

Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

**The Effects of Readers Theatre on the Oral Reading  
Fluency of grade-six Portuguese-speaking EFL Learners**

Tese de Doutoramento em Ciências da Linguagem

Graça Maria de Oliveira Simões Welch

Orientador: José Manuel Cardoso Belo



Vila Real, 2019



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To all those people, this thesis is dedicated.



## ABSTRACT

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Although extremely important, oral reading fluency is often lacking among a great many EFL students. As a result, these students may become discouraged and feel overwhelmed when presented with the task of reading. Research studies have indicated that an effective tool for increasing oral reading fluency in first language (L1) settings and more recently in L2/FL settings is Readers Theatre.

This study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Readers Theatre reading instruction as a means for facilitating and improving grade-sixth Portuguese-speaking EFL students' oral reading fluency development, when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum.

A total of 44 participants and their EFL teacher took part in this five-week quasi-experimental research study which followed a pretest, intervention and posttest schedule. The participating students belonged to two separate Portuguese-speaking sixth-grade EFL intact classes consisting varying levels of reading proficiency. One intact class was selected to serve as the experimental group (n=21, 12 males and 9 females), while the other group comprised the control group (n=23, 13 males and 10 females).

It was hypothesised that the use of Readers Theatre would provide improvements in students' oral reading fluency.

The data collected consisted of scores obtained from both the Curriculum Based Measurement: Oral Fluency Test (CBM-ORF) as well as the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS).

The quantitative results reveal that over the course of this study, the students who participated in Readers Theatre made significant progress and growth in their accuracy, automaticity and prosodic scores, outperforming the control group who partook in the regular grade-six reading instruction via the existing grade-six EFL syllabus. These findings align with existing research on the teaching of fluency

instruction and support the importance and effectiveness of fluency-based interventions to develop and increase students' oral reading fluency.



## RESUMO

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Apesar da sua extrema importância, a fluência na leitura oral de muitos estudantes de EFL é fraca, podendo refletir-se em sentimentos de desânimo e opressão perante um exercício de leitura. Estudos de pesquisa mostram que uma forma de desenvolver a fluência da leitura oral em configurações de primeira língua (L1) e, mais recentemente, em configurações de L2/Língua Estrangeira é através de *Readers Theater*.

Este estudo investiga a eficácia da instrução de leitura de Readers Theatre como um meio de facilitar e melhorar o desenvolvimento da fluência da leitura oral de alunos de EFL do sexto ano, quando integrado no currículo de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira.

Participaram neste estudo quási-experimental um total de 44 estudantes e seu professor de EFL durante cinco semanas, obedecendo a um calendário de pré-teste, intervenção e pós-teste. Os alunos participantes, falantes de língua portuguesa, pertenciam a duas turmas distintas de EFL e apresentavam níveis variados de proficiência em leitura. Uma turma foi selecionada para servir como grupo experimental (n = 21, 12 alunos e 9 alunas), enquanto o outro compôs o grupo de controlo (n = 23, 13 alunos e 10 alunas).

Foi colocada a hipótese que o uso de *Readers Theatre* proporcionaria melhorias na fluência da leitura oral dos estudantes.

Os dados obtidos consistiram em resultados alcançados tanto no Teste de Fluência Oral (CBM-ORF - Curriculum Based Measurement: Oral Fluency Test) como na Escala Multidimensional de Fluência (MFS - Multidimensional Fluency Scale).

Os resultados quantitativos revelam que, no decorrer deste estudo, os alunos participantes em *Readers Theatre* obtiveram progresso e crescimento significativos em precisão, automaticidade e prosódia, superando o grupo de controlo que seguiu o currículo de leitura mais habitual. Estes resultados coincidem com as pesquisas

existentes sobre o ensino de fluência e apoiam a importância e a eficácia da intervenção baseada na fluência para desenvolver e aumentar a fluência da leitura oral dos alunos.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1. Introduction

Sitting in a sixth-grade, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Portugal, a teacher selects a student to read part of a passage aloud from a coursebook. The student reads a few sentences in a choppy, slow and expressionless manner, often interrupted by his teacher who prompts him when he ‘gets stuck’ on a word or ‘feeds’ him the correct or missing word. His classmates listen and follow along. Some may be paying attention, but perhaps only to pick up on the reader's errors and correct them, while others, who have already finished reading the passage, sit quietly waiting for their peer to finish. Following the oral reading activity, the teacher poses a series of post-reading comprehension questions to determine the class’ understanding of the text. Unsurprisingly, the selected student is unable to describe what he has just read and answers no more than a few, if any, questions. Hence, it is assumed that this student has derived little meaning from the printed words on the page.

What is the importance of this scenario? Most scholars would argue that comprehension is the end goal of reading. However, the process of becoming literate warrants a student to advance through various stages with the aim of becoming a skilled reader who can construct meaning from the written word. One of the primary advances in this process is that of moving from dealing with letters on an individual basis, to identifying words with proper accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. This process is known as fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003).

Although “reading fluency is one of the defining characteristics of good readers, and a lack of fluency is a common characteristic of poor readers” (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005, p. 702), fluency is not necessarily a skill that first springs to mind when teachers think of teaching reading. In fact, fluency has been referred to as the “neglected” and “ignored” aspect of reading (Allington, 1983), as “researchers and practitioners alike assumed that fluency was the immediate result of word recognition proficiency, so efforts were directed towards the development of word recognition, whereas fluency itself was largely ignored” (National Reading Panel, 2000, pp. 3-5).

Fluency has more recently taken a front seat in discussions regarding students' reading achievement and effective reading instruction. It has come to be seen as a central constituent of skilled reading, and a driving force in English L1 literacy curriculums (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2005/2006; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, Levy, & Rasinski, 2010; Samuels & Farstrup, 2006). This newfound interest stems, at least in part, from the findings of a highly influential report by the National Reading Panel (2000) in the US, which determined that reading fluency was, indeed, one of the five critical pillars of effective reading instruction, in conjunction with phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and comprehension.

In spite of the renewed attention fluency has received in the academic field of reading research, "experts still disagree about the precise definition of reading fluency" (Morris & Gaffney, 2011, p. 331). According to Rasinski (2006), the lack of a universally accepted definition, may, in part, be due to the fact that reading fluency has metamorphosed over the course of literacy education history, taking on various meanings, depending on the social and educational needs or influential theories of the times. In addition, as reading fluency is a very complex construct made up of a great many sub-processes, it may have a distinct meaning to different people, which further impedes reaching a consensus in relation to the concept. A review of current research highlights that "a consensus is emerging within the literature around the three indicators of word recognition accuracy, word recognition automaticity and prosody as composing the construct of oral reading fluency" (Morris & Gaffney, 2011, p. 124).

Word recognition accuracy and automaticity are the foundation for fluency. Accuracy involves the ability to correctly recognise or decode words (Hudson et al., 2005; Samuels, 2006). When readers spend too many of their intellectual resources on word recognition they may not be able to focus on constructing the meaning of what is being read, and consequently, may develop a disinterest in reading (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011). Although word decoding accuracy is quite necessary, it is not sufficient for fluent reading (Allington, 2001; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Nonetheless, it is crucial for constructing automaticity, another fundamental component of reading fluency.

Those who read with automaticity, read words in texts not only accurately, but also rapidly and effortlessly, with minimal cognitive effort, thus saving mental energy for comprehension (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010).

Prosodic reading, or reading with expression is frequently referred to as “the ability to make oral reading sound like authentic oral speech” (Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, & Linan-Thompson, 2011, p. 293).

Rasinski (2004c, p. 46) states these three fluency components are interconnected. This is further corroborated by Hudson et al. (2005) who argue that all three components of fluency are complimentary to promoting effective fluent reading:

Without accurate word reading, the reader will have no access to the author’s intended meaning, and inaccurate word reading can lead to misinterpretations of the text. Poor automaticity in word reading or slow, laborious movement through the text taxes the reader’s capacity to construct an ongoing interpretation of the text. Poor prosody can lead to confusion through inappropriate or meaningless groupings of words or through inappropriate applications of expression. (p 703)

Developing fluent readers is an essential issue, not only for the L1 readers but for L2/FL readers too, as fluent reading can result in effective comprehension (Rasinski, 2012).

## **1.2. Background of the Study**

A widely recognised problem faced by learners throughout the L2/FL world is that of frustration originating from slow and effortful reading. Mikulecky (1990) suggests that L2 readers are trapped in a feeling of security, in that they believe reading every word leads to a better understanding of a passage. The failure to make the transition from laborious reading to fluent reading, can negatively affect a reader’s subsequent reading progress as he or she advances through school. Expending too much cognitive energy in trying to identify individual words can result in poor comprehension which, in turn, may lead to disengagement with the content.

The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded “there is ample evidence that one of the major differences between poor and good readers is the difference in the quantity of total time they spend reading” (3-10). The more contact a reader has with language through reading, the greater the likelihood he or she will become more fluent and competent in the skills required for reading. However, due to their underdeveloped fluency, slow readers generally have little reading experience. By not reading much, they miss out on opportunities for reading practice and are disposed to being weak in the basic skills and knowledge sources that are needed for reading. Over time, their comprehension skills decline because they do not read. Because of their difficulties, these readers may become easily frustrated, develop a dislike for reading and consequently, not engage in it. According to Good and Kaminski (2002), students who experience difficulties in reading fluency, do not naturally overcome these difficulties. Consequently, while good readers get better, poor readers fall further behind and become weaker compared to their classmates.

Researchers in the field of fluency development (e.g., Nation, 2009b; Samuels, 1997) conclude that in lieu of allowing reading fluency to develop on its own, as a logical outcome of literacy, with a positive or negative outcome, a better option would be to embed fluency instruction in reading instructional programmes as soon as students begin reading. However, this may be easier said than done, as only a minute number of classroom teachers have a clear and complete understanding, of what constitutes oral reading fluency and how to best teach it (Clark, Morrison, & Wilcox, 2009; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Keehn, 2003). Without such an understanding, teachers are left with unclear and incomplete notions that limit their capacity to encourage the development and growth of oral reading fluency in their students.

With fluency contributing so significantly to reading success, what can be done to help students become fluent readers? Rasinski, Blachowicz, and Lems (2006, p. 65) state that “developing fluency as in almost any endeavour, whether it is hitting a baseball, playing a musical instrument, or driving a car, requires practice. This is true for reading as well.”

The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed 100,000 studies conducted in a variety of L1 classrooms, in both regular and special education settings using a wide variety

of instructional materials, and concluded that Repeated Oral Reading and Guided Repeated Oral Reading procedures had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels (p. 3-11). Repeated reading has long been acknowledged by many researchers as one of the most effective approaches to helping students increase their reading fluency (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Pressley, Gaskins, & Fingeret, 2006).

The basic format of Repeated Reading was developed by Samuels, who brought fluency to the attention of many in the education and reading fields, with his 1979 article, entitled, *The Method of Repeated Readings*. The process of repeated reading (or the rereading method) is described as, "rereading a short, meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached". When the reader has reached a designated reading rate for that particular passage, the procedure is repeated with a new passage. In short, this method provides beginning readers with an opportunity to practice a very basic skill (word recognition) and helps them move from the non-accurate reading stage to the accurate stage and ultimately to the automatic stage.

The theory underlying the repeated reading technique is based on LaBerge and Samuels', 1974, *Theory of Automatic Information Processing in Reading*. According to this theory, readers have a limited amount of attention they can devote to cognitive tasks, such as reading. As the task of reading requires readers to complete two important tasks at the same time - decode the words they are reading and understand the text, selective attention which is given to decoding cannot be used for text comprehension. Once readers are able to decode text automatically, this is, to recognise words without having to break them down and 'figure them out', they will be able to achieve fluency (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010). In summary, the theory of automaticity suggests that readers move beyond conscious decoding to effortless automatic decoding and word recognition with speed and accuracy (Rasinski et al., 2006).

Despite the obvious benefits repeated oral readings have in improving oral reading fluency, for some students, the repetition of a text may be seen as a dull activity, may not hold students' attention over the long term and consequently, may fail to increase

student motivation or interest in reading (Nation, 2009b; Rasinski, 1990; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Another drawback of the repeated reading strategy may be that it is very time-consuming for teachers as they are called on to help students who are struggling to read. Thus, a more desirable solution for oral fluency instruction may be Readers Theatre, an inherently meaningful and purposeful vehicle for repeated reading, combining students' desire to perform, with their need for oral reading practice (Carrick, 2009; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Readers Theatre is a rehearsed presentation of text that is read aloud expressively and dramatically, by a group of readers for an audience (Flynn, 2004; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007). Unlike the format of repeated readings described by Samuels (1979/1997), Readers Theatre provides a framework for repeated reading that is “active, analytical, socially negotiated, and interpreted through both verbal and non-verbal means” (Wolf, 1993, p. 541).

In its purely theoretical form, Readers Theatre performances differ from conventional stage plays in several ways. Readers Theatre performances minimise staging, do not require sets, costumes or props, special lighting, although these elements can be included if desired (Coger & White, 1973). Only a script is needed, from which students read aloud. Another key difference is that performers read their parts from scripts as opposed to memorising them. Readers use their voices, not their bodies, to bring characters to life, drawing the audience into their interpretation of the text through their expressive oral reading. Coger and White (1973) label Readers Theatre as a “theatre of the mind” as it exists in both the imaginations of the performers and the audience.

Readers Theatre has been praised for its potential instructional benefits in L1 and L2/FL contexts, primarily for improving reading fluency. Studies have indicated that the implementation of Readers Theatre significantly increased students' oral reading fluency, in terms of reading automaticity (rate), measured by the number of words read correctly per minute (Carrick, 2009; Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Chen, 2006; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998). In addition, Readers Theatre has also shown to be an effective intervention for improving the prosodic elements of oral reading (Keehn, 2003; Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008; Young &



Rasinski, 2009). Readers Theatre has therefore been characterised as a “ticket to fluency” (Martinez et al., 1998).

Another benefit of Readers Theatre is its potential for increasing reading motivation. The performance itself provides strong intrinsic motivation for students to read the scripts repeatedly, and such motivation has often been found to extend to new reading materials (Millin & Rinehart, 1999). This motivating effect has been proven to benefit students with poor reading proficiency, as some studies have reported increased motivation, self-confidence, and level of engagement in literacy events for challenged or resistant readers after the implementation of Readers Theatre in class (Chen, 2006; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Tsou, 2011; Worthy & Prater, 2002).

In addition to fluency and motivation, Readers Theatre is also believed to help enhance social skills and lower anxiety through teamwork (Black & Stave, 2007). In a typical Readers Theatre procedure, lines are distributed among group members, and group members practise and rehearse them as a team to attain better dramatic effect. Less proficient or struggling readers who have difficulty with word recognition or pronunciation have the opportunity to receive fluency support from more capable readers.

Due to the aforementioned instructional potentials, researchers have suggested that instructors use Readers Theatre as “a regular instructional activity rather than [something] limited to special occasions” (Worthy & Prater, 2002, p. 294) in order to achieve a longer-standing effect on students’ learning process. Instructional methods that assist students to learn to read with greater fluency may encourage students to read more, and as a result, more fully seize the opportunities for growth in a foreign language. This study focuses on one such method - Readers Theatre.

### **1.3. Rationale for Present Study**

Reading scholars are calling for more attention to be paid to oral reading fluency (e.g., Carrell & Grabe, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Nunan, 2003; Rasinski, 2012). They urge investigations into the various aspects of fluency that may be affected by changes in oral reading instruction. Thus, the question of what kind of instructional method might facilitate fluent reading is an important one.

Readers Theatre has been utilised in L1 classrooms for more than thirty years. Despite researchers' awareness of its significance for L1 pedagogy, an examination of the literature divulged a restricted number of empirical research findings on Readers Theatre and fluency or fluency training with L2/FL populations, especially at the middle-school level. Further investigation, to determine the impact and viability of Readers Theatre as a vehicle for oral reading fluency instruction in the FL setting, is necessary. The present study attempts to fill the gap in the existing literature, making a contribution to FL oral reading fluency research.

#### **1.4. Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest, control/experimental group study design was to examine the effectiveness of Readers Theatre instruction as a means for facilitating and improving sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners' oral reading fluency, when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum.

In the process of intervention, the control group took part in the regular reading activities found in the coursebook, while the experimental group took part in Readers Theatre reading instruction. Pretest and posttest assessments were utilised before and after five weeks of Readers Theatre instruction. The participants' oral reading accuracy and automaticity levels were assessed using the Curriculum Based Measurement - Oral Reading Fluency probe. The Multidimensional Fluency Scale rubric (see Figure 3 on page 37) measured students' prosodic reading.

#### **1.5. Research Questions to be Investigated**

Through the implementation of Readers Theatre, it is the researcher's expectation to initiate further investigation into the effects of Readers Theatre on English foreign language students' oral reading fluency and provide EFL teachers with insights on how Readers Theatre can enhance their students' oral reading.

##### **Central Research Question**

The major research question that will be investigated is as follows:

Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, facilitate and improve sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners' oral reading

fluency when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?

### **Subsidiary Research Questions**

More precisely, this study aims to address the following questions:

When embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum,

**RQ.1.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading word decoding accuracy skills of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.2.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve automaticity (rate) of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.3.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading prosody of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

### **1.6. Thesis Outline**

The current thesis is composed of five chapters.

The first chapter, *Introduction*, consists of the introductory section of the thesis which describes the rationale behind this project. It sets the scene by providing background information and a statement pertaining to the core problem that led to the current study. It also outlines the purpose and importance of the study, as well as the research questions. This introductory chapter is followed by four chapters.

Chapter Two, *Literature Review*, provides the theoretical framework of oral reading fluency so that the theoretical connections with Readers Theatre can be made explicit. In particular, it traces the historical context of oral reading fluency from the 1900s to present day; provides a definition of fluency; and discusses the theoretical constructs of oral reading fluency and the implications for assessment and

instruction. In addition, it reviews the literature related to oral reading fluency, repeated readings and Readers Theatre.

Chapter Three, *Methodology*, outlines the methodological procedures that have been adopted in the current study. In particular, it provides information with respect to the overall procedures followed, the setting and participants in the study, the research design, the research instruments, data collection and data analysis, the reading materials used in this study as well as a description of the intervention procedures followed for both the experimental and control groups.

Chapter Four, *Results*, provides a detailed description of the main results based on the analysis of the quantitative data that have been collected and the relationships between the variables of the study.

Chapter Five, *Discussion and Conclusions*, synthesises and summarises the findings of the study comparing the different findings drawn from this study with the ones obtained in past research. Concurrently, this chapter includes the ensuing pedagogical implications for classroom practice, pinpoints the limitations of the study, and makes suggestions for future research.

## **Summary**

Studies have shown that L2/FL learners read far more slowly in L2/FL than in their native language (Fraser, 2007; Nation, 2009a; Segalowitz, Poulsen, & Komoda, 1991). Second and foreign language learners often read word by word and check unfamiliar words as they encounter them, suggesting that they lack reading fluency (Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). It is highly improbable that they will comprehend the text they are reading as it is more than likely that their short-term memory becomes overloaded, preventing them from processing ideas efficiently.

Chard, Pikulski, and McDonagh (2006) state that many educators have taken a rather simplistic approach to developing fluency whereby if students just “read, read, read,” they would achieve fluency. Nonetheless, researcher provides evidence that some readers require “expert instruction and teacher guidance in order to progress efficiently through the stages of reading development” (p. 48). Fluency means more

than how fast one can read. It implies reading accurately, with automaticity, and expression.

Oral reading in the classroom has been encouraged as a method to improve oral reading fluency growth. Research and scholarly literature support a number of methods to promote fluency in reading. Among these are repeated readings, the rereading of a text until a level of fluency is reached. While there are many different ways to incorporate repeated rereading into the reading curriculum, researchers have suggested that repeated readings be carried out through more authentic means, for a real purpose and not in isolated practice. This was motivated by those who realised that the repetition of a text can be a tedious and monotonous activity, and therefore were challenged to find alternative ways of practising text.

Readers Theatre truly engages students while practising reading and is a popular, approved form of “repeated guided oral reading” (National Reading Panel, 2000) which has proven to be a quite effective method for improving fluency. As fluent readers usually become high-achieving students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), using Readers Theatre to enhance students’ oral reading fluency in the EFL context is worth exploring. The need to carry out this study, has resulted from the lack of relevant research in the Portuguese socio-educational context, where, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, no study has ever focused on Readers Theatre in an FL setting. Bringing studies such as this to the forefront may help FL teachers become more cognizant of the benefits that Readers Theatre instruction provides FL readers, while increasing their repertoire of successful reading intervention methods.

Based on the awareness of the need for further research on oral reading fluency in the EFL context, this study will examine the efficacy of Readers Theatre on improving sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL students’ oral reading fluency, in terms of word accuracy, oral reading automaticity and prosody.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1. Introduction

This study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Readers Theatre as a means of developing sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners' oral reading fluency.

The review of the research literature is organised into three parts which develop and constitute the foundation for this study. The first part presents a comprehensive, albeit not exhaustive review of the historical context of oral reading fluency from the 1900s to present practice. The second part provides a definition of oral reading fluency, and examines how it is measured. The third part examines Readers Theatre as an instructional strategy to foster oral reading fluency. These three areas will be explored in order to lay the groundwork needed to answer the following research question:

Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, facilitate and improve oral reading fluency, in sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners' oral reading fluency when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?

### 2.2. Part One: A Brief Historical Overview of Oral Reading Fluency from the 1900s to Present Practice

#### 2.2.1. Early Conceptions of Oral Reading Fluency

According to reading historians (Hyatt, 1943; Smith, 2002), from the earliest days of American history, through to the first decade of the twentieth century, oral reading was rendered for family entertainment and the sharing of information. The shortage of reading material, coupled with a high non-literate population, made it incumbent upon those who had mastered the fine art of reading, to read for the benefit of those who were unable to do so (Hyatt, 1943; Rasinski et al., 2006; Smith, 2002).

Owing to its prominence in people's daily lives, expressive oral reading quickly found its place in the schools of the era (Stayter & Allington, 1991). By the mid-1800s, the

public speaking arts of oration and elocution, with precise intonation and emotion, was emphasised as an important component of the curriculum. Recitation lessons usually involved the teacher reading a text out loud to the class, followed by the students practising the passage on their own. In the end, the students would orally read or recite the passage to their teacher and classmates (Hyatt, 1943; Rasinski et al., 2006). Writing in 1835, Lyman Cobb offers a succinct summary of the ideals of oral reading of the time:

A just delivery consists in a distinct articulation of words pronounced in proper tones, suitably varied to the sense, and the emotions of the mind; with due attention to accent, to emphasis, in its several gradations; to rests or pauses of the voice, in proper places...and the whole accompanied with expressive looks, and significant gestures. (cited in Smith, 2002, pp. 40-41)

Oral reading had become such a fundamental and perceived necessary part of American education, that philosopher William James (1892, as cited in Hoffman & Segel, 1983), pointed out that “the teacher’s success or failure in teaching reading is based, so far as the public estimate is concerned, upon the oral reading method” (p. 422).

### **2.2.2. The Demise of Oral Reading**

Towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, oral reading’s notoriety began to diminish, as education scholars and reading reformers voiced concerns that reading in schools was too often an exercise in speaking at the expense of reading for meaning. For example, Horace Mann, an influential American educator of the time, claimed that reading had become more “an action of the organs of speech” rather than “an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling” and that “more than eleven twelfths of all children in reading classes do not understand the meaning for the words they read” (cited in Hoffman & Segel, 1983, p. 4). Mann saw phonics as detrimental to creating a nation of eager readers and advocated a ‘whole-word’ or ‘look-say’ method to reading instruction, which taught children to read words as whole units, rather than breaking the word down into individual letters or groups of letters.



Moreover, the industrial revolution and trans-continental railroads made books and other printed material more accessible for people of all social classes (Hyatt, 1943). Consequently, as more individuals became literate and the written word more readily available and accessible, “the need for oral reading for imparting information declined” (Rasinski, 2006, p. 8). Individual silent reading became a more common feature of family and community life. Researchers, such as Edmund Huey (1908/1968), observed that oral reading had become a practice only found in schools via activities such as recitation. Contrary to oral reading, silent reading was ‘the most economical form of reading (Hyatt, 1943, p. 39), as it enabled students to read and study more quickly, thus covering a greater amount of material. In 1923, Buswell and Wheeler (cited in Hyatt, 1943) noted and openly critiqued schools that still used oral methods of reading in their instructional texts:

In contrast with this, in the modern school, which emphasizes silent reading, a great many books are read in each grade... It (silent reading) is the complex process of getting thought from printed page and involves an entirely new pedagogy. Silent reading objectives will never be attained by oral-reading methods. (pp. 39-40)

Additionally, the early standardisation testing movement, which began around the turn of the century, also had an impact on the shift from oral to silent reading. By 1918, leading experts on reading, such as Thorndike (1917) and William Gray (1915) found that students who practised reading silently, performed best on group-administered tests in a silent reading format, showing gains in both rate and comprehension (Rasinski, Samuels, Hiebert, Petscher, & Feller, 2011; Smith, 2002). As research and experimentation in the field developed, an instructional methods debate regarding silent versus oral reading instruction gained momentum, and initiated the call for silent reading in schools. Consequently, silent reading replaced oral reading as the preferred mode of reading instruction until around the middle of the twentieth century (Rasinski, 2003).

Another possible reason why fluency failed to become an important part of the reading curriculum is attributed to the “reading wars”. By the mid-1960s, Ken Goodman and Frank Smith had begun their attack on the reading curriculum, their

whole language philosophy becoming one of the most powerful approaches to instruction. Whole language polarised the reading debate among educators, researchers and parents and led to the phonics versus whole word reading wars. Samuels (2006) highlights that “fighting the ‘reading wars’ took up the energy of many in the reading community. Compared to fighting the reading wars, work on fluency was of lesser importance” (p. 26). Consequently, oral reading fluency lost its place as a critical component in the reading curriculum.

The demise of oral reading as a goal for the teaching of reading in the 20th century and the line of reasoning for a greater focus on comprehension and silent reading, as the best tool to help students to achieve success, did not, however, lead to the complete disappearance of oral reading as an instructional practice (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Eldredge, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth (1996) noted there was a shift in the use of oral reading from reading for fluent expression to reading for checking word recognition after silent reading. This change came in the format of “round-robin reading” (an unrehearsed sight reading in which students are expected to follow along while individual students take turns reading), which was integrated in into basal reading programmes (Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman & Segel, 1983). Although highly criticised, round-robin reading prevailed right through to the second half of the 20th century as the leading format for practice.

### **2.2.3. More Recent Developments in Fluency**

In the past four decades, significant advances in our understanding of reading have caused reading scholars to pay closer attention to oral reading fluency. Pikulski and Chard (2005, p. 511) note that “while an early discussion of the construct of reading fluency is found in the classic publication by Huey (1908, 1968), most discussions of fluency trace their classic modern theoretical foundations to the 1974 seminal article by LaBerge and Samuels”. Rasinski (2006) noted that the development of LaBerge and Samuels’ theory of automatic information processing in reading paved the way for just about every fluency instructional practice since it was first put forth, and is “one of the more important milestones in contemporary conceptions of reading fluency” (pp. 11-12).

At the very outset of their paper, LaBerge and Samuels (1974) outline the basic limited-capacity argument that was accepted by reading researchers throughout most of the subsequent decade:

During the execution of a complex skill, it is necessary to coordinate many component processes within a very short period of time. If each component process requires attention, performance of the complex skill will be impossible, because the capacity of attention will be exceeded. But if enough of the components and the coordinations can be processed automatically, then the load on attention will be within tolerable limits and the skill can be successfully performed. Therefore, one of the prime issues in the study of a complex skill such as reading is to determine how the processing of component subskills becomes automatic. (p. 293)

The *Automaticity Theory of Reading*, which draws on an abundance of cognitive research, reveals that the human brain has a finite amount of attentional capacity, or cognitive resources available for any given task. Cognitive resources that are employed for a particular task become unavailable for others. The capacity to perform two complex tasks simultaneously requires that at least one has become automatic, in other words, one of the tasks has to be learnt to the point where very little effort or thought is needed to perform the other. When a complex cognitive task is divided into its individual components, and each component has been practised repeatedly, the task becomes more automatic and requires less cognitive effort on the part of the learner. Attention can therefore be directed towards other processes or tasks. For example, when learning to ride a bicycle, we first need to draw our attention to, and concentrate on balancing, turning the pedals, holding on to the handlebars, steering and breaking. Only when these steps or processes are automatic, when our mind is not occupied with the small details of these tasks, can we then focus on, for example, watching the road and traffic around us.

Pikulski and Chard (2005) corroborate LaBerge and Samuels' findings and state that the reading process involves at least two separate, but highly interrelated areas: word identification or decoding and comprehension or the construction of meaning of text (p. 511). Skilled reading requires readers to divert their mental attention from lower-level tasks, such as word recognition, to higher-level tasks, such as

comprehending text. As a result, automaticity became a key explanatory construct in reading. Good decoding skills make room for cognitive capacity which is needed for higher-level processes, such as integrative comprehension processing of text. For example, to divide a sentence into its component parts, one must first be cognizant that spoken words are made up of a combination of individual letters and their associated sounds. For instance, the word 'map' has three sounds, or phonemes /m/ /a/ /p/. The word 'dish' is also made up of three phonemes (or three sounds) even though 'dish' has four letters: /d/ /i/ /sh/. Once students have understood the principles of these letter-sound relationships, they can concentrate cognitive energies on holding on to those sounds, blending them successfully into words, taking them apart again and learning the exceptions to the principles in order to decode the words.

For beginner and at-risk readers, lower level tasks of decoding and word recognition require the majority, if not all attentional resources, leaving scarcely any resources available for the understanding of text. Lower-level processing skills are particularly needed for second or foreign language readers. LaBerge and Samuels ascertained that readers become more proficient at recognising words through considerable practice and consequently, are more likely to be able to comprehend the text they read.

Although LaBerge and Samuels's article was crucial in providing a scientific rationale for understanding how fluency occurred through automatic word recognition, it "was only a theory with no practical suggestions in it" (Samuels, 2006, p. 25). Believing that a good theory should lead to practical outcomes, Samuels devised the Method of Repeated Reading (1979), an instructional fluency building technique. The method which was initially designed for special needs students in L1 English settings, required students to repeatedly read a meaningful hundred-word passage until a particular rate of words per minute was achieved. The students' rate and number of errors were recorded on a graph and when the criterion rate of reading was achieved, the students were given a new passage to read. With each rereading of a passage, the students realised they made fewer initial errors and their reading rate increased which seemed to indicate that reading improvement transferred to similar passages (Samuels, 1997). This was the birth of the repeated reading technique, an

offshoot of automaticity theory and the beginning of a great deal of studies to investigate a technique that helps build reading fluency.

