



Effectiveness of reading license technique on reading comprehension and speed among EFL students

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Abstract

In exam-oriented English as a Foreign Language (EFL) foundation program, achieving a balance between high-stakes testing and skill-based learning remains a challenge. This study examines the limited efficacy of timed reading activities (TRAs) in contexts where students prioritize test preparation over fluency-building practices. In line with the license fashion of today, we provide a “reading license” as incentive to attract EFL students’ attention to TRAs manifested in the Reading Power 1 textbook. In doing so, we aligned the processes of TRAs with those of obtaining a driving license. Accordingly, this study examines the effectiveness of the reading license technique on reading comprehension and reading speed among EFL students. Using a post-experimental research design, 85 students were recruited for this study. The study oriented the students on the process of getting a reading license. With these students, the first author used the reading license technique for one semester during which reading speed and reading comprehension were scaffolded with high-stakes tests. Then, five TRAs, with a corpus of 2000 words, were used to examine the comprehension level and reading speed among the students using the reading license technique to teach TRAs. The results showed that students achieved very good scores (a mean of 3.16 out of 5) and high reading speed (173.29 words per minute) using this technique. The results recommend that investing students’ background knowledge such as the processes of getting a driving license with TRAs is a great scaffolding strategy to motivate students and enhance reading comprehension and reading speed. This study contributes to teaching techniques for TRAs in the context of high-stakes tests.

Keywords: EFL reading, timed reading, reading fluency, reading license.

Introduction

Reading is a hobby that enables readers to explore new life experiences of the world (Vanitha et al., 2021). Reading is linked with literacy or what Broz (2003) called “literacy license” (p. 43). Reading is compared with other daily routines (Cartwright & Duke, 2019). McWilliams (1979) linked reading with driving as both skills require understanding some instructions. Drawing an analogy between driving and reading, we suggest that proficient readers should be awarded a “reading license”, much like drivers receive a driving license upon demonstrating competence behind the wheel.

The complexities surrounding reading skills have sparked intense debate among researchers (Debbabi et al., 2019). It is reported that students’ weakness in reading is linked to teachers’ use of inappropriate teaching techniques/methods (Pandiangan et al., 2021). In response, researchers and methodologists have been prompted to develop innovative approaches to teaching reading. One of these techniques is Timed Reading Activities (TRAs). TRAs to Hazaea and Almekhlafy (2022a) are affirmed to aid instructors in determining their students’ learning needs. Timed reading is a strategy that is used in mastering language skills. Several studies have measured reading comprehension and reading speed (Dayani & Cahyono, 2024; Debbabi et al., 2019; Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a). To the best of the researchers’ knowledge, no study has introduced a reading license technique to teaching timed reading among EFL students in the context of high-stakes assessment.

TRAs have been positively perceived in previous studies for their role in improving reading speed and comprehension (Hazaea, 2025; Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a; Ibiladi, 2019; Pandiangan et al., 2021). TRAs are particularly important for EFL students as they train readers to process texts more efficiently (Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a). In the context of this study, TRAs serve as a foundational element of the reading license strategy, which aims to scaffold reading development through structured exposure to time-bound reading tasks. By incorporating TRAs into the reading license strategy, the study investigates whether such integration can systematically improve both reading speed and comprehension, thereby addressing a critical gap in the teaching of academic reading skills in EFL contexts.

Previous efforts have approached timed reading from two perspectives. From a discourse perspective, TRAs have been correlated with reading text, reading speed, and reading comprehension (Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022b). From a psychological perspective, Chang and Millett (2015) reported that TRAs improve the reading rate and comprehension of EFL beginner learners. From the same perspective, TRAs have been shown to significantly foster students’ fluency (Debbabi et al., 2019), and to enhance students’ reading abilities (Pandiangan et al., 2021). In line with Cartwright’s and Duke’s (2019) DRIVE model, there is a need to approach timed reading as a drive to motivate EFL students.

