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Investigating relationships between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency through AI-driven tool Reading Progress

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency components accuracy and rate among 113 Vietnamese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) university students using the artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tool Microsoft Reading Progress. Over 14 weeks, students engaged in weekly oral reading and comprehension tasks using integrated Microsoft Teams features. Fluency metrics (accuracy and rate) and comprehension scores were automatically collected and analyzed using Pearson correlation. The results revealed weak but statistically significant positive correlations between reading comprehension and accuracy ($r=.257$, $p<.01$), and between comprehension and rate ($r=.289$, $p<.01$), suggesting that improvements in fluency modestly support comprehension. A strong correlation between accuracy and rate ($r=.765$, $p<.01$) was also observed. The study highlights the effectiveness of Reading Progress in capturing fluency data and promoting self-paced improvement. However, limitations such as the short duration, localized sample, and constraints of accent recognition in AI-based speech analysis affect the generalizability and validity of results. The findings support the pedagogical integration of AI tools in EFL instruction while calling for future research with larger samples, extended timelines, and diversified digital tools to further validate and expand on these results.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies highlight the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in language education Alshriedeh and Mohammed [1] found that AI programs significantly enhance reading skills among English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) students. Similarly, An *et al*. [2] reported that both junior and senior high school students exhibit positive behavioral intentions toward using AI in second language learning. In Vietnam, English majors have already utilized AI tools for language learning and hold favorable attitudes toward their application, though concerns about impacts on critical thinking and future careers persist [3]. Moulieswaran and Kumar [4] observed that most English as a second language learners perceive AI-powered tools positively, despite issues with the quality of some applications. Teachers also view AI as beneficial in EFL classrooms, noting its potential to assist both teaching and learning processes [5]. Overall, AI technologies are increasingly being integrated into language education, offering personalized learning experiences and adaptive feedback [6].

Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from text, an essential skill in EFL. It involves cognitive processes that allow learners to decode and understand text, fostering language acquisition, and academic success [7]. Effective reading comprehension supports learners in building vocabulary, improving grammatical accuracy, and enhancing overall language proficiency [8]. In EFL contexts, comprehension not only aids linguistic competence but also serves as a bridge to achieving academic and professional goals [9]. The ability to comprehend text relies on a combination of cognitive and linguistic factors. Cognitive factors include working memory, prior knowledge, and metacognitive strategies, which influence how effectively learners process and retain textual information [10]. Linguistic factors encompass vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and syntactic awareness, all of which are integral to interpreting meaning in a second language [11]. Limited vocabulary and insufficient grammatical understanding often hinder comprehension among EFL learners [12]. Studies have highlighted the role of technology, such as AI-powered tools, in scaffolding these factors by providing individualized feedback and adaptive learning pathways [13], [14].

Oral reading fluency (ORF) refers to the ability to read text aloud accurately, at an appropriate rate, and with proper expression. These components accuracy, rate, and expression are critical indicators of fluency and directly influence comprehension [15]. Accuracy involves correct word recognition, which minimizes disruptions in understanding [16]. Reading rate reflects the speed at which text is processed and is associated with efficient cognitive functioning [8]. Expression, or prosody, contributes to the interpretive and emotional aspects of reading, aiding deeper comprehension [17]. Fluent oral reading bridges decoding and comprehension by enabling readers to focus on constructing meaning rather than struggling with word recognition. Research suggests a strong correlation between ORF and comprehension, emphasizing that fluency development enhances text understanding [18]. Tools like Microsoft Reading Progress facilitate fluency by enabling repeated reading and providing real-time feedback, which improves accuracy and prosody over time [19]. These features align with findings that technology-enhanced interventions significantly benefit EFL learners' fluency and comprehension outcomes [11].