In 1976, unknown to Jay Samuels, Carol Chomsky was doing her own research on repeated reading. While repeated readings is an exceedingly effective strategy which is rather simple to put into practice in a one-on-one context, Chomsky realised that teachers do not always have enough time to work with students on an individual basis. As such, Chomsky developed an alternative method to repeated readings, called read-while-listening. In this approach schoolchildren were asked to read along, silently or orally, with audio-recordings of a passage to increase their reading fluency. By making audiotape recordings of students reading the passages, the teacher was freed during repeated reading time and was able to assess the students at her own convenience. Chomsky's research was instrumental in developing new repeated readings alternatives, such as, Partner Reading, Choral Reading and Readers Theatre, to name a few.

Although automaticity theory accounts for the accurate and effortless decoding that fluent readers exhibit, it may fail to provide a sufficient explanation for the role that prosody plays in the reading process. In 1980, Peter Schreiber theorised that some reading fluency difficulties stem from the absence of prosodic cues in written language, which contribute to an expressive rendering of a text. Without these cues, readers may find it difficult to transfer features of spoken language to written language (Dowhower, 1991; Schreiber, 1980; Schreiber, 1991). He argued that through practice, students developed a greater awareness of the prosodic features of oral reading and speech, and that reading fluency develops as the reader achieves syntactic control of the text. That is, the reader is able to chunk the text into syntactically appropriate and meaningful phrases.

Both Schreiber and LaBerge and Samuels' conceptualisations of fluency are considered hallmarks of fluent reading and crucial elements of current conceptions of reading fluency.

Richard Allington's 1983 classic *Reading Teacher* article, "Fluency: The Neglected Reading Goal" was one of the first pieces of professional literature to help conceptualise reading fluency as it applied to reading development and elevate

reading fluency to the status it enjoys today. Allington consolidated varying and emerging theories on fluency and concluded that it appears to play a significant role in bettering the reading proficiency of many struggling readers. Moreover, he also noted that fluency has traditionally been ignored by the reading community. Therefore, in spite of the fact that fluency is a potential factor in ameliorating reading, it is not viewed as a crucial element in reading instructional objectives, reading hierarchies, teacher's manuals, daily lesson plans, individualised educational plans or remedial intervention, as teachers are not cognizant of its importance. Rasinski (2006) notes that Richard Allington helped heighten the awareness of fluency as his "article began a slow but increasing awareness of the contribution of reading fluency to proficient reading" (p.14).

A development that was paramount in vaulting fluency to the forefront of reading instruction and elevating it to the important status it enjoys today, was the publication of the Report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD 2000). When the reading wars became so intense that they disrupted schooling and threatened to undermine confidence in public education, the US Congress intervened and requested the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the Secretary of Education to convene a national panel of experts to assess the merits of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. The panel consisting of prominent experts in the fields of reading education, psychology, and higher education, analysed decades worth of literature - (100,000 studies), concentrating solely on studies that were experimental or quasi-experimental in design. These studies included a sample size that was considered large enough to be of use, with well-defined instructional procedures (NRP, 2000). As a result of these studies, the *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction* (NICHD, 2000) was produced. The Panel's findings stated that the five components that are the most essential for building the skills to improve reading achievement are; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Rasinski, 2003; Therrien, 2004; Therrien & Kubina, 2006). The report concluded that guided repeated oral reading, not sustained silent reading, facilitated fluency,

comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition of all struggling students, from primary school, up to and throughout high school. Reading fluency had, once again, after a long absence, become an important objective in the reading curriculum (Rasinski, 2003).

To conclude part one, A Brief Historical Overview of Oral Reading Fluency, it is evident that the domain of literacy education has experienced a fundamental change in fluency's relevancy in the research based reading curriculum, "moving from a primary focus in reading instruction to a rarely encountered instructional component to one that is often responsible for driving major instructional decisions" (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010, p. 230). This shift in philosophy is due, in part, to the identification and inclusion of fluency as one of the five reading domains reviewed by the National Reading Panel (2000) that brought fluency to the forefront.

Having outlined the path of oral reading historically, we now move forward to examine and discuss what fluency entails.

## **2.3. Part Two: Toward a Definition of Fluency and an Understanding of its Component Structures**

### **2.3.1. Defining Reading Fluency**

Although the term oral 'reading fluency' is prolific in literature and there is a long-established body of research connecting it to the development of reading proficiency, "expert still disagree about the precise definition of reading fluency" (Morris & Gaffney, 2011, p. 331). Bellinger and DiPerna (2011) state "there is no universally accepted definition of fluency" (p. 417). According to Rasinski (2006) as reading fluency is a very complex psychological construct, made up of a great many sub-processes, it may have a distinct meaning to different people:

To some reading fluency is considered primarily an act of oral reading specifically the oral interpretation and expressiveness (prosody) associated with the oral production of a written text. To others, reading fluency has to do with accuracy and speed (automaticity) in word decoding. And to yet others, reading fluency has largely to do with understanding or comprehension that comes as a result of reading with appropriate decoding speed and accuracy. (pp. 4-5)

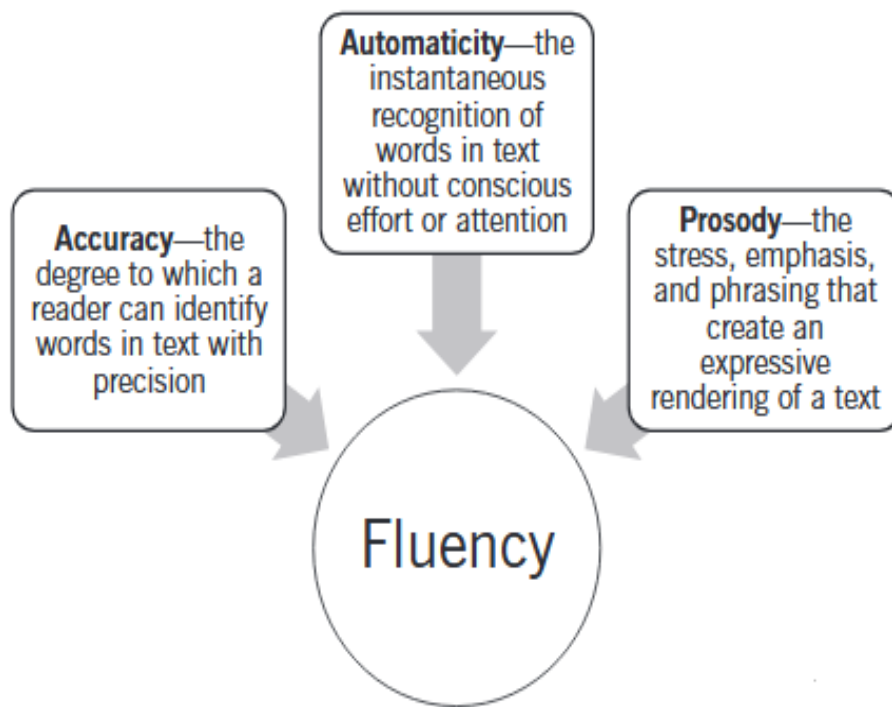
Rasinski (1986) states that researchers have been too narrow in their views of fluency, lacking awareness of its complexity. He asserts that researchers have “made the tacit assumption that each factor [e.g., rate, accuracy, phrasing, prosody] alone was responsible for fluent reading” (p.3). Indeed, more recently, educators (e.g., Kame'enui & Simmons, 2001; Richards, 2000; Strecker, Roser, & Martinez, 1998; Torgesen & Hudson, 2006; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001) offer evidence to support the notion that reading fluency is a multidimensional construct.

Schwanenflugel and Ruston (2008) suggest that the differing views regarding the definitions of fluency “are more based on the details of the definition than on any inherent substance in them”. They conclude that:

few scholars would argue that reading fluency is a single skill. Rather, it is the orchestration of a number of subskills, which, taken together comprise reading fluency. The debate regarding the definition of reading fluency is more about which skills are important to this definition rather than what fluent reading ultimately “looks like” in practice. (p.2)

Although a unified definition of oral reading fluency does not exist, there seems to be a growing consensus emerging within the literature, that the construct is comprised of three interdependent but distinct components (see Figure 1): (a) word accuracy in reading connected text, (b) automaticity or word reading rate/pace, and (c) expressive and meaningful interpretation of text, referred to as prosody (Hudson, 2011; Paige, 2011; Rasinski, Padak, & Fawcett, 2010; Reutzel & Cooter, 2015; Walpole, McKenna, & Philppakos, 2011).





**Figure 1:** Components of fluency. Reprinted from *Developing Fluent Readers* (p. 14), by M. R. Kuhn and L. Levy, 2015, New York, NY: Guilford Publications.

The section that follows will shed some light on the aforementioned components.

### **2.3.2. The Core Components of Reading Fluency**

#### ***Accuracy***

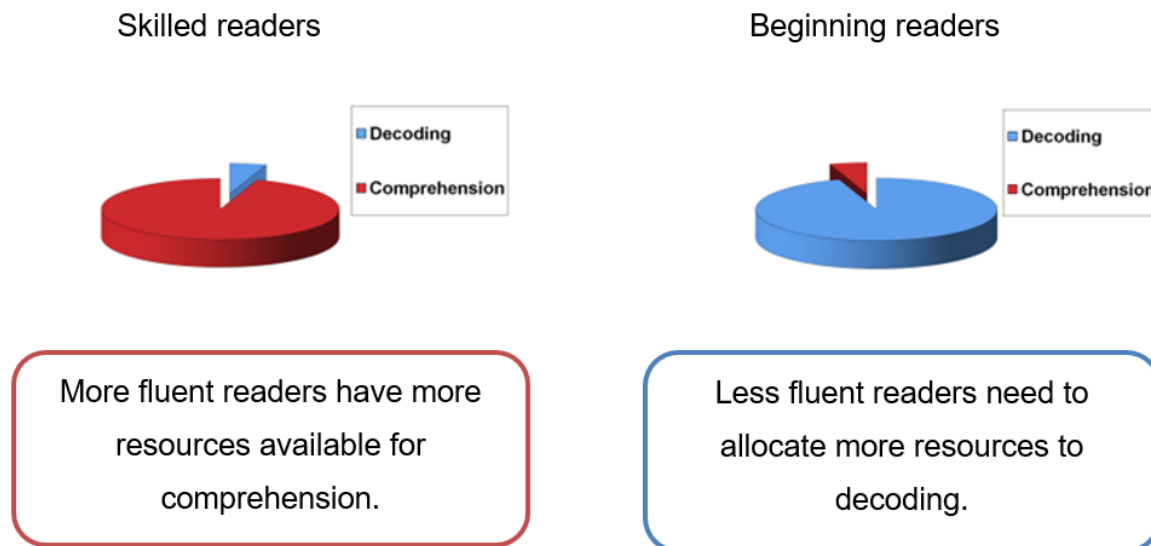
Accuracy, the first requirement in achieving reading fluency, stresses the importance of correct word recognition in reading. Hudson et al. (2005) define word reading accuracy as "the reader's ability to recognize or decode words correctly" (p.703). This will in turn facilitate the reader's understanding and correct interpretation of what is being read (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011). An inaccurate word recognition or constant attention to word recognition may see students tiring and losing motivation to continue reading (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011). According to Torgesen and Hudson (2006), the necessary skills for decoding accuracy comprise: the understanding of the alphabetic principle, the capacity to blend sounds, the capability to use cues to identify words in a passage, and a large sight-word vocabulary of high-frequency words.

On its own, accuracy in word decoding, does not suffice in providing enough evidence on fluency in reading (Allington, 2001; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). It is, however, necessary for building automaticity, another important constituent of reading fluency.

### ***Automaticity***

Automaticity, also referred to as rate, pace or speed has been found to hold as much importance as word reading accuracy (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Reading rate comprises both fluent identification of individual words and the speed and fluidity with which a reader moves through connected text. It refers to the reader's ability to read words in text not only accurately but also effortlessly, with little attention paid to the words' appearance, that is, with minimal cognitive effort (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010).

Given that both decoding and comprehension are difficult tasks, proficient word decoding needs to be developed to a point of automaticity where readers move beyond conscious, accurate decoding to that of decoding words with minimal attention (Evanchan, 2010; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, 2002; Stanovich, 1991). Well-practised words that are recognized automatically, implies that recognition occurs very rapidly, freeing cognitive space for higher order comprehension processes (see Figure 2). In a proficient, fluent reader, these processes are so autonomous that they occur without conscious awareness (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Perfetti, 1985). Slow word reading generally indicates that a reader is devoting a great deal of cognitive resources to recognising words. Most educators quantify rate in terms of reading speed - either by counting the number of words read correctly per minute in a specific passage or the amount of time it takes for a reader to finish reading a passage (Torgesen & Hudson, 2006). The more automatic reading is, the higher the rate will be (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010).



**Figure 2:** The division of attention between decoding and comprehension for beginning and skilled readers.

There is, however, reason for caution when discussing the rapid rate of reading. Research demonstrates that an over reliance on accuracy and automaticity “simply because they are the most quantifiable elements of fluency” (as cited in Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al., 2010) may lead to a very “limited view of fluency, [and] it is essential that reading educators consider a broader definition of [fluency], one that places weight on its less quantifiable elements” (p. 239).

According to Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al. (2010) “there is little dispute that accurate, automatic word recognition is a critical component of fluent reading” (p.238). However, accurate and automatic word recognition should not be mistaken for fluency, as fluency does not depend solely on the reading rate (Allington, 1983). Concentrating on developing more rapid reading can, if not handled well, result in students believing that speed is the ultimate goal. However, this is not the true intent of fluency (Marcell, 2011). As stated by Garnett (2011) a growing body of research shows that “fluency is related to accuracy and rate, but not synonymous with them” (p. 296). Hiebert, Samuels, and Rasinski (2012) remind us that “instruction that aims at increasing students’ correct words per minute (wcpm) without attention to comprehension, has the potential to adversely affect comprehension and knowledge acquisition” (p. 9). Reading fluency is not just recognising words accurately and

reading at an appropriate rate. Reading fluency also encompasses the ability to read materials with prosody to convey meaning when reading aloud.

### **The Difference Between ‘Fluency’ and ‘Automaticity’**

Although sometimes used interchangeably, it is important to note that the terms automaticity and fluency are not identical (Hudson, Pullen, Lane & Torgesen, 2009). According to (Armbruster et al., 2001):

Automaticity is the fast, effortless word recognition that comes with a great deal of reading practice. In the early stages of learning to read, readers may be accurate but slow and inefficient at recognizing words. Continued reading practice helps word recognition become more automatic, rapid and effortless. Automaticity refers only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. (p.21)

Consequently, automaticity is essential foundation of fluency, but not a sufficient condition, to foster fluency.

### ***Prosody***

Accuracy and automaticity in reading have long been considered hallmark constituents of fluency (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001). However, Stahl and Kuhn (2002) postulate that they may not allow for the development of fluent reading, as they do not account for the ability to make oral reading sound like spoken language. Although less quantifiable, many researchers have added prosody as an additional defining element of reading fluency (Hudson, Pullen, Lane & Torgesen, 2009; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Samuels, 2007; Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker & Stahl, 2004). Prosody focuses on reading with expressive and meaningful interpretation of text and is frequently known as the ‘melodic’ element in reading. Rasinski, Reutzel, et al. (2011) define prosody as the “the ability to make oral reading sound like authentic oral speech” (p. 293).

More frequently, prosody has been defined in terms of the elements, or prosodic features, which would be an indicator of the reader’s capacity to segment or chunk text in a meaningful manner. According to Dowhower (1991), Schreiber (1980, 1991) and (Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl, 2004), prosody is most often determined by variations in pitch (intonation), stress (also referred to as

loudness, intensity or emphasis) and duration (also known as pausing, timing, length of time and phrasing), that contribute to expressive reading of text. Taken together, these speech features are classified as suprasegmental as they extend over more than one speech sound and contribute to meaning.

It has been theorised that reading prosody is an indicator of the emergence of automatic decoding and sight word recognition skills as readers shift attention from word recognition to text comprehension (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2006 ; Rasinski, 1985). This is further corroborated by Dudley and Mather (2005) who assert that “when readers are able to mirror the inflection of spoken language, they are demonstrating their abilities to comprehend the text, self-monitor and self-correct their reading errors” (p.22).

Although research indicates there is a relationship between prosody and comprehension, the link between prosody and other aspects of the reading process it is uncertain whether prosody causes comprehension or whether prosody is a result of comprehension, that is, enhanced comprehension enables a student to read prosodically. Kuhn & Stahl (2003) suggest there is a reciprocal relationship between them, in other words, prosody mediates between decoding skills and comprehension to enhance comprehension.

### **2.3.3. Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension**

Although the link between fluency and comprehension has been well acknowledged, the precise nature of the relationship between fluency and comprehension has proven to be quite difficult to define. It remains unclear exactly how fluency is connected to comprehension (Strecker et al., 1998).

The relationship between fluency and comprehension is rather complex. At one end of the spectrum, there are educators who argue that fluency is a facilitator of comprehension and precedes its development, in other words, fluency is a prerequisite for achieving comprehension (Hudson et al., 2005). Comprehension increases because the reader allots more attention to it rather than to decoding and word recognition. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who argue that comprehension fosters fluency, that is, fluency is an ‘outcome’ of good reading

comprehension (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009; Hudson et al., 2005; Keehn et al., 2008).

Although the issue of whether or not fluency is an outgrowth of or a contributor to comprehension is still undetermined, the interrelatedness of fluency and comprehension is undisputed. There seems to be a reciprocal rather than unidirectional relationship between the two - both contributing to and possibly resulting from readers' understanding of text (Strecker et al., 1998; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

In the majority of the studies reviewed, the most common definition of fluency did not specifically include the concept of comprehension; but rather, researchers seemed to be making an effort to discover whether links between fluency and comprehension could be established. As Applegate et al. (2009) state, "It seems ... that the answer to the relationship between fluency and comprehension lies elsewhere in a complex interaction that is not clearly understood and needs much more investigation and research" (p. 520). Therefore, fluency in this study will be defined in the same manner as it is most commonly found in the literature - an indicator of accuracy, automaticity and prosody of oral reading.

In summary, this section revealed the intricacies of the nature of oral reading fluency and the difficulties that can arise when attempting to examine the role fluency plays in reading. Even though a common or precise operational definition of oral reading fluency does not exist, most researchers concur that fluency is a vital component when determining reading ability. They contend that fluency is not a single construct but rather the result of a large number of sub-processes that must be accomplished efficiently, automatically and that interact with each other (Breznitz, 2006). Although multifaceted, there seems to be a "growing consensus in the literature" that fluent oral reading is comprised of three interdependent but distinct constituents: word accuracy, rapid word recognition and prosody. All three components stand complementarily to promote an effective fluent reading. We now turn to a discussion of the issues surrounding oral reading fluency measurement.

#### **2.3.4. Oral Reading Fluency Measures**

According to Rasinski (2004a), fluency assessments, as for any formal assessment tool or method, should meet established criteria of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to “the degree to which test scores for a group of test takers are consistent over repeated applications of a measurement procedure and hence are inferred to be dependable and repeatable for an individual test taker” (Berkowitz, Wolkowitz, Fitch, & Kopriva, 2000, p. 9). Those using the assessments must be certain that the results they obtain are reliable, that the results will provide stable measures of fluency and will not be inconsistent due to any flaws in the assessment. Users must also be assured that the assessments are valid. Validity refers to the degree to which an assessment actually measures what it is supposed to, which in this case, is reading fluency.

Rasinski (2004a) further states that assessments must be efficient in administration, scoring and interpretation. If assessment places an undue burden on teachers and school administrators, it will not be undertaken at all, and the lack of data will be detrimental to all concerned. Moreover, the more time allocated to assessment, the less time available for instruction.

According to Samuels (2006, p.18), establishing any system of measurement is mainly dependent on how the construct to be measured is defined by the researcher. As such, the assessment of oral reading fluency in this study will entail measuring accuracy, automaticity and prosody in reading.

#### ***Curriculum Based Measurement***

The need for a reading assessment that measured students' reading performance continuously during instruction, while at the same time was valid and easy to administer, led Deno (1985) to develop the Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM). The basic intent behind CBM is frequent monitoring of skills using a set of quick (usually one minute) sample and inexpensive standardised probes that are based on the current curriculum and sensitive to literacy growth (Deno, 2003; Ives Wiley & Deno, 2005). Curriculum based assessment may be applied in assessing students' basic academic skills in reading, mathematics, spelling and written expression. The

probes are usually developed from or taken from the books or materials that make up the child's curriculum (Aldrich & Wright, 2001).

CBM in reading is a valid and time efficient means of timed, repeated measurement of reading words correctly in context. Because this CBM clearly focuses on oral reading fluency, it has also been termed Curriculum Based Measurement Oral Reading Fluency assessment or CBM-ORF (Good & Kaminski, 2002).

In Curriculum-Based Measurement of Oral Reading Fluency assessment, students are given a grade-appropriate selected passage, currently used in the school curriculum and asked to read aloud for one minute. The examiner has an “examiner copy”, of the same passage and marks as incorrect, any errors that the student makes. For an illustrative set of scoring guidelines, please refer to section 3.4.1.3., in chapter 3. The passage is then scored for Correctly Read Words (CRW).

Schools can also make their own CBM Oral Reading Fluency passages in PDF format based on text typed in by the user using, for example, the Reading Fluency Passages Generator, at <http://www.interventioncentral.org/teacher>.

Researchers have pointed out that words correct per minute (wcpm) is a sensitive, valid and reliable measure that may be utilised to assess a student's overall reading proficiency and to assess progress within that child's reading curriculum (Fuchs & Deno, 1994; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1992; Shinn, Good III, Knutson, Tilly III, & Collins, 1992). According to Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006),

WCPM has been shown, in both theoretical and empirical research, to serve as an accurate and powerful indicator of overall reading competence, especially in its strong correlation with comprehension. The validity and reliability of these two measures have been well established in a body of research extending over the past 30 years. (p.107)

### ***Assessing Accuracy***

Accuracy, which has been shown to be a valid measure of reading proficiency (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Deno, 1982) is calculated by adding the total number of words read correctly in one minute divided by the total words read (correct or corrected +



uncorrected errors), multiplied by 100. For example:  $100 \text{ words read correct} \div 125 \text{ total words read} (100 \text{ correct} + 25 \text{ uncorrected errors}) = 0.8 \times 100 = 80\% \text{ correct}$ .

After obtaining a student's accuracy score, the teacher may wish to interpret the student's performance by comparing it with English L1 established word decoding accuracy norms and standards set for each grade level. For instructional purposes, accuracy in reading is often divided into three levels (see Table 1). These norms will help teachers in the planning of appropriate instructional goals and strategies on the basis of the CBM-ORF established interpretations.

**Table 1.**

Levels of Performance for English Word Decoding Accuracy

<b>INDEPENDENT</b>	97% accuracy or above
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL</b>	90 to 96% accuracy
<b>FRUSTRATION</b>	below 90% accuracy

*Note.* Adapted from "Assessing reading fluency," by T.V. Rasinski, 2004, *Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)*, p. 6.

The independent reading level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode 97% to 100% of the words. Students at this level can read effortlessly, on their own, without assistance from the teacher or parent. The instructional level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode from 90% to 96% of the words. At this level, students require the support of the teacher or parent. The frustration level is the level at which reading simply becomes too difficult and challenging, whereby a student decodes less than 90% of the words accurately (Rasinski, 2004a, p. 6).

### ***Assessing Automaticity***

Automaticity can be measured via reading rate. Reading rate affords a measure of the degree to which a reader can automatically decode words, hence leaving cognitive resources free for the more significant task of understanding text. According to Hosp, Hosp, and Howell (2007), rate can be determined by simply calculating the total number of words the student has read correctly during a one minute read, minus the number of errors the student made. For example, if a student finished reading after 1 minute at the 125<sup>th</sup> word, he read 125 words in total. He also made 25 errors. Therefore, his Word Reading Count (WRC) was 125 with 25 errors, reported as 100/25. If a student finishes in less than one minute, the number of seconds is noted and the following formula used: number of words read correctly divided by number of seconds to read the passage x 60.

To determine if the student's English L1 score is on target, the examiner may compare it to oral reading fluency end-of-year performance goals (benchmarks), to established norms or to intra-individual frameworks (used to determine an end-of-the-year goal based on a student's individual rate of improvement). Although there are no set or universal numbers for how many words per minute a child should be reading at a certain time, Table 2 shows the most widely accepted scale in terms of L1 oral reading fluency rates of students in grades 1 through 8. It is based on an extensive study conducted by Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006).

**Table 2.**

2006 Hasbrouck &amp; Tindal's Oral Reading Fluency Norms for Grades 1-8

<b>Hasbrouck and Tindal's Oral Reading Fluency Norms for Grades 1-8</b>									
	FALL	WINTER	SPRING			FALL	WINTER	SPRING	
PERCENTILE	WCPM	WCPM	WCPM	AWI	PERCENTILE	WCPM	WCPM	WCPM	AWI
<b>GRADE 1</b>					<b>GRADE 5</b>				
90	—	81	111	1.9	90	166	182	194	0.9
75	—	47	82	2.2	75	139	156	168	0.9
50	—	23	53	1.9	50	110	127	139	0.9
25	—	12	28	1.0	25	85	99	109	0.8
10	—	6	15	0.6	10	61	74	83	0.7
<b>GRADE 2</b>					<b>GRADE 6</b>				
90	106	125	142	1.1	90	177	195	204	0.8
75	79	100	117	1.2	75	153	167	177	0.8
50	51	72	89	1.2	50	127	140	150	0.7
25	25	42	61	1.1	25	98	111	122	0.8
10	11	18	31	0.6	10	68	82	93	0.8
<b>GRADE 3</b>					<b>GRADE 7</b>				
90	128	146	162	1.1	90	180	192	202	0.7
75	99	120	137	1.2	75	156	165	177	0.7
50	71	92	107	1.1	50	128	136	150	0.7
25	44	62	78	1.1	25	102	109	123	0.7
10	21	36	48	0.8	10	79	88	98	0.6
<b>GRADE 4</b>					<b>GRADE 8</b>				
90	145	166	180	1.1	90	185	199	199	0.4
75	119	139	152	1.0	75	161	173	177	0.5
50	94	112	123	0.9	50	133	146	151	0.6
25	68	87	98	0.9	25	106	115	127	0.6
10	45	61	72	0.8	10	77	84	97	0.6
WCPM: Words Correct Per Minute					AWI: Average Weekly Improvement				

Hasbrouck and Tindal, 2006

*Note.* Adapted from "Screening, diagnosing, and progress monitoring for fluency: The details," by J. Hasbrouck, 2006. Reading Rockets. Retrieved from, <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/11200>.

The information in this table can be used to draw conclusions and make decisions about students' oral reading fluency. According to fluency norms for English L1, by the end of Grade 1 children at the 50th percentile read at about 53 wcpm, this increases to 89 wcpm at the end of Grade 2, 107 wcpm by the end of Grade 3, 139 wcpm by the end of Grade 5 and 150 wcpm by the end of Grade 6 (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). There is considerable variation within grades, with stronger readers reading faster and more accurately than their weaker peers, such that ORF scores can range between 80-100 wcpm within a grade. Denser, more difficult text containing many new and unfamiliar words can slow fluency rates down too. Notice that oral reading rates beyond the 8th grade level are not listed. This is due to the fact that when we read aloud, we generally do not read faster than what we can read at an 8th grade reading level. Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) recommend that "a score falling within 10 words above or below the 50th percentile should be interpreted as within the normal, expected, and appropriate range for a student at that grade level at that time of year, at least for students in grades 2–8" (p. 640). Students scoring 10 or more words below the 50th percentile using the average score of three unpracticed readings from grade-level materials need a fluency-building programme.

### ***Assessing Prosody***

As there is a growing consensus in the literature that fluent oral reading is comprised of three interdependent but distinct dimensions, accuracy, automaticity and prosody, the assessment of fluency should include all three components. However, as Deeney (2010) notes, this is not current practice. While accuracy and automaticity are important goals in reading, teachers who rely solely on word count per minute to assess reading fluency, may fail to recognise students who are accurate and quick when reading but lack prosody. Deno and Marston (2006) note that "were we to define fluency as the number of words read correctly from text in one minute, we would be missing other features of fluent reading, such as prosody (e.g., reading with expression), that are not included in the CBM of oral reading" (p. 180). This is supported by Rasinski (2004b) who states that "If we emphasise speed at the expense of prosodic and meaningful reading, we will end up with fast readers who understand little of what they have read" (p. 49).

There are two main approaches for measuring prosodic reading: spectrographic measures and subjective rating scales (Schwanenflugel & Benjamin, 2012). The measurement of prosody using spectrographs, involves converting an audiotaped oral reading into a digital visual representation (spectrogram) that can be changed according to prosodic elements, including pause structure and pitch changes (Schwanenflugel et al., 2004; Steinhauer, 2003). Spectrographic analysis is a slow manual process. Experienced labellers spend between 100 to 200 times the actual recording time to label a single spectrogram (Syrdal, Hirschberg, McGory, & Beckman, 2001). Furthermore, this analysis necessitates both the expertise of a qualified expert and access to technology, typically found only in speech and hearing centres. Schwanenflugel and Benjamin (2012) point out that although spectrographic analysis is not practical for teachers, it could help inform and guide the development of assessments of prosody that are both easy to use and understand.

For practical reasons, fluency rating scales have often been used in lieu of direct measurements of prosody. These scales often incorporate oblique references to prosody as a way of distinguishing fluent from less fluent reading. The most common method for assessing the construct of prosody is to listen to a student's one minute oral reading and rating it on rating schemes that have been created exactly for that purpose.

One such scale is the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)-Oral Reading Fluency Scale (Pinnell et al., 1995). This scale employs a word description of reading behaviour to measure levels of fluency ranging from Level 1 (not fluent) to Level 4 (completely fluent) and has been primarily used to measure short, one minute readings (Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman, & Oranje, 2005). This 4-point scale distinguishes reading that sounds primarily word-by-word from reading that occurs in "larger, meaningful phrase groups" (Pinnell et al., 1995).

