



Primary School English Teachers' Knowledge and Classroom Implementation of Oral Reading Fluency Instruction: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract. Oral reading fluency is a critical component of early literacy because it bridges decoding and reading comprehension. Despite its importance, fluency instruction remains one of the least emphasized aspects of early English reading instruction, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) primary classrooms. This study examined primary school English teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and the factors influencing its classroom implementation. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed involving 20 English teachers from three purposively selected primary schools. Data were collected through structured classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while interview data were analyzed thematically and integrated with the quantitative findings. The findings revealed that teachers possessed only partial knowledge of oral reading fluency, demonstrating stronger understanding of teacher modeling and reading rate than guided oral reading and prosody instruction. Classroom observations similarly showed limited implementation of evidence-based fluency strategies. Teachers identified insufficient pre-service preparation, limited professional development, large class sizes, and inadequate instructional resources as major barriers to effective fluency instruction. These findings highlight the need for stronger teacher preparation and professional development to support comprehensive oral reading fluency instruction in early English literacy classrooms.

Keywords: Early Literacy; EFL Classrooms; Oral Reading Fluency; Primary School Teachers; Teacher Professional Development.

1. BACKGROUND

Reading is widely recognized as a foundational literacy skill that shapes children's academic development during the first years of primary education (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). For beginning readers, learning to read is not merely the acquisition of word recognition skills but the process through which they learn to construct meaning from written language (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). As children progress from decoding individual letters and words to understanding connected text, reading becomes the foundation for vocabulary development, language acquisition, and learning across subject areas (Al Janaideh et al., 2020). Consequently, establishing effective reading instruction during the early grades is essential, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where exposure to English outside the classroom is often limited (De Wilde et al., 2020; Tsang, 2023).

The teacher plays a particularly critical role in fostering oral reading fluency during the early stages of literacy development (Grønli et al., 2026). Unlike other components of reading that rely heavily on explicit rules, fluency develops through repeated exposure to authentic models of expressive reading and continuous guided practice (Cockerill et al., 2023; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Young learners learn not only from direct instruction but also by observing

how teachers demonstrate appropriate pronunciation, articulation, pacing, phrasing, and intonation while reading aloud (Rasinski & Smith, 2018; Cockerill et al., 2023). Through teacher modeling, learners gradually internalize fluent reading behaviors and become better able to read independently with confidence and comprehension (Grønli et al., 2026). Therefore, teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and their ability to model fluent reading constitute essential elements of effective early literacy pedagogy (Hikida et al., 2019)

Despite its recognized importance, oral reading fluency remains one of the most frequently overlooked and inconsistently implemented components of early literacy instruction (Suárez et al., 2018). Whereas phonemic awareness and phonics are comparatively concrete, systematic, and rule-governed, fluency instruction requires teachers to integrate multiple instructional elements simultaneously, model proficient reading behaviors themselves, continuously monitor students' oral performance, and provide individualized, immediate feedback (Grønli et al., 2026). These instructional demands require sophisticated pedagogical knowledge and classroom expertise that many teachers may not have fully developed during pre-service teacher education (Hikida et al., 2019). Furthermore, classroom realities such as limited instructional time, large class sizes, varying learner proficiency, curriculum expectations, and insufficient professional development may further constrain teachers' ability to implement evidence-based fluency instruction consistently (Suárez et al., 2018; Cockerill et al., 2023).

Although previous research has extensively examined early literacy instruction and the development of foundational reading skills, considerably less attention has been devoted to teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and the contextual factors influencing its classroom implementation, particularly in primary school EFL settings (Luo et al., 2020). Understanding both teachers' instructional knowledge and the challenges they encounter is essential for strengthening early reading pedagogy and improving learners' literacy outcomes (Zhao et al., 2016). Accordingly, the present study focuses specifically on oral reading fluency to examine both the extent of primary school English teachers' knowledge of fluency instruction and the classroom and contextual factors that influence whether such knowledge is translated into instructional practice. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent are primary school English teachers knowledgeable about teaching oral reading fluency? (2) What factors contribute to teachers' difficulties in implementing oral reading fluency instruction strategies in the classroom?

