

DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH READING SKILLS AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is one of the fundamental skills in foreign language learning, as it enables learners to access academic, professional, and authentic information. However, many learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) experience considerable difficulties when reading English texts. The present study investigates the major difficulties encountered by EFL learners in developing their reading skills and examines the factors that may contribute to these difficulties. The study focuses particularly on vocabulary limitations, difficulties in identifying main ideas, problems with inference, unfamiliar grammatical structures, and limited reading speed. A mixed-methods research design can be employed through learner questionnaires, reading comprehension tasks, and semi-structured interviews. The findings are expected to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by EFL learners and to contribute to the development of more effective reading instruction.

Keywords: EFL learners, reading skills, reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading difficulties, foreign language teaching

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential component of foreign language learning because it provides learners with access to information, academic knowledge, and authentic language. In the context of English as a foreign language, reading competence is particularly important for university students because a considerable amount of academic material is available in English.

Despite its importance, many EFL learners experience difficulties when reading English texts. These difficulties may prevent learners from understanding texts efficiently and may negatively influence their academic performance. Learners may understand individual words but fail to identify the main idea of a text. Others may experience difficulties with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, implicit information, or culturally specific references.

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the factors that can influence reading comprehension. When learners encounter a large number of unfamiliar words, they may spend considerable time attempting to understand individual lexical items rather than processing the overall meaning of the text. In addition, insufficient knowledge of reading strategies may make it difficult for learners to predict information, identify important ideas, make inferences, and distinguish relevant information from supporting details.

Another important issue is reading speed. Some EFL learners read very slowly because they attempt to translate each word into their first language. Although translation can sometimes support comprehension, excessive dependence on it may reduce reading fluency and make it

difficult for learners to understand longer texts within a limited period of time.

Therefore, identifying the specific difficulties experienced by EFL learners is an important step towards improving reading instruction.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the major difficulties encountered by EFL learners when developing English reading skills.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the major difficulties experienced by EFL learners when reading English texts?
2. Which factors contribute most significantly to learners' reading difficulties?
3. How do learners perceive their own reading difficulties?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data can be collected through a questionnaire and a reading comprehension test, while qualitative data can be obtained through semi-structured interviews.

2.2 Participants

The participants may consist of approximately 50–100 university-level EFL learners. Participants should have a relatively similar English proficiency level, preferably B1–B2, in order to make comparisons more meaningful.

2.3 Research Instruments

Three research instruments can be used:

1. Learner questionnaire

The questionnaire can investigate learners' perceptions of difficulties related to:

- * vocabulary;
- * identifying the main idea;
- * understanding details;
- * making inferences;
- * grammatical structures;
- * reading speed;
- * unfamiliar topics and cultural references.

2. Reading comprehension test

The participants can complete several English reading texts followed by comprehension questions. The questions may include:

- * identifying the main idea;
- * locating specific information;
- * identifying references;
- * making inferences;
- * understanding vocabulary from context.

3. Semi-Structured Interviews

A smaller group of participants can be interviewed to obtain more detailed information about their reading experiences and difficulties.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

First, participants complete the questionnaire. They then complete the reading comprehension test under similar conditions. After analysing the initial data, selected participants are invited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Participation should be voluntary, and participants should be informed about the purpose of the research. Their personal information should remain confidential.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative questionnaire and test data can be analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. If appropriate, relationships between variables can also be examined using correlation analysis.

Interview responses can be analysed thematically. Recurring themes can be identified, coded, and grouped into major categories of reading difficulties.

3. Results

The Results section should be completed after the empirical data have been collected and analysed.

The findings should report:

- * the most frequently reported reading difficulties;
- * participants' performance on different types of reading questions;
- * the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, if measured;
- * differences between learners' perceived difficulties and their actual performance;
- * major themes identified in the interviews.

For example, the final article could present the results in tables showing the percentage of learners who reported difficulties with vocabulary, main ideas, inference, grammatical structures, and reading speed.

No numerical results should be inserted until actual data have been collected.

4. Discussion

The discussion should interpret the findings rather than simply repeat them. If vocabulary limitations emerge as one of the strongest difficulties, this may indicate that insufficient lexical knowledge restricts learners' ability to process English texts effectively.

If learners demonstrate particular difficulty with inference questions, this may suggest that they need greater practice in reading beyond explicitly stated information. Similarly, difficulties with identifying the main idea may indicate that learners require more instruction in distinguishing central ideas from supporting details.

The findings can also be discussed in relation to previous research on EFL reading comprehension. Similarities and differences between the present findings and previous studies should be identified and explained.

An important pedagogical implication is that reading instruction should address specific learner difficulties rather than focus exclusively on answering comprehension questions. Teachers may need to provide explicit instruction in vocabulary development, identifying main ideas, inferencing, prediction, and other reading processes.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the major difficulties experienced by EFL learners in developing English reading skills. Understanding these difficulties is an essential first step towards improving reading instruction. Vocabulary limitations, problems with identifying main ideas, difficulties in making inferences, complex grammatical structures, and slow reading speed may all influence learners' reading performance.

The study can provide useful information for EFL teachers and curriculum developers by identifying areas that require greater pedagogical attention. Further research can investigate specific teaching interventions designed to address the difficulties identified in the present study.

References

The final article should include peer-reviewed sources and major academic works on reading comprehension, EFL reading, vocabulary knowledge, and reading instruction. References should be formatted according to the journal's required style, such as APA 7th edition.