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## Exploring Factors Affecting EFL University Students' Reading Comprehension

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**Abstract**

Reading is one of the essential skills to learn a new language. In the process of learning a new language, most students are facing difficulties in reading. Major difficulties encountered among students are the lack of students' motivation in reading comprehension, the lack of using reading strategies, and the lack of deep knowledge in cultural background and linguistics. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the factors that limit student's ability to improve their reading comprehension skills. It also attempts to find solutions and identify some significant strategies to overcome the difficulties. Reading comprehension is one of the required skills for university students that is essential to be improved through different learning strategies. To conduct the research, the quantitative research approach was applied, and samples were taken from college students enrolled at the College of Basic Education, English department. The result of the study suggests that using different strategies by the EFL students assist them to comprehend reading easily. The study recommends students to spend more time to be familiar with the factors that affect their reading comprehension, and instructors should be aware of their students' weakness in reading, and design and update their module description according to the student's learning ability.



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## 1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is described as a complex process that is composed of parts, procedures, and factors, also, an interactive process to discover the meaning of the text through a series of activities that include dimensions to understand the meaning of the word (Meniado, 2016). Reading is an essential activity for students and cannot be overlooked, and for others, too. Therefore, as stated by Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) it's not logical to imagine that somebody can live without reading since it is an important part of everyday life.

Students read texts for different aims either to gain academic information or to read for pleasure. To increase students' knowledge and to know the major subjects the skill that assists is reading skill. In addition, Scanlon, Anderson, and Sweeney (2016) state that reading skills is a crucial skill for students to read the texts for various goals either to gain information or to enjoy the reading. It is worth mentioning that developing reading comprehension skills have a significant role in improving students' language proficiency. In this regard, developing reading comprehension skill is one of the aims of EFL students that they attempt to attain since they are expected to be exposed to and reflect on a variety of texts in different tasks in other modules and even for real-life situations. It is believed that university EFL students encounter problems understanding difficult texts because reading comprehension does not include linguistic knowledge only, but also involves cognitive and metacognitive processes. As described by Pressley (2000) and Birsch (2011), reading comprehension is a skill that includes word recognition, lexical knowledge, fluency, and previous knowledge as quickly as possible to provide knowledge to the reader. Therefore; many factors influence students' reading comprehension skills, such as students' motivation, reading strategies, knowledge and background of vocabulary, cultural knowledge, and linguistic cognitive abilities.

Hence, investigating these factors is mainly crucial for instructors to enterprise influential strategies in teaching reading skills to support their students' abilities. Thus, this research aims to find out the factors that have an impact on EFL students' reading comprehension skills and their difficulties. Additionally, the research identifies effective teaching strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension.

## 2. Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to explore the reading comprehension problems faced by EFL students. The study conducted by Habibian et al (2015) discussed the importance of psychological factors in the process of reading. The study has further illustrated the significant effect of psychological factors on the process of reading. The analytical method was used to reach a conclusion and cognition, emotion, and motivation were reasons that affect students' psychological factors. The study reached the point that having a positive attitude, self-efficacy, and motivation not only reduces student's anxiety in comprehension but also encourages them to accomplish their task and solve their issues or difficulties while reading. Hence, it was obvious that in the process of reading and teaching curriculum, considering psychological factors could be profitable to the students.

In another study conducted by Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), the relationship between reading strategies and reading comprehension skills was elaborated, factors affecting reading comprehension skills were discussed, and the effective strategies for reading comprehension were explained. The researchers used analytical methods to reach the results, and finally mention suggestions for improving reading comprehension skills. In their study, the authors found appropriate reading strategies play a vital role in improving EFL students' reading comprehension skills.

It is worth mentioning that there are studies conducted on identifying the challenges and barriers facing students in learning English as a second language, especially in reading. Regarding this, Chandran and Shah (2019) included 80 upper-secondary students in their study in the state of Johor,

Malaysia. A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument of the study. The mean score and standard deviation of the gathered data were calculated statistically. There were five classifications of reading comprehension problems among the upper secondary school students. Depending on the analysis, it was discovered that most of the students have approved that the main difficulty confronted by them in ESL Reading comprehension is related to the process of reading comprehension. In conclusion, the implications of these results on ESL reading comprehension difficulties were mentioned from the perspective of what teachers could do in their teaching practice to address this problem and provide techniques to solve it.

Also, Taladngoan, et al, (2020) carried out a study titled “A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Tertiary Students’ Reading Comprehension Ability”. The goal of the study was to examine the impact of internal and external factors on the reading comprehension of Thai EFL tertiary students, as well as to discover the external elements that have a major influence on these students' capacity to comprehend what they are reading. A total of 19 EFL tertiary students from Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Phitsanulok who were majoring in English for International Communication participated in the study. A three-point Likert scale survey was used as the study tool. The study's findings showed that, when internal factors were considered, the participants' linguistic expertise affected their reading comprehension more than their perceptions did. The participants' prior knowledge of the reading material was the sub-internal component that had the greatest impact, while their assessment of the reading's difficulty had the least impact. Regarding the external variables, the three components influence from the instructor, influence from the family, and influence from the environment did not have noticeably distinct effects on the participants' capacity for reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Mahmood (2022) carried out a study about the role of reading in enhancing EFL learners’ language proficiency. The researcher explored the language learning benefits of reading skills and their role in developing communicative competence, writing skills, listening ability, vocabulary amount, and grammatical knowledge. Additionally, the researcher found out the reasons that have an impact on students’ reading skills. This research has been conducted at Paitaxt Institute in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region. A mixed method of qualitative and quantitative methods was utilized. Three tools were used including two different open-ended questionnaires for teachers and students and a class observation. The research results revealed that the essential difficulties are the lack of motivation and the lack of language knowledge.

