

## The Effectiveness of PQ4R Strategy in Promoting Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' Reading Comprehension

Ali Khalid Nayief

[ali.naief2207m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:ali.naief2207m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

Prof. Salam Hamid Abbas, Ph.D.

[salam.hamid@ircoed.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:salam.hamid@ircoed.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

University of Baghdad, College of Education/IbnRushd for Human Sciences

### Abstract

Numerous studies have indicated that Iraqi EFL students struggle with reading comprehension. Therefore, an experiment was carried out to find out whether the PQ4R strategy (Preview – Question – Read – Reflect – Recite – Review) may help Iraqi students become more proficient readers. In order to accomplish this, two groups of students from preparatory schools are chosen at random and given equal weights in a number of significant characteristics. The PQ4R strategy is used to teach reading comprehension to the experimental group during the 15-week experiment, while conventional instruction is given to the control group. Students in both groups take a post-test to gauge their reading comprehension at the end of the experiment.

The study's findings show that the experimental group's reading comprehension of EFL students differs statistically significantly from that of the control group. A series of conclusions and instructional suggestions are made in light of the findings.

**Key words:** reading strategies, reading comprehension, levels of reading, cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies.

تأثير استراتيجية *PQ4R* في تحسين القراءة الاستيعابية لدى الطلبة العراقيين في

المرحلة الإعدادية دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية

علي خالد نايف

[ali.naief2207m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:ali.naief2207m@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

أ.د. سلام حامد عباس

[salam.hamid@ircoed.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:salam.hamid@ircoed.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

جامعة بغداد، كلية التربية ابن رشد للعلوم الانسانية

### المخلص

أشارت العديد من الدراسات إلى أن طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين يعانون من فهم القراءة لذلك تم إجراء تجربة لمعرفة ما إذا كانت استراتيجية PQ4R (معاينة – سؤال – قراءة – تأمل – لقاء – مراجعة) قد تساعد الطلاب العراقيين على أن يصبحوا قراء أكثر كفاءة، من أجل تحقيق ذلك يتم اختيار مجموعتين من الطلاب من المدارس الإعدادية عشوائياً وإعطائهم أوزاناً متساوية في عدد من الخصائص

المهمة ثم تستخدم استراتيجية PQ4R لتعليم القراءة الاستيعابية للمجموعة التجريبية خلال التجربة التي استمرت 15 أسبوعاً ، و يتم تدريس المجموعة الضابطة بصورة تقليدية، يخضع الطلاب في كلا المجموعتين لاختبار بعدي لقياس فهمهم للقراءة في نهاية التجربة.

تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن القراءة الاستيعابية لدى المجموعة التجريبية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يختلف إحصائياً بشكل كبير عن فهم المجموعة الضابطة، و في الخاتمة يتم تقديم سلسلة من الاستنتاجات والاقتراحات التعليمية في ضوء النتائج.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** استراتيجيات القراءة، القراءة الاستيعابية، مستويات القراءة، الاستراتيجيات المعرفية واستراتيجيات ما وراء المعرفة.

## The Problem

Reading is not only a fun pastime and a way to obtain information, but it is also a very effective way to develop and enhance a learner's language skills (Akbar and Farid, 2012). However, the ultimate aim of reading is comprehension. Students typically make an effort to fully understand the written content that the author intends for them to understand. An internally consistent mental image of the text will be formed through the comprehension process, which integrates information from the text with the reader's prior knowledge (Pressley, 1995).

Numerous scholarly investigations suggest that Iraqi EFL students face challenges in comprehending the reading materials they study, which contributes to their seeming disinterest in the reading activities. They generally don't seem to be able to engage with the text or the main idea of it. As a result, students struggle to respond to exam questions based on reading passages or to have class discussions about reading-related subjects (Abdul-Majeed, 2015).

While there are a variety of causes for Iraqi students' inadequate reading proficiency, one that comes up time and time again is the use of conventional teaching methods by EFL teachers in Iraq (Al-Azawi, 2009).

Consequently, more potent teaching methods can be used to help students with RC. This study aims to apply the PQ4R strategy, which is said to involve classroom exercises and procedures that may encourage students to think critically about the text in order to construct meaning without entirely relying on the teacher's guidance but rather on their capacity to understand the text's content.

