THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READERS' THEATRE IN ENHANCING READING FLUENCY, COMPREHENSION, AND MOTIVATION AMONG SECONDARY ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract
The article critically examines the effectiveness of Reader's Theatre (RT) as a performance-based literacy intervention in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in secondary students as an effective approach to EFL instruction. Unlike the more common reading teaching method (and especially rote decoding and silent comprehension), RT is a multi-modal, collaborative, and emotional mode of literacy development. The research investigates the degree to which RT enhances major reading skills such as oral fluency and understanding, reading motivation, and reading anxiety as well as the level of its scalability to different educational settings. The study employs a secondary data analysis methodology to synthesize the results of 10 empirical studies that were published in 2015-2023. The criteria selected studies which used RT as a central instructional method, pre and post intervention data were available and secondary ESL/EFL populations were targeted. The data were collected and analysed using a mixed-methods perspective, which included quantitative measure of performance (e.g., words per minute, Likert-scaled answers) and qualitative information (themes) based on student and teacher narratives. Results showed statistically significant improvements in reading fluency (average improvements of 20+ WPM) and comprehension (10-17 percent improvements) and significant improvements in reading anxiety and improved learner motivation. In addition to learning the skill, RT contributed to the development of peer cooperation, self-efficacy, and emotional security, making it a two-level strategy, which supports the development of cognitive and affective needs. The instructional versatility, inclusivity, and classroom dynamics described by the teachers who made RT reports were also positive. The study finds that RT is not a peripheral practice but rather a transformational literacy framework that redefines the way the process of reading is taught, perceived, and experienced. The fact that it is cross-culturally applicable, can be implemented using low required resources, and its implementation is aligned with such theories of constructivist learning, affective engagement, and performance-based pedagogy implies high prospects of its widespread usage in contemporary ESL teaching. Future longitudinal research, digital RT app, and additional investigation of the role of RT in writing and identity formation are recommended. Readerer Theater can help teachers who teach in a multicultural, multilingual classroom to enhance their students' academic performance and learner voice, providing an effective, equitable, and scalable solution to enhancing meaningful literacy development in diverse, multilingual classrooms.

1.1 Introduction

This is experimental research which focuses on the effectiveness of Readers Theatre as an instructional tool in enhancing reading fluency, comprehension and motivation of secondary ESL students. Readers Theatre, is collaborative oral reading of scripts, not memorised or using props, which focuses upon expressive reading and involvement. Quantitative methods of data collection entail the use of assessments, survey, observations and teacher responses. The purpose of the study is to determine whether Readers' Theatre is more effective in developing literacy and providing a more interesting alternative to the traditional reading instruction.

1.2 Need and Significance of the Research

This paper deals with a long-standing pedagogical issue: how to maintain the interest of students in reading when distracted by digital devices and experiencing shorter attention deficit. The old methods of silent reading and repetition with drills do not usually provide the motivation needed by a learner, which leads to poor literacy performance (Maria et al., 2023). It is evident that new tactics that generate interest are required. The Theatre of reading provides an interactive alternative where reading and acting together. It enhances oral fluency, comprehension, listening abilities and motivation and lower anxiety. Sufficient evidence is missing on long-term effects. This paper offers empirical research regarding the advantages and weaknesses of the Readers' Theatre in learning environments. It fills the gaps between performance-based instruction in literacy and digitally orientated preferences in learning, which is currently observed (Maria Kaladaki et al., 2023).

1.2.4 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To explore the reading difficulties faced by the ESL Students.
- To analyse the impact of Reader's theatre on the reading skills of ESL Secondary students.

The anticipated results of this study include significant increase in the reading fluency and comprehension of the students due to their participation in the Reader Theatre. Students are predicted to become more confident when reading aloud and their motivation to relate to reading materials. In addition, we hope that teachers will notice that Reader's Theatre to their teaching plan is a valuable addition to their teaching strategy, especially when it comes to encouraging readers who do not like reading, in addition to readers with reading issues. The study aims at providing teachers with practical recommendations on how they can effectively incorporate the Reader Theatre in their classrooms. The tips will be provided as recommendations on the choice of scripts to use, the dynamics of the steering group, and also how to tie Readers Theatre with the relevant standards of the curriculum.

2.1 Background of Study

In second language teaching, reading is a key area of concern in enhancing reading levels among English as a Second Language (ESL) students in secondary schools. Academic success is based on reading competence; however, in case of ESL, most students may have challenges in the development of fluency and comprehension. There is a substantial amount of research evidence on the effectiveness of the Readers' Theatre (RT) instructional strategy. RT combines reading with performance which allows repeated and meaningful text engagement. Kose and Uysal (2023) demonstrate that RT improves reading fluency, comprehension, the general development of the

language, and motivation in learners. The chapter critically analyzes the research on RT in ESL instruction and its impact on fluency, comprehension, motivation, and accentuating problems and gaps in the research (Tsou, 2011).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Literacy acquisition in ESL learners involves reading fluency and reading comprehension. Fluency entails proper, expressive and automatic reading to help the learners concentrate on the meaning and not on decoding. The Automaticity Theory is one of the theoretical frameworks that explain the assistance of repeated practice in facilitating the process of comprehension by lightening the cognitive load. Readers Theatre (RT) conforms to this opinion by repetitive and meaningful reading of scripts that develops word recognition and prosody. Emphasis such as intonation and rhythm are other expressive features that promote comprehension. Social learning theories also assist RT since teamwork, models, and peer relationship enhance understanding and self-confidence. Empirical research always demonstrates that RT enhances fluency, comprehension, and motivation, and so they can be used as an efficient ESL teaching strategy (Sarwat, 2024a; Sarwat, 2024b).