Understanding the interplay between reading comprehension and specific fluency components accuracy, rate, and expression is crucial for developing effective instructional strategies. Accuracy ensures correct word recognition, rate reflects the speed of reading, and expression involves intonation and punctuation interpretation [20]. Each component contributes to overall reading proficiency. Despite their importance, expression and its influence on comprehension remain underexplored. The ability to read expressively, navigating punctuation and avoiding monotone delivery, significantly affects comprehension by helping readers convey and internalize meaning [21]. AI-powered tools like reading progress are well-equipped to analyze these nuanced elements, offering insights into their role in comprehension. Yen [22] emphasizes the need for tools that assess both fluency and silent reading skills to develop a holistic understanding of reading abilities. Although significant research has been conducted on the relationship between reading comprehension and fluency, there is limited exploration of how AI-powered tools can evaluate and enhance this relationship. Most existing studies focus on traditional assessment methods or isolated skill improvement [23], [24]. In the Vietnamese EFL context, where technological integration is relatively nascent, the role of tools like Reading Progress in assessing and fostering these skills remains underexplored [3].

Numerous studies have established a strong correlation between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency. Fluency components, such as accuracy, rate, and prosody, directly influence a reader's ability to construct meaning from text [8], [15]. Pey *et al*. [8] demonstrated that ESL learners who exhibited higher fluency rates were more adept at comprehending complex texts, underscoring the reciprocal nature of these skills. Paige [18] highlighted that fluency supports automaticity in word recognition, freeing cognitive resources for comprehension. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating fluency-focused practices to enhance comprehension outcomes in EFL learning.

AI-powered tools have emerged as transformative solutions for evaluating and enhancing reading skills. Microsoft Reading Progress, in particular, automates the assessment of fluency components, offering detailed feedback on accuracy, rate, and expression [17], [25]. Alahmadi [26] found that using Reading Progress significantly improved Saudi EFL learners' oral reading performance, suggesting its efficacy in fostering both fluency and comprehension. These tools leverage advanced speech recognition technology to provide real-time, personalized feedback, enabling learners to address specific challenges independently [19]. Additionally, they facilitate repeated reading practices, which are proven to enhance fluency and comprehension [11], [14]. While the advantages of AI tools are evident, challenges persist. Speech recognition algorithms may struggle with accents and pronunciation variations, potentially leading to inaccurate assessments [13]. Accessibility issues, particularly in under-resourced regions, further complicate the integration of such technologies in educational settings [27]. Despite these limitations, the growing body of research underscores the potential of AI tools to revolutionize language learning and assessment.

Research on the application of AI tools in Vietnamese EFL contexts remains limited. While studies such as Thuan [28] and Van *et al*. [29] have explored technology-enhanced learning in Vietnam, few have specifically examined the use of AI-powered tools like Reading Progress. This gap is particularly significant given the unique linguistic and cultural challenges faced by Vietnamese EFL learners, including tonal pronunciation and syntactic differences from English [28]. Additionally, most existing studies focus on global or regional contexts, with limited attention to the scalability and accessibility of AI tools in Vietnamese educational settings. Jarrah [14] emphasized the need for localized research to address these challenges, advocating for studies that explore the integration of AI tools in under-resourced environments. Addressing these gaps could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of AI technologies in enhancing reading fluency and comprehension for Vietnamese learners.

This study aims to address the aforementioned gaps by investigating the relationship between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency through an AI-driven tool for Reading Progress. Building on existing research, this study seeks to answer the question "What is the relationship between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency?" By answering this research question, the study holds significant implications. The findings will provide educators with actionable insights into the relationship between fluency and comprehension, and contribute to both academic literature and practical applications, supporting the advancement of language education in EFL contexts.

2. METHOD

2.1. Context and participants

The study was conducted in the academic year 2024-2025 in a provincial university in the north of Vietnam. The participants were 113 students majoring in primary education learning in three different English courses: i) general English 1 (40 students), ii) general English 3 (40 students), and iii) English for primary education (33 students) as shown in Table 1. Among the students, there were 9 males and 104 females. Right before the start of the course, the students were introduced to the research project details and informed of the purpose in the first week's face-to-face session in class. The students were invited and encouraged to join the study voluntarily. As a result, all 113 students from the course agreed to participate in the research. At the university, English was trained as a compulsory foreign language for all students. The English courses lasted 15 weeks with 2 in-class sessions per week. For general English courses, the Smart Choice third edition series by Oxford was used as the main textbook. The course book for English for primary education is for internal use only book and consists of 5 chapters covering the theoretical background of primary education in Vietnam and practical instruction of teaching subjects for primary students in English. At the institution, Microsoft Teams was employed as a supportive learning and teaching platform.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (N=113)

