

Issues and Challenges in Teaching Reading Comprehension

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Abstract. To overcome these difficulties, it is suggested that the students need to develop a habit of reading regularly, even if it is just for a short period of time each day. They can start by reading materials that are interesting and relevant to their interests or fields of study. Additionally, they can improve their reading skills by practicing different reading strategies such as skimming and scanning, and by using reading aids such as dictionaries and highlighters. Teachers can also provide support by selecting appropriate reading materials and by teaching specific reading skills and strategies in class. Finally, it is important to create a positive learning environment that encourages students to take an active role in their own learning and to seek help when needed.

Key words: Reading Comprehension, Reading Comprehension Problems, and EFL Students.

English is the main international language taught in different schools. School graduates are expected to be able to compete on an international level, which demands English fluency in four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Regarding reading skills, many students are still not aware of the benefits of having good reading habits, let alone reading in English as a foreign language.

English plays a vital role for all society around this planet. Not only speaking, writing or listening, but reading is also a very necessary for those who prefer to communicate effectively. Chawwang (2008) stated that reading is the most important skill because it is the useful tool for acquiring knowledge. Used in both studying and living life, English is a lifelong skill for many people (Kucukoglu, 2013). Then, without ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success inevitably will be lost (Anderson et al., 1985). If students expect to get the deepest understanding of what they read, they should have the techniques or strategies for reading. The ability to read proficiently is significantly related to how much a person can achieve in his or her personal and professional life (Block & Israel, 2005)

Reading is one of the important academic skills needed by students as a source of knowledge and gratification. Reading can be described as a process of decoding, interpreting, and comprehending written information. It's a thorough procedure. It implies perceiving and identifying letters, words, spelling patterns, and major linguistic units in a precise, sequential manner (Thanuskodi S, 2011).

Hadley defined reading as communication since it connects the author and the reader. It involves a mental process of the reader to create her/his comprehension of the text based on her/his purpose of the reading (Hadley, 2001). Through reading, the reader processes knowledge and information thus it is an active or re-receptive rather than a passive skill. In addition, Tony Buzan describes that reading is understanding what the writer intended, taking in the written word, and the assimilation of printed information (Buzan, 1991).

Reading comprehension has been defined in various studies. According to Sweet and Snow (2003), reading is defined as constructing meaning from text. Moreover, Yukselir (2014) explicitly indicates that "reading comprehension is the result of complex interactions between a text, setting, the reader, the reader's background, her reading strategies, her Language 1 and the Language2, and the reader's decision making." On the other hand, Alyousef (2006) has argued that "reading can be seen as an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency."

Reading comprehension is also considered a thinking process that requires the reader to make inferences from the text. Without using her thinking processes, the reader may not attain any or all the information and may not wholly understand the text. In this sense, it is evident that reading comprehension involves extracting information from the text and constructing comprehension through the interaction between the text and the readers' background knowledge. Hence, in order to obtain excellent comprehension of the text, readers need to develop and reflect on some of the ideas in the text.

The common reading comprehension difficulties Vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary is a tremendous obstacle preventing students from performing well in reading comprehension, shown in several studies Shehu (2015) also reported lexical resources as the primary challenge for learners when reading a text. The factor behind this is that new words make learners stop for a while to read and understand their meaning; consequently, the speed and effectiveness in reading comprehension will inevitably have a negative effect. On the other hand, vocabulary knowledge is a reliable predictor, which means the broader range of vocabulary the learners have, the higher their reading comprehension. Joshi and Aaron indicate that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of reading ability when factoring reading speed with decoding and comprehension. Martin-Chang and Gould found a strong correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension, reading rate, and primary print knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge is essential in reading comprehension because it has a similar background knowledge background in reading comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge helps students decode, which is an integral part of the reading. Students are assumed to understand the meaning of the words to understand the reading passage in a foreign language fully. Students with high vocabulary knowledge will decode and understand the reading passage better than students with low vocabulary levels.

Background knowledge. Background knowledge is defined as "past knowledge that a reader brings to the topic when reading". The more background knowledge learners have, the better they perform, which means students will readily comprehend the text and develop their critical thinking if they have a broad grasp of various reading aspects. In contrast, if the reader's prior knowledge is insufficient or incorrect, it may lead to a "negative impact on the reader". For example, readers will struggle to absorb the text's meaning without background knowledge or and it hard to learn new academic concepts. In a plethora of schools, students are taught to use cognitive processes such as visualizing, predicting, summarizing,

questioning, making connections, and inferring to understand the text; however, "without sufficient background knowledge, none of these tools will be effective". Background knowledge is a crucial factor contributing to improving learners' reading comprehension competence. Short-term memory as "a single mechanism that temporarily held information to be used in processing" during the process of reading comprehension. Working memory helps readers to understand and build knowledge from the text. Also, Adams and Shahnazari Dorcheh assert, "Since working memory is considered a mental workspace where the process of retrieving, integrating, updating and revising of information is performed, it plays an important role in understanding a text." As a result, the students with poor

In more formal settings such as in the work environment, workers and officers are also required to engage in reading activities. Mostly, they need to read, interpret, and use information from work related texts to achieve their goals in the workplace. Therefore, the ability to read various kinds of texts is crucial nowadays. Next, in the educational domain, reading is one of the most common and often compulsory activities that students and academicians have to do all the time, all around the world. They are required to read many kinds of texts for various types of purposes dealing with their assignments and other academic demands. Yukselir (2014) considers that reading is one of the most beneficial, fundamental, and central skills for students to master in order to learn new information, to gain access to alternative explanations and interpretations and to start the synthesis of critical evaluation skills. Hung and Ngan (2015) have also said that reading is a basic skill that can improve students' vocabulary, fluency, speaking and writing, and finally can help them to master their target language. Therefore, it is a no-brainer to state that having good reading skills is essential for successful students. Reading comprehension has been defined in various studies. According to Sweet and Snow (2003), reading is defined as constructing meaning from text. Moreover, Yukselir (2014) explicitly indicates that "reading comprehension is the result of complex interactions between a text, setting, the reader, the reader's background, her reading strategies, her L1 and the L2, and the reader's decision making." On the other hand, Alyousef (2006) has argued that reading can be seen as an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency.

Furthermore, reading texts in a foreign language is different from reading in a first language. Probably, EFL readers have often had much experience reading in their first language. While, when reading any English material, we need to consider a number of language proficiency elements. Specifically, when reading material in a foreign language, the reader will perhaps encounter different linguistic elements from their first language. Those differences across two languages probably range from the lexical to the syntactical elements. In addition, there are also some non-linguistic factors which make reading in the foreign language harder than reading in a first language. Socio-cultural backgrounds for instance, in reading first language material, generally, most of the time, students will not encounter any difficulties in comprehending the sociocultural context of the material. While in almost all cases of reading foreign language material, EFL students will frequently encounter socio-cultural complexities. This happens because each of the languages has its own social and culture features. Therefore, most of the time, reading foreign language material is considered more difficult than reading first language material.

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