reading Fluency. The main reason for such performances might be that thinking of

teachers that English is not their native language, it's a target language so why they may waste their energies and resources in grooming their skills in this language.

Also reading skill, of which reading fluency is a key factor has no weightage in our examination system, so reading fluency is neglected fully on part of teachers, they take no pain to improve upon their skills. Another alarming reason is that reading Fluency has no place in teachers training programs also, no efforts are made on part of education department and training academies to develop such training courses which may improve reading fluency skills of teachers. So it is evident that if teachers are incapable of instructing their pupils in reading fluency, this is likely to have a dual effect, first by preventing children from becoming proficient in English, and second by impeding their learning of content in other subjects (British Council, 2012).

Present study compared the performance of teachers who were English subject specified and of those who were Non-English subject specified on all three factors of reading fluency. The findings clearly showed that English teachers performed visibly well than non-English teachers.

Fluency is "the ability and to better understand what is read" So according to above definition reasons are obvious that only English subject teachers can better understand the skills and terms of the language because they have more exposure to the language and its skill. Reading fluency is not an easy phenomena to be understood and then to be taught to students by non-English teachers

Among all three factors of reading fluency prosody is the most complicated one to be understood as it is blend of expressions & volume, phrasing & intonation, pace, stress and smoothness of English language. These aspects of reading fluency can be taught truly by an English subject specified teacher, especially in a country like Pakistan where English is target language, not everyone can become knowledgeable or expert in it (The National Reading Panel 2000).

It was unfortunate to observe during the present study that in most schools those teachers were assigned the duty of teaching English to grade 4th and 7th who were either of science background or having master's degree in Arabic or Islamiyat, in very few cases English subject specified teacher was teaching English to both grades. Teachers having science though have good exposure of English language but when it comes to skill development like reading fluency, the situation become hopeless as they have little or no knowledge of technicalities of skill like this.

Conclusions

So the present study concluded that English subject specified teachers at Elementary level performed better in all three factors of reading fluency than Non English subject specified teachers.

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