

Amplification of Reading Fluency among Grade 8 Students in English through Audio-Assisted Reading Strategy

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Abstract: The main objective of the study was to identify the efficacy of the audio-assisted reading strategy in amplifying the reading fluency of the students. Further, it intended to ascertain the students' level of appreciation of the strategy as an intervention in boosting the learners' reading fluency. It is a descriptive type as it assessed the level of appreciation of students on the Audio-assisted Reading strategy of Grade 8 learners. Moreover, it quantified the students' level of reading fluency specifically the word recognition skill and reading speed before and after the employment of the reading intervention as it employed the one-group pretest and post-test pre-experimental design. The participants of the study were the identified Grade 8 struggling readers of Ampayon National High School. The study revealed that the students' reading fluency levels significantly improved after the Audio-assisted reading remediation. Furthermore, the data manifest that the level of appreciation of students for the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy is at a respectable level. It is recommended that teachers may utilize the said strategy as it was proven effective and they may consider attending learning and development opportunities to enhance their reading pedagogical competence.

Keywords: Audio-assisted reading, Level of appreciation, Reading fluency, Reading speed, Struggling readers

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital world, the way people learn and process information is rapidly changing and has allowed for improved learning outcomes. To learn and process information, one has to be skillful in reading, besides reading comprehension, fluency is equally important among students. Reading fluency and comprehension are strictly interrelated, and also correlated with important aspects of academic life, such as school outcomes [1], or training success [2].

In secondary school, teachers have been focusing on reading comprehension, neglecting the fostering of students' reading fluency, the influence of which is believed to fade on school outcomes. The fact is that reading fluency is a significant variable in secondary students' reading and overall academic development. More research is called for into the role of reading fluency among older students [3], especially those experiencing difficulty in achieving high levels of literacy. However, this assumption has recently been challenged, and the importance of reading fluency in adolescence re-evaluated [4].

According to the National Reading Panel Report, in order to develop reading fluency, it is more beneficial to have students read with guidance than to read silently without feedback [5]. The National Early Literacy Panel found that both reading books to young children and engaging in activities aimed at improving their language development improved their oral language [6]. Conversely, the children who are most at risk for reading failure started schooling without these early experiences. Frequently, many struggling readers have not consistently engaged in the language play that develops an awareness of sound structure and language patterns. They have limited exposure to bedtime and lap time reading. In short, children who are marginalized, those with limited proficiency in English, those from homes where the parents' reading levels and practices are low, and those with speech, language, and hearing handicaps are at increased risk of reading failure [7].

Reading fluency is one of the initial developments of accuracy and the subsequent development of automaticity in underlying sub-lexical processes, lexical processes, and their integration in single-word reading and connected text. These include perceptual, phonological, orthographic, and morphological processes at the letter-, letter-pattern-, and word level, as well as semantic and process at the word level and connected-text level. After it is fully developed, reading fluency refers to a level of accuracy and rate where decoding is relatively effortless; where oral reading is smooth and accurate with correct prosody; and where attention can be allocated to comprehension [8].

Opportunities to develop all areas of reading fluency are important for all readers, but especially for those who struggle [7]. For slow readers, their limited fluency can affect performance in the following ways: (a) they read less text than their peers and have less time to remember, review, or comprehend the text; (b) they expend more cognitive energy than peers trying to identify individual words; and (c) they may be less able to retain text in memory and less likely to integrate those segments with other parts of the text [9]. Moreover, disfluent readers are more likely to attribute their poor reading to poor ability and are less likely to exhibit task persistence that leads to improved academic results [10].

At the onset of COVID-19 school closures, students showed no growth in reading fluency over the next months. Given how suddenly schools were closed in 2020, and that educators had no opportunity to prepare for remote teaching, disruptions were to be expected [11]. But these relative losses are severe. No growth means that students have fallen about a third of a year behind where they should be in terms of reading development. It is also alarming to note that there were also signs of stratification such that students in lower-achieving districts were falling further behind their peers from the higher-achieving districts [12].

Acknowledging this gap, in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) supports the Every Child a Reader Program, which aims to make every Filipino child a reader and a writer at his/her grade level. Thus, despite the pandemic, DepEd through the Bureau of Learning Delivery-Teaching and Learning Division (BLD-TLD) continues to administer the Revised Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) assessment to learners in public schools nationwide. The Phil-IRI data shall serve as one of the bases for planning, designing/redesigning the reading instruction of the teachers and the school's reading programs or activities to improve the overall school's reading performance [13].

