

**Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among  
University Students**

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### Abstract

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Reading Comprehension has a vital role in foreign language learning because it contains important aspects of language as vocabulary, structure and pronunciation. These aspects play a positive role in language learning. The existing study explores the exact difficulties that may face third year Students of English Department-Morning Studies- College of Basic Education-Diyala University during the academic year 2023-2024 in the subject of ( Reading Comprehension).

To reach this aim, (120) students were chosen in order to be the participants of this study. The results revealed that students have serious difficulties in Reading Comprehension related to lack of vocabulary, weakness in the background knowledge and unsuitable strategies of learning. These variables affect on Reading Comprehension of students and lead to difficulties in understanding. The results may give an idea to students and instructors about difficulties in Reading Comprehension. Certain suggestions and recommendations are presented due to the aim of the study.

**Key words :** Reading Comprehension Difficulties

#### 1. Introduction

English language is regarded as one of the important languages around the world as it is used in different fields of life. There is an increase of needing this language among countries in general and learners in particular. English language proficiency can be considered as a key for success in developing foreign language skills. Many programs and curriculums work hard to find out an effective program in English language to confirm efficiency in language learning.

There is an attention given to English language from many countries in different stages of learning. Thus, the number of people who learn English language is growing because of its positive role in communication for communities and individuals.

Chaterine S. (2013) states that Learning English language skills face difficulties among learners. Reading comprehension is one of the main subjects that participate in developing the basic skills of English language; reading, writing, listening and speaking because this subject gives students practice for developing these

skills. Reading comprehension as a subject has a direct or indirect relation with language skills. As a result, a lot of interest is given to this subject in order to present language skills in an active way. Using new techniques for language learning depends on the learner as a central aim of learning according to the new approaches and methods of language learning.

Because of the importance of reading comprehension, the study investigates the difficulties that may face the third year students at English Department –Morning Studies - College of Basic Education –Diyala University during the academic year 2023- 2024 in their studying the subject of (Reading Comprehension). Thus, the aim of the research can be stated by the following question:-

1-What are the difficulties that may face students in studying the subject of (Reading Comprehension )?

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Definition of (Reading )

Smith (2004) states that reading is viewed as the main natural activity in the process of foreign language learning. The textbook of reading comprehension contains integrated topics in different subjects and there is a lot of practice as drills on these topics.

Reading as a skill is a daily activity done by students in this subject and other topics of language learning. Deavers, R. (2000) discusses that reading as an activity is a compound process because reading only is not enough, but reading needs comprehension which is understanding the reading passage. Nutall (1996) argues another point related to learning language structure through reading comprehension because in reading the passages have different questions and exercises on these passages. The process of reading needs certain abilities that help students in understanding the sentences or the whole passage correctly. There are many factors behind difficulties of reading comprehension related to the unknown of vocabulary for certain words and the inability of translating the meaning of definite words or expressions.

#### 2.2 Meaning of Reading comprehension

There are two concepts related to the subject of reading comprehension; The first one is reading which means the ability to pronounce the passage correctly and the second one is reading with comprehension which means reading with understanding the text (Anderson, R. C., Heibert, E. H., Scot, J. A. & Wilkinson, Ian A. G. 1985). Reading only is a skill developed by practice at the beginning of learning language skills, this kind of reading doesn't require understanding the text. The second type is stressed students because it needs two important things pronouncing correctly and understanding the text. It is a challenging process needs certain abilities from readers which lead to understanding the main ideas that are mentioned by the author of the reading passage (Anema, I. 2008).

Hudson (2007) describes reading comprehension as a matter of recognition for the meaning, the structure and the context of the sentence. It needs the ability of merging the meaning of the main words together in order to reach the general meaning of the passage (Bransford, J. D., & Johnson, M. K. 1972). Background knowledge about the topic and experience may play a major part in understanding the reading passage by students.

Cain, K. (1996) presents three main factors in the process of reading

comprehension; first, the reader who is responsible for comprehending the reading passage, second, the text which contains the reading passages and the third one is the activity which is used by teachers for the purpose of teaching the reading passage . Various teaching techniques are used by teachers in order to help students understand the text in a very short time and less effort.

Reading as an activity is divided into pre-reading which means reading the passage many times before the beginning of the lesson of reading comprehension and post-reading which means reading the passage many times after the lesson of reading comprehension. The result of these activities may help students to rise the process of understanding the content of the reading passage.

A number of studies were conducted concerning reading comprehension. Four studies related to the present study were selected and arranged historically. The first study was done by Gersten et al. (2001) concerning teaching strategies in reading comprehension. It discussed certain techniques for improving comprehension. The second study was presented by Ouellette (2006). It explored the role of receptive vocabulary in increasing the process of comprehension. The study argued the importance of vocabulary in developing language learning skills and the ability to comprehend the reading passage by using the receptive vocabulary. The third study was prepared by Chou (2011) which described the effect of vocabulary knowledge and background on reading comprehension. It revealed that background knowledge had an effect role on student's understanding. The fourth study was done by Zhang (2012) which debated the relationship between linguistic structure and vocabulary in reading comprehension. It exposed that the knowledge of grammatical structures had a weak contribution in understanding reading comprehension.

