Enhancing the Reading Fluency of Grade 2 Learners Through Oral Blending

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Abstract—This study aimed to determine the status of enhancing the reading fluency of the grade 2 learners through oral blending. In the review of literature and relevant studies, the key themes and concepts discussed in this study were represented. The researcher organizes the literature review, starting with a discussion of reading fluency. Reading fluency refers to the ability to effortlessly read a text, with each component contributing significantly. An exploration of its constituents follows, encompassing oral reading fluency (measured in words correct per minute), accuracy, reading speed, prosody, automaticity, and phonemic awareness. Each component is individually examined to understand its distinct role in contributing to overall reading fluency. A skilled reader can effectively synchronize all elements of fluency. The study delves into the concept of oral blending, which stands as an essential skill during the initial phases of language acquisition and literacy development. It involves an auditory process wherein individuals perceive distinct sounds or syllables and adeptly merge them to construct whole words.

Keywords— Blending, enhancing, fluency, learners, oral, reading.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the pandemic, students were forced to use modules and without the direct supervision of the teacher. Learners struggled to identify letters and their sounds. Learners failed to master basic skills that are necessary for reading. One of the top priorities of early childhood education is to teach learners how to read fluently and comprehend a text. The main targets of reading are to accomplish one's aims, cultivate an individual's knowledge, discover one's potential, and be an active member of the society (OECD, 2013). Reading is also a vital skill needed for perform better in school (Hulme and Snowling, 2011). With the goal of helping learners to become more proficient readers, the Department of Education launched the program "Hamon: Bawa't Bata Bumasa" (3Bs) in relation to DepEd Memorandum No. 173, s. 2019. In order to provide support for the administration of the K–12 program, the Department of Education will continue to carry out its mission of developing responsible and productive citizens. The goal of the Department of Education is to help learners to possess the fundamental competencies and skills required for lifelong learning. Schools in the Philippines are tasked to aid students in improving their reading abilities in order to transform every learner to be a fluent reader. It was also mentioned in the said memorandum that reading fluency is one of the elements that is necessary for children to be effective readers.

The low phonemic awareness skills of the learners and their teachers' inadequate understanding of how they should teach them phonemic awareness skills in the classroom have highly influenced the poor reading abilities of the learners (Mohammed and Amponsah, 2018. Learners' competency in reading is poor mainly because teachers fail to teach them how to blend sounds with words. (Mohammed and Amponsah, 2018). It involves an auditory process wherein individuals perceive distinct sounds or syllables and adeptly merge them to construct whole words. This proficiency assumes a critical role early in the language acquisition process, acting as a bridge between phonemic awareness and word recognition (Son et al., 2022). It encompasses various components, including Phoneme Blending, Phoneme Segmentation, Phonics Blending, and Continuous Blending/Reading. The insights gained from this extensive review have provided researchers with a broader understanding and aspirations to not only contribute to academic knowledge, but also potentially shape pedagogical practices and interventions that can positively impact the reading abilities of young learners. The researchers gained a deeper comprehension and broader outlook on the subject through this relevant literature.

By receiving an intervention in segmenting phonemes and oral blending, a small group of first grade learners enhanced their skills in recognizing words with the help of decoding. According to study results, acquiring the decoding skills of segmenting and blending resulted in enhanced word recognition abilities for the learners (Hall, 2015). Many research studies do agree that practicing oral blending contributes to improving one's ability of reading printed words (Carnine et al., 1979). On the other hand, few research studies claim that the fact that the relationship between the amount of reading lessons and the capacity to blend words contributed to the largest proportion of blending variance shows that there is unseen evidence that reading-related experiences encourage oral blending. (Weisberg, 2015). As a result of module learning, an integrated public school is currently facing a difficulty in addressing the problem in the reading fluency of their learners. The learners in the said school have low reading fluency and can hardly identify letters and sounds even in

higher grade levels such as Grade 5. Since the school is situated in a non-urbanized area, there are limited resources, and learners cannot afford to get a personal tutor. The time of the teachers is also limited since they have a lot of paper works and subjects to handle. Teachers had a difficult time and required a great amount of effort and time to find solutions to this dilemma. To address this gap, there is a need to investigate the efficacy of oral blending towards reading fluency of the grade 1 pupils and whether it can be a good method to be used in teaching pupils the skills in reading.