DepEd also encourages teachers to look for avenues to reach out to students who lag behind the reading performance in their respective classes. One of the popular strategies used by secondary English teachers locally is audio-assisted reading [14]. Audio-assisted reading is an individual or group reading activity where students read along in their books as they hear a fluent reader read the book on an audio recording (audiotape, audiobook, or iPod). This reading strategy helps build fluency skills including proper phrasing and expression, improves learners' sight word recognition [15], helps build comprehension [16] allows learners to hear the tone and pace of a skillful reader, and is known to be a flexible strategy that can be used across content areas [17]

The desire to ascertain whether or not audio-assisted reading is an effective strategy to enhance the reading fluency of the students prompts the researchers to conduct the study among the Grade 8 students. As English language teachers, employing a strategy that targets the enhancement of learners' reading fluency has caught their interest. The study identified the level of learners' appreciation of the audio-assisted reading strategy on the enhancement of their reading fluency. The results of the investigation would be used as bases for designing a localized intervention program.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design. It utilized the Revised Phil-IRI Group Screening Test as the baseline in determining the participants of the reading intervention which is the audio-assisted reading strategy. The Graded Passages (Pre-Test) were used in determining the learners' reading levels. After which, the learners were subjected to the intervention activity using the audio-assisted reading strategy. The Graded Passages (Post-Test) were administered to determine the efficacy of the said strategy. The study was conducted in one of the schools in the Division of Butuan City which is Ampayon National High School. The study site is in barangay Ampayon, Butuan City. It is particularly situated in the east side of Butuan City and on the opposite side of Ampayon Police Station and the barangay hall.

2.2 Participants of the Study

In selecting the participants, the lowest 30% of the students in their PHIL-IRI results were selected. The researcher listed down the names of the struggling readers with codes on a sheet of paper and identified the last 63 of them. The codes drawn corresponded to the names in the list. The students whose names are drawn will automatically be considered participants of the study.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study utilized the standardized Revised Phil-IRI Informal Reading Inventory. First instrument was the Graded Passages Pre-test which is an individualized assessment to further describe the students' reading performance. It identified the grade level in which the students can register independent, instructional, and frustration levels in their reading profile. Based on the results of the Graded Passages Pre-test, the researchers then utilized audio-assisted PHIL-IRI reading materials and employed the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy, a strategy greatly considered by other researchers in addressing the problem in reading fluency particularly in enhancing the word recognition and reading speed of the students.

The second instrument used was the Graded Passages Posttest which was administered after one month of utilizing and employing the said reading strategy. The posttest Graded Passages contain parallel level of passages with the Pre-test. It determined the final reading fluency level of the students and it also aimed to ascertain the effectiveness of the intervention employed by the researcher. The final instrument was the survey questionnaire on the level of appreciation of the students on the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy which contains ten (10) items. The validation of the survey tool was comprised of logical and content validation. The Group Screening Test and Posttest Graded Passages are already valid and reliable so only the third instrument on the level of appreciation of students underwent logical and content validation. To do this, the researchers submitted the questionnaire to the panel of experts in the field of English language teaching. They are master's degree holders in English Language Teaching, and they have been teaching English in public secondary schools for five (5) years and beyond.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers personally administered the remediating activity to the participants via face-to-face setting. A brief orientation was done with the students on the nature of the study. The researchers, who at the same time English teachers conducted the Graded Passages Pre-Test to the identified struggling readers. The teacher took note of the miscues of the student while reading the passage. The following miscues were noted such as mispronunciations, omissions, added words, substitutions, repetitions, insertions, and reversals. The grade level in which the students can register frustration, instructional, and independent levels were also recorded. In the administration of the Phil-IRI Graded Passages (Pre-Test), Stage 2, the researchers were provided with four parallel sets (SETS A to D) from the Phil-IRI Manual that they can choose from. This stage of reading assessment further gave the information not just on the weakness of the student in reading but also his or her strengths. It was conducted with the Oral Reading Test.

Also, using the graded passages, the researchers identified the grade level in which the student can register independent, instructional, and frustration levels as his or her reading profile. This aided the teacher in designing reading remediation activities that are suitable for developing the students' reading skills. Further, this served also as guide for the teacher in choosing instructional materials that addressed the reading needs of the students.