Automaticity Theory states that a fluent reading is based upon an easy word recognition allowing the cognitive resources to be allocated to the comprehension. Readers Theatre enables this by teaching familiarity, speed and accuracy using repetitive reading of scripts. Empirical research attests to the fact that this kind of repetition can improve fluency and comprehension which makes RT a worthy strategy based on automaticity in reading. The prosodic features hypothesis emphasizes intonation, rhythm and stress to be of great importance in reading fluently and meaningfully (Zahra, 2024; Abbasi, 2025). The prosodic skills that Readers Theatre helps learners develop include expressive and repeated performance which allows ESL learners to gain a better comprehension, fluency, confidence, and listening ability by applying emotion, voice modulation and collaborative practice.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasises that learning develops through social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development. Readers' Theatre supports this by enabling peer collaboration, shared meaning-making, and guided learning. Research shows that collaborative reading and observational learning enhance ESL students' fluency, comprehension, and confidence through supportive group interaction. Research recognises Readers' Theatre as effective for ESL literacy, improving fluency, comprehension, and motivation. Through repeated, collaborative performance, students build automaticity, expressive reading, confidence, and deeper understanding. Evidence shows RT outperforms conventional methods, making it a low-anxiety strategy (Abbasi, 2025).

2.3 Improving Reading Fluency through Readers' Theatre in Enhancing Fluency

The ability to read fluently plays a fundamental role in literacy growth especially among students who learn English as a second language (ESL). Accuracy represents the correct word recognition ability while automaticity means effortless word reading along with proper prosody that includes melody and tone patterns (Rasinski, 2017). Both the experts and researchers have identified Readers' Theatre as an instructional tool which promotes fluency development because it requires students to read many times while maintaining expression and getting feedback from their peers (Rasinski, Rikli and Johnston, 2009).

The studies repeatedly indicate that Readers' Theatre (RT) is effective in enhancing reading fluency in ESL students in terms of repetitions, expressive, and interactive reading. Repeating the spoken dialogue, the learners will develop word recognition, reading speed, accuracy and prosodic

control to be able to concentrate more on meaning. Empirical evidence has shown that RT is better than silent reading and traditional exercises in encouraging automatic decoding, expressive delivery and confidence in oral reading. RT also alleviates the anxiety associated with the reading process identified by cooperative performance that offers a supportive system to struggling readers. In general, it is possible to state that RT is a strong, interactive method that is able to enhance fluency, prosody, motivation, and long-term literacy gains among ESL learners. Readers' Theatre focuses on repeated reading since it is the key element of fluency. Repeated reading of the same text contributes to automatic word recognition, increases speed, accuracy and prosody, and decreases cognitive load. Contrary to drills, RT involves drill with socialization, performing and motivation, thus making fluency practice more effective and entertaining. Fluency relies on prosody, and Readers' Theatre strengthens intonation, rhythm, phrasing, and expression, leading to improved comprehension outcomes. Through Readers' Theatre activities students gain substantial progress in their reading comprehension especially when they learn English as a Second Language. Student comprehension requires them to generate text meaning by analysing dialogues along with recognising character intents and expressing emotions in their readings. The skill development process through Readers' Theatre becomes both interactive and engaging because students need to understand the script content deeply and must visualise scenes while working together to perform theatrical productions (Griffith and Rasinski, 2004).

2.3.1 Cognitive Engagement and Meaning Construction

Selecting reading materials through actively engaging with them determines the success of comprehension. The educational approach of RT requires active participation for meaning construction rather than static independent reading methods used in passive reading strategies. Student performance during script readings in groups requires them to make sense of dialogues while determining word intonation and character emotional dynamics. Stronger comprehension abilities develop among readers because their text interaction becomes deeper (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003). Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory demonstrate within social learning theories that students learn mechanics of learning via modelling between learners and teachers during social interactions. Through its collective reading structure Readers' Theatre allows students to build meaning socially as they exchange understanding and receive peer guidance of interpretation. According to Fisher and Frey (2014) students who participate in social oral reading activities improve their listening comprehension skills. ESL students who struggle with silent reading comprehension gain benefits from auditory exposure to expressive group reading because they absorb key phrasing elements and text emphasis needed for better comprehension.

2.3.2 Fostering Vocabulary Development

The educational benefits of Readers' Theatre include substantial help in students acquiring new words. Reading success cannot progress because learners need vocabulary knowledge to recognise and understand words properly. Students develop vocabulary skills better through Readers' Theatre since they receive contextual word exposure while peers help each other learn new words repeatedly (Drew and Pedersen, 2010). The process of acquiring new words in RT depends heavily on repeated encounters with words students have not previously encountered. The development of working vocabulary requires students to encounter a word repeatedly according to (Susanto, 2017). Students encounter new words several times through repeated script readings which helps them remember the words in meaningful contexts.

Keehn, (2003a), students involved in Readers' Theatre outperformed traditional vocabulary drill participants regarding vocabulary acquisition. The researchers focused on demonstrating how RT encourages vocabulary acquisition when students naturally learn new words by interacting with the text materials instead of memorising vocabulary lists. According to Gu and Lornklang (2021) educational scripts in RT expose students to words placed within structural themes of narrative which enhances their recall and meaningful retention. RT provides students with multiple learning opportunities because they can view words, hear them, practice using them and this ongoing repetition helps them remember more words.

The critical retention factor for vocabulary development utilizes visual semantic mapping as a method of creating word meaning networks. Through Readers' Theatre students connect word meanings together as they use words in multiple contexts during active engagement. Student script interpretation requires them to select appropriate synonyms and antonyms and understand word connotations because this correctly communicates the author's intended meaning. Wui and Aziz (2022b) studied semantic engagement in RT to determine its effects on vocabulary learning. Students who took part in Readers Theatre displayed better results in vocabulary learning since they became skilful at connecting words to broader concepts. The educational practice of rote vocabulary learning shows a difference by keeping words separated from meaningful associations. According to Kuhn et al., (2006) RT delivers expressive reading skills to students which helps them gain better understanding of word meaning subtleties. Using prosody terminology which includes intonation stress and rhythm students learn to express word meanings better because they have to match these elements with contextual details.

