

ORAL READING FLUENCY AMONG ESL LEARNERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ACROSS PUNJAB: AN AREA-WISE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Mariya Ghani^{*1}, Maria Fatima Dogar²

^{*1}BS Scholar , DELTL, University of the Punjab, Lahore

²Lecturer, DELTL, University of the Punjab, Lahore

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Corresponding Author: *

Maria Fatima Dogar

Abstract

There is no large-scale theoretical or pragmatic research on oral reading fluency. ESL learners face reading fluency challenges that affect their personal and academic lives, damaging their confidence and self-esteem but often neglected. Extensive research is needed to identify the factors affecting reading fluency, particularly in Pakistan. Early screening and evaluation of reading challenges can prevent consequences related to academic achievement. An Extensive quantitative study was conducted in public schools to explore teaching practices to enhance reading fluency. The extensive study of 1826 high school students (boys and girls) in two districts, Narowal (Girls=62) and Lahore (Girls & boys=1764), Punjab, Pakistan, was assessed using oral reading fluency (ORF) norms by measuring Speed as WPM and accuracy as WCPM. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. The adequate fluency range for grade 6 ESL learners is 67-177 WCPM, and the average fluency is 127. About 90% of learners fall at or below the 10th percentile in contrast to grade 6 ORF norms. The results suggest that the lack of formal reading instruction has contributed to the low ORF scores observed among ESL learners in Pakistan, indicating that reading fluency is neglected in public schools, and only grammar and translation are focused. This study highlights the importance of oral reading fluency and helps bring the attention of educators and stakeholders to implement targeted interventions, identify gaps, and assess progress over time.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, reading fluency is a fundamental and imperative skill for academic success in L1 and L2 contexts. Fluency is reading text with comprehension, accuracy, speed, and expression. Learning to read is a basic target during elementary school. Accuracy, speed, and expressiveness are elements of oral reading fluency (Rodrigues et al., 2022). Khalid and Iqbal (2021) state that learners who do not possess excellent reading habits face difficulties both culturally and in academic settings. Another study was conducted and found that oral reading fluency is ignored in all ESL learning countries, including Pakistan. The focus is only on memorisation, translation and grammar activities, vocabulary learning, comprehension questions and essays, etc (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). The multiple factors contributing to the required fluency have remained the subject of a present debate in second language (L2) research (Vu et al., 2024). Word-by-word reading, poor phrasing, and lack of expression all damage students' capacity to understand the text (Buck & Torgesen, 2018). Evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP) showed that a large percentage of fourth graders tested could read correctly but not fluently (McKnight, 2020).

In Pakistan, students face reading issues, and teachers neglect reading fluency in English classrooms. According to Khalid and Iqbal (2021), the dropout rate in primary schools of Pakistan is 6% in urban areas and 17% in rural areas. Only 55% of Grade 5 ESL learners can read sentences from a Grade 2 English textbook (Khalid & Iqbal, 2021). Localised studies on oral reading fluency norms in the ESL context in Pakistan are lacking.

Only a few studies have been conducted on “ORF for learners reading in a second (or third) language in contrast to those for students reading in their L1 (Hulstijn, 1997; Spaul, 2015), but no ORF scores have been reported in Pakistan (Dogar et al., 2025). A study in Spain involved 117 Spanish EFL learners in primary and secondary schools. It developed a corpus of an estimated 6 hours of oral reading, containing 42230 words, and calculated WCPM to assess oral reading fluency. It identified 3522 pronunciation mistakes, e.g., omission, substitution, and insertion, indicating significant challenges in oral reading fluency among learners. The data found less interaction with English and inadequate practice in grapheme-phoneme associations. The findings demonstrate that word recognition and pronunciation can be important factors in weak oral reading fluency skills among EFL learners (Walsh, 2018). Additionally, in Japan, since 2011, “the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)” has decided to begin giving classroom activities based on TOEFL iBT scores, but learners' English levels were still low compared to other countries. To address these problems, another study was conducted with 25 private high school students in the third term (2017) to assess their oral reading skills. It used 100 easy and familiar sentences, including formulaic sequences (FSs) and non-formulaic sequences (NFSs) and 30 filler sentences for accurate results. This study aimed to assess whether learners read faster or better, which could enhance English learning and oral reading skills. The study has limitations as it controlled everything, but it still affected how participants comprehended the language; the results are only based on text and participants, and these results can't be compared to other schools and regions. As a result, further research is recommended (Nishimura, 2021).

