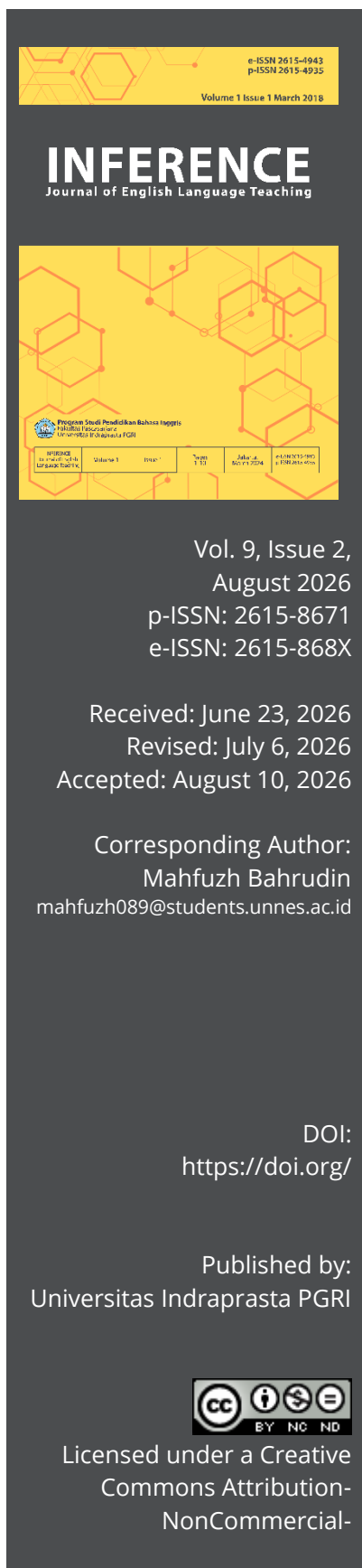




RESEARCH ARTICLE

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON READING STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING READING FLUENCY

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Abstract: Reading fluency presents a significant challenge for EFL students, who often struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary and pronunciation. This study investigated how Indonesian middle school students perceived seven reading strategies aimed at improving fluency. Using a mixed-methods design, survey data (Likert-scale and open-ended questions) were collected from 20 seventh-grade EFL students. The findings revealed that teacher-led and audio-assisted methods helped students pronounce unfamiliar words and recognize text pacing. Students also preferred collaborative activities because reading with peers reduced their anxiety and increased their willingness to read aloud. Additionally, repeated reading helped students become more comfortable with difficult vocabulary. Overall, the findings indicate that students viewed reading fluency as requiring both decoding support and peer collaboration. Based on these findings, teachers should integrate shared and collaborative reading tasks to build learner confidence. Future research should pair student perception data with longitudinal measures of reading rate and accuracy.

Keywords: Reading Strategies; Reading Fluency; Middle School Students; Student Perspectives; English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

PERSPEKTIF SISWA SEKOLAH MENENGAH PERTAMA TENTANG STRATEGI MEMBACA DALAM MENINGKATKAN KELANCARAN MEMBACA

Abstrak: Kelancaran membaca merupakan tantangan signifikan bagi siswa EFL, yang sering kesulitan dengan kosakata dan pengucapan yang asing. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana siswa sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia mempersepsikan tujuh strategi membaca yang bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kelancaran. Dengan menggunakan penelitian metode campuran, data survei (skala Likert dan pertanyaan terbuka) dikumpulkan dari 20 siswa EFL kelas tujuh. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa metode yang dipandu guru dan berbantuan audio membantu mereka melafalkan kata-kata asing. Siswa juga lebih menyukai aktivitas berkelompok karena membaca bersama teman sebaya menurunkan kecemasan mereka dan meningkatkan kemauan mereka untuk berpartisipasi secara lisan. Membaca berulang membantu mereka merasa lebih nyaman dengan kosakata yang sulit. Secara keseluruhan, siswa mengalami kelancaran membaca sebagai tugas yang membutuhkan bantuan pelafalan dan dukungan teman sebaya. Guru sebaiknya mengimplementasikan tugas membaca berkelompok untuk membangun kepercayaan diri pembelajar. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat menggabungkan data persepsi siswa dengan pengukuran longitudinal kecepatan dan akurasi membaca.

INTRODUCTION

Reading fluency has grown in importance within literacy education, in the middle school is where students move from learning to read toward reading to learn. As students that will encounter more complex texts across subject areas and the ability to understand complex text is more critical in today digital world (Taye & Teshome, 2025; Triana, 2021). Yet, many students still struggle to read fluently due to their poor word recognition (Aktaş, 2023; Ratnaningsih, 2025). For students of English as Foreign Language (EFL), these difficulties amplified by limited vocabulary and short grammar knowledge, which hinder fluent reading development (Al-Khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023; Mahmood, 2022; Pahrizal et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2024). In addition, challenges in determining stressed syllables in words, along with reading intonation and rhythm, negatively affect their reading fluency (Harahap, 2021; Midi et al., 2024) With many obstacles their facing, students' ability to read fluently and comprehend texts is limited (Babashamasi et al., 2022; Babayiğit, 2019; Husna et al., 2025).

Given these challenges, it is important to understand reading fluency as a multidimensional construct rather than a single skill. Different researchers view reading fluency as encompassing various components, as the definition of reading fluency has been refined overtime. Overall, it defines as the ability to read text accurately, quickly, with appropriate expression, without conscious effort devoted to decoding (Meisinger et al., 2004; Rodgers et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2018). This definition is important because research shows a positive correlation between fluency and comprehension, as reading fluency promotes understanding word meanings, vocabulary development, and improved automaticity (Martia et al., 2020; Rodgers et al., 2025).

Building on this understanding, numerous studies have looked at the efficacy of various reading strategies, such as Audio-Assisted Reading, Choral Reading, Paired Reading, Partner Reading, Reader's Theatre, Shared Reading, And Timed Repeated Reading. Audio-assisted reading as the name of this strategy it is help students to engage and motivate them to read which can increase their pronunciation, prosody, intonation even vocabulary (Chang & Millett, 2015; Conklin & Alotaibi, 2023; Jafarian & Kramer, 2025; Kirchhoff & Mision, 2022). Choral reading involves students reading aloud simultaneously with peers or the teacher, promotes students' active participation, engagement, and confidence, while improving their pronunciation, fluency, and intonation (Ayuba & Kadir, 2022; Midi et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2018). Paired and partner reading provide opportunities for peer-supported practice promoting social interaction, social cooperation, on-task behaviour, and positive peer relationships, while also aiding development in reading comprehension and fluency, pronunciation, and word recognition, including prosodic such as intonation, rhythm, pausing, and stress (Downs & Mohr, 2025; Harahap, 2021; Khusnul, 2022; Lee & Szczerbinski, 2021; Meisinger et al., 2004; Triana, 2021; Watson, 2015). Reader's theatre emphasizes expressive and meaningful oral reading through rehearsal and performance, enhancing motivation, comprehension, and fluency such as reading speed, accuracy, prosody, automaticity, decoding skill and word recognition (Aktaş, 2023; Mastrothanasis et al., 2023; Rodgers et al., 2025; Young & Rasinski, 2018). Shared reading is a teacher-led and scaffolded approach that provides clear modelling of fluent reading, it also helps students active participation and increasing their vocabulary, reading accuracy, speed, appropriate expression even critical thinking (Batini et al., 2025; Diprossimo & Cain, 2025; Martia et al., 2020). Timed repeated reading emphasizes multiple readings of the same text within a set time, improving students' vocabulary, grammar knowledge, comprehension and fluency such as reading rate, accuracy, word recognition, decoding skills, intonation, correct pronunciation (Maiden et al., 2024;