According to Nazim and Hazaea (2020), achieving a balance between high-stakes testing and skill-based learning remains a challenge in such an exam-oriented context. Hazaea and Almekhlafy (2022a) also reported that EFL students are motivated to score high marks regardless of reading speed. High-stakes tests are not designed to measure reading speed. It is a challenge to motivate students to undertake skill-based learning such as reading speed. Based on the first researcher’s experience, the teaching materials are designed in a way that leads to skill-based learning, however, TRAs are not well-invested in this context. This notable gap in effectively leveraging TRAs to promote skill-based learning catalyzes the researchers to undertake this investigation. Therefore, this study at hand checks the reading speed and reading comprehension level based on the technique of a “reading license”. To motivate students to use this technique and to keep a balance between high-stakes testing, skill-based learning, and students’

background knowledge, this study introduces the technique of a “reading license” as incentive to enhance reading speed and comprehension in such a context.

In this study, we aim to introduce the concept of a “reading license” which metaphorically serves to encourage learners to get this permission and is awarded to those who become competent in reading and pass the reading tests. The study also checks students’ scores in reading after being trained. Hence, this study tries to examine the level of reading comprehension and reading speed among EFL students based on the reading license as a teaching technique to TRAs in high-stakes contexts of assessment. It specifically addresses the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does the reading license technique enhance reading comprehension among EFL students?
2. What is the reading speed among EFL students based on the reading license teaching technique?

Literature Review

Reading License Technique

A reading license is an incentive for attracting learners’ attention to develop their reading proficiency speed. It coincides with Lehtonen’s (2013) reading literacy, which has a motivational reinforcement to encourage students to focus on the reading tasks. We borrowed the term “reading license” to align with the many licenses that appear in many fields like a license for computer use, language teaching (Ansari et al., 2024), and the like. The term “reading license” is brought to simulate the “driving license” because of the similarity between the steps that readers and drivers are passing through. Cartwright and Duke (2019) argued that as a driver performs many processes to get to their destination, a reader acts many processes to comprehend the meanings of various reading texts. Duke and Cartwright (2018) proposed that driving acts as a metaphor for reading. They linked the two skills of reading and driving in the essence that driving requires ignition and reading requires motivation.

Cartwright and Duke (2019) introduced the DRIVE model which includes six elements. First, readers are seen as purposeful drivers managing the reading process, utilizing executive function skills (e.g., working memory (Mekheimer, 2024), inhibition, and cognitive flexibility) to navigate complex interactions during reading. Second, the model emphasizes the importance of reading purpose (analogized as a driving destination) and textual characteristics (e.g., structure, organization, and content) in shaping the reading process. Third, the model bridges cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, recognizing how cultural context and knowledge systems interact with cognitive processes. Fourth, the model highlights dynamic interrelations among elements, such as how content knowledge interacts with text difficulty to affect comprehension. Fifth, the model uses driving analogies to describe reading components, such as text types as road types, reading fluency as axles ensuring smooth navigation, and vocabulary and morphological knowledge as shock absorbers facilitating comprehension. Finally, the model maintains a balance between comprehensiveness and practicality to guide instruction and language instructors. The limitation of Cartwright and Duke’s (2019) model is that it is only a descriptive tool to understand and explain the reading process. It encourages language instructors to consider the nuanced interdependencies in reading, aiming to enhance teaching strategies and literacy development. In this study, we try to operationalize this descriptive model with TRAs.