Likewise, a study in Fujairah, UAE (2021) was conducted, based on the results over the past ten years (2010-2020), showing that learners in public high schools were taking extra time to comprehend unfamiliar words. The researcher confirmed, by focusing on the curriculum (2019), that reading fluency in public schools is neglected, but highly prioritised in private schools. More research is needed to find the impact of curriculum textbooks on oral reading fluency (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). Again, it is possible to see how previous studies agree with a study in Korea in 2024; another study on “oral reading fluency” included 76 3rd-year high school (12th grade) learners. The researcher divided learners into two groups of 38, with similar English skill levels. The study found no difference in WCPM between lower and higher English proficiency. However, when follow-up comprehension questions were asked, higher English-proficient readers performed better. This study showed that some students focused on reading with speed without comprehending the text. Whereas “more proficient learners were better at both reading and understanding text. Furthermore, this study showed that textbook passages may not be useful for learners with lower English skills and assessing ORF scores can be useful in Korea. More research is needed to design appropriate methods of assessing oral reading fluency in SL (second language) learners (Ahn, 2024).”

Some researchers have also investigated “the relationship between oral reading fluency, word identification, and reading interpretation across secondary school EFL learners” in Mansehra, KPK (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Pakistan. It showed a positive relationship between “oral reading fluency and reading comprehension,” meaning more fluent readers tended to understand better, but word identification had a negative correlation with comprehension. This study had some limitations, as it may not apply to other regions, found correlations, not cause and effect, and didn't monitor development

over time. Only the secondary school level was evaluated (Sultana et al., 2024). The result showed that learner-centred reading plays an effective role in teaching and learning oral reading fluency (Lin, 2016). Allington's article, 'Fluency: The Neglected Goal', shows the importance of fluency in elementary school instruction and suggests enhancing the reader's rate and accuracy of oral reading, reminding teachers to focus on expressive reading (Morrison & Wilcox, 2020). Only a small-scale quantitative study was found, reporting ORF scores of Grade 7 ESL learners in Public schools in Pakistan, underscoring the neglected reading fluency skills. A similar one-minute test was adopted to measure WCPM of Grade 7 ESL learners. Non-native ESL learners read 25 WCPM less than native speakers. However, the standard ORF norms for Grade 7 ESL learners are about 97-112 WCPM. The results reported that about 90% of Grade 7 ESL learners fall within the 10th percentile when compared to Grade 7 ORF norms, with a lower mean score of 72 WCPM (Dogar et al., 2025). The previous study has a small sample and has limitations in comparing with other schools and regions. However, an extensive study is required to identify the reading fluency challenges among ESL learners in Pakistan. This study aims to investigate the impact of oral reading fluency among ESL learners in public schools in Pakistan who have diverse language backgrounds (Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki and Pashto, etc).

The main objective is to determine the words correct per minute (WCPM) of grade 6 ESL learners in public schools in Pakistan. And to find out the difference between WCPM (words correct per minute) of English as a second language learners in Pakistan and the oral reading fluency (ORF) norms. It will help to focus on the most abandoned fluency skill of students in public schools, illuminate the vital role of fluency in reading competence and academic performance, and explore the common practices for developing reading fluency in public schools by finding out causes and factors affecting oral reading fluency. Depending upon the difficulties above, the research questions are;

RQ1: What are the WCPM of grade 6 ESL learners in public schools of Pakistan?

RQ2: What are the differences between the WCPM of ESL learners in Pakistan and the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) norms?

Methodology

The quantitative research approach was used to evaluate the reading fluency status of Grade 6 ESL (English as a Second Language) learners enrolled in 28 public schools in two districts: Narowal and Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The study collected data from both girls' and boys' public schools. For data collection, formal approval was obtained from the administrations of all the schools. The researcher explained the objective of the study, and strict measures were taken to protect their privacy and ensure anonymity; the researcher personally conducted the test. A total of 28 public schools presenting Grade 6 students were included in the study. Stratified sampling was used, and the study area was divided into five equal regions of Lahore. Schools were selected randomly from 5 regions; in Narowal, the school was selected purposively, while students were selected randomly, providing a diverse and representative sample of learners.