The first passage that the student read aloud depends on the learner's raw score. If his/her raw score in the GST is 0-7, he or she must be given a passage that is 3-grade levels below his or her current level. If the student's raw score in GST is 8-13, he/she must be given a passage that is 2 grades below his or her current level. Thus, if Student A is a Grade 8 pupil and scores 6/20 in the GST, he or she must be given a passage at the 5th-grade level. If he or she scores 9/20 in the GST, he or she must be given a passage from the 6th-grade level.

In this stage, the researchers already determined the grade level in which the learner can register his or her reading profile in independent, instructional, and frustration levels. It is also expected that the student will have read two or more passages and answered the questions that follow. The number of passages the students read was dependent on the result of each test. Since the study focused on readers belonging to frustration level. The researchers gave a selection that is one level higher than the level in which the student has registered instructional level until the student registered the performance at 89% and below for word recognition and 58% and below for comprehension. This is important for the researchers to know the kind of reading material that the student is already able to perform well in. Once all the data which can be used to describe the student's reading fluency performance were gathered, the researchers then designed an intervention program and chose instructional materials to address the needs of the students in improving their reading fluency.

After getting the reading profile of the students in terms of reading fluency, the researchers then proceeded to the employment of reading remediation (STAGE 3) which is audio-assisted reading. The teacher used the reading materials from the Department of Education that have reading passages for word recognition and reading speed exercises. Passages were audio-recorded by the teacher. Hence, the audio-assisted reading strategy was highlighted in addressing the issue of reading fluency.

Prior to actual reading, the researchers explained the nature of audio-assisted reading strategy to struggling readers, how it is employed, and its importance in augmenting students' performance in reading fluency. Audio-assisted reading as a strategy in improving the reading fluency was delivered. This means that, in face-to-face administration, the teacher-researcher read the difficult words first and the student took his or her turn in reading the terms. However, in the absence of teachers or any other people bearing more knowledge about the remedial activity, audio-recordings of the passages legally served as another MKO in this activity. Then, the audio was played and orally read the entire text followed by the student. This was designed to attain a much higher rate of oral fluency. As soon as the oral reading fluency of the student progressed after multiple tries, the teacher then asked him or her to read the text by himself or herself without the modeling of the teacher or audio-recording. Students also were asked to read aloud and at some other time individually. The reading remediation lasted for 1 month.

Graded Passages Posttest (STAGE 4) then were administered after a month of continuous practice. There were four parallel sets of Graded Passages. The results of the Graded Passages Pre-Test and Posttest were compared to monitor the progress of the students as well as the efficacy of the intervention activity.

After taking the Graded Passages Posttest, the researchers assessed the level of students' appreciation of the audio-assisted reading strategy to identify whether the learners have positive reception of the remediation activity that they have undergone. After the initial analysis of the data gathered, the teacher-researcher made some validation on items that generated ambiguous and/or interesting results. A follow-up virtual interview was conducted with some of the participants to reinforce the data provided in the checklist. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean, and paired T-tests were used to analyze the data gathered from the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. The Level of Learners' Reading Fluency Before (Pre-test) and After (Posttest) the Administration of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy in terms of:

3.1.1 Word Recognition

Figure 1 shows the comparison of the Word Recognition Scores of learners per section before and after the conduct of the reading intervention.

The figure presents the word recognition scores of the six participating sections before and after the conduct of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy. The utilized passage during the remediation was composed of 136 content and function words in total.

Before the conduct of the intervention, it can be gleaned that most of the participating sections got scores ranging from 109 to 112, with Section E garnering the highest score of 112 among others. It can also be noted that Section B got the lowest word recognition score of 106 which is an indication that there is a dire need for the students from these classes to undergo a reading remediation.