Timed Reading Activities (TRAs)

TRAs are reading strategies in which learners are engaged to read a text within a fixed time limit to improve their reading fluency, reading speed, and reading comprehension (Dayani & Cahyono, 2024). TRAs are student-centred pedagogy where students are given a chance to read at their own pace and evaluate their progress (Hamersly, 2015). In TRAs, students increase the speed of their reading while maintaining comprehension at a fixed time by practicing many reading passages with similar length and difficulty levels (Shimono, 2023). TRAs are celebrated among the many previous research studies due to their advantages on students' reading abilities (Dayani & Cahyono, 2024; Debbabi et al., 2019; Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a; Shimono, 2023). Furthermore, TRAs are beneficial for developing students' comprehension in classes with mixed abilities (Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a). TRAs enhance reading achievement in EFL contexts. Hazaea (2025) examined the application of TRAs as a scaffolding technique to improve reading achievement and course learning outcomes among Saudi EFL students. Initiating the impact of engaging EFL students in TRAs, Debbabi et al. (2019) mobilized a group of 50 students to check the impact of TRAs on Saudi EFL students' reading speed and comprehension. The students were split into a control group of 15 students and an experimental group of 35 randomly assigned. The experimental group was trained on TRAs. The groups engaged in pre- and post-tests at the first and eighth week of the course. The investigation demonstrated that time reading has a positive impact on students' reading speed and comprehension. The study concluded that TRAs develop students' fluency in L2 reading. Hazaea and Almekhlafy (2022a) also studied the impact of TRAs on developing Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension and reading speed and aimed to understand their previous use of reading strategies. The study recruited 29 students of mixed abilities in the Preparatory Year at Najran University. The study found that TRAs play a part in improving Saudi EFL students of mixed abilities' comprehension as well as reading speed. The results also indicated that students become aware of their previous improper use of reading strategies. Additionally, other studies shed light on the impact of TRAs among other strategies. Shimono (2023) scrutinized the impact of several reading strategies, namely reading speed, timed reading, and extensive reading on lower intermediate students in Japan. The study engaged 101 students in four groups, one of them was the control group, and three were experimental groups. The first group was trained in the three reading strategies, the second was trained in two of the above reading strategies, and the third was engaged in extensive reading. The control group received no intervention. The findings showed that the three experimental groups outperformed the control group. Moreover, the results indicated that the more a group engages in various reading strategies, the better it performs.

Reading Comprehension and Reading Speed

Reading comprehension and reading speed are closely connected (Abdul-Rab et al., 2022; Mohammed & Hasan, 2023). Many studies focus on measuring students' comprehension and speed alike (Abdul-Rab et al., 2022; Mohammed & Hasan, 2023; Surihami, 2017; Susiana, 2016; Thompson, 2015). Reading comprehension refers to the decoding and retaining of information being read where readers are required to understand the information they scan while reading the text (Susiana, 2016). Reading comprehension is also perceived as a multifaceted cognitive task, encompassing the utilization of background information to activating higher cognitive skills (Catts, 2021). Reading comprehension is boosted by using various reading strategies, where effective readers use inference, prediction, visualizing, summarizing, questioning, and making links to ideas (Vaughn et al., 2024). Empirical studies focused on teaching reading impact of teaching reading to EFL students. Pandiangan et al. (2021) enlisted 10

EFL teachers teaching at secondary schools to check the most suitable reading strategies for teaching reading skills. The results showed that TRAs are effective along with scanning, speed reading, skimming, read-recite review, and structure-response evaluation which were among the suitable techniques for teaching reading.

Reading speed is viewed as a task where the reader processes a certain passage at an increased pace (Thompson, 2015). This skill requires ongoing practice and continuous refinement (Surihami, 2017). Reading speed is engageable (Ounissi et al., 2025); scanning and skimming are effective strategies for developing reading speed (Dewi & Syam, 2022). Other strategies include “reducing physical movements, minimizing vocalizations, and strengthening self-confidence” (Rahmah & Salsabila, 2024, p. 169). Reading speed is measured by the number of words per minute (WPM). Previous studies applied training models to enhance students’ reading speed. Such models were efficient. For instance, Mohammed and Hasan (2023) studied the efficacy of reading speed activities in enhancing the reading speed of Kurdish EFL students. The study embarked on a pre- and post-measure to check the impact of the intervention on 25 sophomore EFL students in Kurdistan. The results of the experiment showed that students after six weeks of intervention developed significant speed from 138.16 WPM to 161.04 WPM. The study recommends the importance of allocating reading speed courses at all university levels. Furthermore, in the Saudi context, Abdul-Rab et al. (2022) investigated the significance of using “7 Speed Reading” (a Software program) on developing Saudi junior students. The study adopted a training intervention for the students using this software for an experimental group of 30 students. The results reported a significant improvement in the experimental group over their peers. Students in the experimental group scored 156.4 WPM after receiving the training, while their speed was 96.03 WPM in the pre-test.

