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DEVELOPING GRADE 9 EFL READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH AUDIOBOOK-BASED INSTRUCTION

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I.INTRODUCTION

EFL reading at the lower-secondary level requires learners to coordinate vocabulary, grammar, word recognition, and higher-level comprehension processes (Jeon & Yamashita, 2014; Grabe & Yamashita, 2022). Reading-while-listening (RWL) may support lower-level processing by synchronizing spoken language with printed text, particularly through pronunciation, intonation, pauses, and phrasing (Chang, 2009; Chang & Millett, 2015). While AI-supported audio input has been shown to reduce processing barriers and improve vocabulary recognition in Vietnamese EFL classrooms (Pham & Tran, 2026), audiobook-supported reading-while-listening (RWL) can extend these perceptual gains to higher-level reading comprehension." However, previous research has reported inconsistent evidence regarding its effects on reading comprehension (Clinton-Lisell, 2023). In Vietnamese lower-secondary schools, audio is mainly used for listening instruction, while evidence on synchronized audio-print reading instruction remains limited.

Therefore, this study investigates a six-week audiobook-supported RWL intervention among Grade 9 students in Gia Lai Province, focusing on overall reading comprehension and five component skills: main idea, details, inference, vocabulary in context, and reference/structure.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: To what extent did students' English reading comprehension change following the six-week audiobook-supported intervention?

RQ2: How is the change reflected in five component skills: identifying the main idea, locating details, making inferences, guessing word meaning from context and recognizing reference/structure?

RQ3: How do students evaluate the comprehension support, interest and engagement, language and pronunciation support and difficulties involved in learning reading with audiobooks?

RQ4: Which factors in the implementation process facilitate or hinder learning to read with audiobooks?

III. THEORICAL FRAMEWORK

The intervention is grounded in four complementary perspectives:

Reading Systems Framework

Efficient integration of orthographic, phonological, and semantic information supports the construction of sentence- and text-level meaning (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

L2 Reading Research

Vocabulary, grammar, fluent word recognition, automaticity, and strategic processing are central to EFL reading comprehension (Jeon & Yamashita, 2014; Grabe & Yamashita, 2022)

Reading-While-Listening (RWL)

Coordinating written text with auditory input can support word recognition, speech segmentation, reading fluency, and comprehension (Chang, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2004; Chang & Millett, 2015).

Multimedia Learning & Self-Regulation

Coordinated audio-print input may facilitate learning when cognitive load is appropriately managed; selective replay allows learners to focus on specific difficulties (Mayer, 2020).

Conceptual Framework:

Audiobook-supported RWL → enhanced audio-print synchronization → improved word recognition & fluency → reading comprehension, supported by strategic processing and self-regulation.

- Previous studies: Audio-assisted reading improves word recognition, rhythm, and comprehension for less fluent L2 readers (Chang, 2009; Chang & Millett, 2015). However, gains depend heavily on pacing, text difficulty, and proficiency (Clinton-Lisell, 2023), while positive student perceptions do not always equal higher scores (Tusimagambet, 2020).
- Research gap: Previous research has largely focused on overall comprehension, reading rate, or vocabulary, with less attention to specific comprehension subskills among adolescent EFL learners. Limited attention has been given to pacing, selective replay, dosage, and strategy-based RWL implementation. Evidence from Vietnamese lower-secondary EFL contexts, particularly Grade 9, remains limited.

=>This study examines a short-term, strategy-based audiobook-supported RWL intervention targeting five reading comprehension subskills among Grade 9 EFL learners.

IV.METHOLODGY

Table 1. Overview of the Research Methodology

	Sub-category / Phase	Summary & Key Specifications
Research Context & Design	Design	One-group pretest-posttest embedded mixed-methods design (Ex = 6 × 6)
	Participants	40 Grade 9 EFL students (22 female, 18 male) at Ly Thong Kiet School, Ha Lai Phuc English zone; 6.30/10 average pretest score
	Setting & Duration	6-week intervention across 12 lessons (45 min each) during regular EFL instruction
	Fidelity	96.7% implementation rate (87/90 fidelity checks met across 18 lessons)
Instructional Procedure	Pass 1	Gist/Main Idea: Background activation, prediction, uninterrupted audiobook reading
	Pass 2	Details & Vocabulary: Text segmentation, keyword/chunk marking, close reading tasks
	Pass 3	Inference & Synthesis: Targeted passage replay, finding textual evidence for implicit meanings
Data Collection Instruments	Pre & Posttests	20 items (9 MCQs, 11 T/F/NG); Phase 1: α = 0.65 (KR-20); Post: 0.71, Post: 0.8
	Weekly Quizzes	6 formative 10-point quizzes (Weeks 2, 4-7) to monitor progress (M=8.6)
	Questionnaire	20 Likert items (4 dimensions, α = .74-.87) + 3 open-ended questions (N=39)
	Observation Logs	Tracked on-task %, voluntary responses, replay requests, and technical issues
	Interviews	Semi-structured interviews with 8 students representing varied score changes
Data Analysis Methods	Quantitative (Pretest)	Descriptive stats (M, SD), paired t-test, Cohen's d6, Wilcoxon signed-rank test
	Quantitative (Survey)	Cronbach's α, Means, and Standard Deviations across dimensions (Likert)
	Qualitative	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) on interviews, open responses, and logs (κ = .83)