Park, 2022; Ratnaningsih, 2025; Taguchi et al., 2023). These instructional approaches have been shown to enhance multiple components of reading fluency, such as reading accuracy, rate, automaticity, prosodic features, therefore they are considering as effective instructional tools for reading fluency and comprehension.

Despite the strong evidence these reading strategies have educational value, the dominant research has always been quantitative research, focusing on instructional design, intervention outcomes, or measured gains in reading performance. While these studies provide valuable insight, but they also offer limited understanding of how students apply strategies, their perceived effectiveness, or the challenges they encounter (Mekuria et al., 2024). This discrepancy suggests that students' perceptions of what is helpful or relevant may not always align with their real-world application of these strategies. Research also said reliance on self-report data raise concern, about validity, as students may not always accurately reflect their actual use of reading strategies (Firat & Koyuncu, 2023).

This gap became more complicated by persistent instructional and learner-related challenges. Ensuring that reading activities remain engaging and motivating for students to maximize the effect of the reading strategies (Oranpattanachai, 2023; Thissen et al., 2018). research also indicates that student's motivation is influenced by various factors such as age and gender (Erni, 2021). Without understanding how middle school students interpret and apply reading strategies, it is remained uncertain whether reading fluency instruction is in line with students' experiences or generally reflects the instructional expectations set by teacher. These motivational challenges are closely linked to students' strategic behaviour during reading. Recent study shows many students lack of the effective reading method, which made limit their ability to store and retrieve information (Odofin et al., 2024). This makes students' reliance on teachers to identify and apply effective reading strategies in their reading development (Husna et al., 2025; Mahmood, 2022; Odofin et al., 2024). Such dependence limits the development of independent reading strategies and might affecting their interest in reading (Babashamasi et al., 2022). Understanding how students perceive and manage reading strategies is essential, as incorporating their perspective is crucial for developing reading fluency in this context at the middle school level.

In response to these gaps, this study intends to explore middle school students' opinion on reading techniques used to increase reading fluency. This study specifically looks how students view, asses, and use reading strategies in their literacy as well as the variables that affect their engagement with these strategies. By focusing on students' perspective, this study aims to provide learner-centered evidence that can improve theoretical models of reading fluency development in various reading strategies and guide more responsive instructional practices. Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What general opinions do middle school students have about the reading strategies used to increase reading fluency?
2. What aspects affect middle school students' engagement with and evaluation of reading strategies for enhancing reading fluency, such as thought of value, difficulty, and relevance to their reading needs?

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by extending fluency research beyond instructional effectiveness and includes students' subjective experiences and strategic interpretations. By emphasizing middle school students' perspectives, the study supports a more inclusive understanding of fluency development that recognizes the role of students' voices and self-awareness. The results should help teachers and researchers to create fluency-focused strategies that are both pedagogically sound and in line with students' perceptions and needs, thereby encouraging students to make them more sustained in engagement and effective reading development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

The research design of this study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of middle school students' experiences with reading strategies. The qualitative design explored students' perceptions of reading strategies (such as audio-assisted reading, choral reading, paired reading, etc.) to increase reading fluency using an open-ended questionnaire. It allowed the study to gain more insights into how participants applied strategies, perceived effectiveness, and encountered challenges or barriers (Mekuria et al., 2024). The quantitative design used a Likert-scale questionnaire to collect data on students' reported use of reading strategies and their perceived effectiveness, providing measurable evidence that can be analyzed statistically. A questionnaire in quantitative research was used to describe the behaviors, opinions, attitudes, and characteristics of the population (Ratnaningsih, 2025). This mixed-methods design aligned with the RQs, which aimed to comprehend students' subjective experiences, interpretations, and quantitative patterns of the reading strategies.

Research participants

The participants in this study were 20 seventh-grade students (ages 12–13 years), and they were EFL learners from Indonesia. The inclusion of 20 participants was consistent with qualitative research standards. This number of participants allowed the researcher to gather a detailed exploration of students' experiences while ensuring strong analytical analysis. These participants were middle school students from one of the public schools in Semarang. The participant from a single school setting further improved contextual precision by maintaining consistency in instructional practices, academic standards, and learning environments, thereby supporting a coherent and reliable interpretation of students' perspectives on reading fluency development. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, which has been often used in other research to capture students' genuine experiences within regular classroom conditions. This method was used to select participants based on classroom accessibility and students' willingness to participate (Aktaş, 2023; Taye & Teshome, 2025). Ethical standards were strictly upheld throughout the entire research process; the school approved the research permission, students provided their agreement, and all the data were anonymized to guarantee confidentiality.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire that included Likert-scale and open-ended questions, and it was designed to explore how students felt about reading strategies in the classroom. This survey design was selected to obtain both quantifiable descriptive patterns and rich qualitative insights regarding students' perceived usefulness, clarity, and applicability of reading strategies in supporting their reading fluency. The first section of the questionnaire was a Likert-scale (1–5 scale) that evaluated students' general attitudes toward reading strategies and their perceived impact on fluency. The Likert scale was used in this research because it enabled students to express degrees of agreement without suggesting the correct or incorrect answers, making it suitable for capturing subjective experiences of using reading strategies (Martia et al., 2020; Oranpattanachai, 2023; Thissen et al., 2018). The second section of the questionnaire was open-ended questions that allowed students to describe more freely based on their own experiences with the reading strategies that were being used. This open-ended questionnaire was an important part of revealing the complex perspectives of students that frequently remained unexpressed in a Likert-scale (Martia et al., 2020). The questionnaire items were modified from existing research on reading fluency and evidence-based teaching strategies to improve instrument reliability and content relevance. To reduce measurement inconsistency, the questionnaire was written in Indonesian to ensure that all items were clear and understandable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the research on middle school students' opinions on different reading strategies and their perceived impact on reading fluency development in the EFL classroom. The findings include students' perceptions toward EFL reading on a continuum, and their perceptions toward the instructional interventions on the cognitive level (pronunciation, reading rate, and comprehension) and the affective level (motivation, anxiety, and classroom engagement). The statements on the Likert scale provided quantitative evidence that resonated with open-ended qualitative statements, confirming the multifaceted nature of reading fluency among participants. Consistent with recent EFL scholarship, the data suggest that adolescent learners perceive reading fluency not as a unidimensional measure of speed and accuracy, but as a socio-cognitive construct in which decoding support, emotional regulation, and peer collaboration function as interdependent and mutually reinforcing elements.