The above-mentioned studies underline the significance of TRAs as a robust strategy for fostering essential reading skills among EFL learners. By encouraging students to read within a fixed timeframe, TRAs effectively address important aspects of reading development: fluency, speed, and comprehension. Moreover, when integrated into language instruction, TRAs provide a structured yet flexible approach that complements other reading strategies, ensuring a holistic improvement in reading proficiency.

Methods

Research Design

This study uses a post-experimental research design. In this design, data collection occurs exclusively after the implementation of an intervention, with the primary goal of assessing its impact on participants or subjects (Shadish et al., 2002). Students’ performance was evaluated after being trained on the reading license. In doing so, the study adapted the procedural steps of obtaining a driving license into a structured sequence of TRAs delivered over one semester, forming the reading license model; something that brings students’ schemata knowledge or ‘what is known’ to the ‘unknown’ (Kalantzis & Cope 2005). It then analyzes the students’ performance in five reading passages.

Context and Participants

The preparatory year is a competitive foundation while-college program. It involves language skills, including reading. Reading is a four-hour course. Students are assessed through centralized assessment methods including assignments, midterms, and final exams. Students pay much attention to high-stakes tests, something to achieve high marks. It is a challenge for language instructors to motivate them to skill-based learning such as TRAs. To motivate

them to build skill-based learning, the first researcher, the language instructor, must associate exam-oriented teaching strategies and students' background knowledge with the skills of TRAs.

At the beginning of the course, the first author, the language instructor, introduced the technique of reading license as incentive to motivate students about TRAs for one semester. He had three sections of a total of 85 students. All students in the three sections were recruited as a sample of the study. These students studied EFL at schools for eight years, however, they can be categorized with a basic level of English language based on the common European Framework of Reference for Languages. They were all Saudis and shared relative cultural backgrounds. They were all males, following the Saudi education system. Their age ranged between 18 and 21 years old. At this age, they can apply for or have applied for a driving license. Most of them came to college in their cars. Most of them had got their driving licenses. The instructor/first researcher found it a great chance to link their background knowledge on how to get a driving license with the new experience of TRAs.

This study was approved by the ethical committee at the institution with reference number 202406-076-021161-048454 dated June 4, 2024. The instructor/first researcher explained to the participants the aim of the experiment and that their participation was not compulsory.

In this course, Reading Power 1 is used as a learning resource. The textbook includes four parts though students dealt with three parts: Part 2 (Comprehension Skills: 8 units), Part 3 (Thinking Skills: 25 exercises), and Part 4 (Reading Faster: 3 units). While Part 2 was used as an orientation and training part for the reading license, Part 3 and Part 4 were meant for practicing what they had learned in Part 2. Students are assessed through four e-assignments (20%), a midterm (30%), and the final exam (50%).

Training Program and Data Collection

The in-class training program lasted for 14 weeks. To educate the students about the reading license approach, an orientation session was conducted with the students in the first week. At this stage, the students were informed about the nature of reading as a process in which they are trained to get a reading license in the same way they get a driving license.

To link the processes for getting a driving license with the reading license, the participants were informed about the three processes for getting a driving license: training about driving, learning license, and a permanent license (see Figure 1).

