

HOW DO EDUCATORS DEAL WITH THE BARRIERS IN TEACHING READING?

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Abstract

Reading is an essential ability that is fundamental to achieving academic achievement and personal development. However, numerous readers encounter difficulties comprehending texts, particularly in identifying main ideas, enhancing their vocabulary, and comprehending detailed information. It is essential to tackle these challenges in order to improve reading skills and establish successful learning and communication. This study explores the barriers and proposes evidence-based solutions in teaching reading. This research applied a qualitative method, specifically a descriptive, and the data analysis employed by Miles et al., (2014). The participants were some English teachers in Indonesia. Furthermore, the researcher used documents and interviews to gather the data. The research found some challenges. They are that students have problems identifying the text structure, lack vocabulary, and comprehension of expository texts. Also, the teachers teach reading traditionally, and they teach large classes. Therefore, the solutions to solve those problems are raising text structure awareness for students, applicating readers theatre, using Ipad and repeated reading, applying metacognitive strategy, grouping students, and using questioning. Teachers have employed additional methods like drill and practice, picture matching, and the Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) Strategy to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension among students. The results highlighted that the successful implementation of these strategies can greatly improve students' reading comprehension and vocabulary proficiency. It can be a reference for educators to implement in their teaching reading.

keywords: challenges; reading; teaching reading; solution

1. Introduction

Reading is a lifelong activity in which we engage (Reynolds, 2018). It is a fundamental skill that serves as a cornerstone for education and lifelong learning. Mastery of reading enhances academic performance and fosters critical thinking, creativity, and effective communication. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2021), ONLY 34% OF United States fourth-graders are proficient in reading, highlighting a significant gap in reading skills among students. This statistic underscores the urgent need for effective reading instruction in the classroom, as reading proficiency is linked to future academic success and career opportunities (Snow, 2002). In order to attain a high level of reading proficiency, it is necessary to cultivate sub-skills, such as comprehension. Reading comprehension highlights that all readings incorporate information from the text, utilizing a structure that builds from the reader's experiences (OECD, 2018). This means that reading comprehension is the ability to articulate and convey understanding. Furthermore,



some readers face numerous challenges in English reading comprehension. They can read a text but frequently have trouble identifying and comprehending the author's message. Some researchers have studied the students' difficulties in reading comprehension aspects. Those are identifying the main idea, a lack of vocabulary, and getting detailed information (Nasir et al., 2019). All readings contain information from the text with a structure beginning from the reader's experience (OECD, 2018). In other words, reading comprehension deals with the process of understanding not only the words in the text but also the content of the text. In previous studies, Shemshadsara (2019) proved that text structure awareness can be used as a useful strategy to improve readers' comprehension. Hence, the other researcher, Stevens (2020), examined the text structure instruction on the main idea generation and reading comprehension, identifying the main topic and the most important idea about that topic. In other words, several studies proved that using text structure could increase students' reading comprehension related to this study. Text structure defines how the information within a written text is constructed. It helps learners comprehend the text and identify the main idea.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the challenges associated with teaching reading and to propose evidence-based solutions that can enhance reading instruction. By examining the existing literature, the researcher identifies effective strategies that educators and students can implement to address these challenges. This exploration will not only highlight the significance of reading but also provide a roadmap for improving reading outcomes among students.

Literature Review

The literature on reading education indicates a broad array of issues that educators must address to enhance pupils' reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is defined as the capacity to accurately extract information from narrative or subject-specific textbooks, which is essential for academic success (Gajria & McAlenney, 2020). According to Joshi and colleagues (2015), reading comprehension is a set of knowledge and skills that readers can use to construct meaning from a text. Furthermore, reading comprehension is quite complex and varies in numerous ways depending on tasks, motivations, goals and language ability (Grabe et al., 2002). It means reading comprehension depends on motivation, goals and language ability. A considerable number of pupils with learning disabilities have difficulties in understanding or assimilating information from text, even though they possess sufficient word recognition abilities. An expanding corpus of research identifies numerous critical obstacles that hinder reading proficiency, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, and instructional factors.

First, cognitive barriers. Cognitive barriers substantially affect reading comprehension, including difficulties in understanding information and establishing links between concepts. Nasir et al. (2019) observed prevalent challenges students encounter, such as the inability to recognize the primary concept and insufficient vocabulary, which are essential for text comprehension. Vocabulary proficiency is associated with general world knowledge; this suggests that learners possessing extensive vocabularies also have a broader context for comprehending texts (Abusamra et al., 2020). These cognitive obstacles require specific teaching



approaches to assist students in acquiring the essential abilities for proficient reading.