Middle School Students' Opinions on Reading Strategies for Reading Fluency Development

Opinions on General English Reading Fluency Activities

Before examining the different reading strategies, it was imperative to establish the students' perceptions on reading in English. The first block of the survey examined the students' intrinsic motivation, their perceived significance of reading English, and the difficulty they ascribed to reading in English.

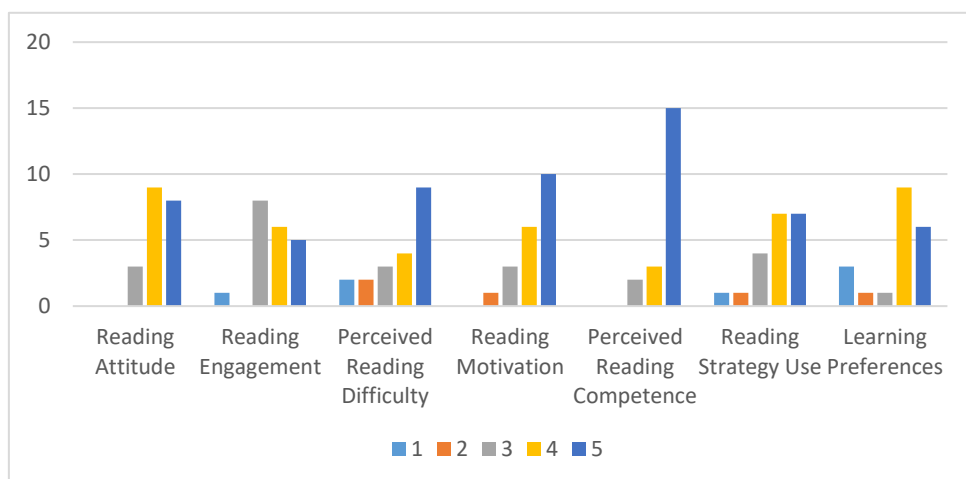


Figure 1
Students' General Perceptions of English Reading

The responses highlighted a noteworthy contrast between students' perspectives on English reading. An overwhelming majority believed that reading English texts was important. At the same time, an almost equal number of students perceived reading English as challenging. This sentiment has been noted in literature as one of the struggles of EFL learners. This creates a well-known EFL learning situation in which learners feel a high degree of instrumental and integrative motivation to learn the language, but at the same time, they recognize their constraints, including a limited vocabulary and a poor command of grammar. These constraints also affect their ability to read in English.

Additionally, almost all of the respondents wanted to develop their reading skills and recognized that their current reading skills were inadequate for their goals. The results indicated that students were open to learning new things. When respondents were asked whether differentiated instruction was helpful to them, the results overwhelmingly indicated a positive response. This emphasized the need for differentiated reading instruction in the classroom.

According to the baseline data, students did not resist reading. They struggled with decoding unfamiliar texts due to high cognitive burden and insufficient scaffolding. In the absence of strategic and effective methods, this burden typically results in a reliance on the teacher and ultimately stifles the interest and extension of the students' independent reading. The perceived high difficulty of the participants indicated that traditional silent reading practices, which lack assistance, were inadequate. Thus, interactive reading practices that are structured are necessary to fulfil the needs of the participants' high reading motivation and help the participants' developing reading abilities.

Opinions on Audio-Assisted Reading

Audio-Assisted Reading entails students listening to a recording of a fluent reader, while they either read the text silently or read it aloud, at the same time. One of the many benefits this reading practice has is the improvement of students' English reading Fluency. In this occasion, a survey was used to assess the improvement in reading Fluency, the improvement in English pronunciation and the improvement of students' reading comprehension of the text.

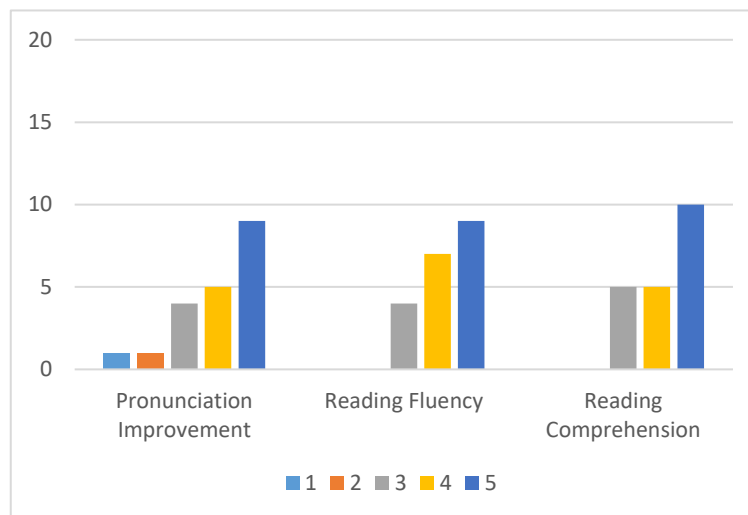


Figure 2
Students' Perceptions of Audio-Assisted Reading

The participants noted that Audio-Assisted Reading support strategies had a positive impact on phonological and reading skill acquisition. Most participants noted that listening to the reading support Audio-Assisted Reading while reading along the text, improved their pronunciation of the English significantly. This finding strongly supports recent reading research and on reading and listening as a reading support strategy and the research of EFL learners. Audio-Assisted Reading provided a near native reading model and eliminated the need for the learner to guess the pronunciation of the word.

Students reported that the auditory model improved reading fluency in addition to aiding pronunciation. Because the energy spent on decoding difficult words was no longer necessary, students were able to shift their focus to making meaning, which improved the speed and comprehension of their reading. This model led to a high percentage of participants stating that Audio-Assisted Reading improved their comprehension. The auditory model showed how phrases should be chunked and modelled syntactic boundaries and intonation. Based on literature, the assisted reading model flies over the limit of working memory and allows novice readers to experience the flow of reading and increases their confidence to read long and complex problems.