Although widely used the NAEP scale has been critiqued. Strecker et al. (1998) pointed out that defining criteria are not acknowledged at all levels of proficiency. Level 1, for example, is dependent on phrasing issues, whereas level 4 makes reference to phrasing, expression and the preservation of the author's syntax. Schwanenflugel and Benjamin (2012) corroborate these findings stating that the

NAEP scale does not include accuracy within its measured features and has ambiguous divisions between descriptors.

The Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) is used to rate each reader on a 16-point scale, rating readers in four dimensions, expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace. When considering expression and volume, students should read in audible voice and with expression that matches or reflects the meaning of the passages. When rating phrasing, assessors make sure students read in meaningful phrases and adhere to punctuation. Smooth reading is characterised by students reading without breaks or hesitations. Finally, students should read at a conversational pace, pausing for effect, or adjusting pace for expressiveness. Generally, scores below 8 indicate that fluency may be a concern. Scores of 8 or above indicate that the student is making good progress in fluency.

Zutell and Rasinski (1991) assert that teachers can use this method and feel confident in its validity and reliability, with reported test-retest coefficients as high as .99.

**Use the following rubric (1–4) to rate reader fluency in the areas of expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace.**

- **EXPRESSION AND VOLUME**

1. Reads words as if simply to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice.
2. Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas of the text but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the word. Still reads in a quiet voice.
3. Make text sound like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.
4. Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.

- **PHRASING**

1. Reads in a monotone with little sense of boundaries; frequently reads word-by-word.
2. Frequently reads in two- and three-word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses.
3. Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness, reasonable stress and intonation.
4. Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.

- **SMOOTHNESS**

1. Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.
2. Experiences several “rough spots” in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive.
3. Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.
4. Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.

- **PACE**

1. Reads slowly and laboriously.
2. Reads moderately slowly.
3. Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.
4. Consistently reads at conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.

**Figure 3:** Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Adapted from “Creating fluent readers,” by T. Rasinski, 2004, *What Research Says About Reading*, 61 (6), 48-49.

### ***Fluency Scale Caveat***

The most frequently noted caveat of scales such as the NAEP Oral Reading Fluency scale (Pinnell et al., 1995) or the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) is their lack of precision (Rasinski, Rikli, & Johnston, 2009; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Zutell and Rasinski (1991), state that even though they may not be as precise as we might wish, they do provide additional insight into students' reading development. Moreover, these scales deepen teachers' understanding of the multiple dimensions of fluency and the critical importance of providing balanced, explicit instruction in those multiple dimensions. Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, et al. (2010) point out that the lack of precision is a reasonable compromise to balance out the misconception that oral reading fluency is speed reading. They go on to add that improvements in such measures will be made as we more fully understanding the linkages between identifiable spectrographic elements of prosody and comprehension. For now, "prosodic measures ... can serve as a rough gauge of how well students are integrating the suprasegmental features of language into their oral reading." (p.244)

### **2.3.5. Foreign Language ORF Norms**

It is important to emphasise that the aforementioned accuracy, automaticity and prosodic norms are based on the reading development of English first language in the United States. However, as there are currently no research studies that reveal grade-level norms for Portuguese FL students' oral reading fluency developmental trajectories, it is unclear how they might be expected to perform compared with monolingual English speakers at grade-level benchmarks. Since the construct of fluency in this study is measured in a foreign language setting, the above mentioned established norms cannot be applied directly, but rather used as a reference.

There appears to be a general consensus that in order to read comfortably, L2/FL readers need to have a receptive mastery of between 95% and 98% or more of the words in a text recognising them rapidly (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hu & Nation, 2000; Schmitt, Jiang, & Grabe, 2011). This percentage coincides with what has been set for L1 students. A student's *independent reading level* corresponds to an accuracy rate of 97% or over. The text should challenge a student sufficiently but not enough that he or she becomes frustrated and cannot read it without teacher support. It is



especially important not to hold L2s/FLs to the native speaker expectations for prosody, or expressive reading. However, their oral reading rate and accuracy should improve over time, just as it does for native speakers.

## **2.4. Part Three - Developing Reading Fluency**

Although important for teachers to develop ways to help readers become fluent, they may not be certain which path to take to accomplish this. Griffith and Rasinski (2004) conclude that this may be attributed to teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of fluency and how to best teach it. Zutell and Rasinski (1991) claim that some teachers believe that fluent reading is the ability to read a text accurately, while for others fluency has evolved to be known as speed reading. Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, and Meisinger (2010, p. 246) state that "It is critical that we establish...instruction that assist(s) learners in becoming *truly* fluent readers rather than *just* fast ones." It is fundamental that teachers understand that reading fluency incorporates accurate word recognition known as "accuracy", reading with ease or at a conversational rate/pace known as the "automaticity" of reading and reading expressively, often referred to as "prosody" (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2004c; Samuels, 2006).

According to a growing number of authors (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984; Bamford & Day, 2004; Grabe, 2010; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003; Stanovich, 1980), the way in which instruction can best facilitate accurate and automatic word recognition as well as the ability to read with expression in both L1 and L2/FL contexts is through extensive practice.

Many teachers have often relied primarily on and implemented round-robin reading in their classrooms as a result of the mistaken belief that it will increase the amount of time students spend on reading and develop oral fluency. Despite the well-intentioned goal, round-robin reading in itself may not increase fluency. In actual fact, it has been proven unsuccessful or even adverse for readers who are facing the most difficulty with the development of their reading (Allington, 1983; Ash & Kuhn, 2006; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). According to Ash and Kuhn (2006), round-robin reading remains an active practice in numerous classrooms all over the world, habitually under the guise of popcorn, popsicle, or combat reading. As such, it is necessary to

review the problems with round-robin reading, in short, before discussing instructional practices that are efficacious in increasing reading fluency.

#### **2.4.1. Round-Robin Reading**

Round-robin reading is defined in the Literacy Dictionary as “the outmoded practice of calling on students to read orally one after the other” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 222), and is customarily not endorsed by most reading experts due to its ineffectiveness and its negative effects on students and their reading achievement.

Given that round-robin reading is widely known to be ineffective, why does it persist in both L1 and L2 classes around the world today? Opitz and Rasinski (2008, pp. 84-86) offer the following list of reasons teachers enumerated for the use of round-robin reading:

- a) Tradition: teachers find it is difficult to break traditions either because they have grown up with this practice and feel comfortable with it or because they may be scared of trying something new for fear that it will not work;
  - b) Classroom management: teachers believe round-robin reading procedures aid in classroom management, as they have a better control over student behaviour;
  - c) Motivation: teachers believe round-robin reading encourages poor readers to work harder, knowing that their reading proficiency is public matter;
  - d) Time Saver: teachers believe round-robin reading procedures save time as they can assess students, while a passage is being read;
  - e) Enjoyment: teachers believe students by and large enjoy reading stories out loud and as a class rather than reading silently on their own;
  - f) Convenience: teachers believe round-robin reading is convenient as the amount of preparation is minimal. All one has to do is select a passage and a reader;
- The final reason given for using the round-robin reading approach was:
- g) lack of alternatives.

Opitz and Rasinski (2008), assert that the limitations of round-robin reading and its many variations far outweigh its benefits. One of the main causes for concern

regarding round-robin reading is that it can provide students with an inaccurate view of reading, as it places greater emphasis on word perfect reading rather than on comprehension. By 'feeding' struggling readers the words before they can decode them independently, teachers deny students the opportunity of developing appropriate self-cross-checking strategies, thereby, hindering their proficiency in word decoding. Possessing such independence in decoding is considered fundamental to reading development because it is intrinsically linked to automaticity, which is a key component of fluent reading (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

In addition, as students tend to read at different rates, round-robin reading may promote faulty reading habits such as sub-vocalisation (Flurkey, 2006). Following along while proficient readers read a passage may leave those who are less experienced, little or no time, to decode the meaning of unknown words. On the other end of the spectrum, requiring proficient readers to follow along while their less proficient peers read inevitably forces them to slow down their reading pace. These two effects counteract the type of meaning-making cognitive work that effective reading entails. In both cases, readers are disenfranchised because they are unable to process information in a manner best suited to them. In addition, the interruptive nature of turn-taking does not allow for effective modelling, which is central to research-based fluency instruction. Listening to passages that are read too slowly, with many halting stutters and mistakes is counterproductive.

Round-robin reading can also cause inattentive behaviour, leading to discipline problems as well as hindering listening comprehension. Although students are supposed to be actively listening to others read while following along, they often do not. Instead they may be preoccupied with following lines of print because they are reading ahead to find their portion of the text, anticipating what they will have to read aloud. They may find themselves distracted by classmates that are too slow or too rapid at reading, or may simply be bored by the procedure. According to Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2006), the result is that little attention is given to the meaning of the passage being read. There is strong scientific evidence that the only student who is actually paying attention to the text is the one reading. The others are generally off task and as soon as a student finishes his or her turn, he or she ceases to pay attention as well.

Opitz and Rasinski (1998) found round-robin reading actually slows reading rates and does not build fluency. Rather than hearing a smooth rendition of a passage, round-robin reading customarily sounds choppy with various pauses throughout. Additionally, because of the turn-taking aspect of round-robin reading, each student is responsible for reading only a very small portion of the text. According to Stahl (2004) "in classes where round-robin reading predominated, children read an average of 6 minutes per day with low-achieving readers often reading less than 2 minutes per day" (p. 190). As a result, students have very little opportunity to better their fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003).

Perhaps the most obvious concern is that round-robin reading may potentially be a source of anxiety and embarrassment for students. As round-robin reading is not rehearsed, those who find reading a struggle may be extremely humiliated and demoralised. A student's lack of reading competency may be placed on display, as teachers correct reading mistakes in front of their peers, quite often before the student is given an opportunity to self-correct (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Favourable reading attitudes are unlikely to be fostered in such situations. The US Government's own National Reading Report (2000) states the following about round-robin reading:

These procedures have been criticized as boring, anxiety provoking, disruptive of fluency, and wasteful of instructional time, and their use has been found to have little or no relationship to gains in reading achievement. (Chapter 3, p.11)

While round-robin reading instruction is not beneficial for students, studies have shown that certain types of instruction involving oral reading by students can enhance reading achievement (Eldredge et al., 1996; Hoffman, 1987; Holdaway, 1979). Let us now turn to the alternatives to round-robin reading, that not only build reading proficiency, but are also a source of motivation for students.

(Hudson et al., 2005) note that "fluency instruction is not a reading programme itself, but rather is part of a comprehensive reading programme that emphasises both research-based practices and reading for meaning" (p.708). Given that the major components of fluency are reading rate, accuracy and prosody, and that fluency is

achieved by substantial amounts of practice, current research has given us some direction about methods that effectively increase fluency.

A meta-analysis of fluency studies conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed 100,000 studies, over a 2-year period and concluded that that fluency practice is most effective when (1) the reading practice is oral; (2) when it involves repeated readings of a text; and (3) when students receive guidance or feedback from teachers, parents, volunteers, and peers (pp.3–11). One key aspect of repeated reading approaches is that they combine extensive opportunities to read connected text with the provision of scaffolding. As such, they provide learners with support through either feedback or modelling which effectively increases readers' accurate and automatic word recognition, promotes their use of prosodic features, such as stress, pitch and suitable phrasing and assists with their comprehension (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003).

#### **2.4.2. Repeated Reading**

Repeated reading, which has been influencing educational practices for over thirty years, has long been acknowledged by many researchers as one of the most effective approaches to helping students increase their reading fluency (Armbruster et al., 2001; Grabe, 2009; Hudson et al., 2005; Pressley et al., 2006; Samuels, 1979; Tyler & Chard, 2000). The 'method of repeated reading', as discussed by Samuels (1979, 1988) and by Samuels et al. (1992), was developed in an attempt to translate LaBerge and Samuels (1974) automatic information processing theory into practice. LaBerge and Samuels' model is grounded on the notion that automatising lower-level components, such as decoding words, frees attentional capacity which can then be allocated to higher-level processing, such as comprehension.

Reading the same passage repeatedly has been shown to significantly increase reading rate and accuracy (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Samuels, 2006) promote prosodic reading, as it enables the reader to segment sentences into meaningful phrases (Dowhower, 1987), and as such, lead to better comprehension (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Sindelar, Monda, & O'Shea, 1990; Therrien, 2004; Worthy & Broadbush, 2002; Young & Rasinski, 2009). In addition, there is evidence that fluency gains, resulting from repeated readings are found to carry over to new unpracticed texts

(Dowhower, 1989; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Rasinski, 2004c; Samuels, 1997; Schreiber, 1991; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Furthermore, the positive influence of repeated reading on fluency has been found to promote self-esteem and has proven to be an excellent motivational device (Carrick, 2009).

In addition to the strategy of repeated reading, guided reading can be a highly successful method for improving reading skills. Guided reading, regularly used in combination with repeated reading has proven to facilitate reading fluency and prevent mistakes in reading as it presents the reader with modelling and immediate corrective feedback (Chard et al., 2002). Listening to the prosodic effects of chunking and phrasing lets readers comprehend the meaning of what is being read, while providing them with an example to follow in subsequent readings when they attempt to read the passage on their own.

While repeated reading has proven to be an adequate method to improve fluency, its lack of legitimate reason to re-read the same text may cause shortfalls to the method itself (Carrick, 2006). An oral fluency strategy is most efficacious when it combines the use of repeated readings, modelling, offers corrective feedback and motivates students' interest in reading (Chard et al., 2002; Worthy & Broaddus, 2002).

Most recently, researchers have suggested that repeated readings be carried out through more authentic means, for a real purpose and not in isolated practice (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003). Worthy and Broaddus (2002) claim that, the most authentic use of repeated readings transpires when teachers ask students to practice reading passages which, will ultimately be performed for others. Understanding that assigned passages will be performed, gives students a real purpose for practising them (Rasinski et al., 2006). One technique which has successfully served this purpose is Readers Theatre, a popular, authentic form of repeated reading and guided oral reading, which masks the mundane act of repeated reading (Young & Rasinski, 2009). Moreover, Readers Theatre has proven to be an effective strategy for improving fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000; Young & Rasinski, 2009). Readers Theatre provides students with the motivation and confidence to "practise, refine and perform texts enhancing accuracy, automaticity and prosody and creates purposeful repeated reading" (Rasinski, 2009, p. 12).

### **2.4.3. Readers Theatre**

#### **2.4.3.1. History of Readers Theatre**

Readers Theatre may be traced back to ancient Greece when wandering minstrels, called 'rhapsodes' travelled the country performing dramatic readings of epic poetry and other literary works. The rhapsodes would use their voices and bodies to communicate with their audiences and were at times accompanied by music (Bahn, 1932, cited in Coger & White, 1973, p.16).

Over time, Readers Theatre became lost as an art form until 1945 when a professional theatrical group in New York who called themselves Readers Theatre, Inc., put on a performance of *Oedipus Rex*. Their stated purpose was "to give the people of New York an opportunity to witness performances of great dramatic works which were seldom if ever produced" (Coger & White, 1973, p. 18).

In 1951, the first professional Readers Theatre production, *Don Juan in Hell*, originally written Shaw, was directed by Paul Gregory, often referred to as the author of the Readers Theatre movement, and performed by the actors Charles Laughton, Charles Boyer, Agnes Moorehead and Sir Cedric Hardwicke. The performers, dressed in formal attire, sat on stools on a bare stage and read from scripts placed on lecterns, engaging in a lively, spirited dialogue accompanied by music. By linking Readers Theatre with classical music performances, Gregory managed to capture the essence of contemporary Readers Theatre (Johnson, 1981). The production, welcomed by both the public and critics alike, was performed all over the country. Gregory believed the production's overwhelming success was owed to the actors' ability to create vivid images in the minds of their audience. The presentation of George Bernard Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*, is regarded as the most influential work in the development of professional and educational Readers Theatre (Coger & White, 1973).

#### **2.4.3.2. The Growth of Readers Theatre as an Academic Activity**

During the early 1960s, Readers Theatre was widely practised in colleges, universities and secondary schools as an educational resource. As interest in Readers Theatre rose it was incorporated it as an integral part of the reading curriculum (Coger & White, 1973). In 1965, the professional production of Roald

Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* sparked an interest among educators and theatrical professionals to adapt materials for children's Readers Theatre performances. Towards the end of the 1960s, Readers Theatre became extremely popular within American schools, especially with young learners (Coger & White, 1973, p. 10).

In 1968, the curriculum committee of the American Theatre Association (1968) strongly endorsed Readers Theatre as a course of study for high school theatre arts teachers. Readers Theatre was used to arouse interest and curiosity in history, science, sociology, art and other subjects. Science classes, for example, were made more interesting when Galileo's scientific investigation became a more personal experience for the reader through Readers Theatre. Foreign language departments were also encouraged to stage Readers Theatre productions in French, Spanish and other languages in order to increase their students' oral skills.

In 1972, Robert Post, associate professor of speech and coordinator of Readers Theatre at the University of Washington, Seattle, encouraged elementary school teachers to use Readers Theatre as a method to enhance and develop reading comprehension. In 1974-1975, two educators, Crain and Smith (1976), working with The Readers Theatre Institute at San Diego State University introduced Readers Theatre to approximately two thousand teachers at a conference in California. Crain and Smith stated that Readers Theatre improved oral fluency skills and reading development, was motivational and stimulated positive peer collaboration. However, it was not until the mid-1990s that Readers Theatre was taken more seriously as an instructional strategy. Even so, it was not until the twenty-first century that major language textbook writers began offering Readers Theatre scripts along with the reading series. Readers Theatre, as an instructional reading strategy began to appear in language arts textbooks in the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s.

Historically, Readers Theatre has provided educators and students with an opportunity to experience literature in a unique way. Coger and White (1973) stress that, "oral reading as used in Readers Theatre is one of the best ways to know and to feel the full meaning of literature because, audibly expressed, it appeals not only to the mind but to the whole range of senses" (p.11).



#### **2.4.3.3. Defining Readers Theatre in the Language Classroom**

According to Worthy and Prater (2002), Readers Theatre is an “inherently meaningful, purposeful vehicle for repeated reading. Effective performances are built upon positive social interactions focused on reading, in which modelling, instruction and feedback are natural components of rehearsals” (p. 295). Carrick (2009) and Corcoran and Davis (2005) add that Readers Theatre combines students’ desire to perform with their need for oral reading practice and offers an engaging and entertaining means of improving fluency and enhancing comprehension.

Although Readers Theatre exists in many forms, in essence, it always involves a group, reading a rehearsed text aloud from visible scripts with an authentic communicative purpose (Black & Stave, 2007; Flynn, 2004; Kinniburgh & Shaw, 2007). The primary focus of Readers Theatre is on fluent and interpretative oral reading as opposed to memorisation, action, props or costumes (Hoyt, 1992, p. 582). According to Casey and Chamberlain (2006), Readers Theatre is less demanding and much easier to implement than an actual play production. It is a ‘minimal’ theatrical production in which students express “meaning through fluent and prosodic readings of scripted stories” (p.18). The purpose is for reading to be done in such a way that it enables readers to paint an image of the events in the minds of the audience. Unlike drama, in which body movements express a great deal of the meaning, Readers Theatre is more reliant on words, rather than physical activity to tell the story. Black and Stave (2007, p.3) put forth that readers bring to life characters, stories or content material through their voices. In short, the voice and the written script are the two most important components of Readers Theatre (Coger & White, 1973; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Flynn, 2004; Johns & Berglund, 2002; Wolf, 1993; Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Readers Theatre performances differ from those of the traditional form of theatre or role play in that the readers are not expected to memorise the lines or act out a script. Furthermore, the use of props, elaborate costumes, scenery, even lights are also not required or only minimally used and very little physical movement is involved (Moran, 2006). However, Forsythe (1995, p. 264) argues that when introducing Readers Theatre to young learners, the inclusion of backdrops, props, and puppets is recommended. Moreover, performers read directly from the script on the stage

because the emphasis is placed almost solely on oral interpretation of the text rather than theatrical effect. Each script is divided into chunks or sentences, which are distributed among the readers. The students are assigned different roles or numbers and they read aloud from the script that they are holding in their hands, each of them having his/her own copy of the script. Each role or number appears several times in the script and every participant therefore reads small chunks multiple times. Usually there is a narrator that provides the cementing details and explanation of what is transpiring in the text (Martinez et al., 1998).

The audience has a very special, participational and imaginative role in Readers Theatre. Drawing on the work of (Coger & White, 1973) “the members of the audience supply a portion of the performance in that their imaginations must complete all the suggestions of characterisations, action and setting” (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995, p. 406). Stimulated by the descriptions in the text, the audience member evokes in his mind’s eye the characters in action and in essence, becomes one of them. Not only do audience members see actors/readers on stage before them, but also envision the characters interacting in the setting of the literature. To fulfill their role in Readers Theatre, the audience must turn themselves over to the performance. There must be a willingness to suspend disbelief, in order to focus on what is transpiring in the performance.

#### **2.4.3.4. Models of Readers Theatre**

Readers Theatre can adopt many different forms depending on factors such as the type of text, number of readers and choices made by those taking part. Readers can sit, stand, alternate between sitting and standing, and can be mobile as they read. Shepard (2004b) categorises Readers Theatre into two main models for staging the performance of Readers Theatre the ‘traditional’ and the ‘developed’ model. What sets the two models apart is the readers’ degree of movement (p.47).

In the traditional model students are arranged in a row or semi-circle and read the scene standing or seated on high stools in front of an audience. A narrator is usually cast, to help the audience visualise the action taking place. Typically, narrators are placed at one or both ends of the semi-circle and the major characters in the centre. Scripts can be held in hand or set on music stands. The students may choose to read

facing the audience full front, at an angle, or facing the character with whom they are speaking. Characters 'exit' by turning their backs to the audience when not involved in the scene. This lets the audience know that the readers are out of the scene, even if visible. Narrators do not normally 'exit'. In regular theatre, the dimming of lights and the lowering of the curtain, indicate scene changes. In Readers Theatre, this change is achieved by a break in movement. According to Shepard (2004b, p.50) an example of this change may be a group freeze, (e.g., readers turning their backs to the audience and freezing), followed by a collective shift (turning around and reentering the scene). Sounds in the story can be added whenever possible, to assist in the illusion. This may be accomplished by readers having their backs to the audience while making these sounds.

In the developed model, in contrast, there is a clear distinction between 'narrators' and 'characters' and several of the readers are mobile (Shepard, 2004b). Readers who portray the characters in the play are free to move around, as a means of reinforcing the story, just as they would in ordinary plays. The narrators, on the other hand, are usually placed in a fixed location in the room and provide the background information in the text. Shepard (2004b) argues that the developed model requires more effort, but is more rewarding and involving for both performer and audience.

#### **2.4.3.5. Implementing Readers Theatre**

Before implementing Readers Theatre in the classroom, it is best to come up with a plan (Prescott & Lewis, 2003). In accordance with the procedure suggested in the literature (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Martinez et al., 1998), the implementation of Readers theatre entails: a) the development or selection of scripts, b) the modelling of expressive reading, c) practice reading, d) rehearsal, e) performance and f) discussion.

##### **A. Selection**

First and foremost, scripts that are interesting, related to individual areas of interest or to the subject matter being studied will foster the motivation to read (Pressley, 2006; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000). Secondly, scripts can either be ready-made, for example, selected from prepared reading materials or adapted and/or developed by teachers or students (Samuels & Farstrup, 2006). Allington (2001) argues that it is more beneficial when students and teachers create their own scripts. He claims that

students will be more engaged in a reading activity and, thus, be more motivated to read when they have the opportunity to play a part in the process of developing scripts. Lastly, scripts need to be carefully selected. Martinez et al. (1998, p. 328) stress that the choice of text is important as texts that are too difficult will affect accuracy, automaticity and expressiveness. The level of difficulty should be set to ensure that students are able to achieve fluency after instruction (Hudson et al., 2005; Welsh, 2006; Worthy, 2005). Level-appropriate texts allow students to feel comfortable and confident to engage in reading activities (Campbell & Cleland, 2003; Worthy & Prater, 2002). Stahl and Kuhn (2002) noted that the more students interact with literature, at their appropriate level, the more they excel. Black and Stave (2007) recommend that texts be divided up into smaller units, which each student will read. Students will then take turns reading until the entire passage has been completed. Some readers may read more than others do, for instance, based on their reading proficiency level. Each child, no matter what his or her academic ability, can make a worthy contribution.

## **B. Modelling Reading**

According to Readers Theatre proponents, teachers can be effective reading models while reading aloud to students (Martinez et al., 1998; Rasinski, 2003; Worthy, 2005). This modelling has been proven to be beneficial for improving oral reading fluency, comprehension and motivation for reading (Chard et al., 2002; Rasinski, 2003). According to Rasinski (2004b), “students need to hear what fluent reading sounds like and how fluent readers interpret text with their voices” (p. 48). By listening to a model’s voice expression, and how that expression conveys the meaning of the story, students can learn how to interpret a script (Martinez et al., 1998; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2000). Keehn (2003) claims that when teachers actively ‘coach’ and offer direction in expressiveness, they provide students with the necessary assistance to identify what they need to do when reading. Keehn et al. (2008) also support the importance that teacher modelling of expressiveness and providing students with encouragement can lead to improved oral expression.

The National Reading Panel’s (2000) extensive review of the literature on fluency, reported that classroom practices that encourage repeated oral reading with corrective feedback or error correction and guidance, lead to marked improvements

in reading development for both good readers and those who are experiencing difficulties (p. 3). Such feedback provides struggling readers with the opportunity to better understand how proficient reading sounds (Samuels, 1997; Therrien, 2004; Therrien & Kubina, 2006; Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). Pany and McCoy (1988) state that repeated reading with feedback and guidance is far superior to repeated reading on its own.

### **C. Practise - Choral and Echo Reading**

Choral reading and echo reading may be used to boost reading confidence before asking students to read on their own. Choral reading is an oral reading strategy that involves student reading a text in unison as a group or with another fluent adult reader (Gillet, Temple, Crawford, & Temple, 2011; Moskal & Blachowicz, 2006). Echo reading is an easy-to-use reading strategy for helping readers learn about fluency and includes the teacher reading part of a text aloud, modelling correct fluency. After reading a part, the students echo back the reading with the same rate and prosody. This activity can be done with individual students, small groups, or larger groups of students (Rasinski, 2003). During Readers Theatre instruction, choral and echo reading provides students with opportunities to practise their scripts together during rehearsal or performance. Choral reading is considered an effective way of building community bonds which offer reading support in the classroom. Through choral reading, students can have in effect, a support system from their peers. It is important that students at different reading levels have opportunities to work together during reading activities. For less fluent readers, the interaction with a more competent peer is beneficial to reading.

### **D. Rehearsal**

According to Walker (1996), "Rehearsal is the key!" (p.12). Walker considers rehearsal as the essence of Readers Theatre because it affords students the opportunity to practise a script repeatedly in order to achieve fluency. Furthermore, she states that as EFL and ESL students rehearse a script over and over again, unfamiliar words will become more familiar because students have ample time to review what they have learned about the target language. After sufficient practice, students can read effortlessly and are able to understand the meaning of the text more easily. Confidence is therefore built and readers begin to feel more comfortable

with the language. As previously mentioned, as students practise for a Readers Theatre performance, guidance and immediate corrective feedback by teachers and peers are crucial (Chard et al., 2002). Research has shown adult guidance and feedback to be vital for maximising fluency development (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski, 2004b; Therrien & Kubina, 2006).

### **E. Performance**

Performance is the last step in Readers Theatre instruction and involves a group of students reading a script together in front of an audience. Performing in front of an audience gives students an authentic reason to practise reading repeatedly without feeling bored and uninterested (Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003; Worthy, 2005). According to Rasinski et al. (2005, p. 26), “when students are asked to perform for others, they have a natural inclination and desire to practice the passage to the point where they can read it accurately, with appropriate rate, and especially with meaningful expression and phrasing” (p. 26).

### **F. Discussion**

Post-performance discussion allows students the opportunity to reflect on their learning and participation in the Readers Theatre activity. When students are collaborators in providing feedback on their own performances, the habit of self-reflection develops. Reflecting on their own work or that of others can help students better develop their understanding of the intended learning outcomes. Research has shown that learners make greater progress when they are actively involved in their own learning.

In summation, it can be concluded that selecting interesting scripts will motivate students to read. Reading aloud will provide students with a good model of fluent reading while choral and echo reading gives the student oral support in reading. Rehearsal offers students sufficient practice opportunities, and support from group work provides students with a concrete reason to read, while discussion allows for reflection. These procedures are effective in improving students’ oral reading fluency while motivating them to read.

The repeated reading and guided reading embedded in the construct of the Readers Theatre may explain the significant increases in readers' reading fluency and

comprehension scores with its use (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Keehn et al., 2008; Martinez et al., 1998). The following section explores studies and applications of Readers Theatre, lending a foundation of support to its many benefits.

#### **2.4.4. Instructional Benefits of Readers Theatre in L1 Contexts**

A growing body of research underscores the viability of Readers Theatre as a pleasant repeated reading instructional approach which has a great potential for contributing to growth in oral reading fluency, in terms of reading accuracy and rate measured by the number of words read correctly per minute and oral reading in expression. Moreover studies indicate that Readers theatre has proven to ameliorate students' motivation, which is often found to correlate positively with the amount and outcome of reading. In addition it has proven to increase students' engagement and confidence in reading. This applies to students at varying reading levels and not only to struggling readers.

Young and Rasinski (2009) implemented a year-long classroom action research study which focused on Readers Theatre as an instructional activity for improving fluency and comprehension among twenty-nine primary second grade students (eight girls and twenty-one boys. Nine of the twenty-nine students were ELLs), in a Title 1 school in Dallas. All students participated in the Readers Theatre intervention, which became a product of the daily 90-minute reading instruction. After the year of implementation, data revealed that substantial growth was made over the school year in students' oral reading rates had increased more than expected - an average growth rate of sixty-five words counted per minute while reading over the course of the year. These results based on Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) puts these students in the 50th and 75th percentile for second graders. Students also had a 20% overall growth in prosody scores, double as the former year in which Readers Theatre was not implemented. The researchers also noted that the students were motivated and engaged during the Readers Theatre lessons and took pleasure in performing in front of their classmates. Parents spoke about the positive impact that their child had in reading, whereas students mentioned they anxiously awaited the reading activity and liked learning.

Carrick (2009) studied the effects of Readers Theatre as an instructional strategy to promote students' oral reading accuracy, rate and comprehension amongst 179 fifth grade students in ten regular classrooms, from four different schools in the same district. The quasi-experimental study, which took place over twelve weeks, used three groups: the control group (n=47) used traditional methods of using their coursebook, the quasi-control group (n=76) used paired repeated reading and the experimental group (n=56) took part in Readers Theatre reading instruction. The groups were not randomly formed, as administration had formed classes previous to intervention.