Based on the researchers' observation, an integrated public school is currently facing a difficulty in addressing the problem in the reading fluency of their learners. The population of non-readers in Grade 2 is quite high. As a volunteer teacher, the researchers decided to conduct this research in order to help learners, teachers, and the school to address their problem in reading fluency. The goal of this research is to produce more ways of improving reading abilities of the pupils by investigating the efficacy of oral blending towards reading fluency of the pupils, and to promote oral blending as one of the effective methods to be used in teaching reading.

II. LITERATURE DISCUSSION

Reading Fluency

Reading fluency refers to a student's capacity to read fluently and quickly in order to comprehend the contents. Students must be able to read and grasp the words automatically and accurately in order to do so. Reading fluency is seen as the most crucial element in the development of students' reading abilities (Wright, 2013).

Teachers must focus on reading fluency in order to help struggling students satisfy academic requirements. In educational contexts where students are expected to study from educational books and undergo limited-time assessments that will assess their progress, reading fluency becomes even more crucial. Numerous educators regard reading fluency as a curriculum-based assessment, which is an authentic and reliable method to regularly assess students' development and make educational decisions (Nese et al., 2013).

A study by Al Kharusi (2014) stated that providing clear instructions and training significantly assisted students in achieving proficiency in reading. It is crucial to maintain in mind that teachers' expertise can be vital to improving students' reading abilities.

Reading fluency is one of the fundamental core abilities that must be developed in order to become proficient in reading, along with other skills like vocabulary, comprehension, and phonemic awareness (Silvano, 2022). It's critical to quantify fluency in a trustworthy manner that makes it simple for test-takers, instructors, and educational practitioners to discern between fluent and less-fluent readers (Tindal et al. 2016).

Students' reading fluency is developed with the aid of evidence-based instruction and motivational strategies. These techniques include students to read an ability-suitable text repeatedly for a predetermined amount of time, having a fluent reader serve as an example for a pupil who is working on

fluency, using methodical word error correction techniques, having students read aloud incorrectly, and including motivational techniques (Padeliadu et al., 2021).

Given the significance of fluency in reading text as a critical fundamental literacy ability and the viability of minimal intervention measures that increase students' fluency in literature, it is imperative to use empirical instruction for the vast majority of Brazilian learners who have not yet acquired reading fluency (Silvano and Godoy, 2022).

Oral Reading Fluency (Words-Correct Per-minute)

According to Tindal et al. (2016), oral reading fluency should be emphasized as a necessary skill and requirement for understanding. They claimed that reading fluency is an ability that strengthens understanding, which they regard as reading's primary objective. According to Di Salle and Rasinski (2017), oral fluency issues are contributing factors for 90% of comprehension issues. As a result, students who have trouble reading fluently in the beginning of their educational journey are likely to have problems afterwards. As a result, literacy skills must be built and developed from an early age (Rasinski, 2014).

The University of Oregon created the standardized test known as Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), which assesses the accuracy, speed, and automaticity of each learner. Learners from the middle of grade one to the grade six will undergo this test (Cummings et al., 2013).

According to Martins and Capellini's research (2021), educators can determine which pupils are having difficulty reading based on one-minute assessments that reveal their oral reading fluency rates. As stated by Martins and Capellini (2021), "These measures help provide an overview of each student's academic development." Elementary school classrooms frequently utilize one-minute timed readings. The tests can be conducted quickly and give information about individuals who require explicit interventions. A word-per-minute rate is used to measure and track fluency. Students should have accomplished the standard requirement for being fluent readers at the end of the year at each grade level.

In research published in 2020, Hudson investigated the ORF levels of learners from primary grades. Learners who struggled with oral reading fluency also often encountered difficulties with vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. The study's participants read less quickly than their peers and scored lower on tests of reading comprehension. The pupils were then given interventions on how to enhance their fluency.

