

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter provides a structural roadmap for this study, encompassing the background of the study and the formulation of the problem. It further specifies the aim of the study while establishing the significance of the study as a rationale for the research.

1.1 Background of the Study

This research is grounded in the recognition that reading plays an important role in second language acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, due to its numerous benefits that span various domains and language skills. In the study by Mahmood (2022), reading greatly contributes to the improvement of EFL students' language skills, including communication skills, writing skills, listening skills, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. Furthermore, reading develops students' critical thinking abilities and analytical skills (Lavarias, 2025). With good reading skills, EFL students can achieve academic success (Adora et al., 2024; Lavarias, 2025; Mihret & Joshi, 2025; Wani & Ismail, 2024).

In order to be able to read well, EFL students must read fluently. What is required for fluent reading is the automation of word recognition at a speed higher than our capacity to listen (Grabe & Stoller, 2020), as this rapid processing is linked to comprehension. Grabe & Stoller (2020) found that a fluent reader can focus on a single word and recognize it accurately in less than one percent of a second. This implies that fluent readers can recognize four to five words per second, allowing them to hold groups of words in mind simultaneously to extract the basic grammatical information necessary for comprehension.

Several studies emphasize the importance of reading fluency as a prerequisite for reading comprehension. Keresteš et al. (2024) emphasizes that reading fluency is extremely important for reading comprehension due to working memory limitations, including the quick decay of information that has already been encoded. It frees up processing resources in the brain that are otherwise used for decoding, allowing readers to focus on meaning and comprehension (Laberge & Samuels,

1974; Perfetti, 1985). Fluency, in both oral and silent reading, is a factor that can either limit or support comprehension (Meggiato et al., 2021).

Over the past five years, research has consistently found a strong relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension (Balnig & Alda, 2023; Cadime et al., 2024; Ecalle et al., 2021; Rachmatia, 2022; Samaniego, 2023; Zulfqar & Hussain, 2021), as well as within the local context (Lorenza et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2023). Lorenza et al. (2022), in their study entitled “The Correlation Between Students’ Reading Fluency and Their Reading Comprehension” found that reading fluency and reading comprehension show a strong positive correlation. The research was conducted using a read-aloud test to assess fluency and a written test for reading comprehension. In the case of oral reading fluency, students were asked to read a passage for one minute to obtain their reading rate, and then, to determine the students’ accuracy, the number of words read correctly in one minute was evaluated. Finally, to determine the students’ prosody score, they used the dimensions of expression and volume, phrasing, fluency, and rhythm adopted from (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). The reading comprehension score was taken from an existing midterm test. Another study by Saputra et al. (2023) found that the relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension is positive. By using texts to assess students’ oral reading fluency and some question items for reading comprehension test, the results indicate that the better the students’ oral reading fluency, the better their reading comprehension.

Although previous research is relatively consistent regarding the positive relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension, several factors make further studies important. First, a systematic review conducted by Meggiato et al. (2021), whose dataset is publicly available on OSF (DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/B6JXF), shows that most of the studies they analyzed assessed only accuracy and speed (58%), indicating that prosody, despite being recognized as a core component of fluency, remains largely neglected in reading fluency assessment. Second, although three out of the four studies in a local context show a strong correlation (Lorenza et al., 2022; Reflinda, 2022; Saputra et al., 2023), research conducted at the tertiary level, that is, in university or higher-education

settings, remains limited. Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between EFL students' reading fluency and reading comprehension by involving students from the English Education Department. This research is expected to address the aforementioned gaps. Furthermore, as future English teachers, students can use this research as a practical basis for designing reading instruction in actual teaching. In addition, it is hoped that this study can raise awareness of reading fluency.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

The research question of this study is "Is there any significant correlation between EFL students' reading fluency and comprehension?"

1.3 Operational Definitions

1.3.1 EFL Students

EFL students are students who reside in regions where it is not the primary means of communication. In this study, EFL students specifically refer to fifth-semester students of the English Education Department.

1.3.2 Reading Fluency

Reading fluency refers to the ability to read quickly, accurately, and expressively. In this study, it is used to indicate the ability of EFL students to correctly recognize English words and read a passage that matches their level aloud with appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression.

1.3.3 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the process of understanding written ideas through thoughtful interpretation and interaction with the text. In this study, it refers to the EFL students' activity of understanding the provided passage, followed by a set of questions, each consisting of four multiple-choice options with one correct answer.

1.4 Aim of the Study

This research aims to investigate the relationship between EFL students' reading fluency and comprehension.

1.5 Significances of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This study is conducted with the intention of increasing awareness of reading fluency and enriching the information about the relationship between fluency and comprehension in L2 setting.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

The substance of this study can be used by students of the English Education Department as candidates of English teachers to design reading instruction.

1.5.3 Empirical Significance

This study provides more reliable and effective assessments by using the Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM) and the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS) for fluency, in conjunction with the Multiple-Choice Test for comprehension. It intended to furnish empirical evidence regarding the relationship between fluency and comprehension in EFL learners.