Findings of the study demonstrated that the experimental group significantly improved their sight word vocabulary and their ability to decode words quickly and accurately as well as their comprehension scores in comparison to the control group and paired reading group. However, there were no significant differences amongst the groups for comprehension. Readers Theatre was also shown to increase motivation. Carrick noted "the students in the experimental group remained enthusiastic throughout the twelve weeks. They looked forward to Readers Theatre every day. In particular they appeared eager to perform the script for their classmates" (pp.114-115). Contrarily, the majority of the students in the paired readers' group conveyed boredom did not feel excitement towards the activity as were tired of it. The teachers observed that some of the readers in this group wanted to drop out after the first month.

Keehn, Harmon and Shoho (2008), studied the effects of Readers Theatre over a six week period, on two classes of eighth grade students in a metropolitan area in the south of Texas. Over half of the students in each class were reading below level at the beginning of the study. The experimental group (n=16, 9 identified as special education students) took part in Readers Theatre-based reading instruction, while the control group (n=20, none of whom were identified as special status students) took part in the more traditional-based reading activities. Pre- and posttests for reading ability level, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary were administered. Results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group in all measurements. Significant growth in expression in reading was observed in the study. The researchers pointed out that modelling of prosodic and expressive reading



by the teacher during Readers Theatre instruction resulted in “more expressive oral reading by students”. The researchers did not find a statistically significant difference in comprehension between both groups.

Interviews, which were administered to the experimental group at the end of the study, reported that students felt motivated by participating in Readers Theatre, making gains in confidence, in their ability to express themselves and in the manner in which they projected their voice. In addition, these students also expressed their like for the scripts used in this study, the enjoyment obtained from performing and the feeling of being engaged.

Casey and Chamberlain’s (2006) research project sought to determine the impact of Readers Theatre over a twelve-week period, on improving children’s reading fluency, oral expression and motivation. They found that within 2 months, over two thirds of the students showed gains in fluency rate from 43% to 52% as measured using Rasinski (2004a) four-point Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Moreover, students began to carry the skills they learned in Readers Theatre over to their everyday reading. In terms of motivation, the researchers described that students were self-motivated and often picked up the scripts to practise independently during transitional or free time.

Keehn (2003) compared the effects of Readers Theatre on low-achieving, average-achieving, and high-achieving second graders in four classes. Two classes engaged in Readers Theatre intervention while the other two classes received Readers Theatre intervention plus explicit instruction - weekly mini lessons and daily strategies - to increase fluency. Various measures were utilised to determine pre- and post-intervention performance of students in reading level, rate, accuracy, prosody and comprehension. No significant difference was found among the two experimental groups, but all four classrooms, irrespective of reading ability, showed improvements in fluency and comprehension. Low achieving students made more significant gains in rate, story retelling, and expressiveness when compared with students at average and high achievement levels. Keehn (2003) states “the reading practice provided by Readers Theatre served to narrow the gap between the low-performing students and high-performing students” (p. 53).

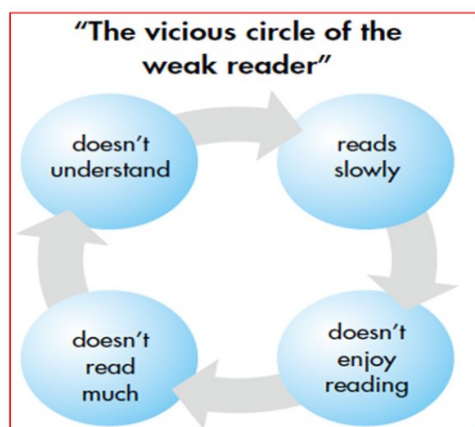
Martinez et al. (1998) conducted an experimental study over a ten week period to examine the influence of Readers Theatre on the reading fluency of second graders. They discovered that the two groups doing repeated readings through Readers Theatre classrooms (n=28) made twice the gains in reading rate (17 words per minute), and most children showed improvements in oral reading prosody based on 5 point rating scale, whereas two similar classes of second graders, who had no Readers Theatre, gained an average of 6.9 words per minute. The researchers believe these results are largely because Readers Theatre “offers a reason for children to read repeatedly in appropriate materials” and “provides a vehicle for direct explanation, feedback, and effective modelling” (p. 334). The students in the Readers Theatre group were eager to practise as they were aware they would be performing at a later date. As one girl wrote in her log: ‘I never thought I could be a star, but I was the best reader today.’

#### **2.4.5. Instructional Benefits of Readers Theatre in EFL Contexts**

Although Nation (1991) was one of the first researchers to reassert the importance of oral reading as essential for L2/FL fluency, reading fluency development has attracted scant attention in L2/FL settings globally. Taguchi, Gorsuch, and Sasamoto (2006) suggest that the reason for this may be the belief that reading fluency is expected to grow naturally as reading skills develop. Moreover, until fairly recently, ‘reading’ in L2/FL settings had been structured as a means to introduce and practise vocabulary and grammar often at the sentence level where “texts are often treated as vehicles for the presentation, practice, manipulation and consolidation of language points rather than the encouragement of reading itself” (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984, pp. 246-247)

In L2/FL contexts, there are often motivational problems with regards to utilising reading as a significant source of linguistic input. Nuttall’s (1982) “vicious circle of the weak reader”, describes readers who lack understanding, enjoyment, who are slow readers and who cannot develop good reading skills (Figure 4). Slow readers do not read much because the reading material is too challenging or is on a subject of little interest to the reader; because they do not understand the material, they read slowly and it is unlikely that they will enjoy reading. The lack of reading implies little

reading practice, which leads to difficulties in understanding texts and to continued slow reading.



**Figure 4:** The vicious circle of the weak reader. Adapted from “The vicious cycle of the poor reader,” by Jarod Turner, 2014, Mandarin Companion. Retrieved from <http://mandarincompanion.com/blog/the-vicious-cycle-of-the-poor-reader/>.

According to Nuttall (1982, pp. 167-168), satisfaction in reading will help students out of the “vicious circle” of slow reading into a “virtuous circle” of good reading (Figure 5). Good readers read books that they can understand or work through until they understand them. As they can understand them, they read faster; because they understand and read faster, they enjoy reading. This leads to reading more and thus perpetuates “the virtuous circle of the good reader”. Nuttall suggests that by increasing reading rate second and foreign learners are exposed to more, the readers can read faster, which in turn, leads to further encouragement to read more and whereby, comprehension is improved.



**Figure 5:** The virtuous circle of the good reader. Adapted from “The vicious cycle of the poor reader,” by Jarod Turner, 2014, Mandarin Companion. Retrieved from <http://mandarincompanion.com/blog/the-vicious-cycle-of-the-poor-reader/>.

Nuttall's (1982) concept is supported by Stanovich (1986) who points to a phenomenon identified as the 'Mathew effect' which suggests that the more students read the more they increase their reading abilities. Bamford and Day (2004) note that it is only through actual reading experience that L2/FL readers can acquire the complex linguistic, world and topical knowledge needed to improve their reading skills (p.19).

Readers Theatre is seen as a strategy that promotes interest and motivation for readers, and provides them with a genuine reason to read a text multiple times, which enhances their word recognition, reading fluency and reading comprehension (Bafile, 2003). It also provides a forum in which interest in and enthusiasm for learning can occur (Ruddell, 1999). Readers Theatre also benefits students with reading difficulties as they are not required to memorise text and the learning environment is safe. Furthermore, Readers Theatre allows for repeated reading to take place in language learning, thus enabling students to interact with their peers, which makes the reading task more appealing than learning alone.

Although Readers Theatre has started receiving attention from L2/FL reading researchers in recent years, the body of empirical research on the use of Readers Theatre and oral reading fluency in a second and foreign language context is very limited and less common than in L1 contexts. However, there has been some research conducted which relates to the effectiveness of Readers Theatre in improving foreign language reading fluency and demonstrates that many of the same benefits found in L1 research also apply in L2/FL.

Huang's (2006) study aimed to explore the effects of implementing Readers Theatre on 36 elementary sixth-graders' English oral reading fluency and motivation in Hsinchu County (Taiwan). Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this study. The statistics data revealed that after receiving 8-week implementation of Readers Theatre, most students reached a significant gain in oral reading rate. The t-test statistics also showed that both low- and high-achievers made great progress in the program, which supports the idea that students with different proficiency levels can benefit from the Readers Theatre activities. In addition, data collected from the questionnaire and in-class discussions indicated that

Readers Theatre helped enhance students' motivation to read, for they perceived self-competence in the process of reading scripts with peers, which subsequently led to the enhancement of their self-efficacy toward success.

Chen (2006) carried out a five-week Readers Theatre instruction with 34 EFL fifth graders (17 boys and 17 girls) to investigate the influences of Readers Theatre on the students' oral reading fluency, motivation for reading and perception of Readers Theatre instruction. Participants experienced Readers Theatre instruction in English classes four times a week for a total of five weeks. Data were collected by oral reading tests and questionnaires before and after the instruction and by the use of an informal interview with students. The results of Chen's study indicated that most participants improved their oral reading fluency in terms of accuracy with an average of 89% and a higher rate of oral reading fluency in the posttest. Most students could read faster with fewer errors after the instruction. In addition, a summary of informal interviews also revealed that Readers Theatre instruction helped the participants to develop a greater motivation in reading in terms of intrinsic motivation and the social aspects of motivation in reading.

Chan and Chan (2009) investigated a remedial class of 20 EFL fifth graders who were "reluctant to communicate in English and experienced difficulty in reading aloud texts fluently and pronouncing words correctly" (p.41). Prior to the Readers Theatre project, the students had been considered as passive and lacking in confidence. An overwhelming majority of the students enjoyed Readers Theatre and collaborating with their peers. They all claimed that they had become more confident in speaking English.

Tsou (2011) investigated the effectiveness of a six-week Readers Theatre programme in promoting reading and writing proficiency in a fifth-grade EFL class in Taiwan. This study concluded that Readers Theatre had significant effects on children's reading proficiency and learning motivation. Research showed that students who were involved in a Readers Theatre programme appeared to have made more improvement in reading accuracy over time, which Tsou (2011) assumed was "a result of the RT treatment" (p.737). Moreover, students were more likely to be

involved in the class, working with their peers and reading and writing in preparation of a performance, all the while deriving pleasure and enjoyment from learning.

Drew and Pedersen (2010) implemented Readers Theatre with struggling 8 and 9th grade EFL readers in a Norwegian school. Their research aimed to investigate how academically-challenged lower secondary school students would respond to Readers Theatre in English 'specialisation' classes and what the benefits of using Readers Theatre with these students would be. Their study revealed that Readers Theatre provided an excellent learning forum for readers with difficulties and for students who were beginning a new year at school as it put them all on equal footing and gave them a common goal. Timid students were able to be more at ease and excel, and those who were hesitant to speak made gains in their reading skills. Moreover, they found that Readers Theatre was a low anxiety activity (p.17) and that the students' motivation flourished and their proficiency got better (p. 15).

The results of this research are encouraging and exciting for advocates of the use of Readers Theatre to improve the oral reading fluency of foreign language learners. Further studies, however, need to be carried out in order to confirm these findings, seeing as most research on Readers Theatre has been conducted using native language learners of English. Therefore, whether or not the same effects can be observed in EFL Portuguese classes is unknown. The current study was thus designed to fill in this gap and contribute to the current understanding of the effects of the use of Readers theatre in EFL teaching.

Given the lack of research available in promoting oral reading fluency among EFL readers, combined with the reported effectiveness of Readers Theatre in improving not only increasing overall fluency performance, but also in engaging middle-school students, Readers Theatre was chosen as the intervention method for this investigation.

## CHAPTER 3: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1. Introduction

Although reading fluency has been a major concern in reading research and education in English L1 settings for the past four decades, relatively little research has been conducted in examining its effects on the second and foreign language student. L2 and FL researchers are stressing that reading fluency take centre stage in discussions regarding student reading success and state the necessity for further attention to and research on effective reading fluency instruction (Grabe, 2004; Grabe, 2009).

The need to carry out this study has resulted from the lack of relevant research, in the Portuguese socio-educational context where, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has ever focused on Readers Theatre in the FL Portuguese setting. Bringing studies such as this to the forefront may help L2 and FL teachers become more cognizant of the benefits with which Readers Theatre instruction provides second and foreign language readers, while increasing their repertoire of successful oral reading intervention methods.

More precisely, this study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Readers Theatre instruction in the sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL class, as a means for facilitating and improving readers' oral reading fluency development when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

When embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum,

**RQ.1.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading word decoding accuracy skills of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.2.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve automaticity (rate) of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.3.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading prosody of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to obtain the results of the study, and is laid out in seven sections. The first section describes the setting and the participants in the study, followed by an explanation of the research design. Information on instrumentation and inter-rater reliability is found in the third section, followed by section four which outlines data collection and analysis. The materials used in this study are discussed in section five, and a description of the intervention procedures for both experimental and control groups can be found in section six. The aspects of research ethics included in this study are outlined in section seven.

### **3.2. Section One - Setting and Participants**

This study was conducted in a suburban neighbourhood in the Leiria district, which covers an area of roughly 565km<sup>2</sup>. The school serves approximately 1292 students from the fifth to twelfth grades. A total of 44 participants and their EFL teacher took part in this study. The participants were members of two separate sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL intact classes consisting of students of all levels of oral reading ability. One class comprised the control group while the other group comprised the experimental group.

As the two classes were taught by the same teacher, using identical materials, an effort was made to avoid potential inconsistencies in the instructional approach between the experimental and control group. The only variance between the experimental and control groups was that the control group did not receive Readers Theatre while the experimental group did.

The study participants consisted of students aged eleven and twelve. Regarding the participants' mother tongue, 43 of the participants had Portuguese as their mother



tongue, whereas one child had French as a mother tongue. All the participants had studied English as a Foreign Language for three and a half years: two years at elementary school (grades three and four) and a year and a half at middle-school. Among the 44 participating students, 3 students (2 in the control group and 1 in the experimental group) were enrolled in extra English classes, that is, a private Foreign Language institute, in combination with the English lessons offered at the Portuguese state school.

In the 2008/2009 academic school year, the sixth-graders in this study had two English periods consisting of 45 and 90 minutes each. As for the coursebook, the school board adopted *English Train 6º ano* (Nolasko, 2005), a two-year English course for students in fifth and sixth grades.

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the administration of the school where the study was conducted (see Appendix A). In addition to the official permission, visiting the school site and meeting the principal and the EFL teacher were considered to be fundamental by the researcher in order to schedule and inform them of the procedures to be followed. The whole procedure, which involved the teaching intervention and the collection of quantitative data, lasted from March 2009 to June 2009.

Prior to the implementation of Readers Theatre, parental/guardian consent forms (see Appendix B) were sent home with each student to their parents/guardians. Aside from providing information on the essential elements of the study, the consent form also described the voluntary nature of involvement in the study. There would be no reward or penalty for participating and the student could refuse to partake in the study or withdraw at any time without penalty. There was a 100% return rate on the Informed Consent.

The notion of anonymity and confidentiality was of paramount importance in this study. The parents/guardians were informed that the subjects' identities and the identity of the school would remain anonymous in this study. Any identifiable information that was obtained over the course of this study remained confidential through the use of a code. Each participating student was assigned a number at

random, to establish the code and all data were recorded anonymously using this code. Once this study is defended, the code will be destroyed. Moreover, when the results of the research are published or discussed, no information will be included that would reveal the any of the subjects' identities.

The students were informed that in addition to their parents giving permission for them to participate in the research, they too needed to give their assent by signing an assent form (see Appendix C). Procedures for the intervention and the purpose of the study were discussed with the students and their questions regarding the study were answered.

The host teacher for the study expressed interest and enthusiasm in Readers Theatre. She has a strong literature and drama background, is involved in a variety of school activities and is an active participant in the school's Portuguese drama club. Considering this, her receptiveness to including Readers Theatre activities in her EFL classroom, as a vehicle to improve oral reading fluency, was crucial, as it was fundamental to select a teaching environment of total support.

As the participating teacher did not have any previous experience working with Readers Theatre, the researcher provided her with training sessions. There was also discussion regarding the researcher's and teacher's various roles. In order to provide the most cohesive application of research possible, it was agreed that the researcher would be involved, assisting the teacher throughout the teaching period whenever deemed necessary.

### **3.3. Section Two - Research Design**

The procedure for this quasi-experimental study followed a pretest, intervention (5 weeks), posttest schedule. As true random assignment of the students was not possible, one intact class was selected to serve as the experimental group (n=21, 12 males and 9 females), while the other group comprised the control group (n=23, 13 males and 10 females). The experimental group underwent Readers Theatre-based reading instruction while the control group received no treatment, taking part in the regular grade-six EFL oral reading activities.

For the purpose of this study, within the experimental and control groups, the students were further divided into three subgroups, according to their reading ability level, subgroups E-Low, E-Medium and E-High for the experimental group, and subgroups C-Low, C-Medium and C-High for the control group. This division was based on the participating students' pre-intervention baseline fluency scores.

### **3.3.1. Experimental Group - Subgroups**

#### **Subgroup E-Low Level Readers - 8 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these students' oral reading performance in English classes was inferior to their classmates' performances. These eight students' accuracy levels ranged from 42.3% to 62.9%, their automaticity levels from 33 to 44 correct words per minute and their prosodic levels from 4 to 6 points.

#### **Subgroup E-Medium Level Readers - 8 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these students' accuracy levels ranged from 74.6% to 82.4%, their automaticity levels ranged from 86 to 105 correct words per minute and their prosodic levels ranged from 7 to 10 points.

#### **Subgroup E-High Level Readers - 5 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these 5 students' oral reading performance was superior to their classmates' performances. Their accuracy levels ranged from 86% to 96.4%, their automaticity levels ranged from 123 to 133 correct words per minute and their prosodic levels ranged from 11 to 13 points.

### **3.3.2. Control Group - Subgroups**

#### **Subgroup C-Low Level Readers - 9 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these students' oral reading performance in English classes was relatively inferior to the other students in the class. These nine students' accuracy levels ranged from 44% to

63.2%, their automaticity levels ranged from 29 to 45 correct words per minutes and their prosodic levels ranged from 4 to 6 points.

### **Subgroup C-Medium Level Readers - 9 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these students' accuracy levels ranged from 73.6% to 81%, their automaticity levels ranged from 82 to 102 correct words per minute and their prosodic levels ranged from 7 to 10 points.

### **Subgroup C-High Level Readers - 5 students**

Based on the oral reading fluency pre-intervention baseline scores, these 5 students' oral reading performance was superior to their classmates' performances. Their accuracy levels ranged from 84.2% to 95.8%, their automaticity levels ranged from 119 to 131 correct words per minute and their prosodic levels ranged from 11 to 13 points.

### **3.3.3. Variables**

#### **Independent Variable**

The independent variable in this study included the method of reading instruction, Readers Theatre-based reading instruction and typical reading instruction via the existing grade-six EFL syllabus.

#### **Dependent Variable**

The effects of the independent variable were sought on the following measures of oral reading fluency: (a) oral reading word accuracy, (b) oral reading automaticity and (c) oral reading prosody.

### **3.4. Section Three - Instruments of the Study**

Two measures were used to assess the students' oral reading fluency skills. The Curriculum Based Measurement: Oral Reading Fluency Test (Deno, 1985) was utilised as a pre- and post- assessment of two of the three constituent elements of fluency: accuracy and automaticity. The third constituent, prosody, was measured by application of Zutell and Rasinski's (1991) Multidimensional Fluency Scale (see Figure 3 on page 37).

### **3.4.1. Curriculum-Based Measurement: Oral Reading Fluency (CBM-ORF)**

The Curriculum-Based Measurement: Oral Reading Fluency probe was administered to both the experimental and control group as a pre-study baseline test in Phase One of the study and then again as a pretest during Phase Two and as a posttest during Phase Three.

Word recognition accuracy was determined by dividing the total number of words read correctly in a one minute oral reading count by the total number of words read (correct or corrected plus uncorrected errors), multiplied by 100. Automaticity scores were obtained by calculating a correct word count per minute (cwcpm), subtracting the total number of errors from the total number of words read in one minute. If a student finished in less than one minute, the number of seconds was noted and the following formula used: number of words read correctly divided by number of seconds to read the passage x 60.

#### **3.4.1.1. CBM-ORF Test Administration**

Before administering the CBM-ORF test in this study, the researcher and class teacher prepared teacher and student numbered and unnumbered copies of each oral reading probe to be used for the baseline, pre-test and posttest assessment. The students read from a “student copy” that contained a grade-appropriate reading passage (see Appendix D, for an example). The researcher scored the students on an “examiner copy” which had an identical reading passage. The difference between both copies was that the examiner’s copy had a cumulative word total listed along the right margin for scoring purposes (see Appendix E, for an example). The numbers on the examiner’s copy allowed for a rapid calculation of the total number of words each student read in one minute.

#### **3.4.1.2. CBM-ORF Directions**

There are multiple versions of CBM-ORF directions. The script presented in Figure 6 is one option for direction (Hosp et al., 2007) which the researcher used in this study. Directions used in this CBM-ORF probe were explained and clarified to the students prior to their oral reading.

1. Give the student a copy of the reading passage.
2. Hold the teacher's version where the student cannot see what the teacher is writing (e.g., put it on a clipboard).
3. Say, "I would like for you to read this story aloud for me. Please start here (point to the first word on the student's copy) and read aloud. This is not a race. Try each word. If you come to a word that you do not know, you may skip it and go to the next word. You may start when I say "Begin." You may stop when I say, "Stop reading." Do you have any questions?" "Begin". (Set the timer for 1 minute).
4. Follow the teacher's copy and make an "X" on any words read incorrectly.
5. At the end of one minute, say, "*Stop reading*" and mark the last word the student read with a slash (/).

**Figure 6:** The Administration Script. Adapted from "Using CBM-Reading Assessments to Monitor Progress," by J.R. Jenkins, R.F. Hudson and S. H. Lee. Retrieved from, <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/assessment/progress/usingcbm>.

### 3.4.1.3. Scoring Guidelines

When administering a CBM-ORF test, teachers may be faced with the dilemma of determining of how to score words. Deno, Reschly-Anderson, Lembke, Zorka, and Callender (2002) and Hosp et al. (2007) supply teachers with guidelines on what is to be deemed as correct and incorrect. An illustrative set of scoring guidelines and examples used in this study is provided below (see Figures 7, 8 and 9).

#### Scored as Correct

**1. Correct Pronunciation:** The word must be pronounced correctly, given the context of the sentence.

**Example:** The word "r-e-a-d" must be pronounced correctly when presented in the context of:

She will read the book. WRC = 5 | Read as: He will red the book. **WRC = 4**

**2. Self-corrected Words:** Words misread initially but corrected within 3(s) seconds are counted as correct.

**Example:** The river was cold WRC=4 | Read as: "the river was could... (2s)... cold " **WRC=4**

**3. Repetitions:** Repeated words are counted as correct. Words said over again correctly are ignored.

**Example:** Peter loves chocolate mousse. WRC = 4 | Read as: Peter loves ... Peter loves chocolate mousse. **WRC = 4**

**4. Insertions:** Inserted words are ignored. When a student adds extra words, they aren't counted as correct word or as reading errors.

**Example:** The dog was friendly. WRC=4 | Read as:"

<p>The dog was very friendly" <b>WRC=4</b></p> <p><b>5. Dialect/Articulation:</b> Variations in pronunciation that are explained by local language norms are all scored as correct.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> They washed the car. <b>WRC=4</b>   Read as: They <u>warshed</u> the car. <b>WRC=4</b></p>
---

**Figure 7:** Scoring guidelines: Scored as correct. Adapted from Deno, S., Lembke, E., & Anderson, A. R. (2002). Progress monitoring study group content module.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scored as Errors</b></p> <p><b>1. Mispronunciation/Word-substitution:</b></p> <p><b>Example:</b> The dog ate the bone. <b>WRC=5</b>   Read as: "the dig ate the bone" <b>WRC=4</b>   <b>WRE=1</b></p> <p><b>2. Omission:</b> Each word omitted is an error.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Ted climbed the oak tree. <b>WRC=5</b>   Read as: "Ted climbed the tree" <b>WRC=4</b>   <b>WRE=1</b></p> <p><b>3. Hesitations:</b> When students hesitate or fail to read the word within 3 seconds.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Mario saw an elephant <b>WRC=4</b>   Read as: "Mario saw an ell..." <b>WRC=3</b>   <b>WRE=1</b></p> <p><b>4. Reversals (Transposition of pair words):</b> When two or more words are transposed, those words not read in the correct order are errors.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Charlie ran quickly. <b>WRC: 3</b>   Read as: Charlie quickly ran. <b>WRC: 1</b></p>
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**Figure 8:** Scoring guidelines: Scored as errors. Adapted from Deno, S., Lembke, E., & Anderson, A. R. (2002). Progress monitoring study group content module.



### Other Scoring

1. Numerals/numbers are counted as words and must be read correctly within the context of the passage.

**Example:** May 5, 1989 **WRC=3** | Read as: May five, one, nine, eight, nine **WRC= 1**

2. Hyphenated Words: In the case of hyphenated words, each morpheme separated by a hyphen is counted as an individual word if it can stand on its own.

**Example:** fifty-seven **WRC= 2** | Daughter-in-law **WRC= 3** | re-enter **WRC = 1**

3. Abbreviations are counted as words and must be read correctly within the context of the sentence.

**Example:** Dr. James said, "Hello" Should be read as: ' Doctor James said, "Hello" **WRC= 4**

Not as: ' D.R James said, "Hello" **WRC = 3**

**Figure 9:** Scoring guidelines: Other types of scoring. Skipped Connected Words or Entire Line Adapted from Deno, S., Lembke, E., & Anderson, A. R. (2002). Progress monitoring study group content module.

If a student skips several connected words or an entire line of the reading probe, the omission is calculated as 1 error. If this occurs, all the words but one are subtracted from the total number of words attempted in one minute. The following example (Figure 10) is taken from *Using CBM for Progress Monitoring in Reading*, retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519252.pdf>:

Look at the following example...The student omitted text 2 times during the 1-minute CBM. The examiner drew a line through the omitted text. The first omission was on words 26-40. The examiner counts 15 words as omitted and drops 14 of the words before calculating the total words attempted. The student also omitted words 87-100. The examiner drops 13 of the 14 words before calculating the total words attempted.

To calculate the total number of words read in 1 minute, the examiner subtracts the 2 words (14 words from first omission plus 13 words from second omission) from the total number of words read in 1 minute (122). The adjusted number of words

attempted is then 95. The student made 7 errors (5 errors marked by slashes and 2 errors from omissions). These 7 errors are subtracted from the adjusted number of

It was Saturday morning and Ellie wanted to go see a movie.	12
She asked her father if he would take her downtown. "Sure," said Dad.	25
<del>"I have to go in to work anyway. It will be right on my way."</del>	40
Ellie called her friends Beth, Katie, and Laura to see whether	51
they <del>could</del> go. They said yes. They went to Ellie's house. <del>There</del> they	64
all got into Dad's car. Then Dad drove to the movies.	75
There were two movies playing. One movie was about a boy	86
<del>and a dog. The ticket lady said it was funny. The other movie was</del>	100
<del>about a mummy.</del> It looked scary. The name of it was "The Mummy	113
Walks Again!" There was a picture of the mummy <del>on</del> the wall. He	126
looked creepy. The girls asked the ticket lady about the movie. She	138
said she had heard people scream when they saw the mummy.	149

words attempted of 95.  $95 - 7 = 88$ . 88 is the number of words read correctly in 1 minute. (p. 19)

**Figure 10:** Sample CBM Reading Fluency Passage. Reprinted from "Using Curriculum-Based Measurement for Progress Monitoring in Reading" by Fusch & Fusch, 2007. Retrieved from. <http://www.studentprogress.org/library/training/cbm%20reading/usingcbmreading.pdf>.

### 3.4.1.4. Interpreting Scores

After obtaining students' oral reading scores, the teacher may wish to interpret the collected data by comparing the students' fluency performance with the established norms and standards set for each grade level. As previously mentioned, for instructional purposes, accuracy in reading is often divided into three levels, adapted from an examination of several IRIs reflecting various levels of word decoding accuracy. These norms will aid teachers in the planning of appropriate instructional goals and strategies on the basis of the CBM-ORF established interpretations. The independent reading level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode 97% to 100% of the words without assistance of any kind from the teacher. The instructional level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode from 90% to 96% of the words and the frustration level is the level at which

reading simply becomes too difficult and challenging, whereby a student can only decode less than 90% of the words accurately.

As for automaticity, (see Table 2, p. 33) shows the oral reading rates of students in grades 1 through 8 based on an extensive study conducted by Jan Hasbrouck and Gerald Tindal (2006). Students scoring 10 or more words below the 50th percentile using the average score of two/three unpracticed readings from grade-level materials will require a fluency-building programme. In addition, teachers can use the table to set the long-term fluency goals for their struggling readers.

It is important to emphasise that these norms and standard sets are based on the reading development of English L1 readers. Since the construct of fluency in this study was measured in a foreign language setting, the above mentioned established norms cannot be applied directly, but rather used as a reference. In this study, the impact of Readers Theatre as a means of improving oral reading fluency with EFLs, will be measured by comparing the data obtained in the students' pretests with those obtained in the posttest.

### **3.4.2. Measuring Prosodic Oral Reading**

Prosodic oral reading scores in this study were obtained by listening to the same digital audio recordings used for the CBM-ORF tests and rating them on the *Multidimensional Fluency Scale* (MFS) developed by Zutell and Rasinski (1991) (see Figure 3 on page 37). The MFS probe was administered to both the experimental and control group as a pre-study baseline test in Phase One of the study and then again as pretest during Phase Two and as a posttest in Phase Three.

As previously stated, there are four main dimensions/categories in the Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Within each dimension, there are four subscales with a description of the criteria for a specific score in that particular dimension.