Instrument

This study used progress monitoring assessments developed by Johns & Berglund, 2010. Two main types of reading passages designed for fluency assessment- narrative passages and informational passages align with the same grade level. But the authors note an apparent difference in difficulty. Based on the prior knowledge of Grade 6 students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in public schools in Pakistan, narrative passages were selected for the fluency assessment. This selection was dependent on the understanding that narrative texts, their known framework and comparatively familiar language, would be more appropriate and require less intellectual effort for ESL learners, ensuring a more valid representation of their fluency capabilities (Johns & Berglund, 2010).

Finding Grade-level Passage

The text difficulty of grade-level passages by Johns and Berglund (2010) was measured, and readability formulas by Fry (1968) were used for this purpose. Although the passage was designed for grade 6 native learners is not accurate for grade 6 “ESL (English as a second language) learners.” Experts decided that the grade 6 English textbook readability score would be calculated, and the content whose readability score is relevant to the grade 6 English textbook would be used. Spaul (2015) & Dogar et al., (2025), in their study, applied the exact method and compared the textbook readability scores with each graded passage readability score. Likewise, Jeon (2012) compared “the readability scores of the oral reading test and comprehension text while conducting research in Korea” (Dogar et al., 2025; Pretorius & Spaul, 2016).

Readability measures

As finding grade level passage was essential for valid assessment, to control necessary research variables, and to identify the difficulty level of grade-level students. The readability scores of both the Grade 6 textbook and grade-level passages were calculated using the same yardstick. The following table shows the readability measures of four grade-level passages found on an online website. “<https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>.”

Table 1 Readability Scores of Grade-Level Passages (Johns & Berglund, 2010).

Readability tests	Grade 4- Living China	Grade 5- in Paper route	Grade 6- Impressions of America	Grade 7- Imagination
Formula	79.1	73.7	69.3	62
Gunning Fog	7.8	9.2	9.2	9.9
<u>The Flesch-Kincaid</u> Grade level	4.9 5 th	5.9 6 th	5.9 6 th	7.4 7 th
<u>The Coleman-Liau Index</u> Grade level	7 7 th	8 8 th	8 8 th	9 9 th
<u>The SMOG Index</u> Grade level	6 th 5.8	6.8 7 th	6.8 7 th	7.4 7 th
<u>Automated Readability</u> <u>Index Grade Level</u>	3.7 4 th and 5 th	4.8 4 th and 5 th	4.8 4 th and 5 th	5.4 4 th and 5 th
Linsear Grade level	5.4 5 th	6.2 6 th	6.2 6 th	6.2 6 th
Readability consensus Grade-level	5 th grade	6 th grade	6 th grade	7 th grade

The table shows that Passage for Grade 4 has a readability consensus equivalent to Grade 5. In contrast, Passages 5 and 6 have a readability level corresponding to Grade 6, while Passage 7 is rated at Grade 7.

Table 2 Readability Scores of Grade 6 English textbook (chapter-wise) by Punjab Textbook Board.

	Ch 1	Ch 2	Ch 3	Ch 4	Ch 5	Ch 6	Ch 7	Ch 8	Ch 9	Ch 10	Ch 11	Ch 12
<u>Flesch Reading</u>	51	59	97	54	78	70	73	51	70	53	97	68
Gunning Fog	10.70	11.7	2.9	9.7	7.8	8.9	9.1	12.2	9.2	11.5	2.9	8.9

<u>The Flesch-Kincaid</u>	10.24 10 th	8.9 9 th	2.3 2 nd	9.9 10 th	5.9 6 th	7 7 th	6.4 6 th	9.7 10 th	6.8 7 th	9.7 10 th	1.2 1 st	6.9 7 th
Coleman-Liau Index	11.3 11 th	10.5 10 th	4.2 4 th	10.3 10 th	7.5 8 th	8.3 8 th	7.5 8 th	11 11 th	8.9 9 th	11.9 12 th	2.24 2 nd	9.4 9 th
<u>The SMOG Index</u>	10.5 10 th	9.2 9 th	2.9 3 rd	9.5 9 th	5.8 6 th	7.2 7 th	7.1 7 th	9.4 9 th	7.2 7 th	9.4 9 th	3.4 3 rd	6.9 7 th
<u>Automated Readability Index</u>	10.5 11 th	9.4 9 th	2.9 3 rd	9.10 10 th	6.4 6 th	6.9 7 th	6.2 6 th	9.4 9 th	7.3 7 th	10.6 11 th	1.14 1 st	7.3 7 th
<u>Linsear Write Formula</u>	69 11-12 th	74 10-11 th	105 3 rd	62 12 th	87 7 th	83 8 th	84 8 th	75 9 th	81 8 th	75 9 th	12 college	82 8 th
Readability consensus Grade-level	11 th	10 th	3 rd	11 th	7 th	8 th	8 th	10 th	8 th	10 th	5 th	8 th