### **3. The Impact of Reading Comprehension on Language Learning**

Reading comprehension has a direct effect on most of basic language skills. The impact of reading comprehension on language learning can be stated in the following fields:-

#### **A. Vocabulary**

There is a direct relationship between reading and vocabulary. Reading gives a chance to increase the average of vocabulary. These two items affect on each other. Reading may affect on the average of vocabulary among learners. Vocabulary on the other hand participate in developing the reading

comprehension skill. Increasing of vocabulary leads to increasing of comprehension ( Chafouleas, S. M., Martens, B. K., Dobson, R. L., Weinstein, K. S., & Gardner, K. B. 2004).

### B. Previous Knowledge

There is a relationship between the preceding of knowledge and reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is influenced by previous knowledge of learners. It reduces errors made by students. In addition, the high scope of knowledge play a positive role in developing language skills through reading comprehension.

### C. Linguistic Structures

Having grammatical knowledge of reading comprehension has a affirmative relation in text perception. In other words, lack of grammatical structure knowledge may cause failure in comprehension (Mokhtari, K., & Thompson, H. B. 2006). The ability of analyzing certain sentences of the text is useful in reading comprehension. It has a relationship with understanding the text properly. It adds improvement to the average of reading speed. The impact of the awareness of the structure has a relation with the grammatical aspects of words and the reading comprehension passage.

## 4. Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate difficulties in reading comprehension among students. A questionnaire is adopted to collect data from the participants. Statistical means are used for analyzing data in order to find out the results according to the aim of the study.

### 4.1 Sampling

The participants of the study consist of (120) students (male and female) of morning studies in the subject of (Reading Comprehension) at the Department of English- College of Basic Education – Diyala University during the academic year 2023-2024.

### 4.2 Questionnaire and Interview

The items of the questionnaire are adopted by depending on the literature review and previous studies about similar topics. The questionnaire consists of (7) items

related to the expected difficulties that may face students in the subject of reading comprehension and the main difficulties in understanding the reading passage (Appendix No. 1). An interview is adopted as a qualitative method to get information due to the aim of the study. The questions of the interview is based on the content of the questionnaire.

### 5. Findings

Statistical means are used for analyzing students respondents .Table ( 1 ) state students respondents to the questionnaire.

**Table(1)**

**Descriptive Statistics of the questionnaire**

No .	Reading Comprehension Difficulties	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Percentage of agreement	Notes if any
1.	<b>A. Vocabulary</b> Most of the reading passages have strange and difficult words and students can't guess the meaning or have enough vocabularies or translate the text.	99	15	6	82.5%	
2.	<b>B.Linguistic structures</b> Students have difficulty in guessing the text structures and know the main ideas because of the grammatical structures of the reading passage..	80	35	5	66.66%	
3.	<b>C. lack of pronunciation</b> Students find difficulty in understanding the reading passage because of difficulty in pronouncing certain words and	40	50	30	38.33%	

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	expressions of the reading passage.					
4.	<p><b>D.Background knowledge</b> Students don't have previous knowledge or enough background about the topics of the reading passage.</p>	85	24	11	70.83%	
5.	<p><b>E.Motivation</b> Reading comprehension is not useful or interested to students and students want to gain the evaluation and pass the course only.</p>	58	41	21	48.33%	
6.	<p><b>F.Time relations</b> Students think that time for teaching reading comprehension is not enough.The time of reading the text is very limited.</p>	52	55	13	43.33%	
7.	<p><b>G.Teaching strategies</b> Students think that teaching strategies of reading comprehension is not suitable or effective for understanding the reading passage.</p>	81	24	15	67.5%	



According to the answers of the respondents ,the findings of the study explored that students have the following difficulties:-

**A.lack of Vocabulary (82.5%)**

Students face difficulties in understanding vocabulary. Some students don't know the meaning of most of the expressions in the reading passage .This process may lead to failure of understanding and answering the related questions about the reading passage properly.

**B.Absence of Bckground Knowledge (70.83%)**

Students have weakness concerning the background knowledge of the reading passage.Limitation of the prior knowledge affects negatively on students' understanding.

**C. Weakness of Teaching Strategies (67.5%)**

Teaching reading comprehension needs certain strategies and techniques give an interest to students and help them in understanding the reading passage in simple and interested way.The current methods and approaches suggest many new and interested techniques for teaching each skill of language learning efficiently.