**Expression and volume** - ranging from 1 [reads in a quiet voice as if to get words out] to 4 [reads with varied volume and expression. The reader sounds like they are talking to a friend with their voice matching the interpretation of the passage];

**Phrasing** - ranging from 1 [*monotonic with little sense of phrase boundaries, frequent word-by-word reading*] to 4 [*generally well-phrased, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression*];

**Smoothness** - ranging from 1 [*frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts*] to 4 [*generally smooth reading with some breaks, but word and structure difficulties are resolved quickly, usually through self-corrections*] and;

**Pace**- ranging from 1 [*slow and laborious*] to 4 [*consistently conversational*]).

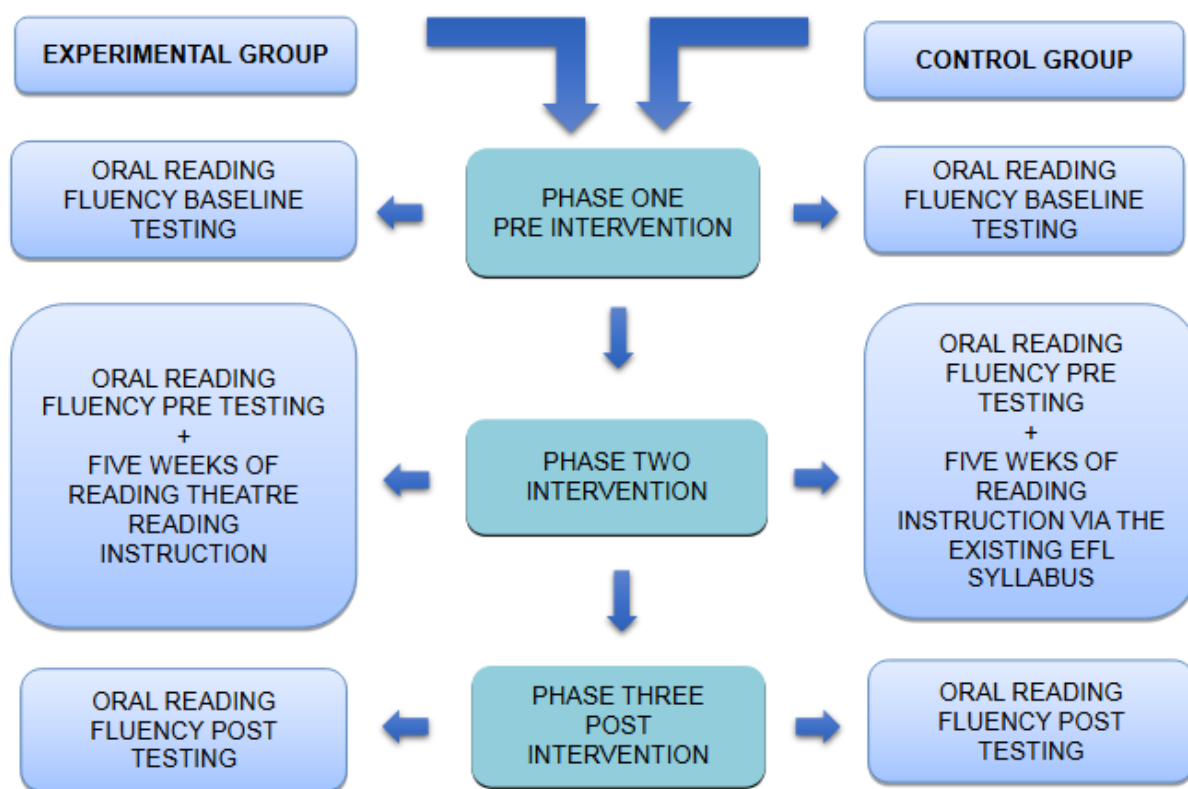
Based on these criteria, the reader received a score that best described his or her oral reading fluency. As scores in one specific dimension ranged from one to four, the reader might receive a total score of four to sixteen. Scores of eight and above indicated that fluency had been achieved for the grade level of the passage read. Scores below eight indicated that fluency might be a concern.

### **3.4.3. Inter-rater Reliability**

Several measures were adopted to ensure the reliability of the study. To avoid subjectivity and to determine whether assessing the same student on oral reading fluency would produce similar results, the inter-rater reliability of CBM-ORF and MFS scores were analysed. To do so, three EFL experienced teachers individually examined the scores of six students, three, from each classroom, in other words, 14% of the 44 students participating in this study were assessed to establish inter-rater reliability. Scores were analysed for statistical significance in order to determine the level of scoring agreement. Using percentage of agreement and Cohen's Kappa (K), the percentage of agreement was found to be high (97.5%) and  $K = .95$  indicating an acceptable level of agreement for CBM-ORF and MFS.

### **3.5. Section Four - Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The flowchart shown in Figure 11 provides a description of the design procedures in this study, for both the experimental and control groups.



**Figure 11:** Research procedures design for the Experimental and Control Group.

### **Phase One: Pre-intervention Phase - Establishing Baseline**

To determine whether there was any statistically significant difference in the oral reading fluency ability level between groups prior to the treatment, three, Curriculum Based Measurement: Oral Fluency Tests and Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS) probes were administered on each participating student, on March 10, 13, 17 and 21, 2009. The same passages were selected for both the experimental and control group. The passages were at the readability level of sixth grade and had yet been read within the classroom were utilised in order to avoid any unplanned variable of familiarity (Appendices D and E).

Deno et al. (2002, p. 7) consider that the median is the best and most accurate reflection of a child's true reading ability as it provides a more precise measure of a student's reading level. In order to obtain a median score for three passages, the researcher and teacher calculated the number of Words Correct per Minute (WCPM) for each of the three passages. For example, if a student read passage one at 96

words read correctly, passage two at 106 words read correctly and passage three at 118 words read correctly, the middle or median score would be 106 correct words per minute (wcpm). This was obtained by discarding the lowest (96 wcpm) and highest scores (118 wcpm), keeping only the middle, or median, score. By omitting low and high scores for each series of three reading probes, the teacher is more able to improve the accuracy of the CBM-ORF reading probe. The same procedure was applied with the participants' prosody scores.

Students were reminded that they would be voice-recorded and that the researcher would be timing their reading and writing notes while they read. Emphasis was placed on reading the passages at a normal pace. Students were given clear instructions in terms of the tests' completion and were allowed to ask clarification questions, but no further assistance was provided. The researcher marked the point in each text the student had reached after one minute of reading. At a later date, the researcher listened to the digital recordings, reviewing the errors scored at the time of the interviews, and revising the scoring as necessary.

The CBM-ORF and MFS prosodic mean scores for the experimental group and the control group were found to be similar and not significantly discrepant. The results showed that the two groups had similar levels of oral reading fluency prior to the teaching intervention, which was an important finding, as it provided a baseline for a more reliable comparison of the post intervention data after the treatment between the two groups.

### **Phase Two - Intervention**

In Phase Two of the study, referred to as the Intervention Phase, participants in the experimental and control groups took an oral reading fluency pretest which consisted in reading the text *Mum's Friend* (Appendix F).

The experimental group then received Readers Theatre reading instruction for a five-week period, while the control group received the typical reading instruction via the existing grade-six EFL syllabus.

### **Phase Three: Post-Intervention Phase**

In Phase Three of the study, both groups took part in an oral reading fluency posttest to determine the impact of the intervention on their oral reading fluency.

Following five weeks of instruction, CBM-ORF and MFS tests were administered to the experimental and control groups, in a one on one manner. The same reading fluency text was used as pre-test and posttest measures to ensure comparable testing and avoid the problem of equating different forms of pretest and posttest measures. The researcher listened to the digital recordings, reviewing the errors scored at the time of the interviews, and revising the scoring as necessary.

Treatment effects were analysed by examining the changes in oral reading fluency scores (oral reading accuracy, automaticity and prosody) from pretest to posttest (experimental group and control group). The researcher examined changes in each student's pretest/posttest scores within each group as well as changes between groups. Students' scores were entered for analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

Only the researcher and class teacher had access to the participants' CBM-ORF and MFS scores. Audio of readings were kept by the researcher and erased once the results had been appropriately analysed for the study. Prior to the data analysis, the researcher and class teacher rechecked the participants' scores for any keying and entry errors, or omissions. Data verification or cleaning involves checking the data file in search of errors, many of which are inevitable, despite the diligence of those involved. As no errors or omissions were found, the researcher initiated the data analysis process. In order to ensure the reliability of the scores obtained in the study, all score sheets were reviewed by the researcher and class teacher at the conclusion of the testing, to ensure that each participant's scores had been accurately tallied and the raw scores had been correctly converted. Once verified by both the class teacher and researcher, statistical analysis was carried out.

### **Data Analysis**

Initial pre-test data were analysed to determine comparability between the experimental and control groups. The impact of the intervention was examined within each group (pretest/posttest) and between groups.

Data distributions were assessed with Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check for normality and with Levene's test to check for homogeneity of variances. The experimental and control students' baseline moment scores were compared using t-tests when the distributions were normal. When the distribution was not normal, data were transformed in order to achieve normality. If any of the t-test assumptions were not met, a Mann-Whitney test was performed instead. Additionally, both the experimental and control groups' subgroups were compared using one-way ANOVA when test assumptions were met, either in raw or transformed data. Otherwise, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. A Post-hoc Tukey test and Dunn test were performed after one-way ANOVA and after the Kruskal-Wallis test, respectively.

Pre-test scores were compared to posttest scores in every group and subgroup and normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The students' pretest and posttest scores were compared using repeated measures t-tests when distributions were normal. If not, the data were transformed in order to achieve normality and if any of these tests assumptions were not met, a Wilcoxon paired-sample test was performed instead.

### **3.6. Section Five - Materials**

Participants in the experimental group received one 45-minute period and one 90-minute period of regular instruction per week via their existing sixth-grade EFL syllabus and the intervention, Readers Theatre. Participants in the control group received one 45-minute period and one 90-minute period of the regular reading activities per week via their existing sixth-grade EFL syllabus.

Both experimental and control classrooms were presented with the same stories at the same time. However, as previously mentioned, reading in the experimental group was taught via Readers Theatre instruction, while the control group received typical reading text instruction and employed the strategies suggested in the grade-six adopted EFL coursebook. The teacher was asked to keep a log of her daily reading activities and requested to record the length of time her classes were involved in oral reading activities to ensure both groups were spending the same amount of time on reading.



## **Coursebook - English Train**

With regards to the coursebook, it is a two-level course that has been specifically designed for students in grades five and six. According to the authors, *English Train* fully meets the requirements of the Portuguese national curriculum and has a carefully-paced, motivating and fun approach to learning English. It is intended for learners at elementary level (corresponding roughly to Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR or CEF]) and consists of 12 thematic units. There is a revision unit for grade six. After every two units there is a cultural text and a self-check section. There are also American festivals (Thanksgiving Day, Independence Day, as well as the Irish St Patrick's Day) featured at the end of the sixth-grade Student Book.

## **Story Scripts**

When adapting the stories to Readers Theatre, a number of guidelines were followed. Firstly, the researcher and class teacher ensured that the scripts were at students' grade level. Secondly, the adapted scripts correlated with the specific theme found in the students' EFL textbook. Lastly, any images/pictures that illustrated the scene of the story were described in the Readers Theatre scripts by adapting them as narrations. In order to ensure that all the students in the class were involved in the Readers Theatre reading activity, the stories were adapted in such a way that each of the Readers Theatre scripts consisted of roles, which corresponded to the number of students in each group. A copy of an adapted script used in Phase Two of the study can be found in Appendix F (student copy) and Appendix G (teacher copy).

## **3.7. Section Six - Instructional Procedures**

### **3.7.1. Experimental Group**

Before employing Readers Theatre in the classroom, it is in everyone's best interest to devise a plan (Prescott & Lewis, 2003). The researcher and teacher in this study followed an eight day plan that comprised practice, mini lessons on fluency and culminating in a Readers Theatre performance of the script (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Hoffman, 1987; Martinez et al., 1998).

With an eight-day format, Readers Theatre was implemented with specific goals outlined for each day. Session one and seven took place outside regularly scheduled classroom hours due to scheduling conflicts.

### **Session One**

In the first session, the class teacher gathered the children and asked them to relate their play-going and theatre experiences in order to activate interest in and develop an understanding for Readers Theatre. The following list of words was placed on the whiteboard:

- actors, costumes, set, curtains, stage, memorising lines, lights, opera, ballet, puppet and magic shows

The class teacher explained to the children that there is a type of theatre in which the performers read to their audiences. The history and benefits of Readers Theatre were briefly presented to the class as was its purpose and the procedures involved.

A Readers Theatre video performance was then shown by the teacher and a comparison between Readers Theatre and a conventional play was listed on the whiteboard. Below are a few examples of what was discussed:

- In regular theatre the lines are memorised.
- In Readers Theatre participants read the lines.
- Scenery is not needed in Readers Theatre
- Curtains are not needed in Readers Theatre
- There is no break in Readers Theatre.
- There is less action in Readers Theatre.
- Costumes are not needed in Readers Theatre.
- In Readers Theatre the characters stand in a line or semicircle and read.
- In Readers Theatre there is a narrator which gives us some details, explanations and narration.

Outlining the differences between a conventional play and Readers Theatre served to develop a deeper understanding of the technique. The discussion gave the children a further opportunity to speak about plays and theatre, a subject which was of interest to many of them.

Following the video demonstration, the class teacher and students discussed the Readers Theatre group's oral reading performance. In order to become a fluent reader, the students and teacher discussed the need to:

- (a) read accurately, or without mistakes, what is on the page;
- (b) vary the speed of reading according to their purpose(s) and how difficult the text is for them and;
- (c) read with appropriate expression.

## **Session Two**

Each instructional session began with the revision of the previous lesson and ended with a concise account of what had been taught, which aimed for further consolidation.

In session two, the script, *Mum's Friend* was introduced and projected on the interactive whiteboard. The class teacher activated what students already knew about the topic, which helped them to predict what they were going to read or listen to and as a result build confidence. The title and warm-up questions were used to create interest.

A brief description of some of the key vocabulary that the teacher and researcher felt could impede understanding was identified and pre-taught. With the aid of student input, vocabulary from the script which could cause student difficulty was used to create a vocabulary chart. The chart remained posted and referred to throughout the duration of the study, focusing on the words' pronunciation and meaning. Students then engaged in word study activities (flash card practice and word games).

Each child was then given a copy of the script (see Appendix H) to keep. The class teacher and researcher modelled, reading the script aloud to the students as fluently and expressively as possible. Following this, time was allocated to talk about the content, meaning and narrative elements of the story. For example:

- describing the personality of the main character
- talking about other important characters in the story and their foibles or qualities
- giving details about the time and setting of the story
- pinpointing the central problem(s) or challenge(s) that the main character faces
- describing how the main character responded to various plot developments

- deciding what overarching theme or lesson the story might convey

Students were also asked to relate this script to any prior experiences.

The class teacher and researcher read the passage a second time while the students followed along silently. The class teacher, researcher and participants discussed the researcher's decisions and interpretation of the characters and events and how these impacted the oral reading. It was emphasised to students that the overall objective is the understanding that good readers create and extend the meaning of the story as well as their understanding of the story, through fluency and expression.

### **Choral and Echo Reading**

The class teacher engaged in assisted reading with students through various forms of repeated reading of the passage, namely, choral and echo reading. Choral and echo reading are invaluable techniques for providing students with the confidence and practice required before they read aloud on their own.

In order to perform choral reading, the class teacher and students read together as a group. By doing so, all the students read at the same pace and with the same fluency as the rest of the group. In echo reading, the teacher read a line and students then repeated it, echoing the teacher's phrasing, expression, pacing and smoothness.

For this lesson, the targeted fluency skill was a focus on accuracy and automaticity (rate). Students were reminded to read at an appropriate rate, to contemplate whether they slowed down or paused at inappropriate places, or whether they paused for extended time to decode words or whether they read too quickly.

The teacher paired students up and each child practised the passage while his or her partner listened, following along silently, providing support when needed. The researcher and class teacher circulated among the students, listening for difficulties, coaching, offering encouragement and praise and providing feedback.

The class teacher encouraged the class to take their scripts home for further practice with parents and other family members or friends.

### **Session Three**

On the third day of the intervention, the lesson focused on expressive reading. Students were asked to reflect on how they were putting words together. Did their reading sound like oral language? Were they placing words in appropriate groups? Where were they pausing and why? Were they pausing or stopping at appropriate punctuation?

The script was then projected on the screen and the teacher and researcher modelled fluent reading to the class. Each line of the script was then read expressively by a different student. The other students followed along and discussed the quality of their classmate's reading. The teacher and researcher stepped in, coaching students as they read.

The class teacher then divided the class up into small repertory groups gathering in circles, so that the number of students matched the number of parts in the Readers Theatre script. The groups contained both proficient learners and struggling learners. This allowed for the higher performing students to help the struggling ones. For example, a boy in one group, who was at a higher level of proficiency in English than the rest of the group, assisted the other students in the group. As a result, a relaxed environment was created, whereby everyone was allowed to read without the fear of being ridiculed.

The class teacher distributed laminated "master scripts" (see Appendix I) with individual parts highlighted. The children immediately began to read the script as a group with each child reading the part he or she had been given. After each reading, students assumed new roles, and the script was again read. This allowed students to consider different character perspectives and to interpret the text from a new stance. Students were asked to focus on reading fluently and to assist one another with unfamiliar words. This procedure continued for a period of ten minutes. During this time, the researcher and class teacher circulated among the groups, offering corrective feedback and coaching on fluency. At the end of this session, the teacher collected the laminated master scripts. Once again, students were encouraged to take their scripts home and practise their reading.

## **Session Four**

In session four, the class teacher handed out the master scripts and asked the class to listen to a recording of the script. The recording was played twice, once in its entirety and then a second time, with pauses, allowing for students to listen and repeat.

Following the listening/repeating activity, the students were placed in new repertory groups in order to work with different peers. The participating students then practised their reading in groups while the class teacher and researcher circulated among the groups, coaching for fluency. Each group was then given the opportunity to read their script to the class and were given feedback on the quality of their reading.

The students were encouraged to take their scripts home for further practice with parents, other family members and/or friends.

## **Session Five**

The procedure for Session Five was very similar to that of Session Four with the students meeting up again in different repertory groups.

The session began with a revision mini-lesson on how to read a passage fluently, focusing on expression, feeling and clarity and reciting the lines as the character would recite them. Students were asked to begin thinking about any additional elements/qualities they could bring to their character or to the script as a whole.

The teacher distributed the master scripts and the children took turns reading different roles. It was exciting to observe, as students began to incorporate their own personalities into their characters and truly began to act out their parts. Meanwhile, the researcher and class teacher circulated among the groups, listening to the oral readings, modelling, coaching, encouraging and providing specific suggestions to foster fluency.

The passage was projected on the whiteboard and the class teacher, researcher and students read it in unison to help build fluency, self-confidence and motivation.

The class teacher then announced that it was time to assign roles for the month's performance. Students in each repertory group had five minutes to negotiate who would read which parts in the monthly performance. Students were also asked to make decisions regarding the use of props in the performance. As the teacher collected the master scripts, she noted the role each child would read. Students were encouraged to practise their lines at home to ensure that their performances would be successful.

### **Session Six**

On day six of the Readers Theatre instruction, the mini-lesson focused on tips and strategies for reading and communicating in front of a group. The class teacher and participants discussed expectations for rehearsal and presentation. The children were guided so as to be aware of the how they stood, where they held their hands and their scripts, their voice level, and a variety of other elements as the short piece was performed for the class.

After each group reading, observations were elicited from the class in order to come up with a few tips and strategies on how to present a performance in front of a group. Ideas were written down and students were asked to model some of the behaviours with their group. Some of the ideas from Aaron Shepard's (2004a) *RT Tips: A Guide to Readers Theatre: Tips on Reading* were also referred to:

Here are suggestions/tips your readers should remember for both rehearsal and performance.

- Hold your script at a steady height, but make sure it doesn't hide your face. If there's anyone you can't see in the front row of the audience, your script is too high.
- While you speak, try to look up often, not just at your script. When you do look down at it, keep your head up and move just your eyes.
- S-l-o-w d-o-w-n. Say each syl-la-ble clear-ly.
- TALK LOUD! You have to be heard by the little old deaf lady in the back row.
- *Speak with feeling.* Audiences love a ham!
- Stand and sit straight. Keep your hands and feet still, if they're not doing anything useful!
- Face the audience as much as you can, whether you're moving or standing still. If you're rehearsing without an audience, pretend it's there anyway and remember where it is.

- Narrators, you're important even when the audience isn't looking at you. You control the story! Be sure to give the characters enough time to do what they must. And remember that you're talking to the audience, not yourself.
- Characters, you give the story its life! Remember to *be* your character even when you're not speaking, and be sure to react to the other characters.

In addition, the researcher, class teacher and students discussed Aaron Shepard's (2004a) "what-ifs" before an actual performance.

- If the audience laughs, stop speaking till they can hear you again.
- If someone talks in the audience, don't pay attention.
- If someone walks into the room, don't look.
- If you make a mistake, pretend it was right.
- If you drop something, try to leave it at least till the audience is looking somewhere else.
- If a reader forgets to read, see if you can read their part instead, or make something up, or maybe just skip over it. But *don't* whisper or signal to the reader!
- If a reader falls on their bottom, pretend they didn't.

Lastly, the students did a run through of the script to be performed by getting into their rehearsal groups and performing for their classmates. This performance served as a dress rehearsal for other audiences. Following their dress rehearsals, students were asked to reflect on their performance by thinking about something that went well, something that needed improvement, and something that was interesting about the experience. Moreover, students made decisions about where to stand, how to introduce the story and how to identify characters.

## **Session Seven**

Session seven consisted of repertory groups performing before an audience. The students practiced with their groups prior to the audience arriving. Another class of children acted as the audience, along with the school principal, custodians, parents, grandparents and siblings who came in as special guests. The researcher and class teacher were part of the audience for every performance. Once the audience members arrived and were seated, the Master of Ceremonies (MC) welcomed the



guests, the synopses of the plays were read, the cast members were introduced and the plays began. Each play was performed in succession before the audience.

At the conclusion of all of the performances, the Master of Ceremonies expressed thanks to the audience members for their presence and invited them to provide positive comments on the performances. Participants took part in refreshments and a small celebration.

### **Session Eight**

One of the most powerful methods of development took shape as class conversations, which followed the performances. This was done as a means of improving students' critical thinking skills. These were open discussions in which students freely shared their observations of themselves and their classmates and their feelings and impressions of the experience, for example, what they enjoyed the most and what could have been done to make the performance even better. It was done in the spirit of learning, not recrimination. In addition to receiving the instructor's feedback, the students had to learn to reflect on how they had performed as well as to evaluate others' performances. The students also gradually learned to appreciate each other as well as to offer advice to their peers. Consequently, the students became aware of how their performance was received in their peers' eyes. They shared with each other the strengths and weaknesses they observed from their fellow students' performances.

#### **3.7.2. Control Group**

The participants in the control group received the same amount of instruction as the experimental group; one, 45-minute period and one, 90-minute period per week, via their existing sixth-grade EFL syllabus.

The source of reading material was identical for the control group as it was for the experimental group. Both experimental and control classrooms were presented with the same story at the same time. However, reading in the experimental group was taught via Readers Theatre instruction, while in the control group reading instruction followed the regular reading activities found in the EFL syllabus. The following sessions took place during regularly scheduled classroom hours.

## **Session One**

In session one, the teacher introduced the text, *Mum's Friend* to the class by projecting it on the whiteboard.

The teacher asked the class to look at the title of the text and the pictures and asked a few warm-up questions to create interest. The class teacher proceeded to activate what students already knew about the topic, which helped them to predict what they were going to read or listen to and as a result, build confidence.

The teacher then used the glossary box translation to teach key words and the students were encouraged to predict how the new words may be used in the dialogue. The glossary box was referred back to throughout the reading sessions, focusing on the words' pronunciation and meaning.

The class teacher and researcher modelled, reading the script aloud to the students as fluently and expressively as possible.

The class teacher engaged in round-robin reading. In the first of the three 'rounds', more proficient readers were chosen to read the text. The teacher and other students offered assistance when the reader encountered a difficult or unknown word. The students' understanding was assessed by the use of comprehension exercises.

## **Session Two**

Session two began with a revision of the previous lesson.

The teacher and students then looked at the glossary box to revise the vocabulary in the text. Following this, the teacher asked the students to orally summarise the text read in the previous class and to relate their past experiences with what had happened in the story.

The students then listened to a recording of *Mum's Friend*. Firstly, the class listened to the audio in its entirety while following along silently. In the second listening session, the class listened to the dialogue with pauses. This allowed for students to listen to each sentence and repeat it afterwards.

### **Session Three**

In session three, the class participated in round-robin reading activities. Students took turns reading out loud while their classmates followed along silently.

### **Session Four**

In this session, the class read the text silently and then partook in choral reading. Following this activity, the class teacher selected a few students to participate in a group reading with while the class listened and followed along. The teacher proceeded to select another group of students to read the text, until all the students in the class had an opportunity to read the text at least once.

### **Session Five**

Session five began with the teacher, researcher and class reading the text in unison. The following reading procedure for Session Five was very similar to that of Session Four with the students being divided into groups and reading the text in front of their classmates.

## **3.8. Section Seven - Integrity of Experiment**

A number of measures were taken throughout the duration of this study to ensure that the research met the highest standard of academic and professional ethics. Firstly, the research objectives were shared with the families of all participants in the study and informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the participants. All data was securely stored on a password-protected personal computer and subsequently transferred to a disc for storage following its analysis. Student anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Finally, families were informed of their right to withdraw their child from the study at any given time.

### **Summary**

This study evaluated the effectiveness of a Readers Theatre programme over a five-week intervention period when used with a population of 44 sixth-grade EFL students. The primary aim of this research study was to employ an engaging method that would potentially improve the oral reading fluency skills of the participants. The secondary purpose was for the class teacher to broaden her skills and increase her

repertoire of successful reading strategies that could be used to strengthen her curriculum for future students.

The following chapter, Results, provides a detailed description of the main conclusions found based on the analysis of the collected quantitative data.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

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### 4.1. Introduction

This study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Readers Theatre reading instruction as a means for facilitating and improving grade-sixth Portuguese-speaking EFL students' oral reading fluency development.

It was hypothesised that the use of Readers Theatre would provide improvements in students' oral reading fluency's three constituent elements, accuracy, automaticity and prosody. To be more precise, this study attempted to address the following questions:

When embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum,

**RQ.1.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading word decoding accuracy skills of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.2.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve automaticity (rate) of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

**RQ.3.** does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction facilitate and improve oral reading prosody of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners?

The independent variable was identified as the method of instruction. This included the following groups: (a) the control group participated in the more traditional-based EFL reading instruction and (b) the experimental group received Readers Theatre as a reading instruction method. The dependent variables were identified as (a) oral reading word accuracy, (b) oral reading automaticity and (c) oral reading prosody.

Two measures were used to assess students' oral reading fluency skills. The Curriculum-Based Measurement: Oral Reading Fluency Test (CBM-ORF) was used

as a pre and post assessment of two of the three constituent elements of fluency: word decoding accuracy and automaticity (rate). The third constituent, prosody, was measured by application of Zutell and Rasinski's (1991) Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS). A pretest and posttest measurement was obtained from each participant on each of the dependent variables.

## **4.2. Phase One: Baseline Data Testing**

Since the participating classes were samples of convenience, it was deemed necessary to investigate whether there was any statistically significant difference in the oral reading fluency ability level between the experimental and control groups prior to the treatment. A Curriculum-Based Measurement: Oral Fluency Test (CBM-ORF; Deno, 1985) and a Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS; Zutell & Rasinski's, 1991) probe were administered to the experimental and the control groups.

### **4.2.1. Statistical Analysis**

To control the possible heterogeneity in oral reading fluency between groups, the experimental and control students' baseline moment scores were compared using t-tests when the distributions were normal. When the distribution was not normal, data were transformed in order to achieve normality. If the normality or the homoscedasticity of the t-test assumptions were not met after transformations, a Mann-Whitney test was implemented using non-transformed data. Additionally, both the experimental and control groups' subgroups were compared using one-way ANOVA when test assumptions were met, either in raw or transformed data, otherwise a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. Post-hoc Tukey tests and Dunn tests were performed after one-way ANOVA and after the Kruskal-Wallis tests, respectively.

### **4.2.2. Results**

Table 3 provides mean scores and standard deviations, for both the experimental and control groups and their respective subgroups. CBM-ORF and MFS mean scores were found to be similar as a whole and not significantly discrepant for both the experimental and control groups. The results of the accuracy statistical testing were:  $t=-280$ ;  $P=0.781$ . Regarding fluency's other two dimensions, the results for automaticity were  $U=249.500$ ;  $P=0.851$  and  $t=-134$ ;  $P=0.894$ , for prosody. These

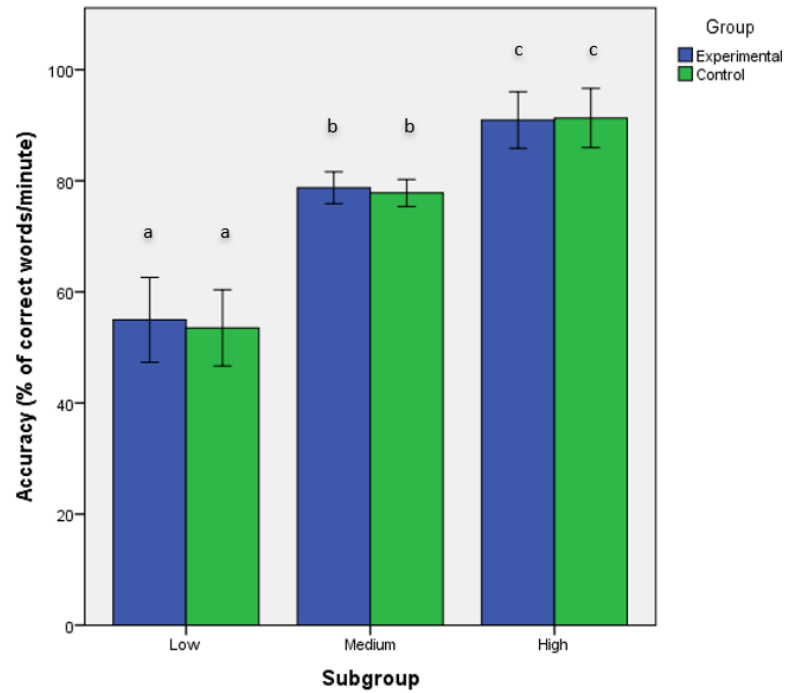
findings indicated that the two groups appeared to be similar with regards to oral reading prior to the teaching intervention. This was an important finding, as it provided a stable baseline measure that could be compared to subsequent testing, providing a more reliable data comparison between groups after the treatment.