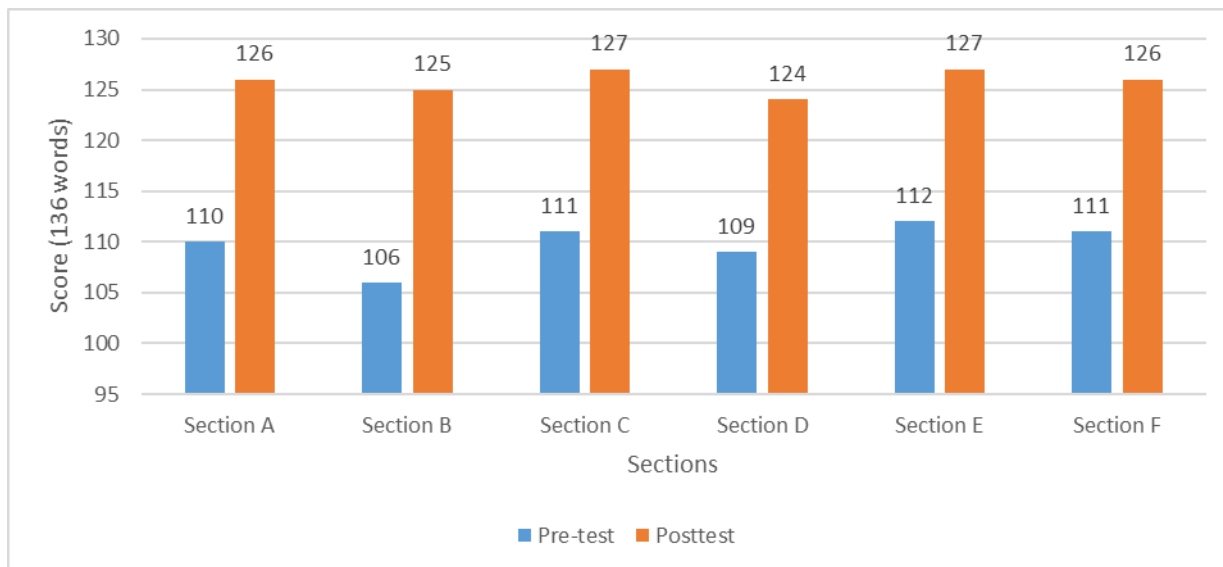


Figure 1. Word Recognition Scores Before and After the Audio-assisted Reading Intervention.

On the contrary, after a series of practices employing the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy, a different outcome came out. The data revealed that among the six (6) sections, Section D got the lowest score of 124 out of 136 described as very fluent. Being the lowest, it can still be gleaned that there is a remarkable improvement in terms of word recognition, given that the lowest score garnered during the pretest was 106. The five (5) remaining sections had a notable increase of word recognition ability as the scores range from 125 – 127 respectively which is described as very fluent after the implementation of the intervention.

To corroborate the results, a study pointed out that fluent oral reading in English is an essential skill for learners at any level of their learning career. In fact, most language teaching experts agree that efficient and effective word recognition skills are a sine qua non for becoming a successful reader [18].

In addition to the foregoing claim, several activities have been used to develop students' reading rates, one of these is repeated reading, where students read passages with similar word counts, and record the time spent on reading each text. These approaches have a clear goal of improving reading fluency, and readers or students can easily detect whether their reading rate has improved [19].

3.1.2 Reading Speed

Figure 2 shows the comparison of the Reading Speed of learners per section before and after the conduct of the reading intervention.

The graph exhibits the reading speed scores of the students before and after the conduct of the reading intervention. The same passage used in yielding the word recognition scores was utilized.

Among the six (6) sections that participated in the study with scores ranging from 98 to 109 words per minute, Section C got the highest score during the pre-test with 109 correctly read words per minute, while Section B had the lowest score of 98 which clearly signifies that there is a necessity of employing a reading remediation activity.

Given that the study highlights the uses and benefits of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy in amplifying

reading fluency, it has been exemplified that significant increase in reading speed scores occurred during the posttest ranging from 116 correctly read words per minute to 121 words per minute which is described as very fluent based on the interpretation of the scales.