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on early literacy instruction by providing a clearer understanding of teachers' preparedness to teach oral reading

fluency and the contextual barriers affecting its implementation. Furthermore, the results are intended to inform both pre-service teacher education curricula and in-service professional development programs seeking to strengthen fluency instruction as one of the most persistently under-emphasized components of early grade reading.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills developed during the early years of schooling because it enables learners to access information, construct meaning from written texts, and participate successfully in subsequent academic learning. During the initial stages of literacy development, children are expected to progress from recognizing letters and decoding individual words to reading connected text fluently and meaningfully. This transition is particularly important because successful reading requires more than accurate word recognition; learners must also read with sufficient automaticity and appropriate expression to comprehend what they read. Consequently, oral reading fluency has been widely recognized as a critical component of early literacy, functioning as a bridge between decoding and reading comprehension (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001). Learners who continue to devote substantial cognitive effort to decoding individual words often have fewer cognitive resources available for comprehension, whereas fluent readers are better able to focus on constructing meaning from text.

Oral reading fluency is generally understood as the ability to read connected text accurately, at an appropriate pace, and with meaningful expression (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010). These dimensions—accuracy, automaticity, and prosody—are interdependent and together support successful reading comprehension (Paige, Rasinski, Magpuri-Lavell, & Smith, 2014). Reading accurately without sufficient automaticity may result in slow and effortful reading, while reading rapidly without appropriate phrasing and intonation may indicate limited comprehension of the text. Therefore, oral reading fluency should not be interpreted simply as reading quickly; rather, it represents the coordinated integration of multiple reading processes that enable readers to comprehend written language efficiently. Because of this multidimensional nature, oral reading fluency has become an essential instructional goal in the early grades and is considered a prerequisite for successful literacy development.

The development of oral reading fluency requires explicit and systematic instruction rather than relying solely on learners' independent reading experiences (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Effective fluency instruction extends beyond asking students to read aloud in class and instead

involves instructional practices specifically designed to develop accuracy, automaticity, and prosody simultaneously. Such practices include teacher modeling of fluent reading, repeated oral reading, guided oral reading accompanied by immediate corrective feedback, and explicit attention to reading rate, accuracy, and expressive reading (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002). Through teacher modeling, learners are provided with examples of appropriate pronunciation, pacing, phrasing, and intonation that can be imitated during subsequent reading activities. Repeated reading provides opportunities for learners to improve accuracy and automaticity through multiple readings of the same text, while guided oral reading enables teachers to provide individualized support and corrective feedback during the reading process. Explicit attention to prosody further helps learners understand how meaningful phrasing and expression contribute to comprehension. Collectively, these instructional practices have consistently been identified as effective approaches for developing oral reading fluency in beginning readers.

Although evidence supporting effective fluency instruction is well established, previous studies have suggested that oral reading fluency remains one of the least emphasized components of early reading instruction. Compared with phonemic awareness and phonics, which are generally supported by explicit instructional sequences and well-defined teaching procedures, oral reading fluency requires teachers to integrate multiple instructional elements simultaneously while responding to learners' individual reading performance in real time. As a result, fluency instruction demands a level of pedagogical knowledge that extends beyond understanding reading theory alone (Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). Teachers must understand the multidimensional nature of oral reading fluency as well as possess practical knowledge of how to model fluent reading, organize guided reading activities, provide effective feedback, and develop learners' expressive reading. Without such pedagogical knowledge, classroom instruction may focus primarily on observable aspects of reading, such as speed, while overlooking equally important dimensions including prosody and individualized guidance.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that teachers' pedagogical knowledge plays a significant role in determining the quality of classroom instruction (Piasta et al., 2009). Teachers who possess a comprehensive understanding of literacy development are generally more likely to implement evidence-based instructional practices than those with limited pedagogical preparation. However, studies investigating teachers' understanding of oral reading fluency have reported that many continue to conceptualize fluency primarily as reading speed rather than as an integration of accuracy, automaticity, and prosody (Luo, Main, Lock, Joshi, & Zhong, 2020). Similarly, classroom observation studies have found that instructional

practices such as repeated reading, guided oral reading, and explicit prosody instruction are implemented less consistently than teacher-led reading activities. These findings suggest that gaps may exist between teachers' conceptual understanding of oral reading fluency and their actual classroom practices.