In the training about driving (something like Part 2 comprehension skills), potential drivers are oriented to know how a car works, regulations, signals, instructions, etc. for a period that ranges from 6 to 30 hours. During learning, potential drivers get a learning license for driving along with the trainer (something like the midterm test and the first e-assignment). Finally, a language instructor can give reading licenses to those students who pass the course. This license is valid for four years during their academic journey in their academic programs at the university.

As students are motivated by their achievement progress to pass the course, the assessment plan was translated to them in the form of the processes for getting a reading license. In so doing, the students were informed that the reading comprehension skills in Part 2 aim to train them on how to read fast and understand better as it is stated in every unit and activity. Students who fail the midterm are not getting the learner license though they have a chance to progress with the course (see Figure 2). This is because getting a reading license involves the chance to enter the final exam.

The students were informed that to pass the reading course (to get the reading license), they have to achieve an average reading speed of 100 words per minute and get at least a score of 3 out of 5 in their reading comprehension. The students were also informed that their

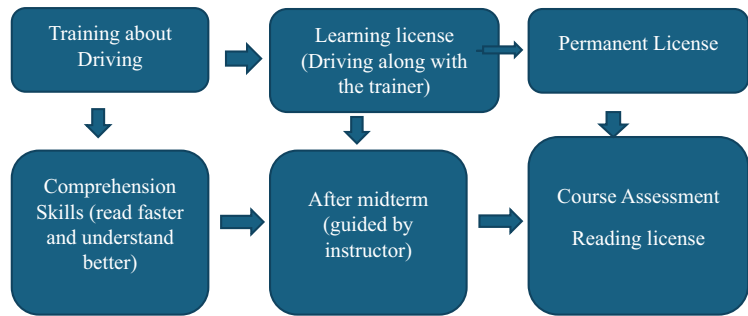


Figure 1. Reading as driving

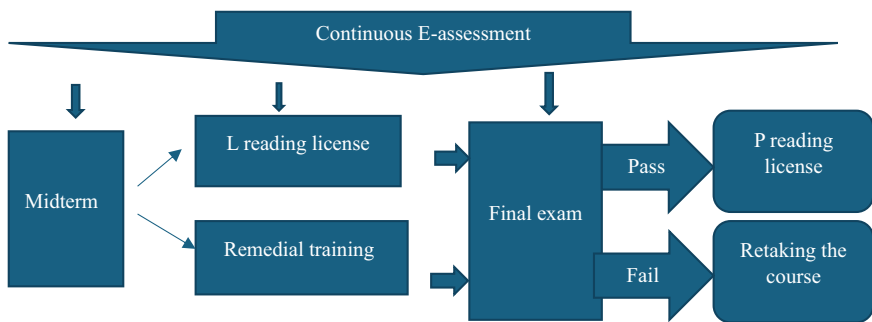


Figure 2. Reading Assessment
Note. L = learner, P = permanent.

e-assignments (continuous assessment) and their midterm (formative assessment) results lead to their getting a learning (an L) license in reading. In case a student does not pass the course, he does not get the reading license, and he must take the course again.

From week 2 to week 6, the students were trained to activate the previewing and making prediction skills at unit 1 of Part 2 with the fast-reading passages of unit 1 of Part 4. In that, they have to follow the guidelines learned in Unit 1 of Part 2 with the activities of Unit 1 in Part 4. They were also trained to employ the scanning skills of Unit 2, making inferences in Unit 3, building a powerful vocabulary in Unit 4, and learning to look for the topic in Unit 5.

Then a training session was conducted with students in week 7 while shifting the content from Unit 5 of Part 2 to Part 3 (thinking skills) and Part 4 Reading Faster (Unit 1 Dimond Family). As for Part 4, the students were informed that the passages move with difficulty levels. In Unit 1, 15 passages have 200 words/each, along with pictures to facilitate students' reading speed and understanding level. From passage 16 to passage 40, the difficulty level gets higher where each passage contains 400 words and no pictures, something that adds to the difficulty level of the passages. Five passages (16 to 20) were used in this study. Reading comprehension tests were used to gather data from students. Five reading passages were selected to measure the students'

level of reading comprehension and reading speed. Every passage consists of 400 words. The five passages form a corpus of 2000 words. These texts were tailored to the participants' proficiency level and were drawn from graded reading materials designed specifically for EFL learners. Their difficulty level can be categorized as intermediate level, compared with the simple level used in discourse comprehension (Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022b). The selection ensured lexical and syntactic simplicity suitable for the participants while maintaining relevance to academic reading contexts.