Furthermore, the affective impact of the audio intervention emerged as a vital factor in sustaining student engagement. For many middle school learners, reading independently often

triggers foreign language anxiety, particularly when confronting texts dense with unfamiliar vocabulary. The continuous, non-judgmental pacing of the audio model provided a psychological safety net that kept students anchored to the narrative rather than abandoning the task at the first sign of difficulty. This consistent auditory scaffolding significantly enhanced their intrinsic motivation and reading engagement, validating assertions that audio-integrated learning environments foster positive academic attitudes. As students felt supported by the rhythmic forward momentum of the audio, their fear of decoding failure decreased. This reduction in the affective filter proved essential for transforming reading from a solitary, frustrating academic hurdle into an accessible, immersive experience.

Opinions on Choral Reading

Choral Reading is a reading technique where a teacher or instructor reads a passage to a classroom or larger group, and the classroom reads the passage in unison as a class. This technique builds the confidence of students and helps the students learn the prosodic features of reading through practice and imitation.

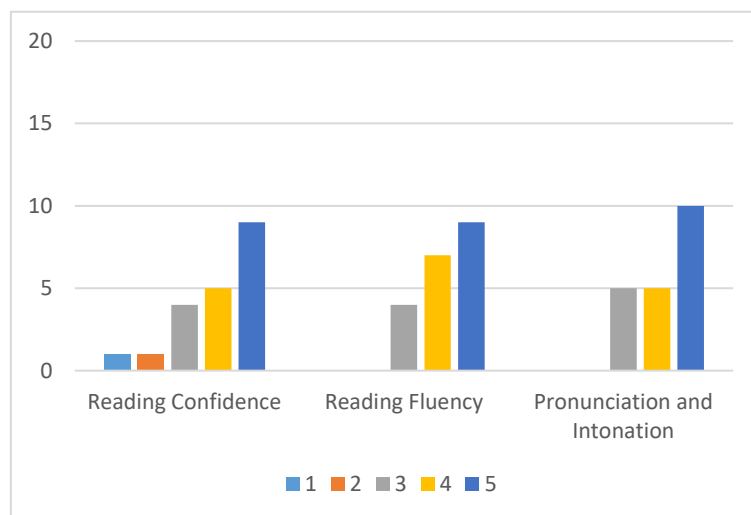


Figure 3
Students' Perceptions of Choral Reading

The survey results show that Choral Reading was of particular benefit for students in that their affective filters were lowered. Responses were overwhelmingly positive regarding the belief that the fear of being evaluated and subsequently judged as poor for reading was greatly reduced when students were permitted to read in unison. The results were conclusive and showed that Choral Reading made students feel confident and engaged, while also increasing the number of students who were willing to actively participate in the lesson. Results showed that students felt more confident and Choral Reading was more effective than standard classroom reading.

Cognitively, Choral Reading functioned as a form of distributed scaffolding. Weaker readers were auditorily pulled along by the momentum of their more proficient peers, which helped maintain a consistent reading rate and prevented the frequent pauses and hesitations that typically characterize struggling readers' performance. The rhythmic nature of Choral Reading also implicitly instructed students on appropriate pacing and stress patterns. By repeatedly synchronizing their voices with the group, students internalized the prosodic contours and intonation of the English language. This synchronous practice not only improved their immediate oral reading fluency and pronunciation but also fostered a collaborative classroom environment where the anxiety of mispronunciation was systematically diffused.

Opinions on Paired Reading

Paired Reading most commonly links a more skilled reader with a less skilled one. The pairing is dynamic, providing the opportunity for immediate error correction and scaffolding, as well as the ability to demonstrate reading fluency. Survey items that referred to reading with a friend had some of the most uniform agreement in this study.

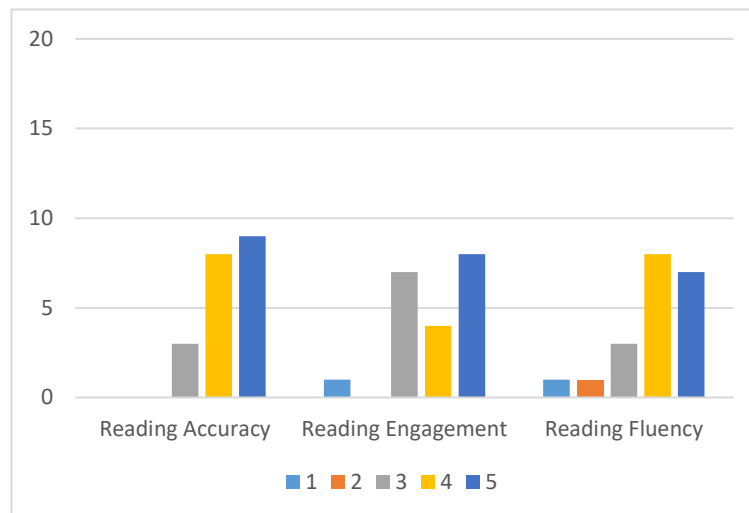


Figure 4
Students' Perceptions of Paired Reading

The descriptive analysis indicates that Paired Reading increased the sense of psychological comfort. Reading with a partner helped draw focus and made it much easier to work through the English reading. Paired Reading promotes good relationships and a necessary foundation for the engagement and work that learning demands. If one student mispronounced a complicated word or lost track of the meaning of a sentence, the reading partner would generally be able to offer the right answer.

Data indicated this strategy effectively corrected word-recognition errors. Students shared that reading with a peer allowed them to fix mistakes without a teacher formally intervening, which can be a more daunting process. The speed of informal feedback is critical for fluency since it stops a mistake from becoming a permanent mispronunciation, and it helps in recognizing the word altogether. Paired Reading also influenced word recognition and pronunciation. This strategy requires students to constantly monitor their partner's reading as well as their own. This one of the most effective strategies in reading is Phonetics and Syntax because it requires students to constantly assess their partner's reading and their own. This process of constant engagement helps to create a culture of accountability toward reading and fosters a cooperative problem-solving process that addresses reading comprehension.

Beyond word-recognition, reading with a peer helps one to recognize reading with the correct expression. Paired reading clarifies a previously challenging read, both because the cognitive demand of reading is shared and reading partners can explain tough passages. Survey results indicated that participants were more engaged, more motivated, and understood the assigned reading better. This supports a need for measurable socialization in reading fluency.

Opinions on Partner Reading

Partner Reading is similar to Paired Reading, where reading partners are students who have similar reading levels. Paired Reading was used to help develop reading stamina and focus.