In addition to teachers' pedagogical knowledge, the implementation of oral reading fluency instruction is influenced by various contextual factors. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, insufficient access to developmentally appropriate reading materials, and limited professional development opportunities may reduce teachers' ability to implement evidence-based fluency instruction effectively (Luo et al., 2020). Such constraints are particularly evident in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where teachers are often expected to address multiple language skills within limited instructional time. Consequently, oral reading fluency may receive less explicit instructional attention than other aspects of language learning despite its importance for reading development.

Overall, previous studies have established the importance of oral reading fluency for early literacy development and have identified instructional practices that effectively support fluent reading. Existing research has also highlighted the influence of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and classroom contexts on literacy instruction. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have examined teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency together with the contextual factors influencing its classroom implementation, particularly in primary EFL settings (Luo et al., 2020). Addressing these two aspects simultaneously is essential for understanding why evidence-based fluency instruction is not consistently implemented in classrooms and for informing teacher education and professional development programs designed to strengthen early English literacy instruction.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated during the interpretation stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of primary school English teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and the factors influencing its implementation in classroom practice. Quantitative data were gathered through structured classroom observations to examine the extent to which evidence-based oral reading fluency instructional strategies were implemented during English lessons. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore teachers'

conceptual understanding of oral reading fluency and to explain the contextual factors underlying the classroom practices observed.

The study was conducted in three primary schools selected through purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). The schools were chosen because they offered English instruction in the lower primary grades and employed English teachers who were directly responsible for teaching beginning readers. These shared characteristics provided an appropriate context for investigating oral reading fluency instruction in early English literacy classrooms. A total of twenty English teachers (N = 20) participated in the study. Participants were purposively selected (Etikan et al., 2016) because they had direct responsibility for teaching reading to young learners and therefore possessed recent and relevant experience in implementing early English reading instruction, including oral reading fluency instruction.

Two research instruments were employed. The first was a structured classroom observation checklist developed based on evidence-based components of oral reading fluency instruction (Rasinski & Cheesman Smith, 2018; Grønli et al., 2026). The checklist examined five instructional practices: (1) teacher modeling of fluent reading, (2) repeated oral reading practice, (3) guided oral reading accompanied by individualized corrective feedback, (4) explicit attention to reading accuracy and reading rate, and (5) explicit attention to prosody, including appropriate phrasing, stress, and intonation. Each instructional practice was recorded as either observed or not observed during the lesson.

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol designed to explore teachers' conceptual understanding of oral reading fluency, their perceived confidence in implementing each fluency instructional component, and the pedagogical and contextual factors that influenced their classroom practices. The interview data were intended to complement the classroom observations by providing explanations for the instructional patterns identified during the quantitative phase.

Data collection was conducted in two consecutive stages. First, each participating teacher was observed while teaching an English lesson in the lower primary classroom. During each observation, the structured observation checklist was completed to document the presence or absence of the targeted oral reading fluency instructional practices. Upon completion of the observation phase, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to obtain deeper insights into their knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and the challenges they encountered in implementing evidence-based fluency strategies in their classrooms.

The quantitative observation data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, to summarize the occurrence of each oral reading fluency instructional practice across the observed lessons. The qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Interview transcripts were coded iteratively to identify recurring themes related to teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency and the barriers affecting its classroom implementation. Finally, findings from both datasets were integrated during interpretation, enabling the qualitative themes to explain, elaborate on, and enrich the quantitative observation findings, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' knowledge and implementation of oral reading fluency instruction.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Knowledge of Oral Reading Fluency Instruction

Interview data revealed considerable variation in teachers' knowledge across the five core components of oral reading fluency instruction. Overall, teachers demonstrated greater familiarity with instructional practices related to teacher modeling and reading rate than with guided oral reading and prosody instruction, indicating that their understanding of oral reading fluency was uneven rather than comprehensive. Table 1 summarizes teachers' self-reported knowledge levels across the five instructional components.