**Table 3.**

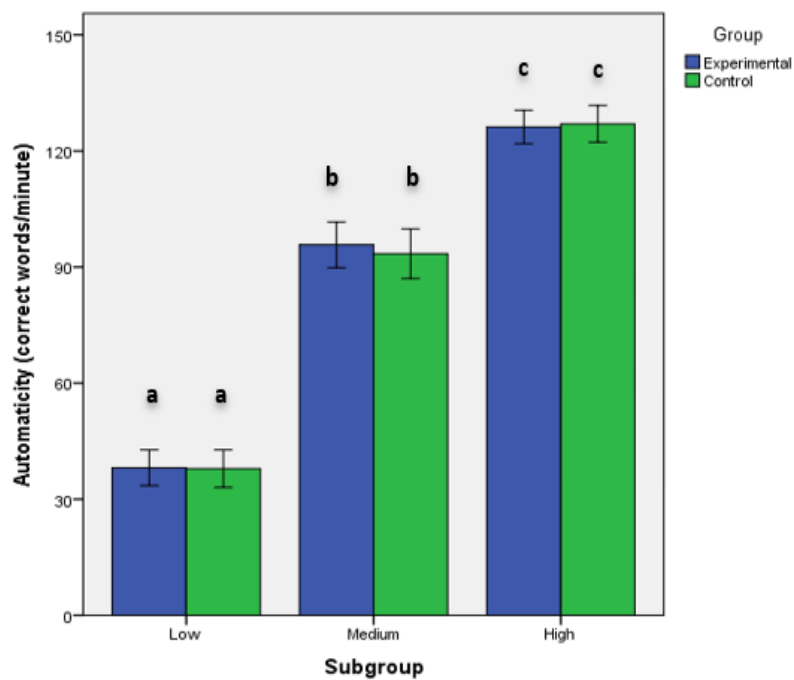
Observed baseline, accuracy, automaticity and prosody scores (means and standard deviations) in the control and experimental groups and their subgroups. WCPM-Words correct per minute; C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

<b>BASELINE</b>	<b>ACCURACY (WCPM)</b>		<b>AUTOMATICITY (% WCPM)</b>		<b>PROSODY (SCORE)</b>	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Groups</b>						
Experimental	72.60	15.86	81.05	36.83	7.91	2.95
Control	72.60	16.18	79.00	36.44	7.78	3.09
<b>Subgroups</b>						
E-Low	54.99	7.64	38.13	4.61	4.88	0.83
E-Medium	78.75	2.87	95.75	5.90	8.38	0.92
E-High	90.92	5.09	126.0	4.32	12.00	1.00
C-Low	53.52	6.85	37.89	4.86	4.67	0.71
C-Medium	77.81	2.44	93.44	6.42	8.33	0.87
C-High	91.30	5.33	127.0	4.74	12.40	0.89

Regarding the subgroups (E-Low, E-Medium and E-High, for the experimental group and C-Low, C-Medium and C-High, for the control group), significant differences in accuracy were only found between the three levels within both the experimental and control groups ( $H=37.656$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ). Each subgroup in the experimental group was considered similar to the corresponding subgroup in the control group (Figure 12). The same can be seen with fluency's other two dimensions, automaticity ( $F=390.609$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ) (Figure 13) and prosody ( $F=96.784$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ) (Figure 14). This was an important finding, as it provided a baseline for a more reliable data comparison between the experimental and control groups' three subgroups, after the treatment.

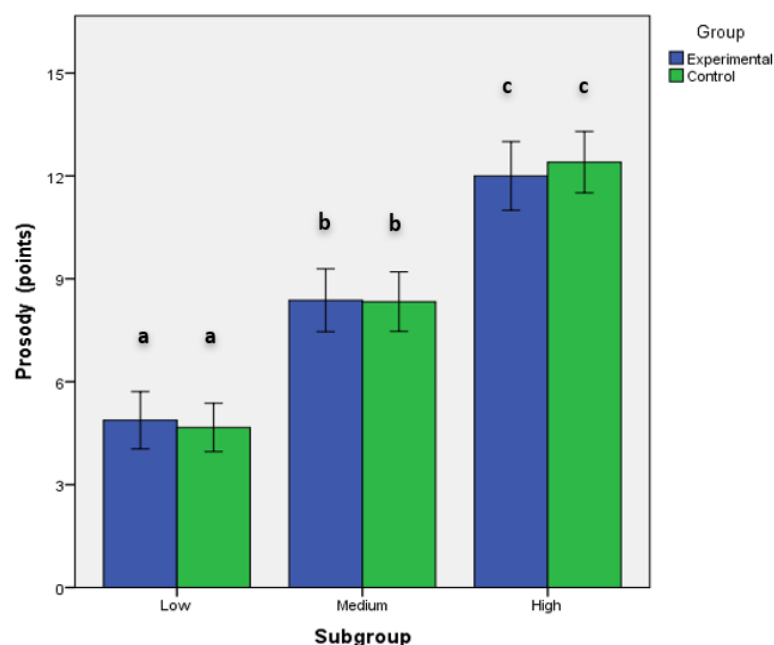


**Figure 12:** Observed baseline accuracy scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$



**Figure 13:** Observed baseline automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .





**Figure 14:** Observed baseline prosody scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation), based on Zutell and Rasinski's 1990 Multidimensional Fluency scale. Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

The remainder of this chapter presents pre- and posttest statistical analysis, for each dependent variable: (a) oral reading accuracy (b), oral reading automaticity (rate) and (c) oral reading prosody for both experimental and control groups and their subgroups.

#### 4.3. Phase Two: Intervention and Phase Three: Post Intervention

##### 4.3.1. Research Question One - Oral Reading Accuracy

Research question one asked, "Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, facilitate and improve oral reading word decoding accuracy skills of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the EFL curriculum?"

To address this question, the researcher administered CBM: ORF pre- and posttests to both the experimental and control groups. Word recognition accuracy was determined by dividing the total number of words read correctly per minute by the total number of words read (encountered) by the student (correct or corrected plus uncorrected errors) and then multiplied by 100.

As previously mentioned, word decoding accuracy performance in reading is often divided into three levels (Rasinski, 2004). The independent reading level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode 97% to 100% of the words without assistance of any kind from the teacher. The instructional level is the level at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode 90% to 96% of the words (challenging but manageable for the reader) and the frustration level is the level at which reading simply becomes too difficult and challenging whereby a student decodes less than 90% of the words accurately. It is important to emphasise that these norms are based on the reading development of first language readers. Since the construct of fluency in this study will be measured in a foreign language setting, the above mentioned established norms cannot be applied directly, but rather used as a reference.

#### **4.3.1.1. Statistical Analysis**

An independent-sample t-test was used to assess the differences between the control group and the experimental group in pre- and posttests. One-way ANOVA was used to compare the subgroups' pretests scores and a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the posttests scores. A Post-hoc Tukey and a Dunn test were performed after one-way ANOVA and the Kruskal-Wallis test, respectively. In addition, a paired-sample t-test was used to analyse differences between pre- and posttest scores within both the experimental and the control group. Pre- versus posttest comparisons within each subgroup were made using either a paired-sample t-test or a Wilcoxon test. Data transformations were attempted in order to achieve normality and homoscedasticity. Non-parametric tests were performed only when these assumptions could not be accomplished with either raw or transformed data.

Table 4 provides accuracy mean scores and standard deviations, for both the experimental and control groups and their respective subgroups.

**Table 4.**

Accuracy scores observed in pre- and posttests in both the control and experimental groups and their respective subgroups. WCPM-words correct per minute; C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

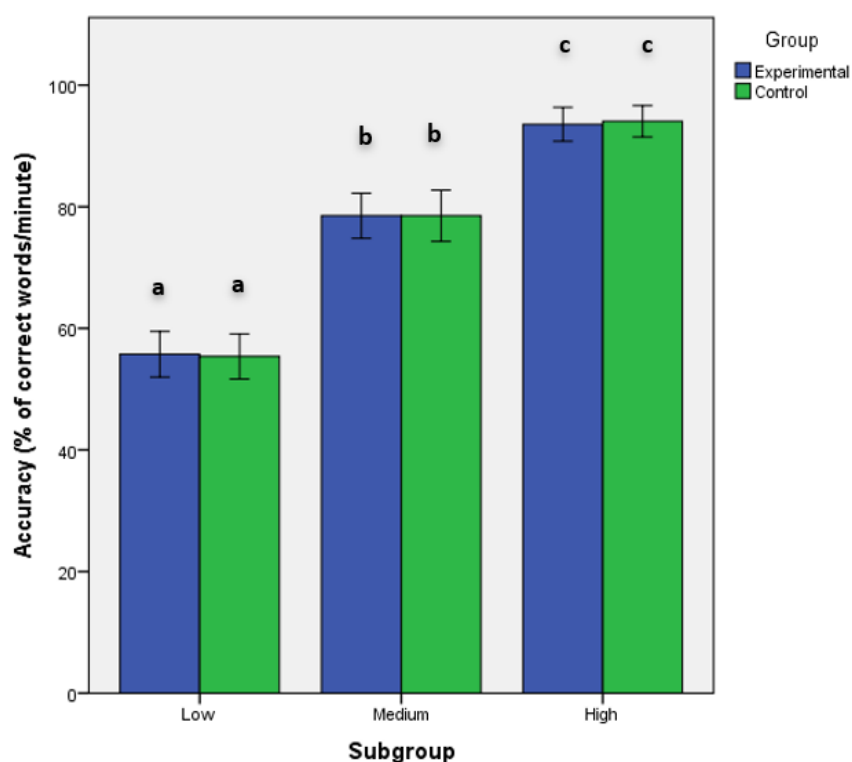
<b>ACCURACY (% OF WCPM)</b>	<b>PRETESTS</b>		<b>POSTTESTS</b>	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>GROUPS</b>				
EXPERIMENTAL	73.424	15.7470	91.352	7.4253
CONTROL	72.839	15.9029	76.935	14.0048
<b>SUBGROUPS</b>				
E-LOW	55.750	3.7539	83.588	4.4299
E-MEDIUM	78.512	3.7061	93.838	3.2941
E-HIGH	93.560	2.7907	99.800	0.4472
C-LOW	55.378	3.7161	62.522	5.2328
C-MEDIUM	78.511	4.2064	80.511	4.3036
C-HIGH	94.060	2.5784	96.440	3.9004

The experimental group's pre-intervention CBM-ORF mean scores were not significantly different from those of the control group. However, significant differences were found in accuracy scores between the two groups after the teaching intervention. The results of the statistical test for pretest accuracy were:  $t=-0.122$  and  $P=0.903$ , while the posttest accuracy results were  $t=-4.317$  and  $P<0.0005$ .

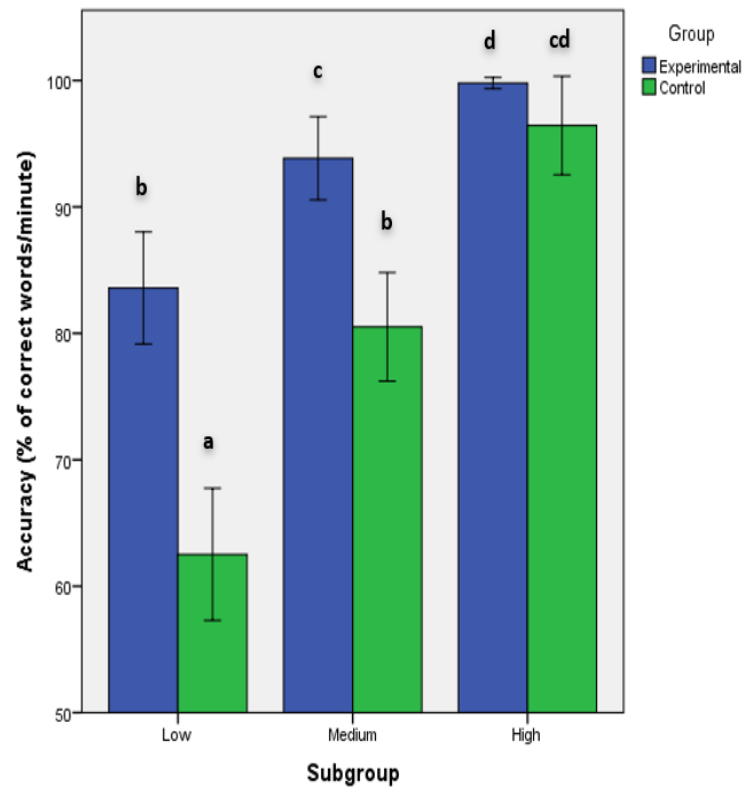
With regards to the comparison made among the subgroups, at the pretest moment, significant differences were found ( $F=150.965$  and  $P<0.0005$ ) as can be seen in Figure 15. The differences were among the three accuracy levels within each group: "low fluency<medium fluency< high fluency". Each level in one group was statistically similar to the corresponding level in the other group.

Significant differences were also found at the posttest intervention moment ( $K=38.889$ ;  $P<0.005$ ) but with a more complex pattern (Figure 16). The control group's subgroups (C-Low, C-Medium and C-High) had significantly differing scores: "low fluency < medium fluency < high fluency". The same pattern can be observed in the experimental group (Figure 16).

With regards to the subgroups E-Low and C-Low, higher scores were obtained in the E-Low group. A similar outcome was found between the E-Medium and C-Medium subgroups. On the other hand, significantly differing scores were not found amongst students in the higher level subgroups (E-High and C-High).



**Figure 15:** Pretest accuracy scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) observed in control and experimental subgroups. Different letters mean significant differences at  $P<0.05$ .



**Figure 16:** Posttest accuracy scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) observed in control and experimental subgroups. Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

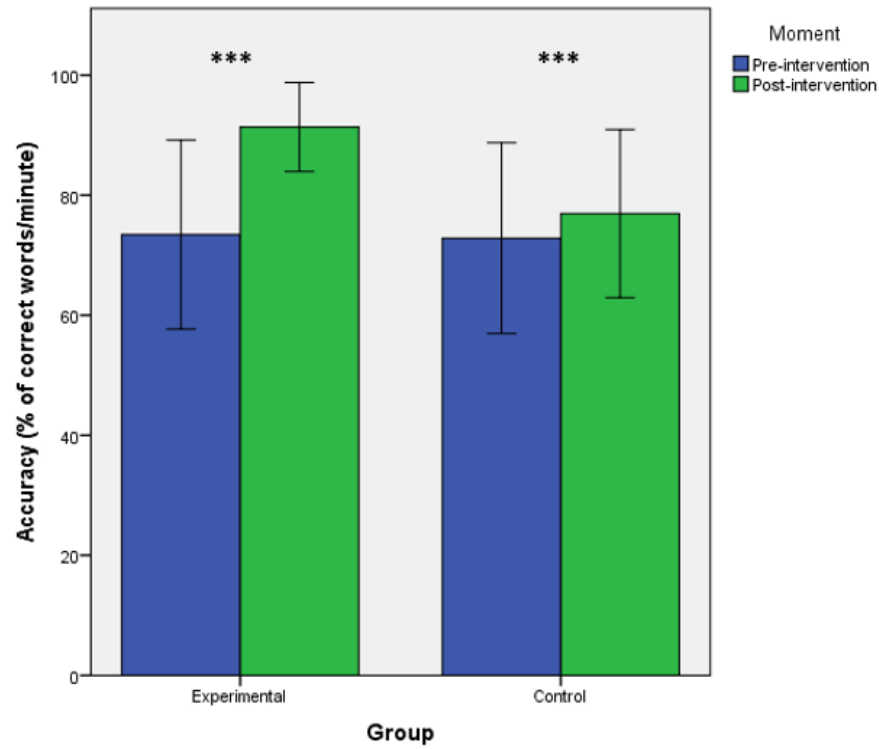
#### 4.3.1.2. Pre-Intervention vs Post-Intervention Analysis

Both the experimental and control group registered significant differences in accuracy scores between pretest and posttest measures. Similar outcomes were found between all the subgroups (see Table 5 and Figures 17 and 18).

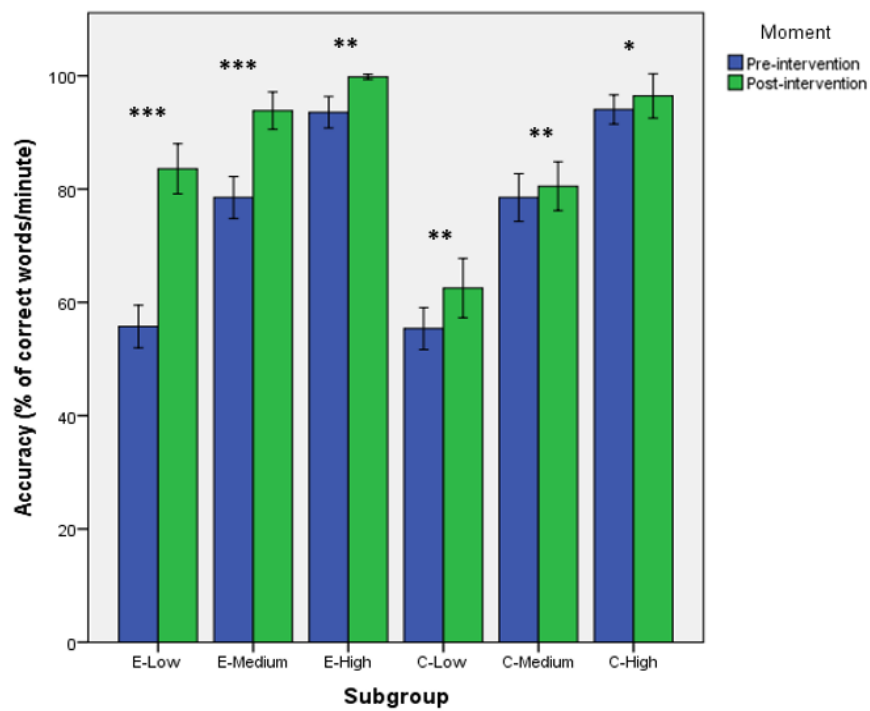
**Table 5.**

Results of the comparisons between the pretest and posttest accuracy scores in the control and experimental groups and in their subgroups. E-Experimental; C-Control.

<b>ACCURACY</b>		<b>Test</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance (P)</b>
<b>EXPERIMENTAL GROUP</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-8.747	<0.0005
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>CONTROL GROUP</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-4.576	<0.0005
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP E-LOW</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-15.154	<0.0005
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP E-MEDIUM</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-25.789	<0.0005
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP E-HIGH</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Wilcoxon test	-4.870	0.008
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP C-LOW</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-4.761	0.001
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP C-MEDIUM</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-4.615	0.002
POST INTERVENTION				
<b>SUBGROUP C-HIGH</b>				
PRE INTERVENTION		Paired samples t test	-3.752	0.020
POST INTERVENTION				



**Figure 17:** Pretest and posttest accuracy scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .



**Figure 18:** Pretest and posttest accuracy scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in subgroups of the control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $0.001 \leq P < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.01 \leq P < 0.05$

#### 4.3.1.3. Progress Magnitude:

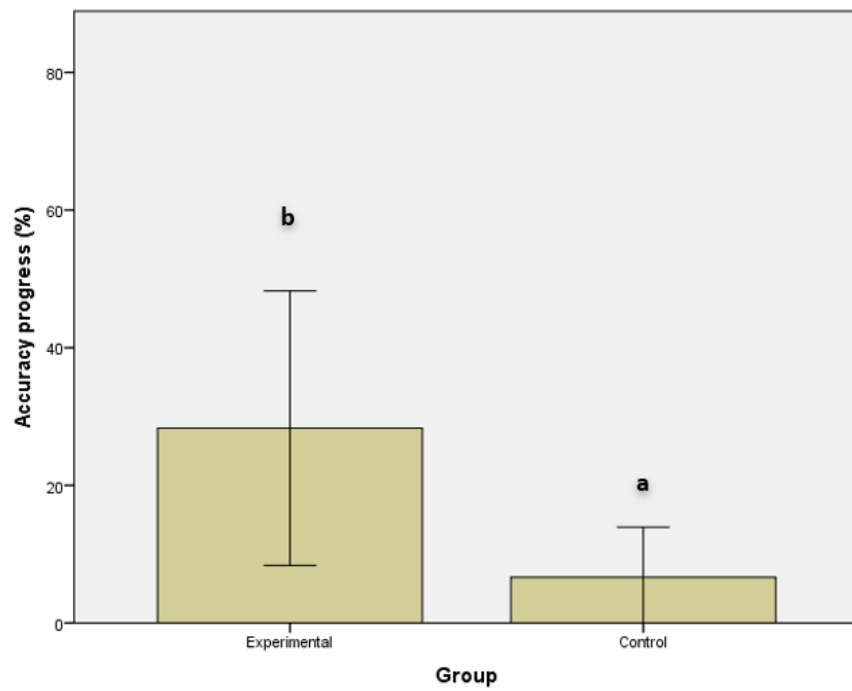
Progress in accuracy was significantly greater in the experimental group in comparison with the control group ( $U=426$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ; Table 6 and Figure 19). Moreover, Figure 20 shows significant differences among the subgroups ( $F=57.982$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ). Regarding the experimental's subgroups, it may be seen that the E-Low subgroup had the greatest accuracy increase, while the E-High subgroup had the smallest increase in accuracy. A similar pattern was observed among the control group's subgroups, though the differences were not significant.

**Table 6.**

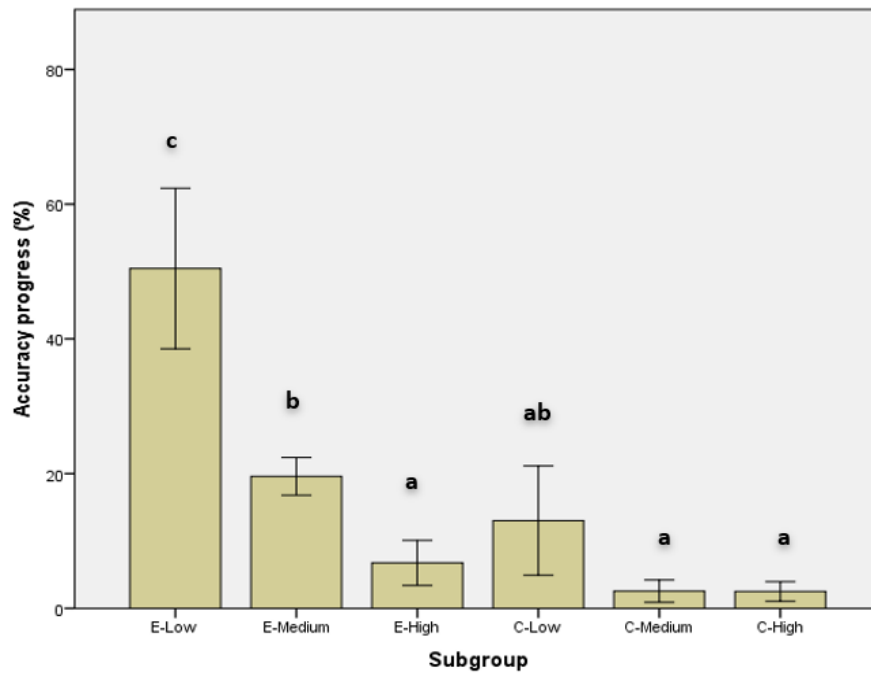
Progress (%) between pretest and posttest accuracy scores in control and experimental groups and their subgroups. WCPM-words correct per minute; C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

ACCURACY (% OF WCPM)	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
GROUPS		
EXPERIMENTAL	28,2943	19,93531
CONTROL	6,64478	7,26484
SUBGROUPS		
E-LOW	50,4538	11,91884
E-MEDIUM	19,6013	2,79955
E-HIGH	6,7480	3,35261
C-LOW	13,0333	8,11759
C-MEDIUM	2,5578	1,66019
C-HIGH	2,5020	1,45214





**Figure 19:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention accuracy scores in control and experimental group (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .



**Figure 20:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention accuracy scores in the subgroups (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

#### **4.3.2. Research Question Two - Oral Reading Automaticity**

Research question two asked, “Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, improve scores in automaticity (rate) of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?”

To address this question, the researcher administered CBM-ORF pre- and posttests to both the experimental and control groups at the beginning and end of the five-week instructional cycle. Automaticity scores were calculated by subtracting the total number of errors from the total number of correct in one minute.

##### **4.3.2.1. Statistical Analysis**

To determine if a difference in automaticity was observed between the experimental and control groups in pretest and in posttest, a Mann-Whitney U test analysis was used. One-way ANOVA was used to compare the scores of the subgroups in pretests and a Kruskal-Wallis test was used in posttests. A Post-hoc Tukey test and a Dunn test were performed after one-way ANOVA and after the Kruskal-Wallis test, respectively. Also, a paired-sample t-test was used to analyse the differences between pretest and posttest within the control group as well as within the experimental group. Pre- and posttest comparisons within each subgroup were made using either paired sample t-tests or Wilcoxon tests. Parametric tests were performed using either raw data or transformed data. Data transformations were done to as an attempt to accomplish normality and homoscedasticity assumptions whenever needed. When these assumptions were not met both with raw and transformed data, comparisons were done with non-parametric tests.

The results (Table 7) revealed significant differences between the experimental group which participated in Readers Theatre and the control group which partook in the reading instruction via their existing sixth-grade EFL syllabus, as well as among the subgroups. These differences are described below.

**Table 7.**

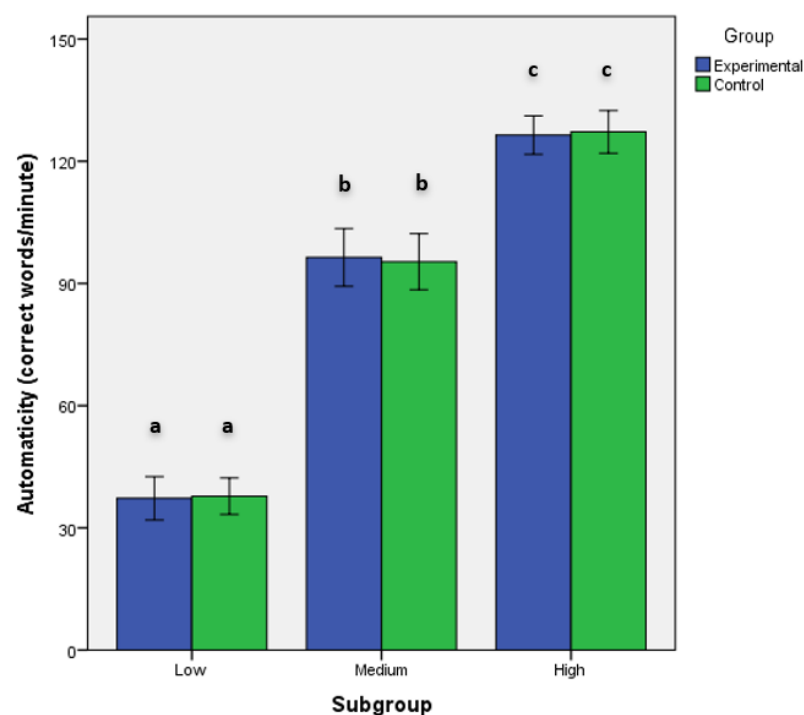
Automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) for both the experimental and control groups and their subgroups. WCPM-words correct per minute; E-Experimental; C-Control.

<b>AUTOMATICITY (WCPM)</b>	<b>PRETESTS</b>		<b>POSTTESTS</b>	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>GROUPS</b>				
EXPERIMENTAL	81.000	37.5167	111.476	26.5398
CONTROL	79.739	36.8945	87.217	33.5938
<b>SUBGROUPS</b>				
E-LOW	37.250	5.3385	79.750	10.1242
E-MEDIUM	96.375	7.0900	127.500	3.8545
E-HIGH	126.400	4.7223	136.600	0.8944
C-LOW	37.778	4.4938	49.778	5.8047
C-MEDIUM	95.333	6.8739	99.889	7.3220
C-HIGH	127.200	5.2154	131.800	5.7184

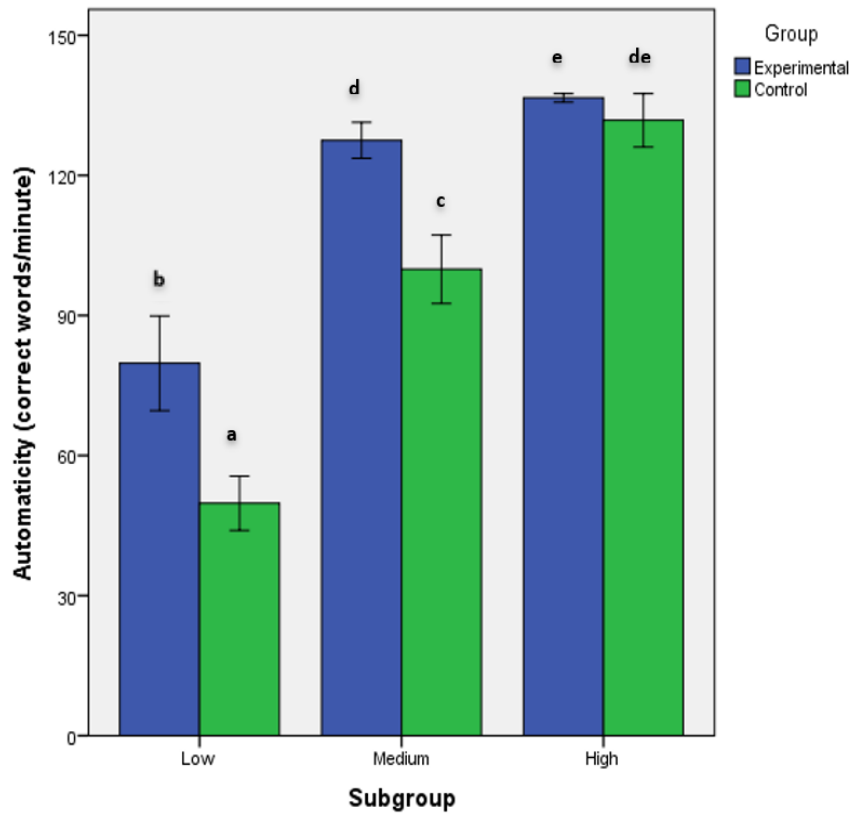
Phase Two Pretest CBM-ORF mean scores for the experimental group and the control group were not significantly discrepant prior to the teaching intervention. However, significant differences were found in automaticity scores between the two groups after the teaching intervention: the experimental group obtained higher automaticity scores than the control group. The results of the statistical test for pretest automaticity were:  $U=238.000$  and  $P=0.934$ , while the posttest automaticity results were  $U=141.500$  and  $P=0.019$ .