## Aim

The present study aims at finding out the effect of PQ4R strategy on Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' RC.

## Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group, which is taught reading by PQ4R strategy and that of the control group, which is taught by the conventional way in the RC post-test.

## Limits

This study is restricted to:

1. Iraqi male fifth-grade preparatory school students (scientific branch) during the academic year 2023–2024.
2. The reading passages in the textbook (English for Iraq – Fifth Preparatory).

## Value

It is hoped that:

1. this study will be of value to preparatory school students to get benefit from the proposed strategy to improve their mastery of RC.
2. the study will be useful for teachers as a possible alternative strategy for teaching RC to be applied in their classrooms to help them in creating an interactive learning-teaching environment.
3. the study will be beneficial to curriculum designers as it may provide them with possible chances to enrich their textbooks with activities that can be taught by the procedures of the experimental strategy.

## THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

### Reading Comprehension

One of the fundamental English abilities that plays a crucial part in the classroom, where language acquisition is the main goal, is reading. It is regarded as a very efficient way to enhance language proficiency (Nuttal, 1996). In order to finish the process of communicating information from writer to reader, it is crucial to enjoy the activation of pertinent knowledge and related language abilities. Put another way, reading is meant to draw the reader's attention to ideas, information, viewpoints, and other elements that the author has assembled on the page in order to produce the most meaningful interpretations for them. This supports the notion that reading is a triangle form of interaction involving the reader, the text, and the message. (AL-Bakri, 2015).

Day (1980) argues that reading requires deliberate strategies that result in comprehension as a process of interpretation, recognition, and perception of the printed material. He also asserts the concept of comprehension, which is predicated on a comprehension of the meaning of written texts; as a result, reading deals with language form, whereas comprehension deals with language content (the final product).

All linguistic components, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic ones, are involved in this process of negotiating comprehension between the reader and the author (McNamara and Magliano, 2009). The expected speech acts that the addresser in the text performs are examples of emotional and psychological elements that are examined in the discipline of pragmatics. Within this context, Goodman (1988) contends that reading is a receptive language process that starts with a linguistic symbol offered by the writer, who is the creator of the written content, and concludes with meaning, which is the ultimate and desired result of this process. Reading is regarded as a psycholinguistic process since readers create meaning through

inferring or using other reading techniques. This fact illustrates a basic and vital relationship between reading-related language and cognition. In order to accomplish the goal of the writing process, the writer uses appropriate writing techniques to encode thoughts as language, and the reader decodes language to thinking in order to comprehend this goal (Krebt, 2018).

Nonetheless, Habush (2010) demonstrates that in order to derive meaning from reading, one must engage in visual decoding, mental processing of the decoded text, and relating it to the reader's experience. Readers should not concentrate on learning patterns and honing their fluency since doing so conveys the incorrect idea that reading is merely a passive process involving the decoding of letters and words. The reading process, according to Chastain (1988), is a sophisticated cognitive mechanism that uses written content to comprehend the text. The writer uses their background information and language skills when writing. Next, in order to recreate the writer's intended meaning, the students must apply this information. As readers' ideas, beliefs, and attitudes interact with their capacity to make linguistic predictions, it is actually an interplay between thought and language.

Effective readers are aware of the goals they are reading for and actively work to achieve them. It is recognised that metacognition—knowing about knowing—controls the reading process. They are employing metacognitive abilities to ascertain the essential meanings contained in the printed sources (Khalil, 2019).

## **Reading Strategies**

The two main types of reading strategies are cognitive and metacognitive strategies. By practicing, evaluating, and structuring input and output, cognitive strategies help the reader make sense of the text. However, students can examine and keep track of their cognitive processes while reading thanks to metacognitive strategies (Davis and Bistodeau, 1993).

## **Cognitive Strategies in Reading**

When it comes to reading strategies, language learners usually employ cognitive strategies the most. The importance of these tactics increases as EFL students get older. Assisting students in making the most use of these tactics is a suitable approach to their development. Nonetheless, practicing cognitive strategies may help students acquire the critical thinking abilities necessary to become flexible and strategic learners (Nikolov, 1990).