Table 1. Teachers' Knowledge Level of Oral Reading Fluency Instruction Components

Fluency Component	Instruction	Adequate Knowledge (%)	Partial Knowledge (%)	Inadequate Knowledge (%)
Teacher modeling of fluent reading		35	35	30
Repeated reading practice		25	35	40
Guided oral reading with corrective feedback		20	30	50
Explicit attention to reading rate and accuracy		30	35	35
Explicit attention to prosody/expression		15	25	60

As shown in Table 1, teacher modeling of fluent reading represented the component with the highest proportion of teachers demonstrating adequate knowledge (35%), followed by explicit attention to reading rate and accuracy (30%). Nevertheless, even for these two components, adequate knowledge was reported by fewer than half of the participants, suggesting that teachers' understanding remained only moderate.

By contrast, substantially weaker knowledge was evident for guided oral reading with individualized corrective feedback and explicit instruction on prosody. Half of the participants

demonstrated inadequate knowledge of guided oral reading, while 60% reported inadequate understanding of prosody, making it the least understood component of oral reading fluency instruction. Interview responses further indicated that several teachers primarily defined fluency as "reading quickly," with comparatively little reference to accuracy, phrasing, expression, or comprehension. This finding suggests that many participants conceptualized fluency as reading speed alone rather than recognizing it as a multidimensional construct integrating accuracy, automaticity, and prosodic reading. A pattern also reported in prior research showing that classroom practices around oral reading tend to emphasize error correction and accuracy over meaning-focused and expressive dimensions of reading (Grønli et al., 2024).

The interview findings therefore, indicate that teachers' knowledge was partial rather than absent. Participants generally recognized the importance of reading aloud and maintaining an appropriate reading pace, yet demonstrated limited understanding of instructional strategies designed to develop expressive reading and provide individualized support during oral reading. Such incomplete conceptualizations may limit teachers' ability to implement comprehensive fluency instruction, as instructional decisions are often shaped by teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

This finding aligns with previous studies reporting that teachers frequently associate fluency with reading speed while giving comparatively less attention to prosody and guided oral reading (Grønli et al., 2024). Consequently, teacher preparation and professional development programs should emphasize the multidimensional nature of oral reading fluency, ensuring that teachers understand not only what fluency is but also how each component can be explicitly taught in classroom practice.

Classroom Implementation of Oral Reading Fluency Instruction and Contributing Factors

The classroom observations largely reflected the knowledge patterns identified during the interviews. Evidence-based oral reading fluency instructional strategies were implemented inconsistently across the observed English lessons, with some components appearing only occasionally and others being largely absent.

Table 2. presents the proportion of observed lessons in which each oral reading fluency instructional strategy was implemented.

Instructional Strategy	Observed (%)	Not Observed (%)
Teacher modeling of fluent reading	35	65
Repeated reading practice	25	75
Guided oral reading with individualized corrective feedback	20	80
Explicit attention to reading rate and accuracy	30	70
Explicit attention to prosody/expression	15	85

As presented in Table 2, teacher modeling of fluent reading was observed in 35% of lessons, making it the most frequently implemented instructional strategy. Explicit attention to reading rate and accuracy followed at 30%, whereas repeated reading activities appeared in only one-quarter of the observed lessons (25%). Guided oral reading with individualized corrective feedback and explicit prosody instruction were the least frequently observed instructional practices, appearing in only 20% and 15% of lessons, respectively.

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 reveals a clear correspondence between teachers' knowledge and their classroom implementation. Components for which teachers demonstrated relatively stronger knowledge—namely teacher modeling and reading rate—were also the strategies most frequently observed during classroom instruction. Conversely, instructional components associated with the lowest levels of teacher knowledge, particularly guided oral reading and prosody instruction, were also the least frequently implemented in practice. This convergence between the interview and observation findings suggests that teachers' pedagogical knowledge substantially influenced the instructional decisions made during English lessons.