Categories		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	9	8
	Female	104	92
Courses	General English 1	40	35.4
	General English 3	40	35.4
	English for primary education	33	29.2

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams is an AI-powered tool designed to evaluate key aspects of reading comprehension and fluency [30], [31]. It employs advanced speech recognition technology to measure fluency components, including accuracy, reading rate, and expression, consisting of punctuation errors and monotone [32], [33]. These metrics are critical for assessing a learner's overall reading proficiency. Accuracy, calculated as the percentage of correct words read, reflects a learner's decoding and word recognition abilities (see Figure 1). The reading rate, measured in words per minute, highlights the efficiency of text processing. Punctuation errors, tracked as a count, provide insights into learners' prosody and attention to textual details.

The process of integrating the reading assignments into Reading Progress was carried out over a 14-week period, during which students engaged with 14 short moral stories (see Table 2). These stories were carefully selected from internet sources and prepared to suit the learners' level. The readings varied in length, ranging from 60 words ("The fox and the grapes") to 181 words ("Tony the clever cowboy"), ensuring both accessibility and gradual challenge across the weeks. On average, each story contained around

115-120 words, providing manageable input for EFL learners while allowing consistent practice in reading fluency and comprehension. The stories represented a mixture of classic fables (The lion and the mouse, the hare and the tortoise, and the ugly duckling) and less widely known tales (Lazy John and Tony the clever cowboy), offering learners both familiarity and novelty. This balance was intended to maintain students' interest and motivation while also diversifying their exposure to narrative structures, moral lessons, and vocabulary.

Figure 1. AI analysis of fluency elements along with metrics of a reading assignment

Table 2. List of used stories

Week	Story	Number of words
1	The lion and the mouse	133
2	The hare and the tortoise	74
3	The fog and the bone	84
4	The thirsty crow	74
5	Lazy John	75
6	The fox and the grapes	60
7	The ant and the grasshopper	140
8	The boy who cried wolf	125
9	The ugly duckling	160
10	The lion and the poor slave	139
11	The elephant and the ants	98
12	Tony the clever cowboy	181
13	Wolf and his shadow	128
14	Roses and the butterfly	131

As for reading comprehension of the stories, Reading Progress offers features to automatically generate comprehension questions based on these passages, which are automatically built on Microsoft Forms (see Figure 2). After setting up the oral reading fluency, the system leads to the establishment of comprehension items for the text. For this study, all the reading texts are accompanied by five multiple-choice questions with a 10-point scale. The reading comprehension comes right after the completion of oral reading on the system. The students click on the questions, choose the correct answer, and submit the forms. The results of the reading comprehension are automatically saved on the system. Then, the scores of each reading passage are downloaded and compiled in an Excel file for data analysis.

To serve the purpose of the study, after the application, all statistics regarding students' accuracy, rate, and reading comprehension results of reading texts were downloaded from the system in Microsoft Teams and prepared in an Excel file. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for students' reading comprehension, reading accuracy, and reading rate, based on data collected from the students. The mean score for reading comprehension was 9.0202, with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.49261. This indicates that the majority of students achieved high and consistent comprehension scores, suggesting a generally strong and uniform level of reading comprehension across the sample. In terms of reading fluency, the mean accuracy score was 76.5670 with a standard deviation of 8.54123. This result reflects a moderate level of accuracy in reading, with some variation among students, implying that while many students were able to read words correctly, a subset demonstrated either significantly higher or lower performance. The reading rate, measured by the number of words read per minute, had a mean of 81.2035 and a standard deviation of 13.07841.