Turkylmaz et al. (2014) discovered that among the three fluency measures of silent reading, retell fluency, and oral reading fluency, oral reading fluency had the greatest impact on the prediction of RC. This was accurate even for the fluency measures that were significantly associated with RC in a sample of fifth-grade students aged 11 to 12.

Accuracy in Reading

Accuracy is a learner's skill to decode printed words in an accurate manner. In order for a learner to read accurately, he or she must first identify individual words. Learning the

principles of the alphabet that involves letters and their individual distinct sounds are necessary requirements for the identification of words. Additionally, decoding isolated words is crucial for the learners which includes common words, words that are frequently used, and words that are not familiar to the learners. Accurate recognition of words occurs automatically when prior knowledge has been mastered (Rasinski 2014).

If a reader does not have the ability to read the text with accuracy, he or she is not likely to comprehend what message the sender is trying to communicate, and incorrect word reading could lead to the text to be interpreted in the wrong way. (Konza, 2014)

Accuracy pertains to reading words quickly without adding subtracting and changing errors in reading sounds, syllables, and words (Akyol et al., 2014).

Reading Speed

According to Turna and Güldenoğlu (2019), speed in reading involves the process of recognizing the word automatically and reading at the right pace for the level of the learner. Automation happens when the reader swiftly and precisely pronounces the words in a book without exerting much effort (Akyol et al., 2014).

Research about how a speed-reading course might increase one's reading speed and how it affects language retention discovered that enhancing reading speed with a speed-reading course does not always have a negative effect on comprehension (Tran & Nation, 2014).

Prosody

Prosody plays a significant role in reading comprehension, although it hasn't received as much attention as accuracy and rate aspects. Often overlooked in oral reading fluency, prosody involves reading with expression and is closely connected to the skill of using suitable variations in pitch, stress, and phrasing. These components of prosody are crucial for both fluency and reading comprehension because they enable readers to engage with the text's ideas by reading words in meaningful phrases. This idea finds support in research, as illustrated by an examination involving 80 third-grade students that explored the link between prosody and reading comprehension. The study's results revealed that children who demonstrated a heightened awareness of prosody, including altering intonation in declarative sentences and using a rising pitch for yes/no questions, achieved higher reading comprehension scores compared to those who did not exhibit such awareness (Hudson et al., 2020). It represents the skill of reading with appropriate intonation and stress that aligns with the meaning of the text. This ability is developed after achieving word recognition, perception, interpretation, and reading speed, similar to the musical aspects of spoken language (Akyol et al., 2014).
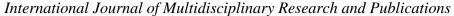
Automaticity in Reading

Fluency in reading has long been a concern among students. Several experimental studies have indicated that this problem arises in both primary and senior schools. During the previous century, psychologists who conducted experiments and were acquainted with the theory of automaticity as an important pattern for developing reading fluency. The idea specifies four key elements of automaticity: pace, independence, ease, and a lack of conscious thought. In this research, diverse data were collected, evaluated, and then analyzed. The study aims to increase the understanding of reading fluency by investigating teacher responsibilities in the process of development of children's fluency in reading using automaticity theory. Several books and world-class periodicals have referenced me. Several papers analyzed revealed similar conclusions about reading fluency and automaticity theories. This study, however, concentrated on three of them, which have supplied essential findings on the subject and have been indicated in several studies and peer-reviewed journals (Feruzi, 2021).

Everyone has limited cognitive capacity. To commit appropriate cognitive resources to higher-order tasks like text comprehension, readers must acquire automaticity in lower-level word identification abilities such as grapheme-phoneme correspondences and phonemic awareness. This ability to automate word recognition processes separates fluent readers from disfluent readers. The cognitive attention of disfluent readers is more likely to be absorbed by decoding since they must pay attention to alphabetical character, sound-symbol correspondences, and word identification. Failure to attain automaticity in lower-order processing exerts enormous demands on the memory, which results in leaving only limited resources for negotiating meaning in texts. Non-automaticity in decoding inhibits understanding of reading, given the importance of working memory in enabling textual information storage and retrieval throughout the reading procedure. It was additionally proposed that proficiency elements of precision and rate regulate the relationship between processing and comprehension of text, which has empirical evidence (Hudson et al., 2020).