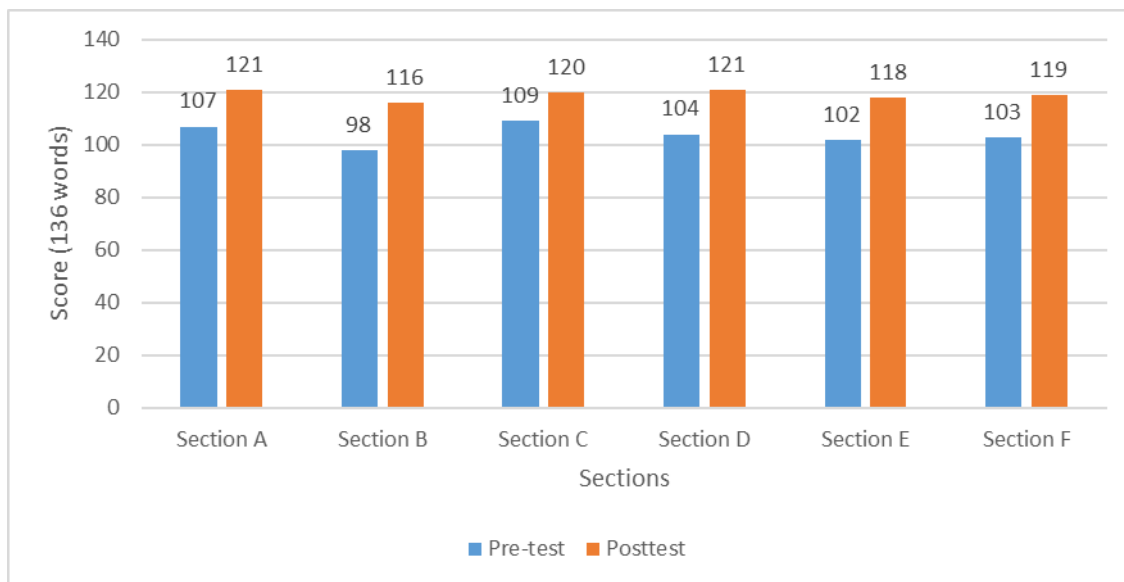


Figure 2. Reading Speed Before and After the Audio-assisted Reading Intervention.

Although Section B was a bit low in scores compared to the other sections, it can still be noted that there has been a significant improvement in the learners’ reading speed rates after the implementation of the reading strategy. Its notable effects in amplifying fluency are best manifested in Sections A and D holding the highest scores of 121 words per minute described as very fluent. Hence, the technique of Audio-assisted Reading has shown dramatic results in fluency programs.

People read more slowly in a second language than in their first language, and below a certain rate [20]. Such frustration can deter readers from persevering to the point of becoming proficient enough in reading to succeed in their academic goals. In addition, being able to read at a faster rate allows more text to be held in working memory.

Research also suggests that sub vocalization the nemesis of speed readers is slower on unfamiliar words. If a learner wants to speed up reading, one must build extensive vocabulary and learn to recognize words faster and naturally, he/she will improve his/her reading speed [21].

3.2 Significant Difference Between the Students’ Reading Fluency in the Pre-test and Post-test Scores

3.2.1 Word Recognition

Table 1 presents the significant difference between the learners’ reading fluency in the pre-test and posttest scores in terms of word recognition.

Table 1. Significant difference between the learners’ reading fluency in the pre-test and posttest scores in terms of word recognition.

Variables	Std. Deviation	P value	Remarks	Decision
Word Recognition Pretest – Posttest	6.88141	.000	Significant	Reject Ho

*tested at 0.05 level of significance

The table shows the result of the paired t-test of the word recognition scores of the students. With an SD of 6.88141 at p=0.000, it indicates a significant difference among the scores. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the learners in terms of Word

Recognition. Clearly, Audio-assisted Reading Strategy is of great help in augmenting learners' reading fluency in terms of word recognition. The data further suggest that the students were able to improve their word recognition ability after participating in the reading intervention activity through the employment of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy.

In congruent with the findings above, Audio-assisted Reading has been used as an effective instructional intervention for struggling readers [22]. Consequently, teachers can promote increased growth in reading fluency when audio-assisted reading is implemented in the place of sustained silent reading for upper elementary students with reading difficulties [5].

Researchers have also cited improvements in reading attitudes due to the self-confidence gained by marked improvements in reading fluency and comprehension, the ability to read grade-level text, and the enjoyment of reading high-interest material.

3.2.2 Reading Speed

Table 2 exhibits the significant difference between the learners' reading fluency in the pre-test and posttest scores in terms of Reading Speed.

Table 2. Significant difference between the learners' reading fluency in the pre-test and posttest scores in terms of reading speed.

Variables	Std. Deviation	P value	Remarks	Decision
Reading Speed Pretest – Posttest	6.48125	.000	Significant	Reject Ho

**tested at 0.05 level of significance*

The table shows the result of the paired t-test of the Reading Speed scores of the learners. It can be gleaned from the data that the analysis yielded an SD of 6.48125 at $p=0.000$, indicating a significant difference in the scores. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Indeed, there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the learners in terms of reading speed. With this, the reading level of the participants has significantly improved.