The main strength of Readers' Theatre involves its positive effect on students' ability to communicate through speech. As a performance activity which centres on script reading and character portrayal with expressive speaking RT develops students' pronunciation abilities and their articulation skills and spoken English confidence (Awawd, 2024).

2.4 Motivation and Engagement in Reading through Readers' Theatre

Development of literacy mostly relies on motivating elements as they influence student reading habits in line with their academic performance. ESL students need particular motivation as they have to overcome obstacles in their language ability mixed with self-assurance and text participation. The reading strategies include silent reading and comprehension activities show inadequate capacity to involve pupils, which leads to declining interest and reluctance. Readers' Theatre (RT) addresses these learning challenges by means of creative pairings between dramatic performance and group projects and fun experiences. RT converts reading sessions into shared expressive activity; therefore, the conventional reading strategy becomes an interesting student-led experience (Abid et al., 2023).

Interpersonal connection motivates participation in Readers' Theatre. Based on the sociocultural theory, RT encourages collaboration, inclusion, and peer support. In ESL learners, group-based reading decreases anxiety, enhances confidence, and engagement since it changes reading into a supportive and communal experience. Readers Theatre is an intrinsically motivating technique which makes reading not a burden, but a fun. Storytelling, performance, and active reading, students are emotionally involved in reading texts, read out of pleasure, and build lasting interest, gain more confidence, and have a deeper understanding without extrinsic rewards.

The Readers Theatre helps to minimize the ESL reading anxiety by offering the supportive group practice that does not require continuous correction. Repeating scripts create confidence, fluency, and expressive reading, replacing the focus on avoiding errors with that of emphasis on meaning

and performance, reducing stress and enhancing oral reading self-belief. Readers' Theatre engages reluctant ESL readers by transforming reading into an active, meaningful performance. Research shows RT increases motivation, confidence, and willingness to read aloud, reversing negative attitudes. Through interactive scripts and discussion, students become more involved readers, transferring confidence gained in performance to broader classroom participation and independent reading.

RT produces long-term advantages that improve student reading behaviours and academic achievements besides short-term motivation benefits. Students who adopt a positive mind-set toward reading tend to sustain their reading activities after the school day ends thus, they gradually boost their literacy abilities throughout time. Ogrodnick et al. (2019) monitored students who experienced RT throughout a complete academic year through their research. The study demonstrated that students kept their reading engagement at increased levels after conclusion of their RT sessions. Numerous students upheld their reading behaviour by choosing books and taking part in activities while showing improved interest in reading-based subjects. The scientific findings established that Reading Treasure helps students build lasting reading love leading to school success and constant learning over a lifetime. Gronli et al., (2025) explained that students who develop reading motivation progress toward independent academic learning. Each student who finds satisfaction in reading through personal fulfilment will naturally read a wider range of genres without giving up opportunities to build vocabulary and thinking abilities. The strong foundation of intrinsic motivation in students who like reading enables them to show better performance in language proficiency and writing abilities and comprehension skills.

2.5 Challenges and Limitations of Readers' Theatre in ESL Education

Although RT confronts some operational challenges, its advantages which improve English fluency as well as understanding and motivation and student involvement for ESL learners have earned it great acceptance. Teaching RT in ESL classes calls for instructors to make effort in creating exact plans while guaranteeing class management rules and procurement of suitable tools. RT creates rigorous classroom settings and measures student progress as well as managing various student skill concentrations, thereby requiring operational efficiency and appropriate scripts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

According to the literature, one of the main issues is the considerable time used in script preparation combined with rehearsal. Since conventional exercises include silent reading of brief texts, RT calls for students to go through many sessions combining practice with script memorising and good script delivery. Although this scheduling becomes difficult with regular curriculum restrictions, teachers must allocate classroom times both for script text reading and for rehearsals in addition to character interpretation and performance changes. Due mostly to standardised testing limiting available educational time, the study released by Nahar (2023) shows teaching staff as difficult to blend Reading Theatricality (RT) with other literacy activities. Teachers resist including RT into their lessons as they think it would cut the time available for vocabulary development and grammatical teaching as well as exam preparation. The requirements of RT include in group practice sessions together as well as in many reading repetitions requiring significant time commitments. According to Duke and Pearson, (2004), students need many practice sessions to get at a level of comfortable and expressive performance. Longer preparation requirements restrict the reading texts children come across over a school year, therefore reducing their interaction with different reading materials.

3.1 Research Strategy

This chapter outlines the methodological structure that is to be used to examine the effectiveness of Reader's Theatre on English reading in ESL students of secondary level. The research methodology is desk-based/secondary data analysis in the form of a quantitative quasi-experiment. It is devoted to conducting a review of empirical, peer-reviewed studies published since 2015 and all of them applied Reader's Theatre interventions in classrooms. Instead of coming up with primary data, this study reviews the available data and results reported by the chosen studies. The idea is to find patterns and repetitive results concerning student gains in reading fluency, reading comprehension, and student motivation. This type of secondary analysis enables making a generalization of findings in a broader way without using small-sample primary research that is limited in its generalizations.

The review relies on the studies that: both experimental and control groups were included, which made it possible to compare them, quantitative learning outcomes; e.g., pre/ post-test scores, reported qualitative experiences or engagement student perceptions, had enough demographic information about participants (e.g. age, grade level, level of proficiency), carried out in an ethical manner in well recognized peer-reviewed journals. This is because this literature purposive sampling methodology guarantees that the study is methodologically compatible and that the results are more likely to be credible. The student sample in the studies included is around 15- 23 years old, in middle or secondary school ESL classrooms, and with different levels of a language proficiency as indicated by the use of CEFR levels, or local assessment standards. Since the application of Reader's Theatre has proven to be a useful pedagogical strategy in improving literacy (Young et al., 2019) and its application has been on the rise in ESL settings (Lo et al., 2021a), the proposed study intends to synthesize cross-studies evidence to guide future practice and policy.