Second, linguistic barriers. Proficiency in linguistics is essential for reading comprehension. The significance of vocabulary development as a prerequisite for literature comprehension is well-established, highlighting educators' need to integrate vocabulary training into their reading curricula.

Third, instructional approaches. Implementing effective instructional approaches is crucial for overcoming challenges in reading comprehension. Recent research highlights the importance of understanding text structure in improving comprehension skills. Shemshadsara (2019) showed that instructing students on text structure can greatly enhance their ability to understand and remember information. Concurrently educating on the main idea, text structure, and retelling, combined with background knowledge enhancement, is the most effective approach for boosting reading comprehension in complex readers (Peng et al., 2024).

In summary, the literature reveals that educators encounter substantial obstacles in teaching reading, encompassing cognitive and linguistic difficulties as well as the necessity for effective instructional methodologies. By utilising evidence-based strategies and emphasising text structure and vocabulary enhancement, educators may optimise reading teaching and elevate student performance.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach involved generating descriptive aimed at comprehending a certain occurrence by utilizing data gathered through many means, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis (Ary et al., 2019). The data collection techniques employed included document analysis and conducting interviews. The references were searched using several search engines, namely Scopus and Google Scholar. The interview was conducted with the English teachers.

In data analysis, the researcher followed the steps provided by Miles et al., (2014), including data condensation, data display, and data conclusions. In the first stage, the data from the selected article findings were simplified to focus on the most relevant and significant data points. All information related to the challenges and solutions offered in teaching reading was highlighted. In the second step, the researcher accompanied the data display with an interpretation explaining the implications of the findings and how they relate to the research question. In the final stage, the researcher discussed them in detail and drew conclusions regarding the challenges and solutions in teaching reading.

3. Results and Discussion

This study has reviewed some research that discusses the challenges and solutions for teaching reading comprehension. The preliminary study was conducted by Shemshadsara et al., (2019) entitled *Raising text structure awareness: A strategy*



for improving EFL undergraduate students' reading comprehension ability. Moreover, it will be supported by other researchers such as Stevens et al. (2020), Young et al., (2019), Alqahtani (2020), Abendroth & Richter (2021), etc.

Challenges

The study found the difficulty of reading comprehension in Iran; expository is harder than in narrative text (Williams 2007; Shemshadsara et al., 2019). Expository text in textbooks is complex and incomprehensible to perceive for students (Hackemann et al., 2022). The conducted research result showed that identifying the text's rhetorical structure becomes difficult (Khoirun Nisak et al., 2021), especially in expository texts (Kalzan & Mulatif, 2021). The reason can be that the way information is organized in a text differs from the typical story structure familiar to students (Roehling et al., 2017).

Text structure is an issue for non-native reader (Welie et al., 2018). Readers fail to comprehend the text because they cannot identify its structure (Shemshadsara et al., 2019). Those are from the simple description, compare-contrast, sequence, cause-effect, and problem-solution (Roehling et al., 2017). Moreover, the readers find the whole passage difficult to understand and its central idea to grasp (Febriani & Gusweni Jayanti, 2019).

The next problem is increasing students' attention by focusing on new words and activating background knowledge by the old teachers' teaching style (Kragler, Martin, & Walker, 2005; Shemshadsara et al., 2019). Teachers are the controller of the learning environment, dictating lesson structure and more like the teacher center (Saeheng, 2017), while the students passively listen and take notes, then accept the knowledge (Bishara, 2018). Furthermore, it challenges the weaker students and makes them hardly gain the material (Bi et al., 2019).

Another issue is the large class sizes. Teachers reported managing classes with as many as 160 students, which is unusually high and makes it challenging to implement effective teaching methods (Adamu et al., 2020). This situation complicates individualized attention and assessment of students' reading skills.

Based on interview results with some English teachers with several years of experience. They have encountered a variety of obstacles while teaching reading to pupils from diverse backgrounds, including variations in economic, social, and cultural factors. They described that students have low grammar skills and a lack of vocabulary. However, they applied some strategies to overcome it.

Solutions

Several research findings provide solutions related to the difficulties of English reading comprehension problems. However, there are several strategies and ways to increase reading comprehension. Shemshadsara et al., (2019) found that raising text structure awareness can overcome students' reading comprehension difficulties. This research proves that using the strategy of raising text structure awareness can increase students' reading comprehension. In line with this research, another study



by Stevens et al. (2020) stated that examining the structure of instructional texts on the main ideas and identifying the main topics can help reading comprehension. It can be said that the structure of the text can help students with reading comprehension.