To support the foregoing claim, one study determined the most effective reading programs, including Audio-assisted Reading, incorporating instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension [22]. Fluency acquisition was described as a necessary skill in the transition from learning to reading to the ability to read for learning.

3.3 The Level of Students' Appreciation of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy

Table 3 shows the mean distribution of the students' appreciation of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy.

Indicator 9, which states that students prefer to make use of this reading strategy since it is very accessible and convenient, garnered the highest weighted mean of 4.68 described as very high. This shows that learners indeed have a very high level of appreciation on the convenience and accessibility of the reading intervention. It clearly proclaims that learners were at ease during their participation in the intervention which was done either in school or at home.

On the other hand, indicator 2, which states that the learners enjoy repeating after the audio especially when they encounter difficult words to pronounce and finally read them correctly, got the lowest weighted mean of 4.48, thus described as moderately high. It can be proposed that indicator 2 may be improved by other teachers who will be using the same intervention in the future since it has not reached the highest level of appreciation yet based on the responses.

Table 3. Mean distribution of the students' appreciation of the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy.

Indicators		Students' Appreciation		Interpretation
		Mean	Description	
1	I like the Audio-assisted Reading strategy for it is flexible that it can be done in person or virtually.	4.59	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
2	I enjoy repeating after the audio especially when I encounter difficult words to pronounce and finally reading them correctly.	4.48	Agree	The level of appreciation is high.
3	I read more fluently since it is self-paced, and I can play the audio and read repeatedly as much as I want to.	4.63	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
4	I get a chance to improve my reading fluency even without the presence of my teacher and parents.	4.60	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
5	I can best help myself in increasing my readability level anytime and anywhere.	4.57	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
6	I can improve my pronunciation by exactly mimicking the audio.	4.56	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
7	I can read much faster with confidence after numerous times of practice.	4.49	Agree	The level of appreciation is high.
8	I can improve my word recognition level resulting to increased reading speed by reading the passage along with the audio.	4.57	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
9	I prefer to make use of this reading strategy since it is very accessible and convenient.	4.68	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
10	The reading materials given are appropriate to my reading ability level.	4.60	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.
Overall Weighted Mean		4.58	Strongly Agree	The level of appreciation is very high.

Range of means: 1.00-1.49 Strongly Disagree; 1.50-2.49 Disagree; 2.50-3.49 Uncertain; 3.50-4.49 Agree; 4.50-5.00 Strongly Agree

The results further suggest that the students' level of appreciation in repeating after the audio, especially in mastering the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word is moderately high but still the least compared with the other indicators. It may have had the lowest weighted mean among all indicators, still, it is fairly agreed by the participants agreed that it significantly improved their reading fluency skills.

The overall weighted mean of the level of students' appreciation of Audio-assisted Reading is 4.58 described as very high. Thus, they exceptionally appreciate the Audio-assisted Reading Strategy. The data also indicate that students realized the advantages of Audio-assisted Reading as compared to traditional reading interventions.

Realizing the effects of Audio-assisted Reading, the National Research Council explained that stumbling obstacles such as absence or loss of motivation and failure to develop a deep appreciation for the rewards of reading activity should be minimized if not eradicated in reading classes since these will forfeit the aims to improve the reading competence of the learners [18].

In this manner, teachers can promote increased growth in reading fluency when audio-assisted reading is implemented in place of the traditional reading style [22].

4. CONCLUSIONS

Evidence reveals that there are quite a few students in Grade 8 who need reading remediation, that is Audio-

assisted Reading as proposed in the study. Before the intervention, it was alarming to note that there are Grade 8 students whose reading levels are way below their expected reading fluency level. However, after the intervention, the scores in Word Recognition and Reading Speed showcases a drastic improvement in the reading fluency skill of the students.

The participants of the reading intervention activity highly appreciate Audio-assisted Reading. The students realize the advantages of participating in a reading intervention program highlighting the augmentation of reading fluency with the aid of a strategy not commonly used in traditional reading sessions. Since audio-assisted reading has proven to be effective in boosting the reading fluency of students, the study recommends its utilization in classrooms.

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