Reading fluency is determined by the ability to complete a task with the least amount of effort, as measured by rapid automatic naming (RAN) and processing speed. However, little is known about the neurophysiological foundations of automaticity. The more sound is encoded, the more automated sound processing becomes possible. As a result, this automaticity may unleash mental capacity like focus and working memory to aid in the development of an integrated reading network. Given a wide body of evidence indicating a tight association, Automaticity and reading fluency correlate to stable neural representations of sounds because of the link between neuronal stability and integrative performance in the central hearing system. FFR to speech syllables, as well as cognitive and reading tests, were conducted. to school-aged children to test this idea. We show that neural response stability to speech corresponds with RAN and processing speed but not with phonological knowledge. Furthermore, the before-established relationship between neural stability and reading ability is mediated via the link between neural stability and RAN. Children with RAN deficiency has particularly unstable neuronal responses. Our neurophysiological method reveals a putative neural mechanism unique to RAN, implying

a link between synchronous neural activation in the auditory system and automaticity, which is essential to improve reading fluency (Silvia et al., 2017).

Phonemic Awareness

Lower elementary school is a vital stage in young learner's life for developing their phonetic and phonological awareness. Children wouldn't have the resources to start learning to read without mastering these skills (Double et al., 2019). According to Rasinki (2017), many students still have difficulty learning to read despite increased attention being paid to the problem on a national level, the implementation of multiple level policy directives, improved training and encouragement for teachers, and the expansion of finest literature for the learners. It has been proposed (Rasinki, 2017) that a significant contributor to these difficulties is a deficiency in fundamental abilities like word recognition. In order to address problems and stop subsequent problems with other aspects of reading, students need thorough support with the word identification (Rasinksi, 2017). Third graders have demonstrated reading improvements with the use of specific phonemic awareness tool (Suggate, 2014), supporting the claim that this grade is still appropriate for intensive interventions. A learner who can manipulate and isolate phonemes within a word, demonstrating their readiness to become a proficient reader, has reached the highest level of phonological awareness (Kilpatrick, 2013).

According to studies, phonemic awareness was a better predictor of pupils' reading progress than IQ (O'Connor, 2013, p. 28). Children can practice their phonological awareness through rhyming, alliteration, and syllable segmentation. Reading story books and poems to young learners during their preschool years might give indirect instruction on these subjects (Kilpatrick, 2013). Because it may be challenging to detect the pupils who are struggling readers, phonemic awareness teaching is essential for all learners to learn (Kilpatrick, 2013).

Studies that have aimed at fluency in Phonemic awareness or phonics typically assessed generalized performance to untrained, real, and/or nonsense words (Brosnan, 2015) or connected text (i.e., in a sentence or passage) (Silva, 2016). For instance, Martens et al. (2013) conducted a preliminary study to evaluate the impact of phoneme blending fluency training towards students' accuracy and fluency in generalized oral reading. The generalization of the students' skills was evaluated in three different ways: to novel words in passages, to trained and untrained words in lists, and to trained and untrained words in terms of the target vowel combinations (aw, oi, and au). When students were able to read the trained list of words at 50% of their initial known high-frequency word list-reading-rate (obtained before intervention) with a maximum of one error, it was determined that they were proficient in the target vowel combination. According to the findings of their research, improving the fluency of necessary phonemic awareness abilities can serve as an intervention to advance generalized oral reading fluency. In order to decode a text while reading, students must have received education in

phonemic awareness, which raises their awareness of the sounds that make up words (Suggate, 2014).

Szabo (2010) asserts that although phonemic awareness (PA) is a talent that is frequently assessed in early elementary school standardized assessments, most schools do not test for PA after grade one. A validated screener called the Dynamic Indicator of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is frequently used to identify strengths and deficits in concepts including word proficiency, oral reading fluency, phonemic awareness, and nonsense word fluency. It is thought that as students advance through their schooling, they will have mastered particular skills in a certain period of time, hence which subtests are given for that grade depend on the grade a child is in. For instance, there is a special subtest for phonemic awareness called Phoneme Segmentation Fluency. However, from third grade on, this subtest is not included in the list of skills examined or tested (University of Oregon, 2019).