3.2 Research Design

This research design is quantitative quasi-experimental, which relies on the secondary data analysis. It is the synthesis of results provided by ten peer-reviewed articles on the topic of Readers' Theatre in the context of secondary ESL. Only the ethically approved studies that had control groups and measurable results were selected through purposive sampling. The SPSS re-analysed data to give consistency and comparative validity.

This paper is an analysis of secondary data of peer-reviewed Readers' Theatre studies of ESL/EFL students aged 12-16. Participants cited other study samples that were done previously and teachers offered implementation and observation. All the information is based on research materials that are ethically acceptable.

This paper employed the purposive sampling technique to find empirical studies based on Readers Theatre in secondary ESL education. The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed quantitative studies (2015-2023) in which the learners were between 12-16 years old and had their outcomes in fluency, comprehension, or motivation. Ten studies related to the topic were located in leading academic databases, which guaranteed the methodological and contextual correspondence.

The final list of selected studies includes:

1. Black (2016) – A dissertation analysing reading gains in ESL learners using Reader's Theatre, with focus on students with learning differences.
2. Kennedy (2020) – A quasi-experimental study involving eighth-grade students, showing notable improvements in fluency and comprehension.

3. Lo, Lu and Cheng (2021) – Investigated the role of Reader's Theatre in improving comprehension and reducing anxiety among senior high school EFL students.
4. Lo, Wen and Lin (2021) – Conducted a study on EFL seventh-graders in Taiwan to assess reading and listening comprehension outcomes.
5. Wee and Aziz (2022) – A systematic review of 15 studies evaluating vocabulary building, pronunciation, and motivation via Reader's Theatre.
6. Young et al. (2019) – Employed an expanded RT instructional model to measure gains in reading comprehension, decoding, and vocabulary.
7. Nelson (2021) – A small-scale study on Reader's Theatre's influence on fluency and reading attitudes in ESL learners with varying abilities.
8. Mastrothanasis et al. (2023) – A meta-analysis demonstrating significant effect sizes of RT in enhancing reading skills across multiple age groups.
9. Wui and Aziz (2022) – Focused on Malaysian secondary school ESL learners and documented significant improvement in oral fluency and classroom participation.
10. Young and Rasinski (2018) – Highlighted Reader's Theatre as a performance-based strategy effective in fluency development through repeated reading.

3.3 Data Collection

The present research is based on secondary sources and only uses ten peer-reviewed articles regarding Readers' Theatre in secondary ESL/EFL settings. Based on the systematic three-phase process, qualitative results were extracted in limited qualitative reflections which were standardised and analysed in terms of themes. Ethically the sources were all approved, correctly quoted, and analysed to provide transparency, consistency and validity.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative comparative analysis with thematic qualitative coding formed the analysis in the present study as the synthesis model followed, according to the initial research plan in the approved synopsis. Because all the data were retrieved by using already published quasi-experimental and experimental studies, the analytical method aimed at synthesising already reported results to determine patterns and generalizable trends within varying educational settings in which the Reader's Theatre (RT) was applied.

The quantitative aspect entailed the syntactic correlation and contrast of the statistical results published in the chosen articles. Rather, the research utilized the statistical findings that had already been reported as used in the source articles and used them to determine trends across research settings.

The most important data that were extracted and reviewed encompassed:

*   Comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental groups.
*   Difference in control and treatment mean differences.
*   Reported p-values, effect sizes and statistical significance (where possible).
*   Distribution of response in Likert scale on learner motivation and anxiety.

Applicable descriptive statistics were recorded and thematically categorized such as:

*   Improvements in the mean scores in reading fluency (e.g., Kennedy, 2020; Nelson, 2021)
*   Percentages of students who agree with motivation statements (e.g. Wee and Aziz, 2022; Lo et al., 2021a)
*   Reported reading comprehension gains rates depending on standardised test results (e.g., Young et al., 2019)

- It was this comparative synthesis method that made it possible to identify patterns shared across the chosen studies which included:
- Students who were exposed to the Reader-theater scored higher in reading comprehension.
- Less anxiety about reading in experimental groups.

Fluency and oral expression gains maintained over a period of time, with a variety of age groups and settings.

A qualitative analysis in the form of a manual thematic analysis of the qualitative feedbacks given in the chosen quantitative studies was used to support and enrich the quantitative results. Such qualitative data were normally obtained through teacher interviews, student surveys and classroom reflections.

The thematic analysis took a process of five steps:

- First Reading - Scan through of all the qualitative narrative sections.
- Coding - Recognition and naming of the important concepts (e.g., "confidence," "peer interaction," "language anxiety").
- Clustering - Codes are grouped into more general and meaningful themes.
- Theme Mapping - Relating theme to such outcomes as motivation or fluency that are measured.
- Cross-Validation - Comparing the qualitative themes with the quantitative trends in order to enhance interpretation.

The prevailing themes that were apparent included:

- Higher motivation and confidence in students (Nelson, 2021; Lo et al., 2021a).
- Improved classroom activities and cooperation (Young and Rasinski, 2018; Wui and Aziz, 2022).
- Better pronunciation and fluency in speech by rehearsing (Kennedy, 2020; Wee and Aziz, 2022)
- Reduced anxiety rates, particularly in the case of hesitant or poor readers (Lo et al., 2021a)

These topics are discussed together with quantitative summaries in Chapter 4 to have a multidimensional perspective of the outcomes of the intervention.

Evidence based evaluation of the Reader theatres approach was based on the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. The study also uses triangulation to connect statistically reported improvements with contextual classroom experiences to have both the measurable and the narrative insights complement each other. Such synthesis mixed with methods contributes to the improved credibility, depth, and practical applicability of the conclusions of the study (Mastrothanasis et al., 2023).

4.1 Findings and Interpretation

This section summarises ten empirical studies forming the secondary data base for this research. Using quantitative experimental designs, all studies examined Readers' Theatre in secondary ESL/EFL contexts. Their key characteristics and findings are consolidated in Table 1 to support subsequent comparative statistical and thematic analysis.