This study utilizes a descriptive correlational design, which provides static pictures of situations as well as establishes the relationship between different variables [34]. To examine relationships between reading comprehension and fluency components such as accuracy, rate, and punctuation errors, this study employs Pearson correlation analysis. This statistical method also explores interconnections among the fluency components, providing insights into how these elements interact. Significance levels of 0.05 and 0.01 are applied to determine the strength and reliability of the observed relationships, ensuring robust and meaningful conclusions about the interplay between fluency and comprehension. The data collection procedure begins with students completing a reading task in Reading Progress. The AI-powered system evaluates comprehension and fluency components, including accuracy and rate. Once the assessment is complete, the data is exported for detailed analysis. To ensure the validity of the reading comprehension questions and the results of fluency analysis, the researcher collaborated with colleagues who volunteered weekly in checking the questions and listening to the submitted audios of students in the system.

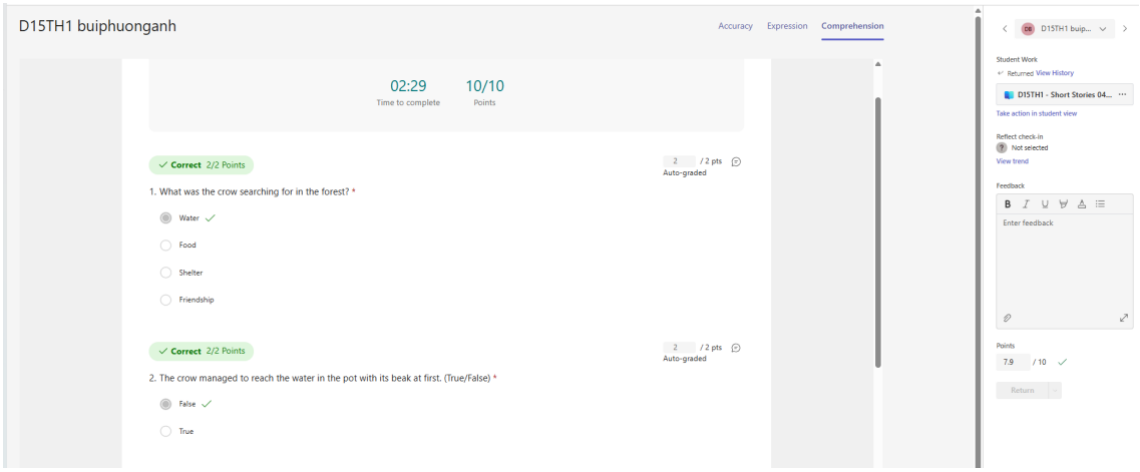

Figure 2. Reading comprehension results

Table 3. Statistical results of students' accuracy, rate, and reading comprehension

Categories	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Comprehension	9.0202	.49261	113
Accuracy	76.5670	8.54123	113
Rate	81.2035	13.07841	113

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 displays the results of the Pearson correlation test, examining the relationships between students' reading comprehension, reading accuracy, and reading rate. The correlation coefficients reveal statistically significant relationships among all three variables at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). It can be seen that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between comprehension and accuracy ($r=.257$, $p<.01$), indicating a weak but meaningful relationship. This suggests that students who demonstrated higher reading accuracy tended to perform slightly better in reading comprehension. Additionally, reading rate was also positively and significantly correlated with comprehension ($r=.289$, $p<.01$). Although the strength of this correlation is also weak, it implies that students who read at a faster rate generally showed better comprehension.

Table 4. The Pearson correlation test results

	Comprehension	Accuracy	Rate
Comprehension	1		
Accuracy	.257**	1	
Rate	.289**	.765**	1

**. correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The findings of this study provide insightful evidence into the nuanced relationship between reading comprehension and oral reading fluency among Vietnamese EFL students utilizing the AI-driven tool

Microsoft Reading Progress. Notably, statistically significant though weak correlations were identified between reading comprehension and both reading accuracy (r=.257, p<.01) and reading rate (r=.289, p<.01). These findings suggest that while increased fluency contributes positively to comprehension, the impact may not be as strong or straightforward in this specific learner population. Such weak yet significant relationships underscore the complexity of reading as a cognitive-linguistic process and invite further consideration of learner variables, text complexity, and task design. The significance of these correlations aligns with earlier findings by Klauda and Guthrie [20], who reported that each component of fluency contributes differently to reading comprehension.