The Grade 6 English Punjab Textbook Board was evaluated, showing variation in the readability scores among chapters, as Chapter 6 stood out and was excluded due to its greater difficulty when calculating the book's overall readability. When reference texts typically associated with Grade 5 & 6 were analysed, both recorded a readability score of around Grade 6. This enhances the relevance of the appropriate materials to the target audience in Pakistani public schools. A consultation in English Language Teaching (ELT applied linguistics) led to a decision that level 4 was the most suitable readability level for students in this context. A narrative passage was adopted to better align instructional text with students' proficiency level: designed for Grade 4 readers (Johns & Berglund, 2010) for Grade 6 learners in Pakistan. This method aligns with international practices in similar academic contexts.

Participants and context

This study was conducted with Grade 6 students enrolled in 28 public schools in two districts: Narowal (1) and Lahore (27), in Punjab, Pakistan. The participants ranged from 8 to 15 years old and had begun formal English language instruction in Grade 1, with five years of English literacy education at the time of data collection. The students represented typical male and female students in public school settings, with no demographic information, especially the socioeconomic status of the students' parents. However, according to statements by principals from all schools, almost 80% of the students come from lower-middle-class backgrounds, and their parents are labourers, uneducated and do not come to see their children's progress.

Sample Size and Linguistic Background

A total of 1,826 Grade 6 students from 28 public high schools in Lahore (27 schools) and Narowal (1 school) across Punjab took part in the study. Of these, 714 (39%) were boys, and 1,112 (61%) were girls. ESL learners aged 8 to 15 years who participated in this study were assessed on oral reading fluency.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Sex/Gender</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>714</i>	<i>39.0</i>
	<i>Girls</i>	<i>1112</i>	<i>61.0</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1826</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>Age</i>	<i>08-15 years</i>	<i>1826</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Their first languages (L1) varied broadly, including Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki and Pashto, featuring the multilingual nature of the study population and its linguistic diversity.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection framework was completed in one week. In each school, students were called individually to a quiet classroom where they read a passage. To ensure the integrity of the testing conditions, students were asked to return to their classrooms to avoid the sharing of details about the assessment. Before the assessment started, the researcher gave instructions to the students, telling them “the objective of the study was to reduce anxiety and help them feel relaxed.” Initially, some students seemed stressed, perceiving the test as part of their formal educational assessment. However, once it was confirmed that the assessment was only for research purposes and would not be linked to their grades, they felt more comfortable. Informed consent was received from all learners before they participated in the study. The procedure was standardised and followed a consistent set of steps for all participants to ensure uniformity and reliability. The steps were as follows:

1. Each learner was invited separately.
2. The researcher explained that the total words read per minute would be counted.
3. The printed paper of the reading passage was given to the student.
4. Learners were given one minute to observe the related picture and read the topic of the passage.
5. The student was asked to read the passage aloud, and the researcher set a stopwatch.
6. As the learner read, the researcher marked reading errors.
7. After one minute, the learner was asked to stop, and the researcher marked the final word read.
8. The total words read in one minute were counted, and the total number of errors was subtracted to measure the student's WCPM.

The same instructions were used at each of the 28 participating schools by the researcher, ensuring accuracy across the whole sample.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants, the research method was carefully designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and protection. Before fluency reading evaluations, all participants were completely aware of the nature and objective of the research. This included research goals, testing methods, the kind of data to be collected, and how the findings would be used. All information was given in Urdu to ensure full understanding. Participants were also given the chance to clarify any confusion before consenting to take part. No personal information was linked to the performance data, ensuring that individual participants could not be identified in any kind of analysis or resulting publications. Anonymity of responses supports ethical data management and develops a trusting environment for the participants. School administrations were involved during the research process, offering supervision and institutional support. As a result, the study followed both legal and institutional rules for human subjects, especially minors, and complied with all relevant moral values.