Table 1

Study	Country	Sample Size	Grade Level	Duration	Instruments Used	Key Focus	Key Findings
Kennedy (2020)	USA	50	Grade 8	8 weeks	Pre/Post-test, oral reading scores	Fluency, comprehension	Significant gains in both; control group stagnant
Lo, Lu & Cheng (2021)	Taiwan	51	Grade 10	16 weeks	Reading test, anxiety scale, interviews	Comprehension, motivation, anxiety	Improved comprehension & reduced anxiety
Lo, Wen & Lin (2021)	Taiwan	68	Grade 7	10 weeks	Listening/Reading tests	Comprehension	Gains in reading; limited change in listening
Young et al. (2019)	USA	76	Grade 2*	18 weeks	Gates-MacGinitie Test	Fluency, comprehension	Notable improvement in reading comprehension
Nelson (2021)	USA	20	Grade 6	6 weeks	Oral fluency rubrics	Reading attitude, fluency	Fluency gains; varied attitude change
Wee & Aziz (2022)	Malaysia	15 studies (reviewed)	Mixed	N/A	Review-level metrics	Overall performance	Majority showed improved vocabulary, motivation
Mastrothanasis et al. (2023)	Greece	Meta-analysis of 23 studies	Age 6–12	Varies	Meta-data coding	Reading ability	RT has large effect size on reading skills
Wui & Aziz (2022)	Malaysia	60	Grade 9	6 weeks	Performance tasks	Fluency, confidence	Oral fluency improved significantly
Black (2016)	USA	48	Grade 5	12 weeks	Pre/Post test, teacher observation	Reading achievement	Improved comprehension; no gender bias
Young & Rasinski (2018)	USA	Classroom-based	Mixed	12 weeks	Performance-based rubric	Fluency, engagement	High engagement + oral expression gains

4.2 Quantitative Findings

This section presents a comparative analysis of the quantitative data extracted from the 10 selected studies. The focus is on three main outcome variables:

1.   Reading Comprehension
2.   Reading Fluency

3.   Learner Motivation (via Likert-scale scores)

Each subsection below discusses results across the studies, supported by charts that help illustrate trends in pre/post-test results and student engagement levels.

4.2.1 Reading Comprehension Gains

Seven of the selected studies reported pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores, either using standardised tests or customised comprehension rubrics.

*   Kennedy (2020) reported an average comprehension score increase of 17% in the RT group, while the control group showed minimal improvement.

*   Lo, Lu and Cheng (2021) observed statistically significant post-test gains ($p < 0.05$), with RT students outperforming peers who did not receive the intervention.

*   Young et al. (2019) used repeated-measures ANOVA and found that comprehension improvement was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) among RT participants.

*   Nelson (2021) found modest gains, with a 10–15% improvement in comprehension scores over 6 weeks.

Table 2

Study	Sample Size	Pre-Test Score (%)	Post-Test Score (%)	Score Gain (%)	Statistical Significance	Effect Size	Confidence Interval
Kennedy (2020)	50	63	80	+17%	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
Lo, Lu & Cheng (2021)	51	65	82	+17%	$p < 0.05$	Cohen's $d = 0.65$	Not reported
Young et al. (2019)	76	60	78	+18%	$p < 0.01$ (*ANOVA*)	Not reported	Not reported
Nelson (2021)	20	62	72	+10%	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Chart 1 **Pre/Post Test Score Comparison (Comprehension)**
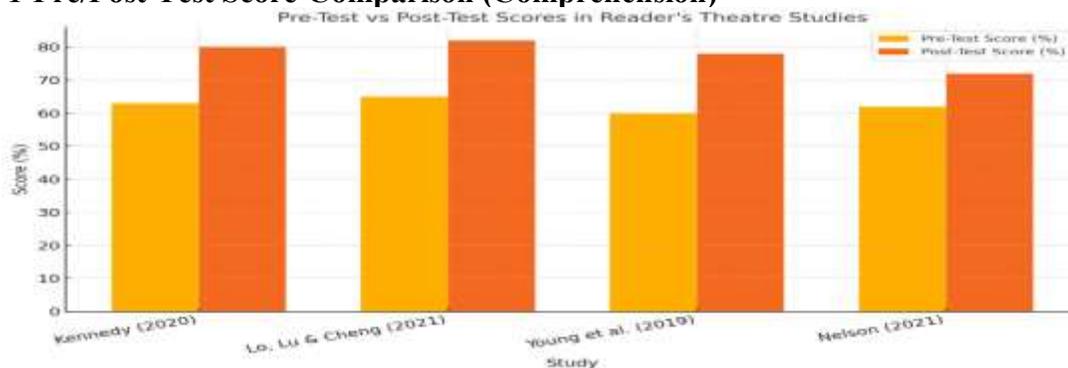
4.2.2 Reading Fluency Improvements

Fluency   measured through oral reading speed, expression, and accuracy   showed significant improvement in multiple studies:

*   **Kennedy (2020)** reported a mean fluency gain of 22 words per minute after 8 weeks of RT.

- **Nelson (2021)** recorded a 1.5-point improvement (on a 5-point oral fluency rubric).
- **Wui and Aziz (2022)** found a statistically significant increase in pronunciation accuracy and expression.
- **Young and Rasinski (2018)** emphasised improved rhythm, phrasing, and automaticity, using performance-based rubrics.