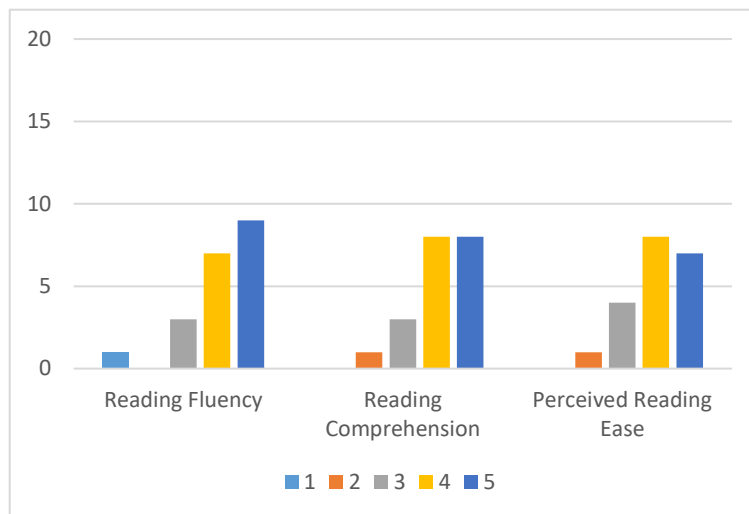


Figure 5
Students' Perceptions of Partner Reading

Data from the questionnaire illustrated that Partner Reading played a pivotal role in sustaining student attention to longer texts. A common problem faced by EFL students is the quick loss of cognitive stamina when reading long texts in English. Partner Reading alleviated this problem by having students reading in short, manageable, and alternating segments of a reading task. This structured approach improves reading fluency and the perception of reading and reading comprehension. Students felt that being given the opportunity to take turns, improved their concentration. While one student read the text, the other student monitored the text, providing active reading participation and concentration. This was done to avoid the cognitive loss that is most common when doing reading alone.

Partner Reading also enhances the modeling of reading intonation and expression of reading in students. Data showed that while students were reading, they paid more attention to the expression and intonation of the reading of their fellow classmates and unconsciously altered their reading expression and intonation to that of their classmates. Firm interaction and the reading of partners helped students vocalize their uncertainty, and when they felt there was a confusing sentence, the partners would stop to negotiate the meaning of the sentence. The quality of this interaction showed that reading partnered with verbal expression was an effective collaborative work approach of social interaction and cooperation.

The effect of Partner Reading's horizontal dynamic, rather than pairing students with more advanced readers, was a major contributor to the development of students' reading self-confidence. Statistical trends showed a noticeable decrease in the intimidation students felt about making phonological or syntactical errors when reading aloud to a peer of the same level. The reading Partner dynamic of working with an equal peer reduced the anxiety of being assessed while reading, which in turn developed positive peer relationships and created a supportive, low-stress learning environment. The positive relationships created through Partner Reading sustained the intrinsic motivation to read for both students.

Opinions on Reader's Theatre

Reader's Theatre encourages students to rehearse and perform a script, derived from a written text, with an exclusive focus on vocal and interpretive expression rather than memorization or physical acting.

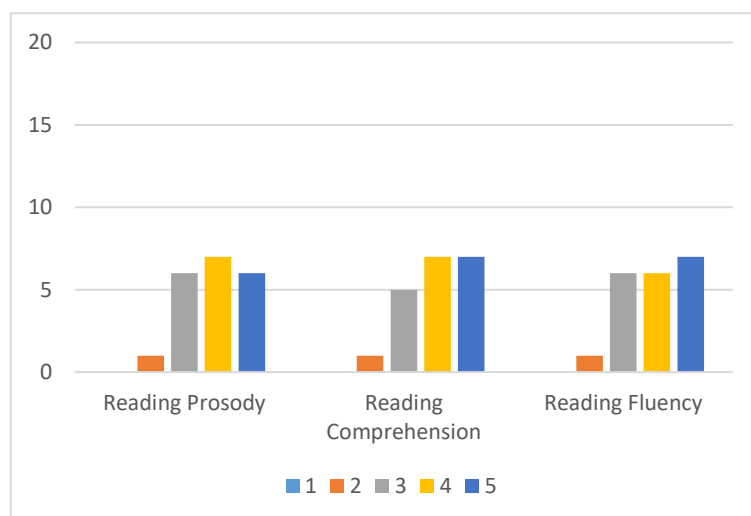


Figure 6
Students' Perceptions of Reader's Theatre

Reader's Theatre demonstrates the most positive interaction to text and the most positive effects on reading development. According to Reader's Theatre feedback, students felt that taking on a character and reading lines from a script changed their interaction with text from a 'code cracking' approach to a 'bridging' approach, in that students were now able to appreciate the feelings and intentions that characters wished to convey through the text. When students were able to appreciate the feelings and intentions of characters, they were also able to perform the feelings and intentions of characters through the use of appropriate reading phrasing, pitch, and volume. This is the essence of reading with prosody and expressiveness.

The statistical trends also demonstrated a positive relationship between Reader's Theatre and higher levels of comprehension. By acting out the parts, students had to understand and explain emotions, as well as the reasons and the context for the characters and the dialogue. The data suggested that the strategy turned superficial decoding into critical engagement with the text, and that engagement had a positive influence on both the reading comprehension and the motivation to read. The acting of Reader's Theatre also had a positive influence on the students' reading self-confidence. Readers' Theatre created a positive environment that made students feel a sense of ownership over the text, thanks to the shared rehearsal and the repetitive nature of the preparation. The rehearsals-built reading skills, such as word recognition and decoding skills, all of which helped improve reading fluency. However, because Reader's Theatre framed the rehearsals as part of an art performance, it helped maintain high levels of intrinsic motivation.

From the emotional side, Reader's Theatre did an excellent job of relieving the foreign language anxiety that most middle school EFL students experience. Students read as characters, as opposed to reading as themselves, so the psychological burden of an ultimate perception of failure was lifted. The students' mistakes became the result of the rehearsal process and not a direct result of a linguistic shortcoming. The questionnaire data indicated that this preparation created a highly supportive social framework, because students perceived peer feedback to be a form of direction rather than a personal critique. This attitude allowed the most anxious and hesitant of readers to participate fully. Reader's Theatre improved the students' reading fluency, while also creating a positive atmosphere that made learning English a fun, collaborative, and creative experience.

Opinions on Shared Reading

In Shared Reading, the teacher demonstrates reading fluency, and the students follow the text silently or aloud when they are able to join in. The purpose of the analysis for the strategy was to understand the use of Shared Reading as an initial scaffolding step.