To facilitate students' understanding of the passages, the students were informed that multiple questions are presented in an order that aligns with the content of the passages. That is to say, students would find the answer to the first question in the first lines and the answer to the last question in the last lines. The questions and the answers are sequenced, something that facilitates their reading speed and understanding. The students were also informed that the passages take into consideration the comprehension skills that they are learning in Part 2.

From week 8 to week 13, the students practiced time reading activities on their textbooks. In so doing, they practiced two passages a week from Part 4 Unit 1. Students used the reading speed and the progress charts in their textbooks. Like a speed meter, a table for reading speed was available in the students' textbook. Progress charts give students a chance to monitor their progress for the 40 timed passages in Part 4. Students are also informed that reading faster makes them save time, understand better, and think in English. The students were also trained on the 40 passages in Part 4. Like training to drive a car before getting a permanent driving license, students are informed that the 40 passages in Part 4 are the roads and streets where they can practice their reading activities before getting the reading license.

Before administering the reading test, the instructor conducted a training session to familiarize students with Google Forms and the stopwatch feature. A pilot test was conducted using two reading texts that were not included in the actual test. During the pilot test, the instructor identified challenges faced by students and provided practical solutions to address them.

Procedures for Data Analysis

To facilitate data collection and analysis, the students were given a Google Form link to read five passages in week 14. The link includes instructions, and background information of the participants (names which were optional, and section number). The link shows the reading passage. It also records reading times per minute with 15-second intervals. The reading times range from 30 seconds (800 words/minute) to 5 minutes (80 words per minute). With the guidance of the language instructor, the students were informed about how to use a stopwatch to calculate and report timing in the link soon after reading a passage. It is important to highlight that calculating and reporting time was conducted under the supervision of the instructor.

After reading a passage, the students were asked to answer eight questions of four multiple choices of each passage. Each question scores one mark. A reading passage scores out of eight. Once students submit their choices of the five passages, they get their scores out of 40 (8×5) and in the five passages. In this way, the data for reading comprehension and reading time were collected.

The reliability of the scoring was ensured by minimizing instructor subjectivity, as the 40 multiple-choice reading questions were objectively evaluated through Google Forms' quiz feature. This allowed for automatic comparison of student responses, and results were immediately reported to students upon test submission. Google Forms generates Excel sheets for data analysis. The Excel sheets show the results for each question. To generate reading comprehension out of 5, the scores of a passage were recalculated based on the formula ($= x/8 \times 5$) where x refers to the cell number. The Excel sheets also show the reading time for each passage. The reading times per minute were replaced with the reading times per second. For example,

the reading time (2:30) was replaced with 150 seconds. Such a replacement helped in calculating the reading time in the Excel sheets. Then, the average reading time was recalculated based on the formula of $(x/60)$ where x refers to the cell number and 60 is the recalculation of seconds into minutes. To generate the reading rate, the calculation was conducted based on the formula $(400/x)$ where 400 stands for the number of words per passage and x stands for the reading time per minute. Finally, the Excel sheet was used to generate the mean and standard deviations for the reading comprehension of each passage and the reading speed (words per minute) for each passage.

Results and Discussion

This study is guided by two questions. In response to the first question, this article first reports the students’ scores in reading comprehension (see Table 1).