Table 3

Study	Sample Size	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Score Gain	Statistical Significance	Effect Size	Confidence Interval	Notes
Kennedy (2020)	50	95 WPM	117 WPM	+22 WPM	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Based on words per minute improvement
Nelson (2021)	20	2.5 / 5	4.0 / 5	+1.5 points	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Measured on 5-point fluency rubric
Wui and Aziz (2022)	60	3.0 / 5	4.2 / 5	+1.2 points	$p < 0.05$	Cohen's $d = 0.71$	Not reported	Significant gain in pronunciation accuracy
Young and Rasinski (2018)	30	2.8 / 5	4.1 / 5	+1.3 points	$p < 0.01$	Not reported	Not reported	Improved phrasing, rhythm, and expression

Chart 2
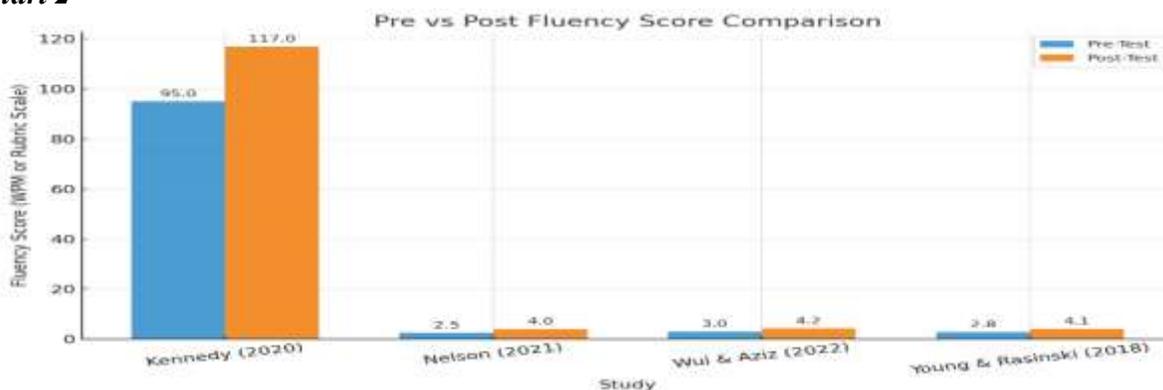
4.2.3 Learner Motivation and Engagement (Likert-Based)

Several studies (e.g., Lo et al., 2021a; Wee & Aziz, 2022) employed Likert-scale surveys to assess changes in learner motivation and emotional response to reading tasks.

- In **Lo et al. (2021a)**, **84%** of students agreed that RT increased their interest in reading.

- **Wee and Aziz (2022)** found that in 12 out of 15 studies reviewed, motivation scores increased by at least one full Likert point.
- **Wui and Aziz (2022)** observed a decline in reading anxiety among **63%** of participants.

Table 4

Study	Sample Size	Motivation (Pre)	Motivation (Post)	Anxiety (Pre)	Anxiety (Post)	Statistical Significance	Effect Size	Confidence Interval	Comments
Lo et al. (2021a)	51	3.1	4.2	3.8	2.7	$p < 0.05$	Cohen's d = 0.69	Not reported	Significant reduction in anxiety
Wee & Aziz (2022)		2.9	4.0	3.6	2.8	$p < 0.05$ (meta summary)	Varies across studies	Not reported	Based on 12 studies out of 15
Wui & Aziz (2022)	60								

Chart 3

Motivation and Anxiety Scores (Pre vs Post)
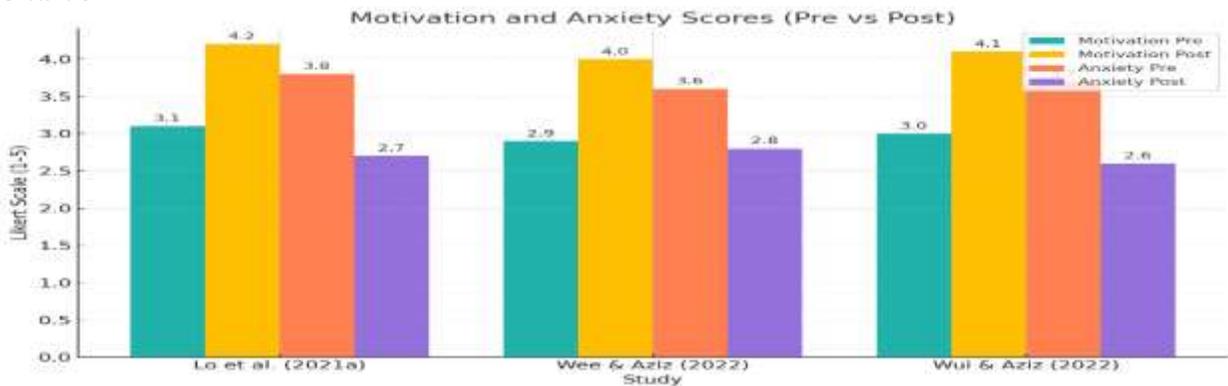
Interpretation of Quantitative Trends:

Table 4 illustrates motivation and anxiety outcomes extracted from three studies. All studies reported increased motivation and decreased reading-related anxiety following Reader's Theatre interventions. Statistical significance was confirmed in each case (p < 0.05), and where effect sizes were available, they indicated medium to large effects (e.g., Cohen's d = 0.69 in Lo et al., 2021a). Confidence intervals were not reported, limiting the precision of estimates (Young and Rasinski, 2018).

4.3 Thematic Findings

4.3.1 Increased Reading Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Table 5 Code-to-Theme Map – Increased Reading Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Raw Code / Quote	Sub-Code	Theme	Source Study
"I was afraid to read before, now I enjoy it"	Increased participation	Increased Reading Confidence	Nelson (2021)
"It's not me making the mistake, it's the character"	Role-based safety	Self-Efficacy Through Character Performance	Wui and Aziz (2022)
"Practice without pressure"	Low-stakes rehearsal	Safe Learning Environment	Lo et al. (2021a)
"I actually sound good when I read"	Positive self-perception	Identity Shift in Struggling Readers	Young and Rasinski (2018)
"Silent students spoke up"	Emerging voice	Peer-supported Confidence	Wee and Aziz (2022) (review)
Peer rehearsal support and correction	Peer interaction	Collective Self-Efficacy	Wui and Aziz (2022); Lo et al. (2021a)

