

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION IN EFL STUDENTS*Nasirov Navro'zbek Allamuratovich**Uzbekistan State World Languages University**Linguistics and English Literature*

Annotation: This article explores effective strategies for improving reading comprehension among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Using a qualitative approach, it identifies pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading methods that enhance students' engagement and understanding. The study emphasizes the importance of activating prior knowledge, scaffolding through guided reading, using authentic materials, and integrating technology. It concludes that a balanced, student-centered approach—incorporating both cognitive and sociocultural elements—is essential for developing reading competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, EFL students, pre-reading strategies, scaffolding, authentic materials, learner autonomy, cognitive engagement, sociocultural approach, interactive reading, language learning.

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена изучению эффективных стратегий развития навыков понимания прочитанного у студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL). Используя качественный метод анализа, автор выявляет приемы до чтения, во время чтения и после чтения, которые способствуют активному вовлечению учащихся и углубленному осмыслению текста. В исследовании подчеркивается важность активизации предшествующих знаний, использования направляющего чтения, аутентичных материалов и интеграции технологий. Делается вывод, что наилучших результатов можно достичь, применяя обучающую модель, сочетающую когнитивный и социокультурный подходы, ориентированную на потребности студентов.

Ключевые слова: Понимание прочитанного, студенты EFL, стратегии до чтения, педагогическое сопровождение, аутентичные материалы, самостоятельность учащегося, когнитивная активность, социокультурный подход, интерактивное чтение, изучение языка.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchi o'quvchilarning matni tushunish qobiliyatini oshirishga qaratilgan samarali strategiyalarni o'rganadi. Sifat tahlil usulidan foydalangan holda, maqolada o'quvchilarni o'qishga jalb etish va tushunishni chuqurlashtirishga xizmat qiluvchi o'qishdan oldingi, o'qish jarayonidagi va o'qishdan keyingi usullar aniqlanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, ilgari olingan bilimlarni faollashtirish, yo'naltirilgan o'qish orqali qo'llab-quvvatlash, real hayotga yaqin matnlardan foydalanish va texnologiyani o'quv jarayoniga integratsiya qilish muhim ahamiyatga ega. Muallif xulosasiga ko'ra, kognitiv va sotsiomadaniy yondashuvlarni birlashtirgan o'quvchiga yo'naltirilgan uslub, EFL kontekstida o'qish kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishda eng samarali yondashuvdir.

Kalit so‘zlar: O‘qish tushunchasi, EFL o‘quvchilari, o‘qishdan oldingi strategiyalar, soddalashtirilgan o‘qitish, real matnlar, o‘quvchi mustaqilligi, kognitiv faollik, sotsiomadaniy yondashuv, interaktiv o‘qish, til o‘rganish.

Introduction

Reading comprehension remains a cornerstone of language proficiency, especially for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). As global educational systems increasingly emphasize communicative competence, the role of reading becomes more than simply decoding text. It is about constructing meaning, interpreting context, and critically engaging with information. However, EFL learners often face unique challenges stemming from limited vocabulary, unfamiliar syntactic structures, and cultural references embedded in texts. This research explores evidence-based strategies aimed at enhancing reading comprehension in EFL contexts by drawing from both cognitive and sociocultural pedagogical frameworks. The 21st century requires individuals who are proficient readers in their mother tongue and, at least, in an L2 so that they can effectively access and use the vast amounts of information available in both print and digital format. Helping learners become effective readers is one of our main concerns as teachers since education involves preparing learners for life, which entails encouraging and enabling them to become individuals capable of taking, conveying, discussing, supporting, and revising their views on topics and situations affecting their lives as well as proposing alternatives to improve. Such skills can be promoted by being able to comprehend information. In this sense, reading comprehension seen as the capacity of constructing meaning through involvement and integration of both written language and the reader’s knowledge (Snow 9; Koda 4) is a core element to evaluate the existing knowledge and explore new ideas and meanings from it. Therefore, reading is an essential skill to face the challenges that our rapidly changing world characterized by a knowledge-based economy presents: “Knowledge Age worker-citizens need to be able to locate, assess, and represent new information quickly.” In language learning reading promotes continuous expansion of vocabulary, full awareness of syntactic structures and forms of written discourse, development of cognitive skills and learner autonomy, and increasing comprehensive knowledge of any topic readers want to learn about. Therefore, teaching learners how to use reading strategies so that they can gradually become skilled readers and therefore improve their comprehension is a primary duty in our elt classrooms (N. Anderson 2). The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a proposal for explicit instruction in reading strategies in the improvement of students’ performance on reading tests and tasks and the expansion of their reading strategy repertoire. The instruction proposal was developed as a result of previous research on reading strategies carried out in the same institution and whose findings suggested that learners tended to use mainly bottom-up reading 1 The term L2 (second language) is used here to refer to the order of acquisition and not to the difference between second and foreign language regarding learning context. strategies in testing conditions and that helping learners expand their strategy range was needed. Reading as a cognitive and strategic process Gillet and Temple suggest that reading is important because it is functional in our daily lives (23). Thus, it is social since it is part of our day-to-day private and public life and provides opportunities for cognitive, educational, language, artistic, emotional, intellectual, professional, social, personal, and spiritual development. Besides, it is recreational since it gives us pleasure when reading for entertainment or reading about a topic we are keen on. Goodman (127) defines reading as a guessing game in which the reader reconstructs, as best as possible, a message that has been encoded by a writer. In addition, he suggests that the reader interacts dynamically with the text and uses primarily schematic knowledge to make sense of the data coming from the text. Also, Smith argues that the reader understands a text because they are able to