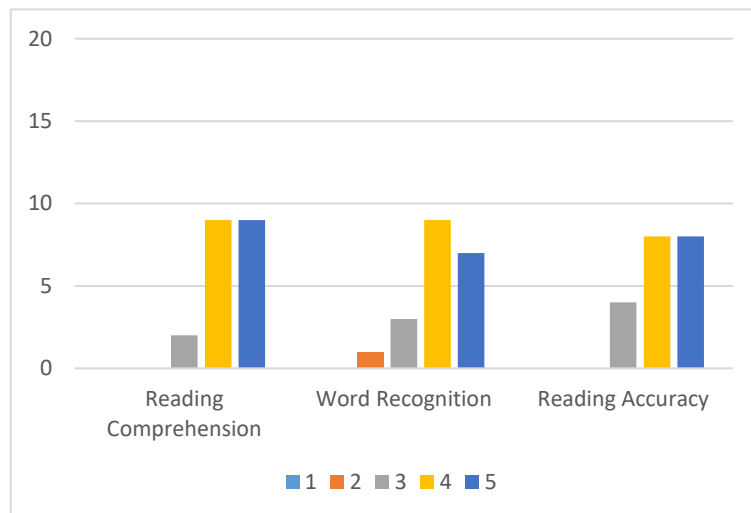


Figure 7
Students' Perceptions of Shared Reading

All the students suggested Shared Reading was helpful in learning pacing and boundary reading. The data suggested that when the teacher models the reading of a passage, points out the text features, and demonstrates the reading of a passage, the students learn the reading of the text not only in English, but in hearing the text read English. Teacher scaffolding and modelling reading with text features is the best way to encourage students to read actively, read on the text, and read at a faster pace.

All the students suggested the Shared Reading created an audio guide for them. The students liked hearing a teacher explain and go through a difficult text and meaning before attempting the reading themselves. The model also provided a front loading of the text and its meaning, greatly helping students ease anxiety and learn new vocabulary and words in a text. The metacognitive strategies and the scaffolding for reading also provided the students and reluctant readers with encouragement to read texts that may be difficult to comprehend.

Additionally, the combined effect of collaboration and teacher-direction on Shared Reading created a safety zone for augmented cognitive growth. Survey data suggested that since the teacher held the dominant role in decoding, students' cognitive energy was available to engage in critical thinking and thematic work. Instead of working on phonics in a solitary and frustrating manner, the students engaged in a group process of scaffolded meaning construction. The data emphasized that the students' collective experience enhanced their self-confidence while expanding their receptive vocabulary. By integrating the students' independent reading levels with their listening comprehension skills, Shared Reading served to ease students into more difficult English texts with minimal anxiety, keeping the students interested and intellectually active for the duration of the reading task.

Opinions on Timed Repeated Reading

Timed Repeated Reading is the process by which students read the same, usually brief, passage several times until a specific level of reading fluency is met and is frequently measured by rate and accuracy of reading for each reading.

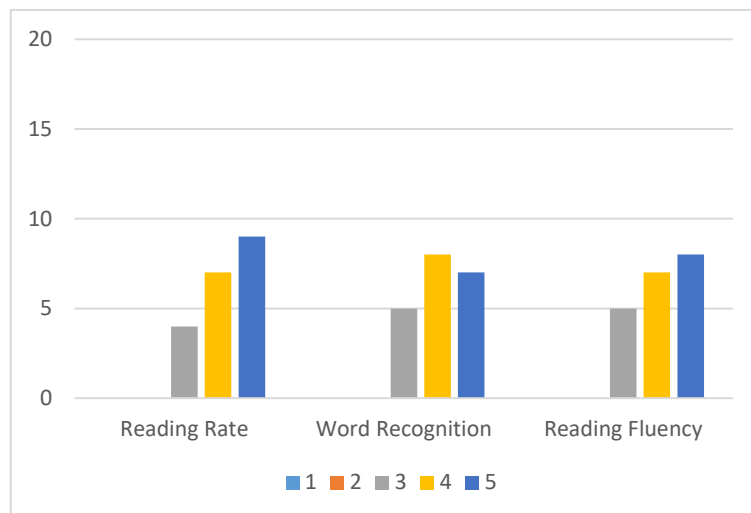


Figure 8
Students' Perceptions of Timed Repeated Reading

The data from the Repeated Reading questionnaires provided evidence for the impact of Repeated Reading in the building of reading automaticity. Participants reported that multiple readings of a text improved reading fluency each time. As was predicted, the first reading was slow with many breaks to parse the text due to obstacles such as unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar sentence structures. However, the data showed that with each subsequent reading the difficulty of the task diminished.

The feedback from participants identified that Repeated Reading has a positive effect on remembering vocabulary. With repeated exposure to the same words in the same context, the connections in the brain to retrieve those words were strengthened. Participants reported that they could even "memorize" the text or at least the vocabulary, leaving some brain space for other things. When participants were able to quickly identify vocabulary, they were able to figure out the meaning of the text. The effect of repeated reading on vocabulary and comprehension demonstrated that reading and understanding are related and critical in EFL progress.

Aspects Affecting Middle School Students' Engagement with the Reading Strategies Used

Difficulties in Vocabulary Knowledge and Pronunciation

The qualitative data most clearly reflected the reading and processing bottleneck caused by decoding long English words, as well as the challenge of inconsistent English pronunciation. When students were asked what difficulties, they faced in reading long or new English texts, their answers each referenced the same decoding bottleneck.

One student noted, "Kesulitan untuk mencari arti kata kata yang asing, dan kesulitan untuk melakukan speaking bahasa inggris" (The difficulty is finding the meaning of unfamiliar words, and the difficulty of speaking English). Another participant echoed this, stating the main issue was "saat tidak mengetahui bagaimana cara bacanya" (when not knowing how to read/pronounce it).

These quotes reveal the challenges faced by learners of EFL. Unlike native speakers, who possess a rich vocabulary to decode printed words, middle school students often came across words that they did not know or had never heard. This resulted in a breakdown of comprehension. This provides an evidence base as to why these two strategies (Audio-Assisted Reading and Shared Reading) were the most highly rated strategies, while the other strategies were not. These strategies provided the much needed external phonological and semantic support to help students overcome the two barriers faced.

Reading Anxiety and the Development of Student Confidence

Anxiety associated with reading English was an area of focus in the qualitative data, and the various reading strategies that were employed removed this anxiety. This indicated a clear movement along the response continuum from anxiety to confidence caused by the combination of practice and reinforcement through the social presence of the student's peers.

Responding to whether practicing with specific strategies made them more confident, a student reflected, "Iya, karena saat saya merasa sudah memahami teks saya lebih paham untuk menyampaikan kepada teman dan lebih percaya diri" (Yes, because when I feel I already understand the text, I understand better how to convey it to my friends, and I become more confident). Another simply stated, "iya, karna jadi lebih merasa pede" (yes, because I feel more confident).

These quotes are insightful as they connect advanced understanding to psychological safety. In this case, confidence was not an inherent personality trait, but rather an outcome of understanding and preparation. The anxiety from reading out loud came from the fear of failing in front of an audience. By using methods that ensured students understood the material before they read it to the class, the reading anxiety was slowly removed.