Data Analysis

The test scores were analysed in SPSS using a scatter plot, and averages (mean) were calculated. The average reading speed and WCPM are shown in Table 3 below.

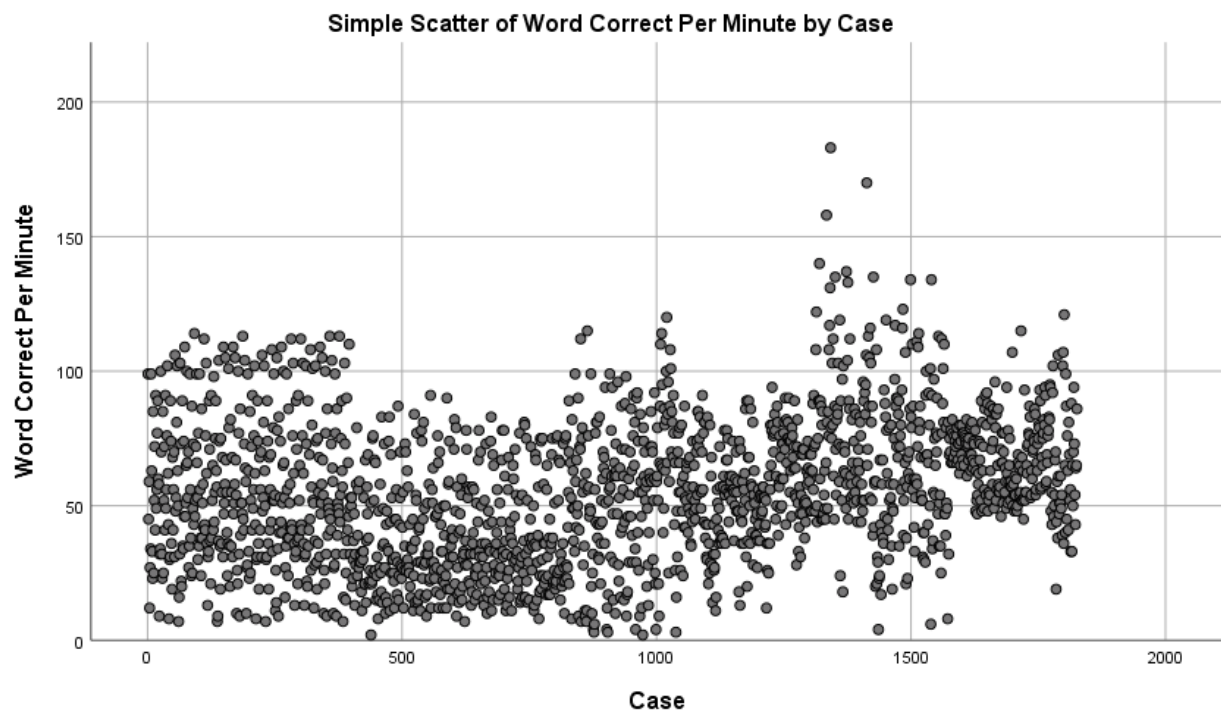


Figure 1 Scatter Plot of Grade 6 ESL learners' WCPM.

The scatter plot shows that most learners' scores lie between 50 and 100 WCPM (words per minute), and many fall below 50 WCPM. Only a few learners lie above 100. The average WCPM for Grade 6 ESL learners across all schools is 55; when comparing both districts, the mean score of schools in Lahore was 54 WCPM, but in Narowal it was 65 WCPM, which is considered an inappropriate measure across Punjab, and learners' performance matches Grade 2 and 3 native English speaker norms, not Grade 6. This shows a fluency deficiency among schools' second language learners (SLLs). However, such large mixed-ability classes can make any reading program difficult if implemented for this population.