As can be seen in Figure 21, significant automaticity differences were found among the subgroups (low, medium, high) at the pretest moment ( $F=335.060$  and  $P<0.0005$ ). Each level in the experimental group (E-Low, E-Medium and E-High) was statistically similar to the corresponding level in the control group (C-Low, C-Medium and C-High).

Significant differences were also found at the posttest moment amongst the subgroups ( $H=40.139$  and  $P<0.0005$ ) but with a more complex pattern (Figure 22). The automaticity scores obtained in both the control and experimental groups' subgroups were significantly different: low < medium < high. The E-Low subgroup had a higher score than its C-Low counterpart. The same outcome was found in E-Medium and C-Medium and E-High and C-High.



**Figure 21:** Pretest automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in control and experimental subgroups.



**Figure 22:** Posttest automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in subgroups of the control and experimental groups. Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

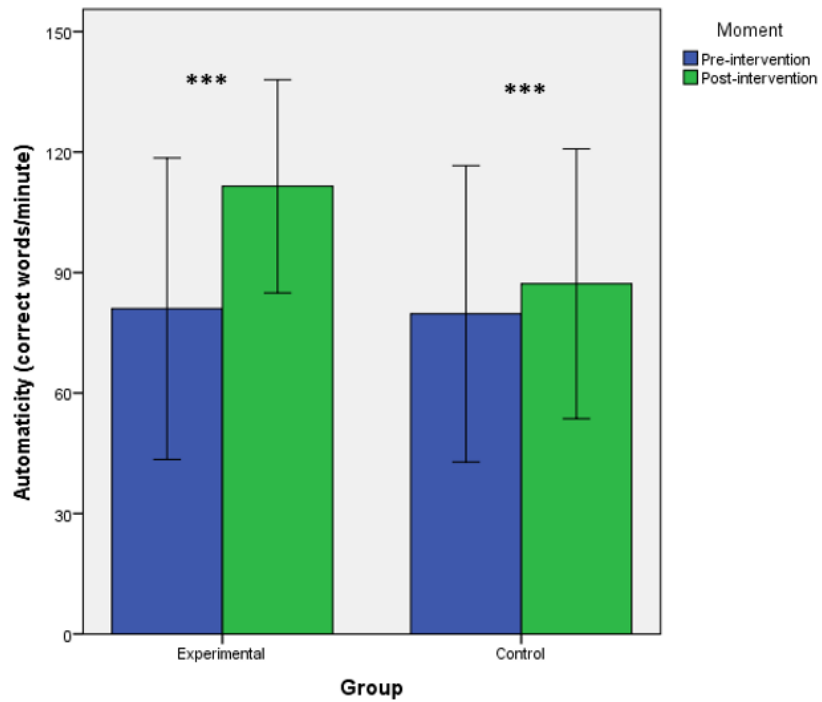
#### 4.3.2.2. Pre-intervention vs Post-intervention Analysis

Both the experimental and control group registered significant differences in automaticity scores between pre- and posttest measures (see Table 8 and Figure 23). The same outcome can be seen with all the subgroups (see Table 8 and Figure 24).

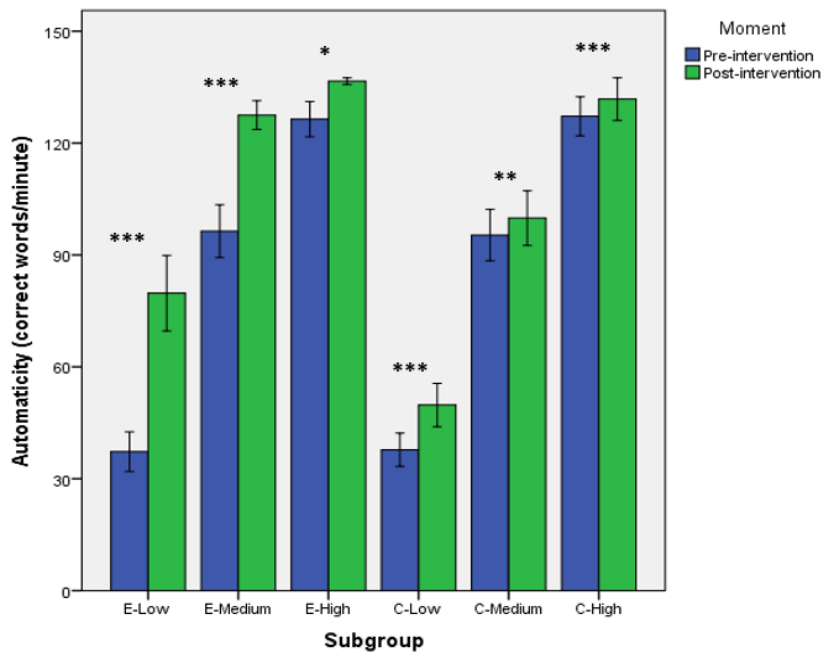
**Table 8.**

Results of the comparisons between the pretest and posttest automaticity scores in the control and experimental groups and in their subgroups. E-Experimental; C-Control.

<b>AUTOMATICITY</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance (P)</b>
<b>EXPERIMENTAL GROUP</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-10.356	<0.0005
<b>CONTROL GROUP</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-7.812	<0.0005
<b>SUB-GROUP E-LOW</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-21.947	<0.0005
<b>SUB-GROUP E-MEDIUM</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-21.545	<0.0005
<b>SUB-GROUP E-HIGH</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Wilcoxon test	15.000	0.043
<b>SUB-GROUP C-LOW</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-9.985	<0.0005
<b>SUB-GROUP C-MEDIUM</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-5.155	0.001
<b>SUB-GROUP C-HIGH</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-18.779	<0.0005



**Figure 23:** Pre- and posttest automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .



**Figure 24:** Pre- and posttest automaticity scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in subgroups of the control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $0.001 \leq P < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.01 \leq P < 0.05$ .

#### 4.3.2.3. Progress Magnitude:

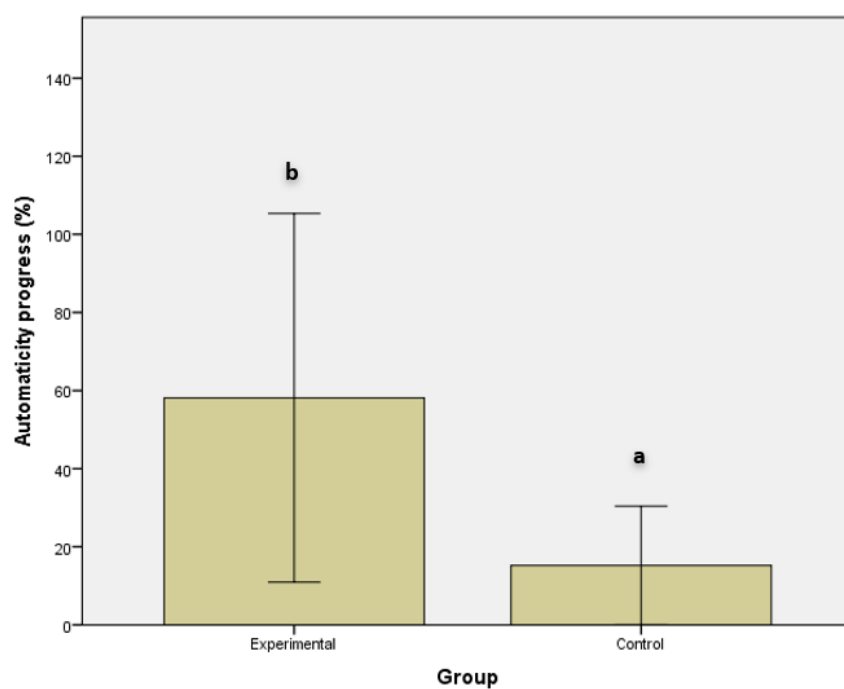
Progress in automaticity was significantly greater in the experimental group in comparison with the control group ( $U=393$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ; Table 9, and Figure 25). Moreover, Table 9 and Figure 26 demonstrate significant differences among the subgroups ( $H=38.619$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ). Concerning the experimental group's subgroups, it may be seen that the E-Low subgroup had the greatest increase in automaticity, while E-High had the smallest increase. A similar pattern was observed among the control group's subgroups, though only subgroup C-Low differed from the other subgroups.

**Table 9.**

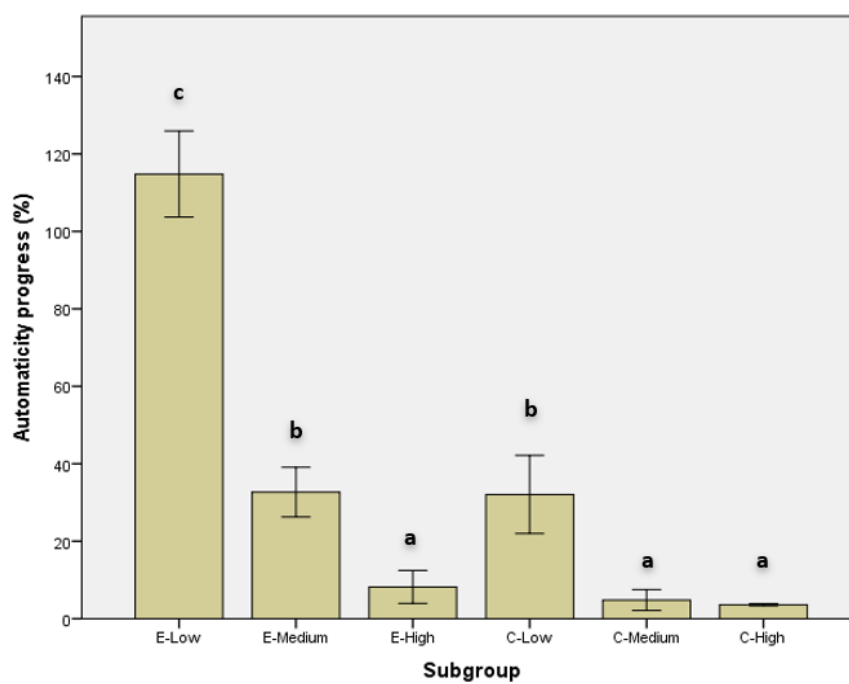
Progress (%) between pre- and posttest automaticity scores in control and experimental groups and their subgroups. C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

AUTOMATICITY	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
<b>GROUPS</b>		
EXPERIMENTAL	58.1388	47.20765
CONTROL	15.2086	15.19338
<b>SUBGROUPS</b>		
E-LOW	114.8059	11.12276
E-MEDIUM	32.6866	6.42339
E-HIGH	8.1949	4.26312
C-LOW	32.0654	10.08797
C-MEDIUM	4.7964	2.69306
C-HIGH	3.6082	0.30626





**Figure 25:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention automaticity scores in control and experimental group (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .



**Figure 26:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention automaticity scores in the subgroups (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

### **4.3.3. Research Question Three - Oral Reading Prosody**

Research question three asked, “Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, improve oral reading prosody of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?”

To address this question, the researcher administered the MFS probe as pre- and posttests to both the experimental and control. Prosodic oral reading scores were obtained by listening to the same digital audio recordings obtained for the CBM-ORF tests and rating them on the *Multidimensional Fluency Scale* (MFS) developed by Zutell and Rasinski (1991).

#### **4.3.3.1. Statistical Analysis**

A Mann-Whitney U test was used to assess the differences between the control group and the experimental group in pretest, while a t-test was used to assess the differences between these groups in the posttest. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the scores of the subgroups in both pre- and posttests. A Dunn test was performed after the Kruskal-Wallis test. Moreover, a paired-sample t-test was used to analyse the differences between pretest and posttest within the control group as well as within the experimental group. Pre- and posttest comparisons within each subgroup were made using either paired sample t-tests or Wilcoxon tests. Non-parametric tests were used only when the assumptions of the parametric tests were not accomplished, even after data transformation. Table 10, provides prosodic mean scores and standard deviations, for both the experimental and control groups and their subgroups.

**Table 10.**

Prosodic mean scores and standard deviations, for both the experimental and control groups and their subgroups. C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

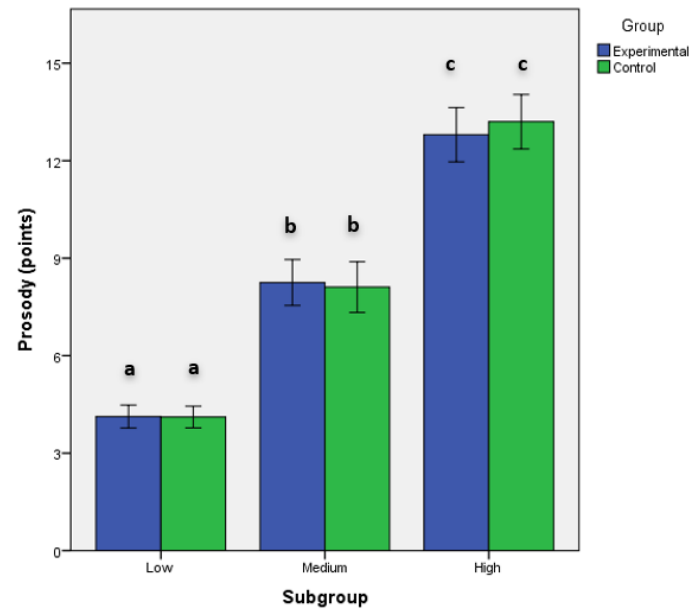
PROSODY	PRETESTS		POSTTESTS	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>GROUPS</b>				
EXPERIMENTAL	7.762	3.4771	12.905	1.6403
CONTROL	7.652	3.5498	8.696	3.0217
<b>SUBGROUPS</b>				
E-LOW	4.125	0.3536	11.250	0.4629
E-MEDIUM	8.250	0.7071	13.250	1.0351
E-HIGH	12.800	0.8367	15.000	0.0000
C-LOW	4.111	0.3333	6.111	0.9280
C-MEDIUM	8.111	0.7817	8.556	0.8819
C-HIGH	13.200	0.8367	13.600	1.3416

The experimental and control groups' Phase Two pretest MFS scores were not significantly different. However, significant prosodic score differences were found between the two groups after the teaching intervention. The results of the statistical test for pretest prosody were:  $U = 236.000$  and  $P = 0.895$ . Moreover, Phase Three's posttest prosodic results were  $t = -5.912$  and  $P < 0.0005$ .

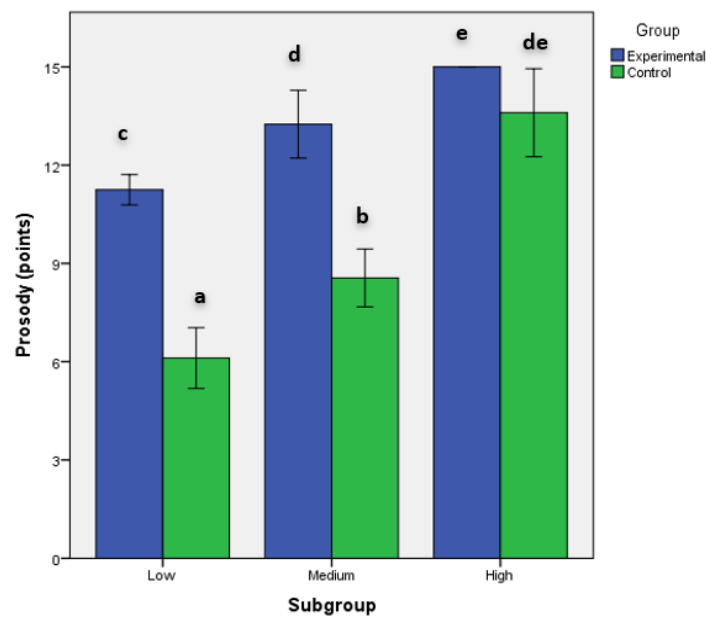
As can be seen in Figure 27, significant differences were found at pretest moment amongst the control and experimental subgroups ( $H = 39.559$  and  $P < 0.0005$ ). Differences were found within the three subgroup levels (low, medium and high) in both the control and experimental group. However, each level in the experimental group was statistically similar to the corresponding level in the control group.

In relation to the posttest moment, significant differences were also found amongst the experimental and control subgroups ( $H = 40.144$  and  $P < 0.0005$ ). Those significant differences existed amongst the various levels within the experimental group and within the control group, as follows: low < medium < high. Moreover, E-Low and C-

Low were significantly different as were E-Medium and C-Medium and lastly, E-High and C-High (see Figure 28).



**Figure 27:** Pretest prosody scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) observed in control and experimental subgroups. Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .



**Figure 28:** Posttest prosody scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) observed in control and experimental subgroups. Different letters mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .

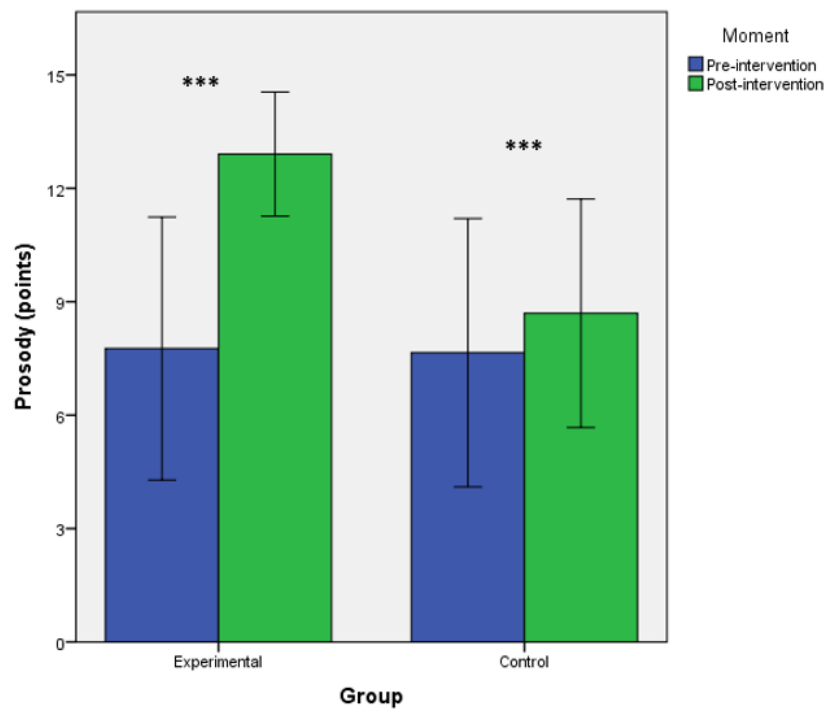
#### 4.3.3.2. Pre-Intervention vs Post-Intervention Analysis

Both the experimental and control group registered significant differences in prosodic scores between pre- and posttest measures (see Table 11 and Figure 29). The same can be observed with all the subgroups, with the exception of subgroup C-High (see Table 11 and Figure 30).

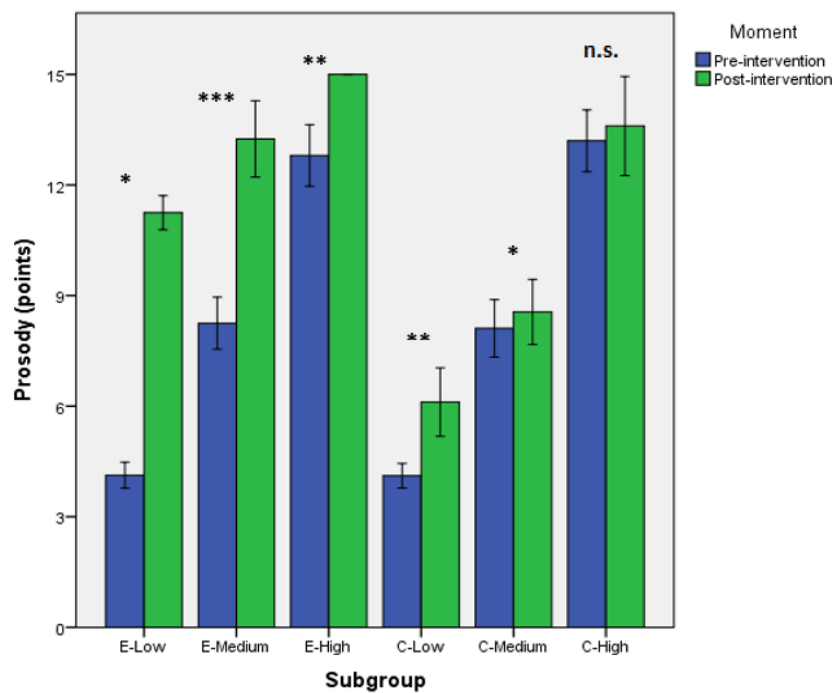
**Table 11.**

Results of the comparisons between the pretest and posttest prosodic scores in the control and experimental groups and in their subgroups. E-Experimental; C-Control.

PROSODY	Test	Test Statistic	Significance (P)
<b>EXPERIMENTAL GROUP</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t-test	-11.075	<0.0005
<b>CONTROL GROUP</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t-test	-4.324	<0.0005
<b>SUB-GROUP E-LOW</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Wilcoxon test	36.000	0.010
<b>SUB-GROUP E-MEDIUM</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-11.832	<0.0005
<b>SUBG-ROUP E-HIGH</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-4.870	.008
<b>SUB-GROUP C-LOW</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Wilcoxon test	45.000	0.007
<b>SUB-GROUP C-MEDIUM</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-2.530	0.035
<b>SUBGROUP C-HIGH</b>			
PRE INTERVENTION POST INTERVENTION	Paired samples t test	-1.633	.178



**Figure 29:** Pre- and posttest prosodic scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .



**Figure 30:** Pre- and posttest prosodic scores (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) in subgroups of the control and experimental groups. \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $0.001 \leq P < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.01 \leq P < 0.05$ ; n. s. – no significant differences

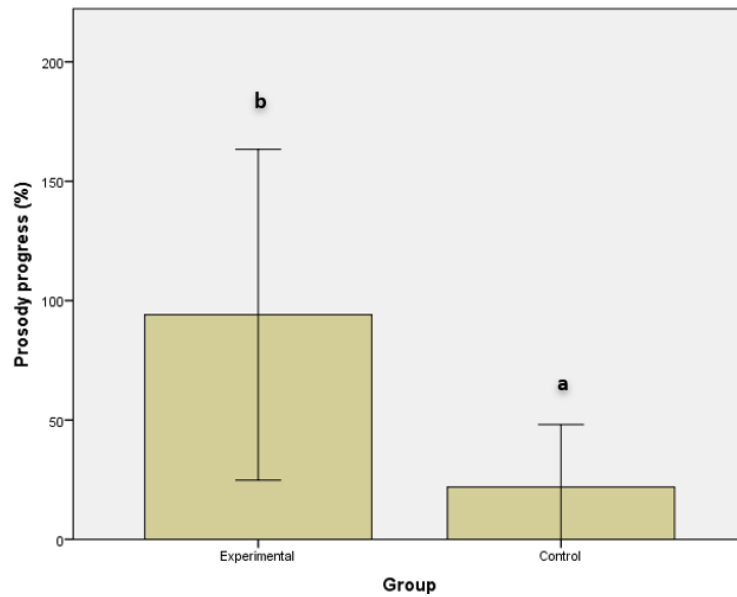
#### 4.3.3.3. Progress Magnitude:

Progress in prosodic scores was significantly greater in the experimental group in comparison with the control group ( $U=412$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ; Table 12 and Figure 31). Moreover, Figure 32 and Table 12 demonstrate significant differences among the subgroups ( $H=38.619$ ;  $P<0.0005$ ). With reference to the experimental subgroups, it may be seen that E-Low level had the greatest prosodic increase, while E-High had the smallest increase in prosody. A similar pattern was observed among the control group's subgroups, although only subgroup C-Low differed from the other subgroups.

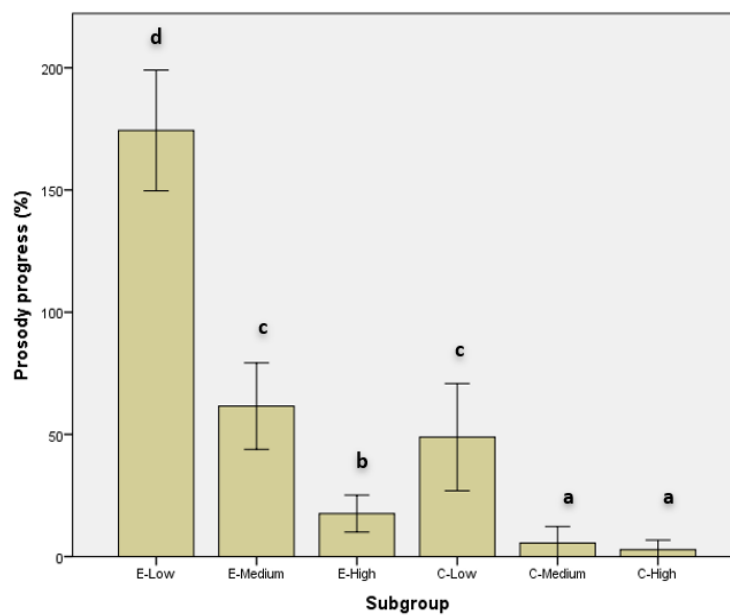
**Table 12.**

Progress (%) between pre- and posttest prosodic scores in control and experimental groups and their subgroups. C-Control group; E-Experimental group.

PROSODY	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
<b>GROUPS</b>		
EXPERIMENTAL	94,0748	69,27554
CONTROL	21,9427	26,12729
<b>SUBGROUPS</b>		
E-LOW	174,3750	24,70360
E-MEDIUM	61,5823	17,70785
E-HIGH	17,5824	7,56119
C-LOW	48,8889	21,90573
C-MEDIUM	5,5996	6,68799
C-HIGH	2,8571	3,91230



**Figure 31:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention prosodic scores in control and experimental group (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .



**Figure 32:** Progress (%) between pre and post intervention prosodic scores in the subgroups (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Different letters above columns mean significant differences at  $P < 0.05$ .



## **Summary**

This study examined the use of Readers Theatre in the EFL classroom as compared to the regular EFL reading instruction.

Though the experimental and control groups were at the same reading ability level prior to the teaching intervention, all in all, based on the findings of this study, it seems that the teaching intervention, was efficient in enhancing students' oral reading fluency. A comparison of the data collected before and after Readers Theatre instruction revealed that the students exposed to the teaching intervention significantly improved their performance on oral reading fluency in relation to the students in the control group. The greatest progress was observed among the less proficient readers.

This chapter presented an analysis of all data collected for the purpose of measuring the effects of Readers Theatre on the participating students' oral reading fluency. The next chapter offers conclusions of the study, and implications that can be drawn from the study for classroom practice are proposed, recommendations for further implementation and future research, as well as limitations imposed on the research



## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS**

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### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter is designed to provide insight and discussion into the findings of Readers Theatre-based instruction on grade-six EFL students' oral reading fluency. Firstly, a summary of the study is presented and in the second section, the findings of the study are summarised and discussed. In the third part, implications for classroom practice are proposed based on the findings. Finally, in the fourth section, limitations of the study are outlined and suggestions for future research are provided in section five.

### **5.2. Section One: Summary of the Study**

This research study was carried out with a total of 44 sixth-grade English as a Foreign Language students, in the Leiria district, during the 2008-2009 school year. The objective was to examine the effectiveness of Readers Theatre-based reading instruction on the participants' oral reading fluency (accuracy in decoding, automaticity in word recognition and the appropriate use of prosodic features).

The procedure for this quasi-experimental study followed a pretest, intervention (5 weeks), posttest schedule. One intact classroom was selected to serve as the experimental group which underwent five weeks of Readers Theatre-based reading instruction while another classroom was assigned to the control group receiving no input, but rather participating in the regular reading activities in their EFL syllabus.

The impact of the Readers Theatre programme on the participants' oral reading fluency was assessed using two separate tools: the Curriculum-based Measurement – Oral Reading Fluency (CBM-ORF) probe, which measured two of the dimensions of fluency, accuracy and automaticity, whilst the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS) probe measured the third constituent, prosody.

Data regarding changes in the experimental and control groups' pretest to posttest oral reading fluency scores were compared using the same reading material to determine if a difference in oral reading fluency was observed for students within

each group and between groups. Participants' scores from the CBM-ORF and MFS were entered into IBM *SPSS* Statistics 22. Data distributions were assessed with a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check for normality and with Levene's test to check for homogeneity of variances. The experimental and control students' baseline scores were compared using t-tests when the distributions were normal. When the distribution was not normal, data were transformed in order to achieve normality. If t-test assumptions were not met, a Mann-Whitney test was completed instead. Additionally, both the experimental and control groups' subgroups were compared using one-way ANOVA when test assumptions were met, either in raw or transformed data. Otherwise, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. Post-hoc Tukey and Dunn tests were performed after one-way ANOVA and after the Kruskal-Wallis test, respectively.

Pretest scores were compared to posttest scores in every group and subgroup. Normality was assessed using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The students' pretest and posttest scores were compared using repeated t-test measures when distributions were normal. Contrarily, the data were transformed in order to achieve normality. Moreover, if any of these tests' assumptions were not met, a Wilcoxon paired-sample test was performed alternatively.

The posttest results revealed significant accuracy, automaticity and prosodic differences among participants in the experimental and control group.

### **5.3. Section Two: Summary and Discussion of the Findings**

#### **5.3.1. Research Question One**

Research question one sought to answer the following: Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, facilitate and improve oral reading word decoding accuracy skills of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?

CBM-ORF probes were administered prior to the start of the intervention, in Phase One of the study, to both the experimental and control groups to establish a baseline for the construct of accuracy and once again as pre/post study tests during Phases

Two and Three. Word recognition accuracy was determined by dividing the total number of words read correctly by a student in one minute by the total number of words the student read (encountered), (correct or corrected plus uncorrected errors). That score was then multiplied by 100.

Analysis of the data regarding oral reading accuracy revealed a significant difference amongst the experimental and control groups. Although both groups made progress from pre- to posttests, the control group did not improve as much as the experimental group, within a five-week period. After participating in Readers Theatre, the experimental group increased their reading accuracy on the practiced passage from 73.4 % correct words per minute to 91.3 % correct words per minute, representing a global increase of 24.3%, whereas the control group only had a marginal improvement, increasing by 4.1% correct words per minute, a 5.6% global increase between pre- and posttests. It was observed that the participants in the Readers Theatre group made significant improvements in becoming more familiar with the text, particularly, with the more difficult vocabulary, whereas those in the control group continued to pause repeatedly before reading a difficult or less familiar word.