Peer Collaboration as a Source of Engagement and Social Support in Reading

The results from the thematic analysis were in strong agreement with the socio-cultural theory of learning, and demonstrated how peer interaction was both a learning and emotional motivator. Students usually described engaging with their peers as the most effective strategy for overcoming their reading difficulties. When discussing their preferred strategies, a student explained, "Reader theater adalah yang aku praktikan di kelas. Aku menggunakannya dengan cara berbagi peran dengan teman." (Reader's theater is what I practice in class. I use it by sharing roles with friends).

This phenomenon demonstrated that the group activity of "sharing roles" created an opportunity to read together, thereby transforming reading from an individual academic activity into a collective social one. The qualitative comments consistently affirmed that reading together with a partner alleviated the fear associated with the teacher-student reading interplay. In paired activities, students felt free to read words aloud and to ask simple questions about the vocabulary and the text, as well as to build understanding without the fear of being evaluated or corrected. The social learning framework of Paired and Partner Reading was essential to support reading especially when students faced difficulties with the text.

Repetition and the Development of Metacognitive Reading Awareness

The qualitative feedback emphasized the richness of the data and the metacognitive gains associated with Repeated Reading. Students demonstrated an understanding of the underlying principles of the repetition, illustrating awareness of self-regulated learning.

One participant detailed their process: "Sangat terbantu, karena dengan adanya metode membaca saya lebih bisa dapat menghafalkan teks dan memahami teks" (Very helpful, because with reading methods I can better memorize the text and understand the text). Another mentioned their coping strategy for difficult texts was simply "Strategi membaca menghafal teks dan membaca ulang teks" (The reading strategy of memorizing the text and re-reading the text).

These quotations show how the activity shifts from engaged decoding to automatic word recognition. It is clear that the first reading was done to “survive” through the words. After “membaca ulang” (re-reading), the students had the cognitive ability to “memahami teks” (understand the text). The students had the metacognitive awareness to not blindly follow the teacher’s instructions and were also aware of the importance of automaticity. They used repetition to unlock the meaning of the text.

Student Preferences for Interactive Reading and Perceived Value of Strategies

According to the qualitative data, students showed a clear opt-over interactive reading that consisted of multimodal activities as opposed to the static reading. Among the favored reading strategies, students identified a variety of strategies that required the engagement of multiple senses, as well as some that involved active verbal and physical participation.

A student noted their preference for multimodal input: "mendengarkan audio bahasa Inggris dan novel berbahasa Inggris karna cepat faham" (listening to English audio and English novels because it makes me understand quickly). Another preferred the active engagement of peer methods: "Ya karena beberapa strategi membaca yang diberitahu guru membuat saya lebih lancar dan lebih cepat dalam membaca namun..." (Yes, because some reading strategies told by the teacher make me more fluent and faster in reading...).

The combination of Audio Assisted Reading (AAR) and Reader’s Theatre puts emphasis on an important facet of pedagogy. It is crucial to get the middle school EFL students actively engaged. Untouched printed text can be perceived as a barrier. A page can contain vibrant, interactive text when it is coupled with an engaging audio accompaniment, or when it is a script for performance with a partner. The qualitative results show that interactivity is a key element necessary in sustaining the cognitive involvement that is essential in developing reading fluency.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated Indonesian middle school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and attempted to understand their reading fluency development concerning their conceptualization of reading strategies. The results of this study found that adolescent EFL students perceive reading fluency as a sociocognitive construct rather than a unidimensional view of speed and the accuracy of traditional models. Their perceptions seem to describe a multifaceted construct. Decoding aids, automaticity, emotions, peer engagement, and a sense of belonging are interdependent and mutually supportive. By emphasizing constructed realities rather than the objective metrics of fluency, the data present a more sophisticated view in which readers perceive the transition from hesitant decoding to fluent expressive reading.

A significant insight from the data was the observed focus on vocabulary and pronunciation in relation to the issues with fluent reading. Many students associated their reading problems with the difficulty of the English spelling system. They explained that if they could not check the pronunciation of a word, they could not understand the meaning of the sentence. As a result, students reported being very assisted by strategies that used auditory scaffolding, such as Audio-Assisted Reading and Shared Reading, among other strategies. These students explained that the model of fluent reading that they listened to facilitated the guesswork of the pronunciation of a word. This strengthened the perception, which was expressed by many researchers, of the value of the dual input system. The perceptions expressed by these students also aligned very well with the perceptions of Chang and Millet (2015), when they highlighted the effect of Audio-Assisted reading on the increase of the reading speed, and Conklin and Alotaibi (2023), when they pointed out its effect on reading vocabulary. The value of the dual input system was expressed by the students of this research, and was expressed by Diprossimo and Cain (2025) in the context of Shared Reading and word learning. Listening to a model of fluent reading not only reduces the students’ anxiety of encountering new

words, it also serves as a pronunciation aid. Because in the Indonesian EFL context there is little exposure to fluent reading (Pahrizal et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2024), this auditory support, due to the lack of exposure, functions as a necessary support for listening and reading in English.

Building upon the need for decoding assistance, participants believed that repetition was essential to develop both reading familiarity and stamina. Responses related to Timed Repeated Reading demonstrated that students viewed multiple readings of the same text as a means of shifting from laborious word reading to faster, more fluent reading. This shift seems to show students were beginning to develop a form of metacognitive awareness pertaining to their learning. Within the literature, Park (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of repeated reading in developing L2 reading fluency and Taguchi et al. (2023) described the usefulness of repeated reading in foreign language programs for the development of reading automaticity. Inclusion of the study's middle school participants demonstrated that repetition helped to lessen working memory overload. However, alternative view should also be presented. Without the development of reading automaticity and true orthographic mapping, perhaps memorization of the passages was all that was achieved (Ratnaningsih, 2025). Without standardized assessments for reading fluency, this differentiation is almost impossible to determine. Although the viewing of rereading as a means to gain text meaning, along with the students' metacognitive reflections, demonstrated participants in the study utilized repetition for self-regulated purposes and not for a rote learning activity (Babashamasi et al., 2022; Husna et al., 2025; Odofoin et al., 2024).