Table 4

Word Correct Per Minute		
Schools	Mean	N
1	56.08	142
2	55.26	134
3	55.47	121
4	36.64	66
5	37.75	75
6	39.00	80
7	48.89	65
8	50.63	57

9	52.65	34
10	49.91	22
11	72.74	34
12	57.09	64
13	46.72	40
14	52.67	57
15	58.91	53
16	61.17	53
17	78.41	122
18	56.75	44
19	70.37	40
20	62.77	52
21	72.12	50
22	67.54	50
23	62.44	50
24	37.24	70
25	37.76	63
26	38.64	76
27	72.56	50
28	65.95	62 (Narowal)
Total	55.12	1826

N= Number of students assessed in each school

Mean = the average number of words correct per minute in each school. Schools are numbered 1 to 28. The table shows the oral reading fluency performance (WCPM) scores of learners across 28 public schools, with **1826 total of students**. The mean score represents the average number of words correctly read in 1 minute at each school. It identifies which schools have higher or lower average fluency levels. In the table, the columns show the number of students assessed in public schools. The results indicate variability in average reading fluency across schools. Schools **11, 17, 19, 21, and 27** are high performers with average WCPM above 70. Schools **4, 5, 6, 2, 4, and 25** are low performers with an average of 40 WCPM. They need to implement an intervention program. Schools **1, 2, 3, and 17** show strong data reliability due to the large number of learners. A small-scale study from school **28 Narowal** shows variation. The data show mixed results. The average WCPM is 55 across public schools in Punjab, indicating very poor oral reading fluency.

Schools with low mean scores may need reading support, trained teachers, and an appropriate curriculum. School 10 has a very small number of learners (N=22), not considered reliable. Overall, the comparison between Lahore and Narowal, no significant distinction in reading fluency among learners across Punjab.

Discussions and findings

The WCPM measurement method offers many advantages of ORF assessments. It can be applied easily and provides accurate and quick measurements. The data show reading fluency skills, the WCPM of Grade 6 ESL learners and the difference between the WCPM of ESL learners in public schools of Pakistan and ORF norms. Data show that the average reading fluency across 28 schools of 1826 ESL learners is 55 WCPM. Only five schools showed WCPM above 70, whereas six schools performed very poorly. Only 4 schools showed strong data reliability because of the large number of learners. The average difference

among Grade 6 ESL learners is 55 WCPM, and ESL ORF norms are 67-177. Most learners read below grade level. The findings showed that ORF is not prioritised in classrooms, similar to (Dogar et al., 2025). The current study measured the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) of Grade 6 ESL learners in public schools in Pakistan and found that their performance aligned with Grade 2-3 native English speakers. "The collective average reading rate recorded across 28 schools was 55 Words Correct per Minute (WCPM). Comparing both districts, the average scores were 65 WCPM in Narowal and 54 WCPM in Lahore district, which is lower than 72 WCPM in Sheikhupura reported by Dogar, Shah et al. (2025) for Grade 7 ESL learners. Consequently, this series of studies shows mixed results and a consistent pattern of low reading fluency scores across Punjab. Comparing mean scores across districts in Punjab, it is clear that schools' reading fluency skills are ignored, requiring intervention programs. However, these scores are significantly lower than the 3522 pronunciation mistakes of 42,230 words noted by Walsh (2018) for primary and secondary EFL learners in Spain. Aldhanhani and Abu-Ayyash (2021) observed that public schools do not prioritise reading fluency. These results reflect an inconsistent pattern seen across ESL and EFL contexts globally. Spaul (2015) observed that Grade 5 ESL learners in South Africa read at levels equivalent to Grade 2 native English speakers in the U.S, underscoring the gap in fluency between native and second-language readers. Recognising that applying native speaker benchmarks to ESL learners is inappropriate, Spaul proposed a localised ORF target of 90-100 WCPM for Grade 5. Similarly, Jimerson, Hong, Stage, and Gerber (2013) reported a mean score gap of 25 WCPM between native and non-native English readers (Jimerson et al., 2013). In light of these insights and considering both international findings and local linguistic contexts, this study proposes a standard benchmark of 127 average WCPM for Grade 6 ESL learners in Pakistan. This adjusted target acknowledges the challenges in L2 environments while setting a realistic but achievable goal. Based on this revised benchmark, the current average of 54 WCPM (Lahore) and 65 WCPM (Narowal) indicates that the sample group is approximately 72 WCPM below the desired level, indicating very poor reading fluency among ESL learners. It also clarifies that reading skills are neglected not only in early grades but also in Grade 6 and Grade 7 (Dogar et al., 2025), indicating a serious challenge. This research highlights the importance of oral reading fluency and teacher training programs, which help ESL learners improve their reading skills and support teachers and educators in integrating activities to enhance reading fluency. A large-scale study is required in other districts and provinces to report ORF scores among ESL learners across regions, as this research cannot be applied to other regions, as it supports identifying early reading fluency challenges. Further research will support educators and stakeholders to make policies, intervention programs, and to revise challenges related to grade-level curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