In addition, a solution study by Adamu et al., (2020) is grouping students. Many teachers utilized grouping as a primary strategy to facilitate reading instruction. By dividing students into smaller groups, teachers aimed to provide more focused attention and support, allowing for differentiated instruction within the large class context.

Furthermore, other studies have proven that consistent application of reader theatre can increase students' vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Young et al., 2019). The reader theatre method can help students analyze a text and understand vocabulary so that it can give students reading comprehension. Moreover, Alqahtani (2020) also states that the result of the iPad and repeated reading research can improve students' reading comprehension. Using the iPad helps speed up reading texts, and repeated reading can help understand deeper reading comprehension. Additionally, a study conducted by Abendroth & Richter (2021) shows that metacognitive strategies also help readers prepare to understand some texts in reading comprehension. Another solution that can be used is to use questioning. Tun Zaw Oo (2022) describes that teaching with a reflection-based questioning approach (RBQA) influences students' reading comprehension. RBQA positively impacts students' understanding and helps them understand a text. Thus, the solutions to overcome problems in reading comprehension above can be used to help students' problems in reading comprehension.

According to their experiences, some teachers also have their own methods to reduce reading comprehension problems.

"It is adding vocabulary, adding a few words each meeting, then making sentences so that they are easier to remember" (R1).

From the statement above, we can call it a contextual learning approach. Contextual learning involves teaching vocabulary by making sentences from the given vocabulary. This helps students see how the words are used in context, which makes them easier to remember.

The next solution is drill and practice. This technique involves repeated practice to reinforce a specific skill, such as pronunciation or vocabulary mastery. By requiring students to memorize and pronounce words. It helps them improve their vocabulary mastery and pronunciation accuracy.

"Every time I take attendance, I require students to present (5 irregular verbs + their meanings) that they have memorized at home. Of course, correct them immediately if they say something wrong when reading" (R2).

The next solution is picture matching. Pictures provide visual support that helps students, especially those who struggle with vocabulary or sentence structure, to understand and remember the texts they read.



"My students have low vocabulary skills. I have a way to overcome it. I used media like matching words or sentences. So, they are not bored and easy to memorize through pictures" (R3).

The last solution is using the Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) Strategy. SFA is an instructional strategy in which the unique features of a concept or vocabulary are defined and discriminated. SFA in foreign language learning helps them understand the terms and helps their comprehension as a way to enhance academic vocabulary.

"I applied Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) Strategy in my classroom, and it is proven that this strategy can improve students' reading scores" (R4).

Based on analysis and interviews, integrating the aforementioned strategies offers a comprehensive method for overcoming the complex obstacles of reading comprehension. The efficiency of each method is contingent upon the particular circumstances and requirements of the students. This means that older students or those with an adequate reading background may find it more beneficial to focus on developing their understanding of text structure. On the other hand, younger students or those who struggle with vocabulary may find it more helpful to learn through contextual learning and matching pictures.

Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasize the significance of adjusting instructional approaches to accommodate the number of students in a class and their diversity. Grouping and differentiated instruction are essential tactics in large classrooms since the availability of individualized attention is limited. Simultaneously, incorporating technology, such as iPads, into the educational process can provide supplementary assistance, especially for children who require additional practice or alternative involvement methods.

In conclusion, a comprehensive approach is necessary to deal with reading comprehension barriers. This approach should involve increasing students' awareness of text structure, grouping students based on their individual needs, incorporating interactive and repetitive learning methods, and implementing teacher-driven strategies tailored to the students' specific needs. By employing these strategies, educators can establish a more conducive and efficient learning environment that improves students' reading comprehension abilities and overall academic achievement.

However, this study also has limitations. The researcher conducted interviews with a restricted number of educators in Indonesia, thereby insufficiently comprehensively encompassing the many difficulties encountered by educators in other locations or nations. Future researchers should focus on examining teachers' difficulties when teaching reading, especially in EFL countries, in order to get valuable insights. Future research could enhance the comprehensiveness of our understanding of the challenges and successful approaches in teaching reading comprehension worldwide by broadening the study's scope to incorporate a wider range of views and educational environments.



4. Conclusion

This study concludes that English reading comprehension difficulties happened to some students in teaching reading. The challenges are that students have problems identifying the text structure and lack vocabulary and comprehension of expository texts. Also, the teachers teach reading traditionally, and they teach large classes. However, the solutions to solve those problems are raising text structure awareness for students, applying readers theatre, using Ipad and repeated reading, applying metacognitive strategy, grouping students, and using questioning. Reflection-based questioning approaches and contextual learning methods, such as making sentences from vocabulary words, also support comprehension. Teachers have employed additional methods like drill and practice, picture matching, and the Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) Strategy to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension among students.

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