**D.Linguistic Structures (66.66%)**

According to the students respondents,the grammatical structure is not considered a serious difficulty among students in the subject of Reading Comprehension.It has a weak effect on understanding the reading passages.

**E-Other Vairables**

Other vairables of the Questionnaire have a weak effect in reading comprehension as time relations ,motivation and pronunciation according to students responses .

## **6.Discussion**

The existing study has explored four difficulties in reading comprehension as follows:-

A- The first difficulty is related to the limited average of vocabulary which leads to failure in understanding the text.Students need alot of practice in reading

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comprehension with integrated passages. This procedure may help students obtain new vocabularies. It may give students a kind of self-confidence which has a positive role in motivating them for language learning.

B- The second difficulty has a relation with the previous knowledge of students about the content of the reading passage. Inspiring may help students by encouraging them for reading. Reading may increase the average of knowledge which facilitate the process of language learning progressively.

C- The third difficulty deals with teaching techniques. This difficulty is concerned with the responsibility of teachers. Well qualified teachers have the ability to select new and effective techniques which play an important role in understanding the reading passages. Teachers can adopt these techniques inside classrooms.

D- The fourth difficulty is related to the effect of grammatical structure on reading comprehension. Preceding knowledge of language structure facilitate understanding the reading passage.

The results revealed that students didn't have problems concerning the other items of the questionnaire as the, time relation, pronunciation and motivation.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendation

### 7.1 Conclusion

Reading comprehension has an important role in language learning. It has a direct relation with the basic skills of language. According to the results of the study, students have real problems in reading comprehension as :-

A. Lack of Vocabulary is considered one of the main factors that affects on students in reading comprehension .

B. The second aspect that affects on reading comprehension is the prior knowledge of students concerning reading passage.

C. The third element is related to teaching strategies which plays a vital role in teaching the subject of reading comprehension. Selecting effective teaching techniques by teachers help students in comprehending the reading passage. Weakness in teaching techniques causes failure in language learning.

D. Understanding the grammatical structure may help students in understanding the reading passage. Ambiguity of language structures may cause failure of understanding. The recognition of language structure participate in language learning.

## 7.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

For additional studies, It may be essential to have further studies in language learning. It may investigate other variables of language learning and teaching as teachers, students, textbooks and teaching techniques. It is necessary to investigate certain issues has a relation to language learning as class management or the role of motivation in language learning in general or reading comprehension in particular.

### المستخلص

يلعب الأستيعاب القرائي دور حيوي في تعلم اللغة الاجنبية لأنها تحتوي مفاهيم من اللغة مثل معاني الكلمات والتراكيب اللغوية بالإضافة الى التلّفظ حيث تلعب هذه المفاهيم دورا مهما في تعلم اللغة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى تقصي الصعوبات الحقيقية التي قد تواجه طلبة المرحلة الثالثة في قسم اللغة الأنكليزية في كلية التربية الأساسية- جامعة ديالى – الدراسة الصباحية للسنة الدراسية 2023-2024 في مادة (الأستيعاب القرائي).

من أجل الوصول الى أهداف البحث تم اختيار (120) طالبا من الذكور والاناث كعينة للبحث وقد بينت نتائج البحث ان الطلبة لديهم صعوبات حقيقية في هذه المادة لها علاقة بقلة معاني الكلمات وضعف المعرفة المسبقة بالموضوع بالإضافة الى عدم ملائمة ستراتيجيات التعلم.

تؤثر هذه المتغيرات على استيعاب الطلبة لهذه المادة وتؤدي الى صعوبة فهمها وقد بينت نتائج البحث أفكار للطلبة والتدريسيين حول موضوع البحث وقدمت مقترحات وتوصيات طبعا الى نتائج الدراسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** صعوبات الأستيعاب القرائي

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(Appendix No.1) Descriptive Questionnaire Submitted to Students

No .	Reading Comprehension Difficulties	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Notes if any	
1.	<b>A. Vocabulary</b> Most of the reading passages have strange and difficult words and students can't guess the meaning, ,or have enough vocabularies or translate the text.					
2.	<b>B-Linguistic strucutres</b> Studcents have difficulty in guessing the text structures and know the main ideas because of the grammatical structures of the reading passage.					
3.	<b>C. lack of pronunciation</b> Students find difficulty in understanding the reading passage because of difficulty in pronouncing the words and expressions of the reading passage.					
4.	<b>D.Background knowledge</b> Students don't have a previous knowledge or enough bacgkround about the topics of the reading passage.					
5.	<b>E.Motivation</b> Reading comprehension is not useful or interested to students and students want to gain the evaluation and pass the course only.					
6.	<b>F.Time relations</b> Students think that time for teaching reading comprehension is not					

	enough. The time of reading the text is very limited.					
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7.	<b>G. Teaching strategies</b> Students think that teaching strategies of reading comprehension is not suitable or effective for understanding the reading passage..					
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