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1994), cognitive strategies for reading are mental or internal processes that are intrinsically linked to certain learning tasks and include actively manipulating or transforming the learning content. According to Brown (1994), these strategies are the steps or processes involved in comprehension or problem-solving that necessitate direct reading material analysis, transformation, or synthesis.

Through the application of cognitive strategies, students can become adept at focusing their attention when reading, and these strategies pertain to understanding what the students read, how to make the reading meaningful, and how to handle challenges or issues that may arise. As Pressely and Afflerbach (1995) point out,

while this method can support or help students understand the reading material they read, it can also impede or undermine comprehension.

To be able to think consciously, some students need to be trained directly. Teachers can thus specifically teach these techniques to support students in communicating texts' concepts in a reflective and analytical manner. Students who successfully grasp the internal process would be able to self-instruct and become autonomous learners (Chen, 2002).

In summary, cognitive reading strategies aim to enhance RC by actively engaging with the written text, aiding in comprehension, and actively altering the information that is presented. But in order to be effective readers, these strategies require higher-order thinking from the students because they repeat words or phrases, skip the tough parts, use linguistic clues, summarise, use a dictionary, and guess topics based on context (Williams and Burden, 1997).

### **Metacognitive Strategies in Reading**

The term "metacognitive strategies" refers to RC strategies that improve a person's capacity to assess when their present level of RC is insufficient and to regulate it. The concepts of self-evaluation, self-regulatory, and thinking about thinking are reflected in them. In other words, they are future-focused, goal-oriented, intentional, and planned mental processes that can be applied to the RC tasks (Skehan, 1989).

The idea that metacognitive strategies are methods for reflecting on one's own learning is supported by Kuda (2005). In order to improve comprehension of textual content, struggling readers should focus on the methods they lack by knowing about them (Alderson and Bachman, 2000). The readers are unable to apply reading strategies that could improve their comprehension of written texts because they lack metacognitive awareness. In this instance, the teacher's main responsibility is to mentor students, particularly those who struggle with reading, and provide them with explicit teaching methods that will enable them to move beyond simple word recognition and begin creating meaning (Anderson, 2008).

According to Hussein and Al-Bakri (2022), proficient readers can use the following metacognitive strategies to increase their RC: identifying the important information in a passage; modifying the speed at which they read; skimming; previewing; utilising context to clear up misunderstandings; formulating questions about information; and monitoring their cognitive processes, which includes identifying issues with the information they are reading or their inability to understand it.

Metacognition in reading, according to Nunan (2015), not only promotes autonomous learning but also increases language proficiency. That is to say, students who are self-regulated and who keep an eye on their own learning process will probably grow into individuals who can make decisions for themselves about how to reach RC. Self-sufficient reading among students ought to be promoted. As such, educators must give students the resources necessary to enable them to make independent decisions. Through the use of metacognitive strategies, students can become more autonomous in their reading and take ownership of their RC process.

Skilled readers understand when and how to apply a reading strategy. Following text diversity, there is diversity in reading strategies and approaches as well. These strategies help struggling readers engage with the text and improve their comprehension of the material by making reading an active and observable experience. The most crucial reading strategies are summarising, guessing, paraphrasing, inferring, linking, and predicting. Nonetheless, using a variety of strategies can help students understand a material (Paran, 2003).

### **PQ4R Strategy**

It was Thomas and Robinson who created the PQ4R strategy. Building upon the SQ3R strategy, Sanacore (2000) laid the groundwork for the PQ4R learning strategy. According to Sheffield et al. (2005), Francis Robinson is credited with developing the self-regulated reading method known as SQ3R. To supplement SQ3R at the "reflect" stage, the PQ4R strategy adds a fourth R. After that, the procedure becomes six steps. When the learner's objective is to grasp the subject matter completely, the PQ4R strategy ought to be effective in improving RC (Sanacore, 2000).

Mangal (2005) claims that the PQ4R strategy teaches students to take a methodical approach to studying the necessary subject by following predetermined procedures. According to Burns et al. (1988), using this method improves students' retention of the subject matter compared to reading it aloud. Woolfolk (2004: 300) provides the following explanation of this strategy's efficacy:

Initially, students become more conscious of how a particular text is structured as they follow the procedures. Next, rather of attempting to understand everything at once, these procedures mandate that students study the text in chunks. Distributed practise is utilised here. Students are forced to study the content more thoroughly and elaborately when they are asked to create and respond to questions about it.