Similarly, Pey *et al*. [8] emphasized the importance of both reading rate and accuracy in supporting ESL learners' comprehension. The results of this study reinforce the idea that fluency and comprehension are mutually supportive, with rate and accuracy enhancing readers' ability to process text efficiently and understand content more effectively. However, the relatively low correlation values in this study contrast with those reported in some previous works that identified stronger relationships [9], [18], possibly due to contextual differences in learner proficiency levels, instructional design, or the nature of the AI tool used. A particularly strong correlation was observed between reading rate and accuracy (r=.765, p<.01), highlighting a high degree of interdependence between these two fluency components. This supports the notion that readers who recognize words accurately are also more likely to read at a faster pace. As Hudson *et al*. [23] and Ja'afar *et al*. [16] point out, reading rate and accuracy often develop simultaneously, and improvement in one area typically reinforces the other. The strong correlation in this study affirms that Reading Progress can effectively capture this relationship through its speech analysis metrics.

The study also offers a valuable contribution to the literature by demonstrating the utility of Reading Progress in evaluating reading performance in a Vietnamese EFL context. The integration of this AI-based tool enables accurate and automatic tracking of fluency, accuracy, and speed metrics, as well as seamless connection to comprehension tasks through Microsoft Forms. The tool's design enabled the researchers to collect granular data over 14 weeks, facilitating both formative and summative assessments. This aligns with findings from Alahmadi [26], who demonstrated that Reading Progress significantly enhanced EFL learners' oral reading fluency and comprehension through repeated practice and immediate feedback. Importantly, Reading Progress proved effective in reducing teacher workload while increasing diagnostic precision. It allowed for the large-scale analysis of individual reading performances and comprehension scores without extensive manual grading. As Hasumi and Chiu [12] and Burns [17] note, such AI tools support personalized instruction and encourage learner autonomy through self-monitoring and iterative improvement. This study affirms those benefits, particularly in under-resourced Vietnamese classrooms where personalized support is often constrained by class size and time limitations.

4. CONCLUSION

The AI-powered Reading Progress tool has provided valuable insight into the relationship between oral reading fluency and comprehension among Vietnamese EFL students. By integrating automated assessments of accuracy, reading rate, and punctuation into university English instruction, the study highlights how these components contribute to comprehension. Despite offering practical implications, several limitations affect the reliability and broader application of the findings. The relatively small and homogenous sample (113 students, 92% female) from a single Vietnamese university limits statistical power and generalizability. Larger, more diverse samples across institutions and regions would yield more robust and transferable findings. The 14-week duration may also be insufficient to capture meaningful long-term development in reading fluency and comprehension. Reading skills require extended, iterative practice, and longer studies could better reflect lasting effects. Additionally, the exclusive use of Reading Progress presents limitations. While it effectively tracks accuracy and rate, its ability to assess prosody, such as expression and intonation is limited. Crucial fluency elements like stress and natural phrasing may be missed. Moreover, the tool's speech recognition is optimized for standard English, which may misinterpret Vietnamese-accented English and lead to underestimations of fluency and comprehension. Nonetheless, the study has strong pedagogical implications. It suggests that EFL instruction should explicitly incorporate fluency training, targeting not only speed and accuracy but also expressiveness. Tools like Reading Progress can support this through immediate feedback and repeated practice. However, AI assessments should be paired with teacher-led evaluation, especially for aspects like prosody and silent comprehension. Future research should extend over longer periods, compare different AI tools, and consider both oral and silent reading modes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of reading development in EFL contexts.

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Pham Duc Thuan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pham Thi Tam		✓		✓		✓			✓	✓		✓		

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been compiled with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [PDT] upon reasonable request.

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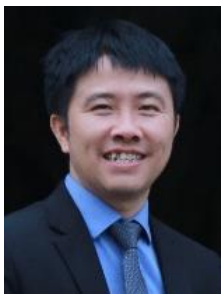
BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS



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