The trained students on the reading license responded to five passages. Their scores, as Table 1 shows, ranges from 2.81 to 3.51 out of 5. Their average score in the five passages was 3.16 with a standard deviation of 0.62. This score is ranked as “very good” according to the grading system at Najran University (Scholaro, 2025). Table 1 indicates that students have improved during the training. In the beginning, they score a little above the pass mark, which is 2.5. This result shows the similarity between reading and driving, where drivers at the beginning of their training hardly pass the driving test. The students who responded to passage 3 got a little enhancement in their reading comprehension with a mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.21. They scored above the average mean (3.16) in the last three passages. The improvement in the students’ reading comprehension can be attributed to training on reading skills such as previewing, understanding paragraphs, skimming, scanning, developing strong vocabulary, etc. The researchers believed that getting students to master the reading skills previously listed by embedding them with a reading license can participate in their success.

These results contribute to the positive impact of combining TRAs with reading licenses in the EFL reading comprehension classroom. The reading license has motivated students since the beginning of the semester to pay attention to mastering the reading skills and applying them to the reading passages they encounter. Students put much effort into getting a license in reading which enhanced their reading comprehension. The results coincide with many previous studies that revealed the positive impact of TRAs on EFL students’ reading comprehension (Brysbaert, 2019; Chang, 2010; Hazaea & Almekhlafy, 2022a; Kramer & McLean, 2019; Shimono, 2019). Our result is empirically supported by Shimono (2019) who found the

Table 1 EFL students’ scores in reading comprehension

Passages	Participants	Mean	Std Dev.
Passage 1	85	2.86	0.96
Passage 2	85	2.81	0.79
Passage 3	85	3.51	0.21
Passage 4	85	3.18	0.80
Passage 5	85	3.45	0.33
Overall	85	3.16	0.62

positive impact of combining repeated oral reading and timed reading as effective methods for developing L2 oral reading fluency. Furthermore, Hazaea and Almekhlafy (2022a) found that TRAs were generally effective in improving the reading comprehension and reading speed of EFL students with mixed abilities. Similarly, Mekheimer (2024) highlighted the importance of working memory in supporting reading comprehension skills of EFL tertiary-level students.

The result confirms that scaffolding TRAs with adults at the age of applying for a driving license has strong potential to motivate students to do extensive reading. In line with the present result, Ounissi et al. (2025) and Atkins (2010) showed that extensive reading completed by students has a statistically significant interaction effect on their reading fluency development and engagement. Furthermore, this result highlights the ideas of Hidayati (2019) who affirmed that using reading strategies contributes to the development of students’ reading comprehension. This activity coincides with reading literacy proposed by Lan and Yu (2022) for consolidating students’ attention to be focused on reading.

In sum, inspiring students’ focus to master reading skills improves their reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers are urged to make use of young people’s tendency to obtain licenses in various fields.

In response to the second question, this article reports on the reading speed among EFL students based on the reading license teaching technique (see Table 2).

Students, due to the intervention they received concerning a reading license, have achieved a reading speed of 173.29 words per minute (WPM). This speed, according to previous classification sets in the 1-200 WPM category, where readers belonging to this set are considered a “talker” in which their levels of reading speed are parallel with their talk speed. Table 2 indicates that students’ reading speed has been developed. In passages 1 to 5, they gradually achieved a result of 180.61 WPM, an increase from the initial 163.06 WPM. The intervention significantly enhanced students’ reading speed, as evidenced by their improved performance. The prospect of earning a reading license sparked students’ interest, motivating them to master reading strategies and apply them effectively. This, in turn, led to increased reading speed. Our results are supported by Lehtonen’s (2013) study, which highlighted the importance of “reading literacy” initiatives, like our reading license, in promoting students’ focus on reading tasks.