V. MAIN FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

1.Overall Comprehension (RQ1)

Class mean increased significantly: 12.50 →15.60/25 (+3.10 pts/+12.4%), t(39) = 6.93, p < .001, d = 1.09
Individual variation: 28 improved, 6 unchanged, 6 decreased (range: -2 to +9)

Figure 1. Mean reading comprehension scores before and after the intervention, error bars represent approximate 95% CIs

=>The findings suggest that audio-assisted reading can support overall reading comprehension among Grade 9 EFL learners, consistent with Chang and Millett (2015). However, substantial individual variation suggests that learners may not benefit to the same extent.

2. Component Reading Skills (RQ2)

-Significant Gains: Main Idea (+1.20, p < .001) and Details (+1.18, p < .001)

-Non-Significant Gains: Inference (+0.33, p = .140), Vocabulary (+0.20), and Reference (+0.20)

Figure 2. Mean scores before and after the intervention (from pretest-posttest)

=>The pattern suggests that synchronized audio narration and multi-pass reading may provide stronger support for lower-level text processing (main ideas and details), whereas higher-order skills such as inference and contextual vocabulary may require more explicit strategy instruction.

3. Weekly Progress

Figure 3. Mean quiz scores (Weeks 2-6) with 95% CI bars, based on responses (approximate 95% CI)

Quiz scores increased overall (7.11 → 7.98), with reduced variability (SD 1.37 → 1.11-1.15). Recorded exposure was positively associated with gains (r = .45, p = .004), but no causal dosage effect can be inferred.

4. Student Evaluations and Perceptions (RQ3)

Scale	n	Items	M	SD	α
Comprehension support	39	6	2.79	.45	.74
Interest/engagement	39	5	2.76	.53	.82
Language support	39	5	3.04	.50	.75
Difficulties	39	4	2.95	.59	.80

Overall, students perceived audiobook-supported RWL positively, but these favorable perceptions did not always translate into measurable gains in higher-order comprehension skills.

5. Implementation Factors & Overload (RQ4)

Engagement improved: on-task behavior 66% → 85%; voluntary contributions 7 → 16

Replay requests decreased: 19 → 9, shifting from whole-text to targeted passages

Technical interruptions: 3 → 0; fidelity = 87/90 checks (96.7%)

Figure 4. Changes in the seven steps of audiobook use on task and the number of replay requests across the 6 lessons

The shift toward targeted replay suggests increasingly strategic use of audio support over time.

6. Qualitative Results

Theme	Key finding
Word recognition & chunking	Pacing and intonation supported word recognition and meaningful chunking.
Selective replay & self-regulation	Replay shifted from whole texts to targeted passages, suggesting more strategic use.
Interest & concentration	Audio supported reading rhythm and engagement, but effects varied across learners.
Speed & dual-channel overload	Fast narration, unfamiliar vocabulary, and simultaneous listening-reading/writing created difficulties.
Need for strategy instruction	Audio support did not fully resolve inference difficulties; teacher strategy instruction remained important.
Differentiation & learner choice	Students differed in preferred pace, text difficulty, and use of audio, suggesting need for flexible options.

=>Qualitative evidence suggests that audiobook-supported RWL enhanced text access and strategic engagement, but its effectiveness depended on pacing, task demands, explicit strategy instruction, and learner differences.

VI . CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

-Pedagogical implications:
- Purposeful multi-pass reading: Structure passes systematically (Pass 1: Gist → Pass 2: Details → Pass 3: Targeted Replay)
- Explicit strategy instruction: Use audio as input support, not a substitute for teaching inference, vocabulary, and cohesion strategies.
- Differentiated pacing: Transition from teacher-led audio to learner-controlled replay or silent reading based on proficiency.

Limitations: Single-group design (N = 40, 18 lessons) without a control group; self-report measures; single-cycle design; and long-term retention not assessed.

Future research: conduct comparative studies (Audio vs. Silent Reading) measuring reading rate, eye movements, and precise replay behaviors.

=>Audio-assisted reading effectively scaffolds L2 text access and improves literal comprehension (main ideas/details), but higher-order reading skills require explicit strategy instruction alongside differentiated audio pacing.

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