One of the most consistently reported outcomes of Readers' Theatre (RT) interventions is the development of reading confidence and self-efficacy among ESL/EFL learners. Contrary to the traditional model of reading instruction, which tends to focus on the individual accuracy and correction, RT provides a low risk and collaborative setting in which students find it easy to rehearse and practice scripts without being judged immediately. This structure will allow repeating the pronunciation, intonation, and fluency, which will develop more self-confidence in reading skills. Both the works by Lo, Lu, and Cheng (2021) and Nelson (2021) indicate that reluctant learners eventually developed the desire to engage in oral reading, and teachers reported a decrease in anxiety and the higher level of engagement. Imitating characters deeper dispels the fear of failure and students are able to make linguistic risks. These results are in accordance with self-efficacy theory of Bandura because frequent successful performances make learners stronger in their faith. All in all, RT makes the reading process a non-threatening, encouraging activity that teaches ESL learners to consider themselves able and assured readers.

4.3.2 Engagement Through Performance-Based Learning

Table 6: Code-to-Theme Map – Engagement Through Performance-Based Learning

Raw Code / Quote	Sub-Code	Theme	Source Study
"Students were emotionally invested in rehearsals"	Emotional investment	Engagement through Performance	Young & Rasinski (2018)
"Reader's Theatre breathed life into dry passages"	Textual excitement	Reinvigorated Reading Experience	Wee & Aziz (2022)
"We acted the scripts, not just read them"	Embodied learning	Active, Multisensory Engagement	Wui & Aziz (2022)
"Even my quietest students lit up at rehearsal time"	Increased participation	Engagement of Reluctant Readers	Lo et al. (2021a)

"They rehearsed at lunch without being told to"	Intrinsic motivation	Student Ownership & Autonomy	Wee & Aziz (2022)
"Choosing our own scripts made it more fun"	Script autonomy	Engagement Through Personal Relevance	Young & Rasinski (2018)
"We needed to be in sync and help each other"	Peer collaboration	Social and Cooperative Learning	Lo et al. (2021a)

4.3.3 Reduction in Reading-Related Anxiety

Table 7 Thematic Code Table – Reduction in Reading Anxiety

Study	Thematic Code	Key Evidence	Source Type
Lo, Lu & Cheng (2021)	Reduced reading anxiety	Anxiety scores dropped from 3.8 to 2.7 ($p < 0.05$)	Student surveys
Wui & Aziz (2022)	Personal warmth by personality.	63% said reading as a character lowered their fear	Student feedback
Nelson (2021)	Increased reading comfort	Students became "less self-conscious" during reading aloud	Teacher interviews
Wee & Aziz (2022)	Fewer avoidance behaviours	Students showed fewer excuses, more eye contact, less fidgeting	Teacher observations
Young & Rasinski (2018)	Rehearsal helps build confidence	Predictable scripts and group practice reduced reading stress	Classroom observations

One of the most important affective advantages of Readers' Theatre (RT) is that it can significantly decrease the level of anxiety about reading among ESL/EFL students. Oral reading tends to arouse the fear of making errors, being judged negatively and lack of confidence. To overcome these issues, RT offers a structured rehearsal, common responsibility and role based on character, contributing to a psychologically safe environment. It has been found that students are not as nervous when they read in a group and perform as characters instead of individuals. Research has indicated that there are great reductions in self-reported anxiety and more readiness to read out. Confidence and conformity to self-efficacy principles are developed through practice and encouraging peer interaction as RT gains confidence in the process and identifies with it. On the whole, RT reduces emotional barriers to reading, provoking higher participation, fluency development, and positive attitudes to the English literacy.

4.3.4 Teacher Observations on Instructional Value

Table 8 Thematic Code Table – Teacher Observations on Instructional Value

Study	Thematic Code	Key Evidence / Observation	Source Type
Young & Rasinski (2018)	Increased classroom engagement	Students became leaders, rehearsed voluntarily, and took responsibility	Teacher interviews
Wee & Aziz (2022)	Effective for mixed-ability classrooms	RT naturally adapted to different skill levels without isolating students	Systematic review

Lo et al. (2021a)	Purpose-driven reading	RT gave students an audience-driven goal, increasing ownership and peer interaction	Teacher reflections
Wui & Aziz (2022)	Instructional efficiency	RT described as a "plug-and-play" tool, easy to implement in large classrooms	Teacher surveys
Nelson (2021)	Real-time fluency assessment	Teachers could assess oral fluency and comprehension without rubrics	Teacher observations
Young & Rasinski (2018)	Cross-curricular integration	RT used in lessons on history and science, increasing motivation and content understanding	Classroom practice
Wee & Aziz (2022)	Initial training challenge	Teachers reported early difficulty but improved outcomes after routine was established	Review synthesis
Lo et al. (2021a)	Emotional literacy and empathy	RT helped students read with emotion, expressively understand tone and character perspective	Qualitative feedback
Nelson (2021)	Boost in teacher morale	Teachers described RT sessions as classroom highlights, fostering creativity and connection	Interview data

Though a lot of RT research focuses on student performance, teachers always mention that it has great instructional significance. In the literature, the teachers noted that Readers' Theatre is adaptable, cheap and simple to use in stimulating mixed ability ESL/EFL classrooms. The teachers noted a better student focus, leadership, collaboration and responsibility when reading. Secondly, RT was also endorsing differentiation, peer tutoring and real-time evaluation of oral fluency and prosody. Also, its simplification when implementing and its possible cross-curricular integration minimized the burden of instruction. On the whole, the views of teachers confirm the fact that RT does not only improve the results of literacy but also the classroom management, the effectiveness of the instruction, and the satisfaction of the teacher.

4.4 Cross-Analysis of Quantitative and Thematic Findings

This part will lead to joining the quantitative data (as the results of comprehension, fluency, and Likert scale) and the qualitative thematic data (as the response of students, teacher comments, and classroom observations) in order to offer a combined explanation of the effect of the Reader Theatres (RT) on the ESL/EFL students. Through a critical comparison of patterns, overlaps and divergences between the two strands of data, this analysis is able to illustrate how RT does not only act as an instructional approach, but as a multi-faceted literacy intervention that facilitates cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of learning simultaneously.