The students’ reading speed surpassed the students’ scores who received training in the Saudi context. For example, Abdul-Rab et al. (2022) found that Saudi EFL students scored 156.4 WPM after being trained using “7 Speed Reading” software. This high achievement of students’ scores may be the result of the high efficacy of reading licenses. In other words, students’ reading speed enables them to obtain the reading license because they have passed

Table 2 EFL students’ scores in reading speed

Passage	N	Word count	Reading speed: words/minute
Passage 1	85	400	163.06
Passage 2	85	400	173.69
Passage 3	85	400	175.61
Passage 4	85	400	173.46
Passage 5	85	400	180.61
Overall	85	400	173.29

the prerequisite reading rate amounting to 100 WPM. This result supports the significance of reading licenses in developing students' reading speed. The high speed of our students in reading compared with Abdul-Rab et al. (2022) results may be a result of adopting different tests than the one in our study, which may focus on different reading abilities and skills.

Our study has gone further to check the impact of the reading license activity to develop students' skill-based learning in an environment rooted in high-stakes testing. The results on reading speed have shown great development due to the application of the reading license concept. They achieved an average of 173.29 WPM which is close to the average adult reading speed (183 WPM) (Brysbaert, 2019). The result is classified as a "talker" in the reading speed categories (Pratama, 2019). Previous studies reported that training students on reading speed boosted students' reading speed (Abdul-Rab et al., 2022; Mohammed & Hasan, 2023). Moreover, our preparatory-year students achieved reading speeds higher than those achieved by junior Saudi EFL students as reported by Abdul-Rab et al. (2022), Change (2010), and Mohammed and Hasan's (2023) findings on the Kurdish EFL students. For example, Abdul-Rab et al. (2022) conducted a study where students were trained to speed up their reading comprehension using "7 Speed Reading". The study revealed that the experiential group reached 156.4 WPM. Chang (2010) showed that the students who completed the TRAs increased their reading speed by an average of 29 words per minute (a 25% improvement) and their comprehension by 0.63 (a 4% increase). Furthermore, Mohammed and Hasan's (2023) study revealed that Kurdish EFL students who received training on reading speed techniques achieved after the training 161.04 WPM.

In summary, the reading license activity seems more active in speeding up the reading speed of EFL students as our study revealed, when compared with previous studies in the same context. While timed reading is commonly perceived to enhance students' comprehension, it has also been proven effective in increasing the reading speeds of adult learners.

Conclusion

This study draws a parallel between obtaining a license for practical life skills and obtaining a reading comprehension license. The analogy is used to show similarities in following the regulations for getting a driving license. The study develops a training model for EFL students to go through while learning in the reading course. It gives clear steps for EFL learners to follow while learning reading. It provides evidence for the effectiveness of timed reading and its potential role in obtaining a reading license within the Saudi EFL context. By exploring these aspects, the study provided valuable insights that can enhance reading assessment practices in Saudi Arabia. Reading comprehension and reading speed can be achieved using various activities and techniques. In this study, a reading license is found beneficial for students in the Saudi context.

The results of this study highlight the effectiveness of the reading license technique in enhancing both reading comprehension and reading speed among EFL students. By aligning the processes of TRAs with the familiar steps of obtaining a driving license, this technique as a kind of extensive reading successfully engaged students (Ounissi et al., 2025) and motivated them to participate in fluency-building practices despite the exam-oriented nature of their learning environment. The improvements observed in reading speed suggest that leveraging students' background knowledge can serve as a powerful scaffolding strategy.

This study focused solely on the analysis of students' performance scores during the reading license intervention, without incorporating qualitative data to capture learners' experiences. Including qualitative interviews could provide richer insights into students' experiences with the reading activities. Furthermore, the sample was drawn from a group of Saudi male EFL learners, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts.

The results provide practical implications for EFL instructors to link their teaching with the habits that students practice or wish to achieve. The study also provides practical implications to course designers and materials developers to assign reading licenses as teaching and assessment strategies for teaching reading skills. Future research could explore the long-term impact of this approach and its adaptability to other language-learning contexts. It could benefit from employing a more robust experimental design that includes both control and experimental groups to validate the effectiveness of the reading license model more rigorously while accounting for gender differences.

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