Interview data further provided explanations for these classroom patterns. One of the most frequently cited barriers was large class size, which teachers believed limited their ability to monitor individual reading performance and provide immediate corrective feedback during guided oral reading activities. This concern is consistent with broader evidence suggesting that class size can meaningfully affect students' reading achievement and teachers' capacity to deliver individualized instruction (Filges et al., 2018). Participants also reported receiving little explicit preparation on oral reading fluency during their pre-service teacher education. Most indicated that their professional preparation had emphasized phonics, vocabulary, and general reading instruction, while oral reading fluency received comparatively little attention. This is consistent with findings that pre-service reading education often underprepares teachers to

teach the full range of reading processes, with fluency instruction frequently receiving less systematic coverage than other foundational components (Hikida et al., 2019).

Another recurring finding concerned teachers' understanding of prosody. Several participants acknowledged that they had not previously regarded expressive reading as a skill requiring explicit instruction. Instead, they assumed that learners would naturally acquire appropriate expression and intonation through repeated reading practice. In addition, teachers identified limited access to leveled reading materials, insufficient instructional time, and curriculum demands as practical constraints that reduced opportunities for implementing repeated reading and guided oral reading activities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the limited implementation of oral reading fluency instruction cannot be attributed solely to contextual constraints such as class size or instructional resources. Rather, the findings indicate an interaction between contextual factors and teachers' pedagogical knowledge. Even where opportunities for oral reading existed, instructional practices tended to emphasize reading aloud without systematically incorporating teacher modeling, repeated reading, individualized feedback, or explicit prosody instruction. This pattern reinforces previous research suggesting that oral reading fluency is often treated as a by-product of reading practice rather than as a distinct instructional component requiring deliberate, systematic teaching (Grønli et al., 2024). From a practical perspective, improving oral reading fluency instruction therefore requires a multidimensional approach. Professional development programs should explicitly address the theoretical foundations of oral reading fluency while equipping teachers with practical classroom strategies, including teacher modeling, repeated reading, guided oral reading with corrective feedback, and prosody instruction. At the same time, educational stakeholders should consider contextual supports such as manageable class sizes, sufficient instructional time, and access to developmentally appropriate reading materials to enable teachers to implement these strategies consistently.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study investigated primary school English teachers' knowledge of oral reading fluency instruction and the factors influencing its implementation in lower primary classrooms. The findings indicate that teachers possessed partial rather than comprehensive knowledge of oral reading fluency. While many participants demonstrated a basic understanding of teacher modeling and the importance of reading rate and accuracy, considerably fewer understood the instructional roles of guided oral reading with individualized feedback and explicit prosody instruction. This incomplete conceptualization of oral reading fluency was reflected in

classroom practice, where evidence-based fluency instructional strategies were implemented inconsistently, with teacher modeling occurring more frequently than repeated reading, guided oral reading, and explicit attention to prosody.

The integration of interview and classroom observation data further revealed that the limited implementation of oral reading fluency instruction resulted from the interaction between teachers' pedagogical knowledge and contextual constraints. Insufficient pre-service preparation, limited professional development focusing specifically on oral reading fluency, large class sizes, time constraints, and inadequate access to appropriate reading materials collectively reduced teachers' opportunities to implement comprehensive fluency instruction. These findings suggest that strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding alone may not be sufficient unless accompanied by supportive classroom conditions that enable evidence-based instructional practices.

The study contributes to the growing literature on early English literacy by highlighting oral reading fluency as a component of reading instruction that remains underemphasized in primary EFL classrooms. Several limitations should also be acknowledged. The study involved a relatively small sample of teachers from three primary schools, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples across different regions and educational settings, and incorporate longitudinal classroom observations.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving oral reading fluency instruction requires both enhanced teacher preparation and supportive instructional environments. By strengthening teachers' knowledge of the multidimensional nature of oral reading fluency and providing opportunities to implement evidence-based instructional strategies, schools may better support beginning readers in developing fluent reading as a foundation for successful reading comprehension and long-term literacy development.

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