PQ4R strategy optimises memory retention and material processing that goes into great detail is quite advantageous. The strategy can be used on a single chapter or the entire book. Students who pick up study techniques in a course should use them in different situations than the ones in which they were initially taught. When a student learns efficient learning strategies as opposed to rote learning, those strategies frequently translate favourably to learning in a completely other context. The PQ4R strategy comprises six steps and methodically integrates a number of crucial study techniques, providing a game plan for reading a chapter or completing an assignment from a textbook (Peirce, 2003).

According to Trianto (2011), elaboration methods involve the process of producing materials or information to give the new one a deeper meaning. Unlike the SQ3R strategy, the PQ4R strategy incorporates an additional elaboration called "Reflect", which is designed to improve students' comprehension of the subject matter. For knowledge to go from short-term to long-term memory, it must be retained in short-term memory for about five seconds. The readers will draw connections between the previously learned material and the new knowledge when they are in the reflect stage. They can now move data from short-term to long-term memory.

PQ4R performs such functions as it facilitates students' understanding of both the material that is central to the book and the information that is relevant to their lives.

### **Steps of PQ4R Strategy**

The six steps that are supposed to be implemented by students in this strategy are as follows:

#### **Preview**

Students can fit the material into a mental compartment by using a preview, which is a quick assessment. To start reading a text, students must first spend a few minutes going through it cover to cover. According to Sobkowiaka (2001), previewing is the process of obtaining the data required to establish objectives and focus on the text. At this point, the reader reads the title and considers the subject it might allude to. The reader scans boldface headings for additional information, and any images should be noted and examined carefully since they create a framework that will be filled in with details during close reading.

#### **Question**

The question step is the real key to success. Questions give students the opportunity to plan or identify the important information to be obtained from the reading. The process of question and answer lies at the heart of explaining and understanding because it is a central feature of most classrooms. In order to extend students' innate curiosity, questions should, whenever possible, make connections to prior knowledge as questions push students to think at a higher level (Feden, 2003).

#### **Read and Reflect**

Reynolds (1996) argues that, this is the core of the reading process. In order to answer the questions, read the material once you have formulated those questions. Being ready to ask questions while reading is essential for an engaged reading experience. In the smallest amount of time, you want to get the most understanding of a book's content. Furthermore, knowing why you are reading and what you are searching for is essential to being an effective reader.

Reading a paragraph, pausing, reflecting, and formulating questions regarding the content is helpful in multiple ways. First of all, the knowledge remains the centre of attention. Second, when one reads too rapidly or carelessly, their mind goes into automatic pilot and they may retain very little or no information, and third it is possible to get greater precision and focus, which leads to enhanced comprehension (Wong, 1994).

#### **Recite**

Following their reading of a part under a heading or subheading, students should read aloud the response to their question for that section in their own words. The section should be read again if a learner is unsure of the answer. They might need to construct a more appropriate question for the content if a question is still unanswerable. Recitation helps people retain the information in the material (Mangal, 2005).

## Review

Students will need to go over the reading part again in order to remember what they have read, as most forgetting occurs within a day. It must be completed once all questions have been addressed and documented. The review consists of going over the headings and subheadings one more time, summarising the key points beneath each one, and responding to all of the questions. Rereading both the content and the response to a question is advised if there is no way to answer it. Before testing, the following day, at the end of the week, and so on, this procedure should be repeated. Review is essential as, in just two weeks, youngsters tend to lose 80% of what they have read. Consequently, exam performance is significantly better for students who review often (Reynolds, 1996).

## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample Selection

Students attending preparatory schools in Iraq during the academic year 2023–2024 represent the population of this study. The researcher selects a random sample of participants for the study at the fifth grade of preparation. An experimental group consisting of 31 students and a control group consisting of 31 students each are chosen at random from the fifth stage of a preparatory school in Kerbala. In terms of participants' IQs and RC pre-test results, the equalisation of these two groups is examined. See table 1.