Oral Blending

When there were no gaps between sounds, oral blending of the prescribed sounds into CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words was significantly and noticeably better than when there were intervals of 1 or 3 seconds. In Experiment 1, the variations between first graders and nonreading kindergarteners were more noticeable at 1 and 3 seconds. In Experiment 2, kindergarteners who had received considerable blending and reading instruction blended equally well with the first graders, while younger, beginning readers equaled the performance of the kindergarteners in Experiment I. The impact of training remained the primary determinant of blending when age was held constant. Additionally, we discovered relationships between the word familiarity and the type of starting sound (hold versus stop sounds), as well as between the word familiarity and the pause interval (meaningful versus nonwords) (Savard, 2015).

Phonemes Blending

According to studies, pupils' reading skills have increased when they can distinguish between graphemes and phonemes (Henry, 2020). Children will begin to comprehend that certain letters and phonemes are contained within words after they comprehend the relationship between letters and sounds (phonemes) (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Knowing this will help them become more accurate readers (Dolean, 2016). Research has long supported teaching children phonological awareness skills and integrating them with their reading abilities (Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

Phoneme Segmentation

Rhyming, segmenting, letter sound correspondence, syllable identification, vowel identification, phoneme identification, alphabetic principles, and other concepts can help kids develop these critical skills (Double, 2019). It is reasonable to separate, or at least isolate, comprehension from decoding. When a learning condition with a reading disability is identified, for instance, the DSM-V mandates that we identify any impairments in reading precision, reading speed or proficiency, spelling, or reading comprehension (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013). The chances that a degraded comprehension could exist independently of a compromised fluency is evidence that the two abilities reside in separate neural networks. Given the complex relationship between the two, it may be difficult to tell if reading fluency is a cause or an effect of understanding. Several studies have shown that reading fluency affects reading comprehension (Nese et al., 2013)

Phonics Blending

Nadiah (2015) continued by stating that the whole-language approach to teaching reading skills has been replaced with phonics instruction in the field curriculum. The principal, instructors, and school must be knowledgeable about the many interventions. When a student first enrolls in school, it is anticipated that they have mastered the basics of literacy. Numerous observations showed that many Malaysian English language teachers encounter comparable difficulties when instructing English to students who are not proficient readers. 2016 (Antonia, Melor, & Azlina). Additionally, students who have trouble reading need special support because it's crucial throughout the first semester of school (Antilla, 2013).In their 2013 study, Noltemeyer, Joseph, and Kunesh sought to ascertain whether phonics teaching in small groups would enhance kindergarteners' word reading skills. In order to enhance decoding abilities and sight word identification, Ayala and O'Connor (2013) investigated the effects of having children at risk for reading impairments self-model their decoding abilities on video.

Continuous Blending/Reading

As part of the linked phonation treatment before blending, students were instructed to pronounce phonemes (such as "sssaaann") without halting the speech stream. The CVC nonwords were made up of extended and joinable consonants. After learning how to apply criteria, students faced a change challenge to decipher CVCs with break consonants, which are more challenging to connect due to interference from schwa vowels. On the transfer test, the results showed that connected phonetics instruction, as opposed to segmented phonation training, promoted learning to accurately read and decode nonwords (Gonsales-frey, 2020).

III. CONCLUSION

Studies have revealed that in order for students to read fluently, they must master the important skill of reading fluency, which is rooted in their phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is a foundational skill for reading because it helps youngsters to understand the relationship between letters and sounds (phonemes), which they will begin to realize that letters are contained within words (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). According to Cummings, Park, and Schaper (2013), the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessment examines students' accuracy, speed, and automaticity as reading fluency components. The concept that every letter represents a distinct sound, and those sounds are used to enunciate words through the use of oral blending, phoneme, and phonics blending was

also demonstrated to be a successful method for teaching students how to read.

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