In addition to the cognitive strategies of decoding and repetition, the results describe the importance of social factors involved in reading fluency, especially in reading and repeated reading done with peers. Reading activities that distributed the cognitive and emotional load of reading (e.g., Choral Reading, Paired Reading, Partner Reading) were viewed as providing the participants with a greater sense of psychological safety. Students described feeling less anxious reading in unison or taking turns reading with a partner as opposed to reading aloud to the class. This perception offers an important dimension to the existing body of literature on peer-assisted reading. Downs and Mohr (2025) provided a synthesis of the cognitive advantages of synchronous paired reading. Meisinger et al. (2004) explained that the nature of the interaction in partner reading has a direct effect on reading comprehension. The current findings offer a unique synthesis of these studies in that they show that for adolescent EFL learners the nature of the social interaction is what they perceive to be the primary cognitive reading task. Choral reading (Ayuba & Kadir, 2022; Midi et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2018), peer reading with correction (Khusnul, 2022; Lee & Szczerbinski, 2021; Watson, 2015) gives students the psychological safety to attend to reading and comprehend it. Reading also needs to be contextualized in the Indonesian classroom, which has a collectivistic focus to learning. The strong tendency toward collaborative strategies is possibly due to social desirability or leaning toward more social strategies rather than a value-added element to developing fluency in your practices (Erni, 2021). That being said, the constant mentioning of peer support as a way to diminish reading anxiety denotes that emotional security is a big part of their understanding of fluency.

The interplay between cognitive and affective dimensions was most pronounced in the students' perceptions of Reader's Theatre. Participants associated this strategy not only with increased motivation but also with a deeper understanding of textual meaning and prosody. By shifting the focus from accurate decoding to expressive performance, students perceived that they were reading for communicative intent rather than academic evaluation. This observation complicates traditional hierarchies of fluency development. While Young and Rasinski (2018) established the positive effects of Reader's Theatre on word recognition automaticity and reading prosody, and Rodgers et al. (2025) explored its utility in pairing phrase-cued text for prosodic development, the current data reveal how adolescent learners internalize these benefits. The participants perceived that adopting a persona functioned as a psychological shield, allowing them to experiment with pitch, volume, and phrasing without feeling personally scrutinized. Consequently, this role-playing appeared to bridge the gap between superficial reading and deep thematic engagement, supporting Aktaş's (2023) and

Mastrothanasis et al.'s (2023) assertions that Reader's Theatre profoundly impacts reading comprehension and motivation. The students' responses suggest that prosody is not merely an aesthetic byproduct of automaticity. Rather, the act of striving for expressive reading actively drives comprehension.

These themes provide novel theoretical perspectives on EFL reading fluency. Traditional reading fluency models described the linear progression of reading as the mechanical development of reading, with the dimensions of reading speed and the proficiency of word recognition as the dominant aspects of fluency (Maiden et al., 2024). However, based on the results of this study, the perceptions of middle school learners indicate that this model rather does not exist within the EFL context. The results of this study propose a reading fluency model that is socio-cognitively oriented. Within this model, a learner's reading fluency is determined by the learner's reading environment and by the learner's social context and emotional state. The results of this study indicate that automated reading, emotional state regulation, and classroom belonging are connected. A learner who perceives a peer as being emotionally supportive will likely engage in the repetitive reading practice needed to achieve automated reading and thus will be able to perform expressive reading that is necessary for comprehension (Thissen et al., 2018; Triana, 2021). Thus, middle school learners understand reading fluency as a socio-cognitive process that is integrated.

While these interpretations offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of adolescent EFL readers, several methodological limitations must contextualize the conclusions. The reliance on convenience sampling within a single-school setting and a small sample size restricts the transferability of the findings. More critically, the study relied entirely on self-reported questionnaire data without employing objective fluency assessments or experimental manipulations. Consequently, claims regarding statistical effect sizes or the causal effectiveness of the interventions cannot be made. It is entirely plausible that teacher enthusiasm, the novelty effect of stepping outside standard textbook routines, or a general preference for interactive peer activities inflated the students' positive evaluations (Mekuria et al., 2024; Oranpattanachai, 2023; Taye & Teshome, 2025). Students may have conflated the enjoyment of a collaborative task with actual improvements in their reading competence. However, even if these alternative explanations partially account for the highly positive responses, the specificity of the students' reflections particularly regarding how certain strategies alleviated specific anxieties related to pronunciation and pacing, suggests that their perceptions hold substantial educational relevance.

These methodological constraints and theoretical tensions naturally delineate pathways for future research. Because the present study mapped the perceptual landscape of reading strategies, subsequent investigations should utilize mixed-methods longitudinal designs that pair subjective student evaluations with objective, standardized measures of reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension. Such research is necessary to determine whether the profound sense of emotional security and cognitive clarity that students perceive during collaborative reading translates into durable, independent reading fluency over time. Furthermore, exploring how different reading proficiency levels and metacognitive strategy preferences interact with these instructional methods (Babayigit, 2019; Firat & Koyuncu, 2023) would significantly refine the socio-cognitive model proposed here.

By centering the voices of adolescent EFL learners, this study illuminates the complex, multidimensional nature of reading fluency development. The students' perceptions strongly suggest that learning to read fluently in a foreign language is not exclusively a cognitive challenge of mapping sounds to symbols, it is equally an affective and social endeavor. Strategies that integrate auditory scaffolding, metacognitive repetition, and peer-mediated support were perceived not just as helpful academic tools, but as essential mechanisms for navigating the vulnerability inherent in language learning. Recognizing reading fluency as a socio-cognitive process where cognitive support and emotional security work in peer provides a more holistic and empathetic framework for understanding and supporting the adolescent EFL reader.

CONCLUSIONS

These theoretical and methodological challenges will set restrictions for future studies based upon this one. The present research focused on a specific perceptual domain relating to reading strategies. Future studies grounded in this perceptual domain will be able to employ longitudinal mixed-method research designs that integrate subjective student feedback alongside more objective measures of reading rate, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension. It will be important to understand if students' strong perceptions of emotional safety and cognitive openness during collaborative reading really do result in reading fluency that is more practiced and independent. It will be also be important to determine the preferences for metacognitive strategies as they pertain to varying degrees of reading competency, and how they interact with the teaching strategies of the work of Babayiğit (2019) and Firat and Koyuncu (2023) in order to improve the socio-cognitive model of this work.

The findings of the present study indicate that the development of reading fluency in the EFL classroom needs to be understood as reliance on social and emotional scaffolding and support. The findings have added insight to the existing academic literature by showing that adolescent learners appreciate the teaching methods and strategies that deal with the decoding issues and alleviate foreign language anxiety. The findings of the study have considerable implications for EFL teachers, as they need to include multiple scaffolding and peer reading methods and strategies in the reading lessons to maintain students' interest and motivation for reading, rather than providing them with independent silent reading activities.

The study brings excellent findings on learner experiences. However, due to the use of self-reported survey data, we are unable to say for certain that these strategies increased any fluency metrics. Future research should implement mixed-method designs to combine qualitative student feedback and long-term empirical data on reading pace, accuracy and overall comprehension. These types of studies will help understand how effective these interactive strategies are across varying educational contexts and EFL proficiency levels.

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