With regards to the subgroups in this study, E-Low and C-Low, both made accuracy gains. The Readers Theatre subgroup, yielded a greater gain than its comparison counterparts, increasing by 27.8 percentage points of correct words per minute (a 49.9% global increase, from pre- to posttests), while the C-Low subgroup increased 7.1 correct words per minute (a 12.9% increase).

As for the subgroups E-Medium and C-Medium, both also ameliorated their accuracy scores, yet the Readers Theatre group yielded a greater gain than its equivalent counterpart. The E-Medium subgroup increased 15.3 percentage points of correct words per minute, a global increase of 19.4% from pre- to posttest, whereas the C-Medium subgroup only increased by 2 percentage points of correct words per minute, representing, a global increase of 2.5% increase.

With reference to the subgroups E-High and C-High, once again, both subgroups made gains in accuracy; however the Readers Theatre group yielded a greater gain than its comparison counterparts. The E-High subgroup increased 6.3 percentage

points of correct words per minute, a 6.7% global increase from pre- to posttest while the C-High subgroup had a 2.4 percentage points of correct words per minute, a global increase of 2.6% increase.

In summation, although the experimental and control groups' oral reading accuracy levels were at the same level, prior to the intervention, those who received Readers Theatre instruction considerably improved their oral reading accuracy scores in the posttest measurements, outperforming the participants in the control group who received their regular reading-based EFL instruction.

With respect to the Experimental group's subgroups, students initially at a lower reading level, the E-Low subgroup, made greater accuracy gains than those at a higher reading fluency level (E-High). As both low and high achievers made progress with Readers Theatre instruction, it can be noted that students at various reading proficiency levels may benefit from Readers Theatre. A similar pattern was observed among the control group's subgroups, although the differences were not significant.

In such a manner, although the control group did not improve as much with regards to their accuracy scores in the posttest measurement as did the experimental group in this study, even though both groups were taught by the same teacher who used the same stories, the Readers Theatre's substantial posttest accuracy improvements can be credited to the teaching intervention.

This finding is consistent with previous studies which have also examined the impact of implementing Readers Theatre instruction on students' oral reading accuracy. Chen's (2006) research provided evidence that most readers participating in Readers Theatre, performed better in terms of reading accuracy with an average gain of 89% from pre to posttest. Most students were able to read faster with fewer errors after instruction. In Huang's (2006) study, results using words correct per minute revealed that most students reached a significant accuracy gain, 32%, after the implementation of Readers Theatre. Moreover, in Tsou's (2011) study, statistics indicated that there was a large increase in scores for the Readers Theatre group from pretest (68.1%), to posttest (78.5).

## Instructional Levels

As previously stated, there appears to be a general consensus that in order to read comfortably, L2/FL readers need to have a receptive mastery of between 95% and 98% or more of the words in a text recognising them rapidly (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Hu & Nation, 2000; Schmitt et al., 2011). This percentage coincides with what has been established for L1 students. A student's *independent reading level* corresponds to an accuracy rate of 97% or over.

The present study demonstrated that the baseline mean accuracy score among sixth-grade students in this study was approximately 72% for both the experimental and control groups.

After the Readers Theatre intervention, the experimental group's mean accuracy score was 91%. Overall, through Readers Theatre, students in the experimental group moved from a frustration level (72% in the pretests), in which a student decodes less than 90% of the words accurately, to an instructional level (91% in the posttests), at which a student can accurately pronounce or decode 90 to 96% of the words. The control group in this study remained at the frustration level (76.9% in the posttests), at which reading simply becomes too difficult and challenging.

Concerning the subgroups in this study, the E-Low group's pretest accuracy score placed the students at the frustration level in both pretest (55.7%), and posttest (83.5%). Despite not having reached the 90% score, which would have placed these students at an instructional level, it must be pointed out that this subgroup's accuracy score increased substantially within this level after participating in Readers Theatre. Prior to the intervention, this group was far from being able to reach the instruction level, whereas, after participating in Readers Theatre, the group was very close to achieving it (see Figure 20).

Contrastingly, both the E-Medium and E-High subgroups increased a level following Readers Theatre. The E-Medium subgroup moved from a frustration level (78.5%) in the pretest to an instructional level (93.5%) in posttest. Similarly, the E-High subgroup which began at the instruction level in the pretest (94%), reached the independent level at posttests (99.8%).

Regarding the Control group's subgroups, C-Low, C-Medium and C-High remained in the same level they initially began with. C-Low's pretest accuracy score (55.3%) and posttest accuracy scores (62.5%) placed these readers at the frustration level. In like matter, C-Medium's pretest (78.5%) and posttest scores (80.5%) also positioned these readers at the frustration level. Comparitavely, C-High did not advance to another level, standing at an instructional level in both pretest (94%) and posttest (96.4%).

### **5.3.2. Research Question Two**

The second research question sought to determine whether the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction would facilitate and improve gain scores in automaticity (rate) of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum.

During Phase One, prior to the teaching intervention, CBM-ORF probes were administered to both the experimental and control group to assess students' automaticity and to establish a baseline. CBM-ORF probes were administered once again as pre/post study tests during Phase Two and Three of the study. Automaticity is most often assessed by determining a reader's reading rate on a grade level passage in words correct per minute, calculated by subtracting the total number of errors from the total number of correct words in one minute.

A comparison of the data collected prior to and after the teaching intervention revealed that the students taught using Readers Theatre significantly improved their performance in automaticity as measured by CBM-ORF, outperforming the control group. The experimental group read at a rate of 81 correct words per minute in pretest, while the control group read at 79 words correct per minute. Following the Readers Theatre intervention, the experimental group read at 111 words correct per minute, a 30 words correct per minute increase or 37% improvement in speed, whereas the control group only increased by 8 correct words per minute, reading at 87 correct words per minute, or a 10% improvement.



In relation to the subgroups, the participants who had the greatest difficulty with oral reading fluency (E-Low and C-Low) revealed higher gains in automaticity measures than their more able counterparts (subgroups E-High and C-High). The E-Low subgroup's automaticity gain was 29 words correct per minute greater than the C-Low subgroup's gain, increasing their rate by 42 words correct per minute compared to 12 words correct per minute. As for the subgroups E-Medium and C-Medium, the C-Medium subgroup's reading speed was 95 words correct per minute in pretest and 99 words correct per minute in posttest, a 4 words correct per minute gain. On the other hand, the E-Medium subgroup began reading at 96 words correct per minute and increased their automaticity rate to 123 correct words per minute, a 31 words correct per minute improvement. As for the more advanced groups, E-High and C-High, the E-High subgroup displayed a 10 words correct per minute increase, reading at 136 correct words per minute in posttest, while the C-High subgroup experienced an increase of 4 correct words per minute, reaching 131 correct words per minute.

In short, although both the experimental and control groups were at a quite similar level of automaticity previous to the teaching intervention (pretest measurement), it was revealed that the experimental group gained from the Readers Theatre experience, since the experimental group outperformed the control on posttest automaticity measures. The results of this study confirmed the beneficial effects of Readers Theatre instruction on this particular sixth-grade Portuguese EFL students' oral reading automaticity performance.

The results of the study are consistent with and further substantiate the general tenor of previous L1 and EFL Readers Theatre research indicating a direct association with Readers Theatre instruction and automaticity improvement. In particular, Young and Rasinski's (2009), study recorded a near doubling of normal gains in automaticity and a 20% overall improvement in students' ability to read with expression after a year of implementing Readers Theatre. In Martinez, Roser and Strecker's (1998) 10-week study, results showed an average 17 word per minute gain in the Readers Theatre group compared to the control group's 6.9 wpm gain. In addition, Young and Rasinski's 2009 study, results using words correct per minute, showed significant gains from an average of 21.9 correct words per minute (the year before the

intervention) to 123.6 correct words per minute for the year that Readers Theatre was implemented

The results of the present study also support LaBerge and Samuel's (1974) Theory of Automatic Information Processing in Reading, which is predicated on the belief that readers have a finite amount of attentional resources and are limited in their ability to parcel that attention to multiple tasks, for example, decoding and comprehension. Given that both decoding and comprehension are challenging tasks, proficient word decoding needs to be developed to a point of automaticity where readers move beyond conscious, accurate decoding to that of decoding words with minimal attention. In effect, the current study confirms this. As readers became more capable of identifying words correctly, the more automatic their reading became.

### **5.3.3. Research Question Three**

Does the implementation of Readers Theatre, as a method of reading instruction, facilitate and improve oral reading prosody of sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL learners when embedded as an instructional component of the English as a Foreign Language curriculum?

Although accurate and automatic word recognition have long been considered hallmark components of fluency, it has been suggested that these two components do not account for the ability to make oral reading sound like spoken language. Many researchers agree that while readers must be capable of recognising words accurately and automatically, they must also read with phrasing and expression in order to interact meaningfully with a variety of texts.

Prosodic reading, or reading with expression, is one of the essential but often forgotten aspects of reading fluency. It is certainly not assessed as regularly or as easily as reading accuracy and rate. Poor prosody can lead to confusion by reading inappropriate word groupings and with the incorrect application of expression. As students become fluent decoders, their reading mirrors that of a proficient reader. Prosody makes oral reading come alive and reflects the author's message more accurately and more meaningfully.

Prosodic oral reading scores were obtained by listening to the same digital audio recordings obtained for the CBM-ORF tests and rating them on the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MFS) developed by Zutell and Rasinski (1991). The MFS probe was administered to both the experimental and control group. A baseline was established prior to the start of the intervention in Phase One of the study and then as pre/post study tests during Phases Two and Three. There are four main dimensions/categories in the Multidimensional Fluency Scale. Within each dimension, there are four subscales with a description of the criteria for a specific score in that particular dimension: expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness and pace. Readers receive a score that best reflects their oral reading fluency. As scores in one specific dimension ranged from one to four, the reader might receive a total score of four to sixteen.

When taking both expression and volume into account, readers should read in audible voice and with expression that is similar to or mirrors the meaning of the text. When scoring phrasing, teachers need to ensure a reader reads in meaningful phrases, adhering to punctuation. Smooth reading consists of reading without breaks or hesitations. Finally, a reader should read at a conversational pace, pausing for effect, or adjusting pace for expressiveness. Pace is different from rate as faster is not necessarily better in this category.

Although both the experimental and control groups experienced gains in reading prosody over the course of this study, this study demonstrated that students who received Readers Theatre instruction as a reading intervention made substantially greater gains in prosody as compared to the students in the control group who received the reading activities through their existing sixth-grade EFL syllabus.

Prior to the intervention, the experimental and control groups' prosodic mean scores were virtually identical (Experimental: 7.7 points and Control: 7.6 points). The Readers Theatre posttest scores (12.9 points) revealed a 5.2 point prosodic growth (from 7.7 to 12.9 points), while the control group's posttest prosodic score were not as significant as this group only displayed a 1 point gain (7.6 to 8.6 points).

With regards to the subgroups, E-Low gained 7.1 points from pretest (4.1 points) to posttest (11.2 points), while C-Low only gained 2 points (pretest mean score: 4.1

points and posttest mean score: 6.1 points). In addition, E-Medium had a 5 point prosodic increase (8.2 to 13.2 points), whereas its counterpart C-Medium was only able to obtain a 0.4 point prosodic increase, from 8.1 to 8.5 points. As for E-High and C-High, the experimental subgroup experienced a 2.2 point prosodic gain (12.8 points in pretest to 15 points in posttest) while the control group achieved a very similar pretest/posttest score (13.2 and 13.6 points).

This result replicates the findings of other studies of Readers Theatre by Keehn (2003), Young and Rasinski (2009) and Martinez, Roser, and Strecker (1998) who found Readers Theatre to be an effective intervention for improving the prosodic elements of oral reading.

The modelling of expressiveness by the teacher and the ongoing encouragement to add a dramatic quality to their oral reading results in more expressive oral reading by students. Moreover, Readers Theatre naturally provides support for struggling readers. By working with one another, those who have greater difficulties can benefit by listening to students who are more proficient readers. When scripts are read chorally, students can receive immediate assistance with expression.

Therefore, as the control group did not gain as much in the posttest measurement with regards to their oral reading prosodic performance as the experimental group, even though the same teacher was teaching both groups using the same reading material, the significant prosodic gains of the experimental group in the posttest measurement can be attributed to the teaching intervention. Drawn from the findings above, it can be concluded that the Readers Theatre intervention was facilitative and enhanced EFL students' oral reading prosody.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Readers Theatre was effective in increasing students' oral reading fluency, as the experimental group who took part in Readers Theatre significantly ameliorated their fluency scores (accuracy, automaticity and prosody) in the posttest measurement, in comparison to the participants in the control group who were part of the more traditional-based reading instruction.

#### **5.4. Section Three: Implications for Classroom Practice**

The most promising results from this study is that Readers Theatre is as an effective guided oral repeated reading instructional strategy that successfully improves oral reading fluency in FL students of various academic abilities. Consequently, a significant implication of this study is that Readers Theatre should assume a larger role in the EFL curriculum and not be implemented occasionally.

In this study, Readers Theatre was conducted in such a way that grade-six EFL teachers are able to comply with the curriculum requirements listed by the Portuguese Ministry of Education, while, simultaneously implementing Readers Theatre in the class. Readers Theatre is easily integrated into any reading programme, is adaptable for all levels of readers and allows for individual, partner and group work. The key is to adapt the reading materials found in the EFL curriculum to Readers Theatre scripts.

However, in order to implement Readers Theatre instruction in EFL classes, teachers first need to be cognizant of the importance of oral reading fluency strategies and how these may be implemented in their classrooms. This, in turn will allow teachers to select the strategies that best suit them and their students, thus making the EFL oral reading fluency learning process more stimulating. Through professional development teachers can learn how to use Readers Theatre for its oral reading fluency and affective benefits.

Being cognizant of the vital role that prosody plays in reading (Schrieber, 1991), the researcher suggests that oral reading fluency activities that take place in the EFL classroom include a practice element, which helps build accuracy and automaticity and as well as a prosodic element that fosters expression. Hence, it is recommended that EFL teachers incorporate a performance component, such as Readers Theatre, in their oral reading fluency instruction.

## **5.5. Section Four: Limitations of the Study**

In spite of the fact that the results of the study reveal positive influences of Readers Theatre instruction on students' oral reading fluency, there are a number of limiting factors that may have influenced the results.

This study was limited as all data was from a single school site and not the entire target population of sixth-graders in the district. Since the subjects of this study were chosen from the available population of students at the school, any generalisations of the findings are cautioned and need to be limited to similar subjects and schools to address the errors of having a non-random sample. However, this can be offset by the common characteristics that the population shares, such as age, mother tongue, and proficiency level, which presents a sample of the student population in Portuguese sixth-grade EFL schools in the Leiria district. A further limitation was the relatively small sampling size, 44 students. This project was limited in size so as to be manageable for a sole researcher to conduct the testing and training. A larger sample may have produced different results.

In addition, the duration of the study, five-week time frame from the first pretest to the final posttest assessment, was another limitation. This however may be overcome by allowing for a longer period of research in the future.

Unfortunately, as there are no established local or national oral reading fluency norms for EFL students, the L1 established norms could not be applied directly, but rather used as a reference. In this study, the impact of Readers Theatre as a means of improving oral reading fluency with EFL learners was measured by comparing the data from students' pretests with those in the posttest.

## **5.6. Section Five: Suggestions for Future Research**

This study documented oral fluency gains made by EFL sixth-graders resulting from their participation in Readers Theatre over a five-week period. Drawing from the findings of this study and the limitations highlighted in the previous section, a series of recommendations can be made for further research.

The findings of this study indicate that Readers Theatre can be a significant component of the EFL reading programme especially in developing oral reading fluency. Further research concerning the effect of Readers Theatre on improving oral reading fluency is needed to substantiate the findings of this study.

Establishing EFL oral reading fluency norms will provide researchers and teachers with information on their students' grade-level performances in oral reading fluency. These norms would allow educators to effectively measure and compare their students' oral reading fluency progress. It is suggested that more studies be undertaken to assist researchers in collecting reliable data on students' oral reading fluency, and allow them to establish an oral reading fluency norm, especially for students in an EFL environment.

Aside from oral reading fluency, numerous studies indicate that Readers Theatre is effective in increasing students' attitude and motivation towards reading as well as enhancing social skills, and lowering anxiety through teamwork (Worthy & Prater, 2002). Based on comments made by the students in this study, the researcher and class teacher believe that there were significant changes in students' attitudes and motivation towards reading during the intervention period. A study examining EFL students' attitude and motivation, when exposed to Readers Theatre is suggested.

The relationship between fluency and comprehension remains unclear among researchers. A further suggestion for future research would be to examine the effects of Readers Theatre has on comprehension in the EFL classroom as the present study did not focus on comprehension. It would answer the question of whether or not improvements in fluency lead to improvements in comprehension. The notion behind this theory is that students would be free to concentrate their efforts on other aspects of the reading process, once fluency was no longer an issue.

Only a minute number of classroom teachers have a clear and complete understanding of what constitutes oral reading fluency. In the absence of such understanding, these teachers are left with unclear and incomplete notions that limit their capacity to encourage the development and growth of oral reading fluency of their students. A proposal for future research would be to aid teachers in becoming more educated in oral reading fluency practices. This could be achieved through

teacher training education courses with a specific emphasis on oral reading fluency instruction, enabling teachers to select and implement the strategies and methods that best accommodate their students' needs.

### **Concluding Remarks**

A great amount of empirical and clinical research suggests that success in reading is difficult to achieve in the absence of fast and accurate word recognition skills and reading prosody. Difficulties in automatic word recognition may lead to laborious and slow reading, which in turn, can draw students' attention away from passage being read, thus, hindering understanding. Not only will the need to constantly reread the passage hinder automaticity and prosody, it may also decrease the pleasure of the reading experience.

Based on the findings drawn from the collected data of this study, Readers Theatre was shown to be a powerful tool. It has the potential to become a valuable technique in language learning and teaching, and in helping EFL students develop the oral reading fluency skills necessary in becoming more proficient readers of the English language. Moreover, it can be concluded that Readers Theatre can be easily incorporated into the sixth-grade Portuguese classroom in the regular English curriculum.

This research project did not attempt to arrive at absolute defining answers, but rather, contribute to strengthening oral reading fluency educational practices with young, foreign language learners and broaden teachers' understanding of Readers Theatre. Furthermore, it supports L1 Readers Theatre oral reading research findings and strived to provide insight into foreign language teaching and didactics in Portugal, by examining an area, which to the researcher's knowledge, had yet to be researched in the country.

In the context of teaching, it is hoped that the findings will inspire EFL teachers and researchers to design and implement more classroom activities to augment the significant role of Readers Theatre in different language classrooms, at various levels, in EFL settings.



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### APPENDIX A:

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dr [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Director

Rua [REDACTED]

Tel.: [REDACTED]

RE: Request for Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the ELT programme at the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD) and am in the process of writing my Doctoral Thesis. The study is entitled “The effect of Readers Theatre on the Oral Reading Fluency of foreign language learners”, conducted under the supervision of José Manuel Cardoso Belo, (UTAD, Portugal). I have provided you with a copy of my thesis proposal.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit two sixth-grade Portuguese-speaking EFL classes. Interested students, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the research process.

If approval is granted, student participants will take part in Readers Theatre activities during their regular EFL schedule. The research process should take no longer than five weeks. The research results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at: --- or [grace.welch@ipleiria.pt](mailto:grace.welch@ipleiria.pt).

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your institution.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

---

Printed name

---

Signature

---

Date

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER**

Dear Parents,

My name is Grace Welch. I am a graduate student in the Department of *Ciências da Linguagem* at the University of UTAD. I would like your child to take part in my research.

#### **What is Involved in the Study**

During five weeks of May to June, Ms. [REDACTED] and I will be researching the effect of Readers Theatre on the Oral Reading Fluency of foreign language middle-school learners. If you and your child agree that your child may participate in the study I will ask your child to take part in Readers Theatre activities, a fun, interactive way to build reading fluency. Your child's teacher will be asked to take part in the activities.

#### **Rights as a Participant**

The school principal has approved the research study. However, participation in the study is voluntary. Your child does not have to participate in the research and participation or non-participation will not result in any penalty, loss of benefits to which your child is entitled, harm his/her relationship with the researcher, class teacher and colleagues or affect your child's grades. Moreover, your child may choose to leave the study at any given time. Additionally, the investigator may stop the study or take your child out of the study at any time they judge it is in your child's best interest. They may also remove your child from the study for various other reasons. They can do this without your consent.

#### **Confidentiality**

All of the information I obtain from your child will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be used on any of the forms they complete, and no information about your child will ever leave school premises with a name attached. The survey that your child completes will be marked with a number I select but no one who works in the school will ever know this number. The thesis will not contain any INDIVIDUAL information about children.

**Risks**

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study, and most students enjoy the opportunity to express their opinions. The information from this research should help us learn more about oral reading fluency.

**Contacts for Questions or Problems**

If you have any questions about the study that your child is participating in you are encouraged to call or e-mail the researcher (Tel.: -----| E-mail: [grace.welch@ipleiria.pt](mailto:grace.welch@ipleiria.pt))

**Permission for Participation in Research**

If you and your child agree that your child may take part in the research please return a signed copy of this form to me in the enclosed envelope. You may keep the other copy for future reference.

As parent or legal guardian, I authorize \_\_\_\_\_  
(child's name) to become a participant in the research study described in this form.

Printed Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C:

### CHILD ASSENT FORM

I am doing a study to learn about Readers Theatre. We are asking you to help because I need to know if Readers Theatre will help children in grade six better their oral reading fluency skills.

If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you to participate in Readers Theatre Activities.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask us to stop.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign this paper or if you change your mind later.



Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D:

### PHASE ONE - BASELINE TEST SCRIPT - STUDENT COPY

#### People at work



Curriculum-Based Measurement: *Oral Reading Fluency Passage: Student Copy*

---

Sarah, Greg's mum, wakes up startled. She thinks it's a quarter to ten in the morning.

Oh, no! It's almost a quarter to ten! I'm late for work!

Sarah gets up and runs to Greg's room.

Greg, get up! It's almost a quarter to ten!

What! I get up at seven o'clock for school every day! I've got a test this morning!

I know! I know! We're late!

Greg gets up and goes into the bathroom to have a shower.

Greg, you can't have a shower now!

But I always have a shower!

Not today. Come on!

Greg goes to the kitchen to have breakfast.

Greg, there's no time for breakfast!

But I always have breakfast before I go to school!

Not today – just have an apple.

Mum looks out the kitchen window.

How strange! It's still dark!

Greg goes into his Mum's bedroom and looks at the clock.

Look at the clock, Mum, it's upside down!

Oh no! Sorry! It's only a quarter past four!

## APPENDIX E:

### PHASE ONE - BASELINE TEST SCRIPT - TEACHER COPY



Curriculum-Based Measurement: *Oral Reading Fluency Passage: Examiner Copy*

Assessment Date: ____/____/____	Student: _____	Examiner: _____
Words Read Correctly (WRC): _____	Errors: _____	Notes: _____

#### People at work

Sarah, Greg's mum, wakes up startled. She thinks it's a quarter to ten in the morning.	15 16
Oh, no! It's almost a quarter to ten! I'm late for work!	28
Sarah gets up and runs to Greg's room.	36
Greg, get up! It's almost a quarter to ten!	45
What! I get up at seven o'clock for school every day! I've got a test this morning!	61 62
I know! I know! We're late!	68
Greg gets up and goes into the bathroom to have a shower.	80
Greg, you can't have a shower now!	87
But I always have a shower!	93
Not today. Come on!	97
Greg goes to the kitchen to have breakfast.	105
Greg, there's no time for breakfast!	111
But I always have breakfast before I go to school!	121
Not today – just have an apple.	128
Mum looks out the kitchen window.	134
How strange! It's still dark!	139
Greg goes into his Mum's bedroom and looks at the clock.	150
Look at the clock, Mum, it's upside down!	158
Oh no! Sorry! It's only a quarter past four!	167

#### Scoring

Accuracy:

Words correct = \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_ %  
Total words read orally

Automaticity: \_\_\_\_\_ wcpm

Prosody- Multidimensional Fluency Scale

Expression and Volume: \_\_\_\_\_

Phrasing and Intonation: \_\_\_\_\_

Smoothness: \_\_\_\_\_

Pace: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments and Observations:

## APPENDIX F:

### MUM'S FRIEND - PHASE TWO and THREE - TEST SCRIPT - STUDENT COPY

NARRATOR: Sarah, Mathew and their mum Daisy are at the bus station looking for Pam.

MUM: Now, where's my friend Pam?

SARAH: Mum, is that woman coming out of the bus your friend Pam?

MUM: No. That woman's got short red hair and is tall. Pam's got long brown hair, brown eyes and is short.

MATHEW: You said she's got freckles.

MUM: Yes, she does.

SARAH: Look, that woman with the back pack, has long brown hair.

MATHEW: Shh! Sarah, that's a man not a woman.

SARAH: Oops!

MATHEW: What about her?

MUM: Who?

MATHEW: The woman with the green glasses. She's got long hair and freckles.

SARAH: No, she's got long black curly hair. Pam's got long brown hair and doesn't wear glasses.

NARRATOR: After 45 minutes, Daisy thinks she sees Pam.

MUM: Look, there's Pam.

SARAH: Where? I don't see her.

MUM: Over there.

MATHEW: Mum, I think you need glasses!

NARRATOR: Mum, Sarah and Mathew start walking towards a lady sitting on a bench.

MUM: Pam?

PAM: Hello Daisy. It's so nice to see you.

MUM: I am so happy to see you too. Wow, I like your hair.


PAM: Thank you. I really needed a change.

MATHEW: But she's got short curly blond hair...

SARAH: ...and blue eyes!

## APPENDIX G:

### MUM'S FRIEND - PHASE TWO and THREE - TEST SCRIPT - TEACHER COPY

 Curriculum-Based Measurement: *Oral Reading Fluency Passage: Examiner Copy*

Assessment Date: ____/____/____	Student: _____	Examiner: _____
Words Read Correctly (WRC): ____ Errors: ____ Notes: _____		

#### Mum's Friend

Sarah, Mathew and their mum Daisy are at the bus station looking for Pam.	14
Now, where's my friend Pam?	19
Mum, is that woman coming out of the bus your friend Pam?	31
No. That woman's got short red hair and is tall. Pam's got long brown hair,	46
brown eyes and is short.	51
You said she's got freckles.	56
Yes, she does.	59
Look, that woman with the back pack, has long brown hair.	70
Shh! Sarah, that's a man not a woman.	78
Oops!	79
What about her?	82
Who?	83
The woman with the green glasses. She's got long hair and freckles.	95
No, she's got long black curly hair. Pam's got long brown hair and doesn't	109
wear glasses.	111
After 45 minutes, Daisy thinks she sees Pam.	119
Look, there's Pam.	122
Where? I don't see her.	127
Over there.	129
Mum, I think you need glasses!	135
Mum, Sarah and Mathew start walking towards a lady sitting on a bench.	148
Pam?	149
Hello Daisy. It's so nice to see you.	157
I am so happy to see you too. Wow, I like your hair.	170
Thank you. I really needed a change.	177
But she's got short curly blond hair...	184
...and blue eyes!	187

#### Scoring

##### Accuracy:

Words correct = \_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_ %  
Total words read orally

Automaticity: \_\_\_\_\_ wcpm

##### Prosody- Multidimensional Fluency Scale

Expression and Volume: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phrasing and Intonation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Smoothness: \_\_\_\_\_  
Pace: \_\_\_\_\_  
Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Comments and Observations:

## **APPENDIX H:**

### **MUM'S FRIEND - CLASS SCRIPT**

#### **Mum's Friend**

**NARRATOR:** Sarah, Mathew and their mum Daisy are at the bus station looking for Pam.

**MUM:** Now, where's my friend Pam?

**SARAH:** Mum, is that woman coming out of the bus your friend Pam?

**MUM:** No. That woman's got short red hair and is tall. Pam's got long brown hair, brown eyes and is short.

**MATHEW:** You said she's got freckles.

**MUM:** Yes, she does.

**SARAH:** Look, that woman with the back pack, has long brown hair.

**MATHEW:** Shh! Sarah, that's a man not a woman.

**SARAH:** Oops!

**MATHEW:** What about her?

**MUM:** Who?

**MATHEW:** The woman with the green glasses. She's got long hair and freckles.

**SARAH:** No, she's got long black curly hair. Pam's got long brown hair and doesn't wear glasses.

**NARRATOR:** After 45 minutes, Daisy thinks she sees Pam.

**MUM:** Look, there's Pam.

**SARAH:** Where? I don't see her.

**MUM:** Over there.

**MATHEW:** Mum, I think you need glasses!

**NARRATOR:** Mum, Sarah and Mathew start walking towards a lady sitting on a bench.

**MUM:** Pam?

**PAM:** Hello Daisy. It's so nice to see you.

**MUM:** I am so happy to see you too. Wow, I like your hair.

**PAM:** Thank you. I really needed a change.

**MATHEW:** But she's got short curly blond hair...

**SARAH:** ...and blue eyes!

## APPENDIX I:

### MUM'S FRIEND - MASTER SCRIPT

#### MUM's Friend

**NARRATOR:** Sarah, Mathew and their mum Daisy are at the bus station looking for Pam.

**MUM:** Now, where's my friend Pam?

**SARAH:** Mom, is that woman coming out of the bus your friend Pam?

**MUM:** No. That woman's got short red hair and is tall. Pam's got long brown hair, brown eyes and is short.

**MATHEW:** You said she's got freckles.

**MUM:** Yes, she does.

**SARAH:** Look, that woman with the back pack, has long brown hair.

**MATHEW:** Shh! Sarah, that's a man not a woman.

**SARAH:** Oops!

**MATHEW:** What about her?

**MUM:** Who?

**MATHEW:** The woman with the green glasses. She's got long hair and freckles.

**SARAH:** No, she's got long black curly hair. Pam's got long brown hair and doesn't wear glasses.

**NARRATOR:** After 45 minutes, Daisy thinks she sees Pam.

**MUM:** Look, there's Pam.

**SARAH:** Where? I don't see her.

**MUM:** Over there.

**MATHEW:** Mum, I think you need glasses!

**NARRATOR:** Mum, Sarah and Mathew start walking towards a lady sitting on a bench.

**MUM:** Pam?

**PAM:** Hello Daisy. It's so nice to see you.

**MUM:** I am so happy to see you too. Wow, I like your hair.

**PAM:** Thank you. I really needed a change.

**MATHEW:** But she's short curly blond hair...

**SARAH:** ...and blue eyes