use not only the information in the text but also their own knowledge (qtd. in Grabe, "Current Developments" 377).

Methods

For EFL learners, reading is not merely about decoding text but about constructing meaning through interaction with language, context, and culture. Comprehension difficulties often stem from unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and limited exposure to authentic texts. Therefore, reading strategies must be intentionally structured to support both linguistic and cognitive development. Activating background knowledge before reading fosters better engagement with the text. When learners predict content, explore related vocabulary, or reflect on personal experiences, they are more prepared to process information. During the reading phase, techniques such as context-based guessing, identifying main ideas, and using graphic organizers help learners focus and structure their understanding. After reading, activities like discussion, summarizing, or reflective journaling reinforce comprehension and allow for deeper processing. A critical element of successful reading instruction is the incorporation of culturally relevant and authentic materials. Texts that reflect learners' realities, interests, and identities increase motivation and reduce cognitive barriers. Teachers who draw connections between the text and the learners' experiences help bridge gaps in understanding. In addition, the integration of technology enriches the reading experience. Tools such as digital texts, text-to-speech applications, and interactive comprehension exercises support diverse learning styles and promote learner autonomy. The flexibility offered by digital platforms also allows learners to control the pace and revisit content, which is especially beneficial for comprehension development. Ultimately, the process of improving reading comprehension in EFL students relies on thoughtful pedagogy that blends cognitive, emotional, and contextual support. A classroom environment that values interaction, critical thinking, and student voice can significantly enhance reading outcomes. Future research and teaching practice should continue to adapt and personalize strategies to reflect learners' evolving needs and global realities. This study employed a qualitative-descriptive methodology to analyze effective strategies used by EFL instructors in diverse learning settings. Data was collected from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student reflective journals at several secondary and tertiary institutions where English is taught as a foreign language. Particular attention was paid to instructional approaches, learner engagement, and adaptation of materials. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring pedagogical strategies that correlated with improvements in students' comprehension abilities.

Results

The data analysis revealed several recurring strategies employed by successful EFL educators. One prominent method was the use of pre-reading activities, such as brainstorming, predicting content from titles or images, and discussing related personal experiences. These activities activated background knowledge and scaffolded comprehension. During-reading strategies included guiding questions, reciprocal teaching, and vocabulary mapping. These techniques helped learners stay engaged and build textual understanding incrementally. Post-reading strategies such as summarizing, group discussions, and text-to-self connections were also widely implemented and appeared to deepen comprehension and retention. Another crucial finding involved the integration of authentic and culturally relevant texts. Teachers reported that selecting reading materials that reflected learners' interests or cultural backgrounds enhanced motivation and made comprehension tasks more accessible. Furthermore, technology-assisted tools, including digital storybooks and interactive reading apps, were highlighted as effective in promoting engagement and supporting diverse learning styles. The