"The study presents the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) scores for sixth-grade students learning English as a second language in Punjab, Pakistan. The average Words Correct per Minute (WCPM) was found to be 55 for all participating schools, approximately 47 words fewer than international ORF standards and 25 words below the benchmark generally set for ESL learners, which would be 102-152." About 90% of learners fall in the 10th percentile in contrast to Grade 6 ORF norms. This indicates a serious deficiency in systematic Reading instruction. This trend aligns with results from other ESL contexts globally. Furthermore, the Grade 6 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore, exhibits unreliable levels of text challenges, making it challenging for learners to build fluent reading skills. The results recommend that the lack of formal reading instruction has contributed to the low ORF scores observed among ESL learners in Pakistan. This contributes to the argument made by Pretorius and Spaul, who link low ORF outcomes with minimal reading instruction and limited reading practice in schools. Similarly, (Dogar & Shah, 2024) reported the absence of systematic reading programs in Pakistani schools, an argument that also contributes to the validity of the current study's results. Based on these results, it is

recommended that a structured reading intervention be introduced to enhance students' oral reading fluency and the English textbook for Grade 6 in Punjab requires revision to ensure consistent and appropriate text complexity, especially in comparison to materials used in other districts within the province.

Recommendations

This large-scale study focused on Grade 6 students in public schools across Punjab, Pakistan. Based on its findings, it is strongly recommended that oral reading fluency (ORF) norms for ESL learners be formally established at both government and private school levels nationwide. Furthermore, comprehensive ORF development programs should be initiated. While this study does not claim to represent all public schools in Pakistan, it reasonably suggests that similar conditions may present elsewhere. A critical finding of the study is the inconsistency in the Grade 6 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board. Variations in text complexity present significant challenges to second language learners. That's why, it is required to revise and rewrite the textbook to align with appropriate readability standards. Additionally, textbook developers and curriculum planners should conduct a thorough readability assessment of all textbooks used in public schools to ensure the reading materials are pedagogically sound and linguistically appropriate for the target grade level. To effectively address the gaps in reading fluency and comprehension, evidence-based instructional strategies and targeted interventions must be incorporated into ESL curricula. Fluency tests must be conducted within comprehension evaluations to confirm a comprehensive understanding of students' reading abilities. Future research should continue to improving reading fluency and comprehension approaches. Particular attention should be given to exploring the influence of bilingual and multilingual educational contexts and evaluating the effectiveness of diverse instructional methods among different school environments.

Limitations

Despite the valuable understanding offered by the study, various limitations must be recognised. Firstly, comprehensive demographic data were not collected. While school principals estimated that over 80% of students came from lower-middle-class backgrounds and that most parents were illiterate and labourers, no formal data on parental education, income levels, or home literacy environments were available. This limited the ability to fully assess how socioeconomic factors influenced learners' reading development. Furthermore, the research was restricted to public schools in only two districts, Narowal and Lahore, which makes it complicated to generalise the results to students in other areas, private schools, or different educational contexts. Another limitation lies in the linguistic diversity of the participants. Students came from various first-language backgrounds (Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki, and Pashto). However, the study did not differentiate results based on students' L1, which may have influenced their English reading fluency. While this approach effectively measures fluency, it does not cover other essential aspects of reading, such as comprehension, vocabulary learning, or sustained reading capacity. The testing environment may also have influenced student performance. Although the purpose of the test was explained and efforts were made to put students at ease, the one-on-one method and the unfamiliar testing setting may have caused anxiety for some participants. The time limit was also a challenge; data were collected over one week, limiting the opportunity for repeated measures or follow-up evaluations to ensure consistency across all 28 schools. Lastly, as the study was cross-sectional, it does not provide a longitudinal perspective on the development of reading fluency over time. Further study would be necessary to explore how students' skills evolve and what factors support sustained improvement in reading proficiency.

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