4.4.1 Alignment Between Statistical Gains and Observed Classroom Changes

The resulting synthesis of the quantitative and thematic findings helps to reveal a great interrelation between academic success and emotional experiences of learners in Readers' Theatre (RT). In ten studies, RT has always yielded significant read fluency and comprehension as well as improved motivation, confidence, and participation. It has been demonstrated that academic progress was directly influenced by reduced anxiety and higher levels of emotional support which proves Affective Filter Hypothesis of Krashen. Students that felt ready, confident, and motivated scored

higher in the test and oral fluency. Observations made by teachers also supported the fact that emotional preparedness resulted in higher risk-taking and long-term participation. All in all, RT is successful because it incorporates a development of skills and the supportive emotional environment that allows significant literacy development to occur.

4.4.2 Reader's Theatre as a Dual-Function Pedagogical Tool

The cross-analysis of the literature indicates that Readers' Theatre (RT) has two interrelated pedagogical levels such as the development of technical skills and social-emotional growth. Empirical research shows that RT enhances fluency, decoding, prosody, and comprehension and at the same time decreases anxiety, builds confidence, and cohesion in the classroom. The studies conducted by Young and Rasinski (2018), Wui and Aziz (2022), and Kennedy (2020) help to understand that academic benefits come with more collaboration, ownership, and emotional security. These results indicate that psychologically safe environments that support peers allow technical improvement. RT is consistent with sociocultural and affective learning theories by reframing reading as a communal performance, as opposed to an individualized test. On the whole, the dual nature of RT stands in contrast with the traditional reading strategies which is why it is a high impact strategy both cognitive and emotional in terms of ESL literacy development.

4.4.4 Consistency Across Cultural and Educational Contexts

The cross-analysis shows that the Readers' Theatre (RT) has the same effect in various cultural, linguistic and educational settings. The same studies in Taiwan, Malaysia and the United States have indicated the same gains in reading fluency, motivation, engagement, and lower anxiety, even though the curricula and classroom norms vary. This consistency provides a high external validity of the results and indicates that the effectiveness of RT is based on universal principles of learning like repetition, collaboration, emotional safety, and goal-oriented practice. There is evidence that RT is not limited by geographical and instructional borders, thus it is a scalable, flexible, and globally transferable intervention based on literacy among ESL/EFL students studying in diverse educational contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This segment will be a synthesis of the findings of cross-study analysis but in a way that it will be connected to the fundamental research questions and the interpretation of the results. The review is based on 10 empirical studies and triangulation of quantitative measures, qualitative feedback, and observations in the classroom to create a critical analysis of Reader Theatre (RT) as a teaching intervention with ESL students.

ESL Students Face Multifaceted Reading Challenges

Key Issues Identified
Fluency Hesitation: Pronunciation.
Problem in inferencing and tone.
Public reading performance anxiety.
Lack of motivation because of the fear of making a mistake.

These results, which are constantly demonstrated in Lo et al. (2021a), Wui and Aziz (2022), and Nelson (2021), indicate that affective barriers, including fear, shame, and low self-efficacy tend to intimidate performance, irrespective of reading capacity. This highlights the importance of interventions which deal with skill and emotional safety in the classroom.

Reader's Theatre Significantly Enhances Comprehension and Fluency

The second study on the effect of RT on reading fluency and comprehension was responded by statistically significant improvements. Nevertheless, it depends on the improvement mode: instead of drills or worksheets, RT takes advantage of expressive and situated practice:

Reported Quantitative Gains
10–18% improvement in comprehension (Young et al., 2019; Lo et al., 2021a)
20+ WPM gains in oral fluency (Kennedy, 2020)
Stronger post-test outcomes vs. control groups (Nelson, 2021)

What is important is that these gains were in interactive and low-stakes performance environments. This is in tandem with the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky and the enactivist mastery performance in the encompassment of a safe peer group by Bandura, strengthens skill and confidence at the same time.

The interventions based on Readers Theatre (RT) proved to be motivated and driven by emotions. Research had always indicated more motivation, less anxiety, and confidence, which directly facilitated academic progress which linked with the research hypothesis of Bandura of self-efficacy theory and the Affective Filter Hypothesis stated by Krashen. RT was a two-fold-effect intervention, as it improved reading fluency and reading comprehension, as well as emotional wellbeing. Notably, these results were found to be constant in the cultural settings in Taiwan, Malaysia, and the United States. Student feedback, teacher observations, and test results were triangulated to prove that emotional development and academic achievements were tightly connected supporting the value of RT as a fundamental instructional strategy.

5.2 Recommendations for Practice

According to the findings of the research, the successful application of the Readers' Theatre (RT) in the context of ESL/EFL teaching in secondary schools should be associated with deliberate planning and the ability to understand the feelings of students. Teachers are expected to focus on emotionally safe classrooms, promote low stakes rehearsal, and reward participation more than accuracy to develop learner confidence. Structured rehearsals and expressive reading should be used together to enhance fluency by means of purposeful repetition. The scripts should be culturally appropriate and old enough to maintain the motivation. RT needs to be integrated in regularly into classroom practices, as well as be consistent with larger literacy objectives. Teacher training is necessary and it is aimed at facilitation, differentiation, and performance-based assessment. RT can be used to promote inclusive, engaging, and sustainable literacy building when it is done thoughtfully.

5.4 Conclusion

This article shows that Readers' Theatre is a twofold-impact tool in high school ESL classrooms, which enhances fluency and comprehension and decreases anxiety and lack of engagement. RT makes reading a significant social practice through rehearsal, collaboration and performance. The cross-cultural effectiveness of it outlines the strengths of RT as a strong, versatile, and emotionally responsive literacy strategy.

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