**Table1: The equalization of the experimental and control groups in Intelligence and RC Pre-test**

Variable	Groups	No.	M	SD	Computed t-value	Critical t value	d.f	Sig.		
Intelligence	EG	31	40.968	3.401	0.071	2.000	60	No		
	CG	31	41.032	3.719						
RC pre-test	EG	31	25.355	3.808	0.693					No
	CG	31	24.645	4.239						

### Teaching Material

five reading texts were chosen from the required textbook English for Iraq/Student's Book by Olivia Johnston and Mark Farrell, Published by Garnet, for the fifth preparatory classes to be the material for the present study.

### Instrument of the Study

A post-test on RC is utilised as the data gathering instrument in this study. Reading texts are followed by five questions. The researcher chose the unseen passages for this test from a variety of online sources based on the students' linguistic and cognitive abilities. There are many test items in the RC post-test, including true/false, multiple-choice, completion, short answer, and gap-filling questions. A score of fifty is required for the test.



## Face Validity of the Post –test

The post-test and its scoring rubric are presented to a jury of English language teaching experts from various Iraqi and foreign colleges, as well as English teaching supervisors from the Ministry of Education, in order to ensure the test's face validity and appropriateness for the fifth preparatory students. The jury members generally find the test and its scoring scheme to be valid, though some modifications are made based on their suggestions.

## Pilot Administration of the Post-test

It is standard procedure to test data collection instruments prior to their eventual administration. As a result, a sample of thirty students chosen at random from the population has been given the test. The purpose of this application is to assess the clarity of the test instructions and calculate how long it will take test takers to complete the questions. Nonetheless, it is discovered that the pilot sample students need anywhere from 40 to 50 minutes to complete the test. Thus, 45 minutes is the average amount of time needed to complete the test. Moreover, students do not observe or report any ambiguity in the test instructions.

## Item Analysis

It is not sufficient to select language items that are appropriate for the test; one must also ensure that each item functions correctly in the test. This can be verified through item analysis of the test, which is a fundamental process to ensure a trustworthy test by evaluating the test's items to determine their degree of difficulty and discriminating power (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1991).

In order to carry out this process, 150 randomly chosen students from the population are given the test.

However, the final scores are ranked from highest to lowest when the test papers from the statistical analysis sample have been scored. The scores are then divided into two groups: an upper group made up of the top 27% of the scores and a lower group made up of the lowest 27% of the scores. There are 41 points in each category. This is carried out in order to analyse the exam items' degree of difficulty and discriminating power, and find out how reliable the test is.

## Difficulty Level

Determining whether test items are excessively simple or challenging can be accomplished by measuring their level of difficulty. According to Madesen (1983), the approved difficulty level falls between 0.20 and 0.80. On the other hand, it is discovered that the post-test items' difficulty levels vary from 0.35 to 0.60.

## Discriminating Power

The ability of a test item to distinguish between test takers who perform well and those who do not is known as discriminating power. Ebel (1972) states that an item is deemed acceptable if its discriminating power is 0.30 or higher. It is discovered that the post-test items' discriminating power ranges from 0.34 to 0.63. As a result, in this regard, each test item is appropriate.

## Reliability of the Post-test

Reliability, according to Mehrens and Lehman (1991), is the degree of consistency between two test measures. It is the degree to which a collection of test results consistently measures the objectives.

The Kuder-Richardson 20 formula is the technique utilised in this study to estimate test reliability. A reliability sample of one hundred fifty students has been chosen at random to take the test. The dependability coefficient, which is deemed acceptable and high, has been determined to be 0.85.

## The Experiment

Starting on October 3, 2023, and ending on January 16, 2024, was the duration of the experiment. Taking five days a week, that's fifteen weeks of it.

In order to carry out the current experiment, a set of lesson plans with comprehensive instructions on the methods and strategies used to instruct the two groups must be created. Regarding the experimental group, the purpose of the first session was to familiarise the students with the PQ4R strategy. Additionally introduced are the roles of the teacher and the students as well as the protocols for implementing this strategy. RC is taught using the six steps of the PQ4R strategy, which was previously covered. On the other hand, the Teacher's Book instructions for the fifth preparatory classes are applied to teach the control group using the conventional method of teaching RC.

## Final Administration of the Post-test

After the experiment is over, the experimental group and the control group take the RC post-test simultaneously on January 16, 2024. For the test, 45 minutes are allocated for answering questions. The three reading passages should be attentively read by the test takers, and they should then respond to the questions that go along with each one.

## RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The statistical analysis of the data obtained by using the post-test, as displayed in table 2, indicates that the experimental group's mean score is 39.61, whereas the control group's is found to be 31.94.

When two independent samples are used, the t-test formula yields a computed t-value of 5.929, which is greater than the critical value of 2.000 at the 0.05 level of significance and 60 degrees of freedom.

**Table 2: The Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and T-Test Value for Both Groups in the Post-test**

Group	No. of Groups	— X	SD	Computed t - value	Critical t - value	d.f.	Level of significance
CG	31	31.94	5.831	5.929	2.000	60	0.05
EC	31	39.61	4.240				

According to this finding, the mean scores of the experimental and control groups differ statistically significantly from one another. When it comes to RC instruction,

the PQ4R strategy works better for the students in the experimental group. Consequently, it is decided to reject the stated null hypothesis.

The ETA-Square method is used to calculate the statistically significant effect size of the researched strategy on students' RC. It produces a value of 0.37, indicating a high effect size.

## **Discussion of the Results**

The following factors are responsible for the beneficial impacts of the strategy under investigation that this study has shown:

- 1- Reading is meant to help students understand the material, and using this strategy makes that possible.
- 2- Finding out what the students already know about the subject matter of the text helps them remember, think about, and make connections between various ideas that could help them understand the text.
- 3- It gives students the knowledge of what they require in order to do the RC assignment.
- 4- It motivates students to practise the assignments in various protocols and real-world settings.
- 5- By using this strategy, students can improve their capacity to extend concepts beyond the text.
- 6- It establishes a friendly, secure, and encouraging learning atmosphere. Students will feel more comfortable sharing their opinions in this setting, where they are encouraged to take chances and try new things without worrying about receiving unfavourable feedback.
- 7- It enables students to understand the instructional objectives—also known as behavioural objectives—and to strive towards achieving them. This encourages the students to be more committed to the RC task and to be more motivated.
- 8- The main objective of a communicative classroom is to accomplish the RC assignment, which calls for group work that may be extremely important in supporting the learning process by encouraging student engagement and cooperation.
- 9- Students are able to attain RC objectives by using the provided strategy to assist them distinguish between irrelevant and essential information.
- 10- The students become the centre of the educational process when this strategy is put into practice since they are given an active role in participating in class activities.
- 11- More opportunities to memorise and recall vocabulary words are provided to the students by this strategy. It is for this reason that there has been an improvement in vocabulary knowledge among the experimental group of students.
- 12- Because it is entertaining and used with purpose, it has been seen that the execution of this strategy minimises monotony, boredom, anxiety, and shyness in the classroom.

## Conclusions

In light of the findings, it is concluded that;

1. Students at Iraqi EFL preparatory schools with PQ4R strategy applied can increase their RC of many kinds of texts.
2. The current study's experimental groups' subjects exhibit strong engagement and interest in the novel strategy (PQ4R). They consequently engage in activities with greater vigour and enthusiasm than the students in the control groups.
3. The traditional procedures outlined in the teacher's book is less suitable and less effective than PQ4R when it comes to teaching RC to Iraqi EFL students.
4. In addition to being statistically significant, the PQ4R strategy has a considerable impact on Iraqi students.

## Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are made in light of the findings and conclusions.

1. EFL teachers have to understand how important it is to help students understand what they read and how it affects their performance in other language domains.
2. EFL teachers should take into account the unique characteristics of each student and employ RC teaching strategies that allow them to engage in a variety of activities.
3. It is the responsibility of EFL teachers to make their classrooms a secure, welcoming, and encouraging place for their students to improve their comprehension skills in reading.
4. By allowing EFL students to contribute to the ongoing and enhanced learning process, this method lessens the need for direct instruction from the teacher. Teachers in the classroom should therefore possess the discernment to recognise when to assign homework to students alone and when to collaborate with them.
5. It is advised that teachers give their students additional, engaging, and well-known RC texts covering a range of subjects. This way, they can act as supplementary materials and see themselves as facilitators of learning possibilities both within and beyond the classroom.
6. Through encouraging students to engage with one another and voice their ideas, this method helps students who are shy. Teachers ought to take advantage of this information and motivate reticent and bashful students to participate fully in the RC assignment.

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