data obtained during the study confirmed that among the approaches used to develop reading comprehension for students learning English as a foreign language, some strategies consistently showed effectiveness. The extensive use of pre-reading activities by teachers, especially by guessing the content of the text, identifying the main idea through alternative headings, and discussing topics related to the students' lives, significantly increased their interest in reading. Active activities aimed at finding answers to questions during the reading process, identifying the main idea, and understanding new words based on context helped to actively engage students in the text. Through methods such as reciprocal teaching, students not only understood the content through mutual explanation and exchange of ideas, but also formed an analytical approach based on the text. In the post-reading phase, individual reflection, group discussions, and text-based personal reflections helped students develop self-awareness and deeper analysis of the text. In particular, when students were offered texts related to their own culture and life experiences, their motivation, level of participation, and comprehension efficiency increased. The use of modern technologies, including e-texts, audiobooks, and interactive applications, also increased students' interest in independent reading. These tools allowed students to work at their own pace, reread complex texts, and individualize their learning. Overall, these strategies were effective in developing not only reading comprehension but also general language competence among students.

Discussion

The strategies identified reflect both cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of reading comprehension. Activating schema before reading aligns with schema theory, which posits that understanding is constructed through the activation of prior knowledge. Guided and reciprocal reading strategies support Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, where learners achieve higher levels of understanding through structured social interaction. Post-reading reflections, on the other hand, foster metacognitive awareness—a critical skill for long-term reading development. It is also significant to note the role of learner autonomy. Encouraging students to select texts, generate questions, and evaluate their understanding nurtures independence and builds confidence. These findings are in line with communicative language teaching principles that promote learner-centered approaches. This study suggests that improving reading comprehension in EFL learners requires a multi-faceted strategy. Teachers must not only focus on linguistic input but also on cognitive engagement, cultural connection, and emotional resonance. Tailoring strategies to individual learner needs and contexts, supported by ongoing teacher training, appears essential to achieving meaningful reading comprehension outcomes. The result of students pre-test and post-test score in cycle 1 In measuring the student's prior knowledge about their reading comprehension and critical thinking skill, the pre-test was conducted at the first meeting before applying the DRTA as a teaching strategy. In the reading comprehension test, the students finding out the topic of a text, predicting and answers some questions. Whereas to measure their critical thinking skill, the students have to solve problems, make informed decisions also answers some questions. The result of students' pre-test for reading and critical thinking tests can be seen in figure 1.

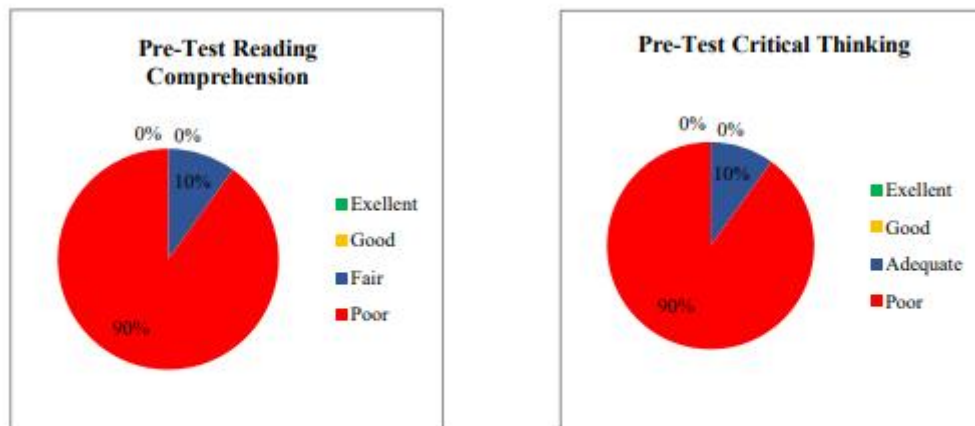


Figure 1. Students' Pre-Test Score in Cycle 1

Prior to the implementation of DRTA strategy in the classroom, a pre-test was conducted. The pre-test result in figure 1 above indicated that almost all of the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Ambon's reading comprehension and critical thinking skills were at a poor category, only 2 students or 10% of the students were at an adequate category. From this finding, the researchers interviewed the students to know more about their reading and critical thinking skills. The result of the interview showed that the students were having difficulty in comprehending an English text. They lack vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to understand the text. Consequently, they often find it challenging to understand the text. They got difficulties in finding the main idea, meaning of new words, recognizing references, determining text purpose, and determining detailed information.

Conclusion

Effective reading comprehension instruction for EFL students is grounded in an integrated pedagogical approach that includes pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies. Employing a mix of cognitive supports, culturally relevant content, and interactive technology tools can significantly enhance learners' ability to understand and engage with texts. Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of these strategies across various age groups and proficiency levels to inform curriculum design and teacher professional development.

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