The current study differs from the first four researches because it was conducted in a different context, i.e., at the English department of the College of Basic Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil. Additionally, both Habibian, et al (2015) and Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) are analytical research. The researchers have reviewed a number of studies to discuss reading comprehension difficulties encountered by the students. This study mainly deals with four main reasons that cause challenges to students’ reading comprehension.

### **A. Factors Affect Students’ Ability in Reading Comprehension Skills**

Factors that cause difficulty and affect students’ capability in understating texts of reading skills are the lack of student motivation, cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge problems, and lack of student comprehension strategies. The first key factor that affects students’ ability to read is the lack of motivation to pursue students to improve this important skill. Identifying written symbols and understanding their meaning are both essential components of reading comprehension. According to Dennis (2008), several factors affect reading comprehension skills which are complications of the reading text, environmental influences, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation, speed of decoding or word recognition, and medical problems. Additionally, the study mentioned that students’ motivation and interest are very crucial in improving reading comprehension skills. There will be difficulty concentrating on reading comprehension if the

reading material is boring. This can lead to a decrease in reading comprehension. For the exact purpose, teachers should design materials based on the student's interests and motivations. Reading materials that are interesting to students can make it easier for them to understand and remember.

The second factor is cultural knowledge which restricts students from improving reading skills. When reading something, students run into several problems that prevent them from understanding it. For example, problems with background knowledge, text type knowledge, and cultural knowledge. Texts that need a deep understanding of students' cultural and knowledge background are other factors that lead to difficulty in reading comprehension. (Chawwang, 2008).

The third factor relates to the speed at which words may be decoded and identified. Compared to students who do not have these issues, students who have problems with word recognition and decoding read slower and have more difficulty grasping the meaning of texts. According to the study, vocabulary has an impact on reading ability since readers use their decoding abilities to understand the sound and meaning of words they haven't come across before. People who have a sufficient vocabulary can explain the meaning of texts more quickly than those who must guess the meaning of new terms based on context cues (Dennis, 2008). Thus, how students' reading comprehension skills are affected by word recognition and decoding. Further, reading comprehension is more challenging for decoding-challenged students than it is for students who lack these problems (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016).

Finally, the lack of strategies is found to be an important factor that demotivates students to learn and improve reading skills. Students require feedback, practice, and modeling to master comprehension skills. On this issue, Alfassi (2004) outlines the important understanding strategies. The first key strategy identified by the author is the utilization and previewing of prior knowledge. Reading passages in advance allows students to make use of prior knowledge that helps them understand the content that they will be reading. This acts as a foundation for all the new knowledge they read.

The second strategy is the student's prediction of the contents and context. The predictions made by students about the content that they read provide to set expectations since they are based on their prior knowledge of relevant topics. People might mentally modify their predictions as they read to account for new information. Additionally, the author found recognizing and summarising the main idea as a significant strategy. Students must first choose what is important and then articulate it in their own terms to identify the essential notion and summarize it. It is inherent in this approach to try to understand the writer's motivation for writing the article. Interrogating in terms of asking and answering questions regarding the content is an additional strategy to focus on its importance. Therefore, teachers should help students by providing examples of how the students use the content to get the answers to inquiries and how to ask successful questions. Finally, the author finds imagination and concludes two other effective strategies to boost students' motivation toward reading comprehension.

The author highlighted that to infer information that is not explicitly stated in the text, students must learn to draw on prior knowledge and recognize information within the text itself. Also, the author believes that students who visualize while reading are better at remembering what they read. Readers who are reading the text without any visuals may use the embedded graphics or create their own mental pictures or doodles.

### **B.Strategies for Improving Students' Reading Comprehension Skills**

When students want to read various kinds of texts, they should use different reading strategies to be able to interact with texts to expand their understanding of the information they read. Three different types of reading models are commonly employed by readers, as Nuttall (2005) mentioned the models include bottom-up, top-down, and interactive. Students apply these models while engaging

with written texts, with a focus on the interactive model. They initiate the process with the top-down model, making educated guesses about the content's meaning. Subsequently, they transition to the bottom-up model, ensuring a comprehensive grasp of the writer's intended meaning.

Furthermore, Carrell, Devine, and Eskey (1988) state when students read a text, they should be able to continually leap from one type of model to the other type according to what and how they read; therefore, this model emphasizes the bottom-up model which helps the students to recognize the words while the top-down model supports in relating with the previous knowledge to approve the assumption of meaning. Nuttall (1982) has categorized reading strategies into skimming, scanning, extensive reading, and intensive reading.

According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), each sort of text requires using various reading strategies that support students to interact with texts in reading comprehension such as predicting, forecasting, deducing, summarizing, examining, and evaluating. Reciprocal teaching, instructional discussions, visualization, companion reading, various reading strategies, assessment, and running records are some beneficial strategies for enhancing reading comprehension, in the reciprocal teaching approach, teachers instruct students on how to anticipate, summarize, explain, and pose questions about various textual elements. When students are given tools by their teachers to help them grasp the text, these strategies have been found to be successful in helping students improve their reading comprehension skills (Pressley, 2002). Additionally, Tompkins (2011) argues that two types of assessment including formal and informal assessments are used to check a student's comprehension skill and utilization of comprehension strategies. Informal assessment can be done by observation and the use of instruments such as storyboards, word sorts, and interactive writing. A formal assessment is a district or state assessments that assess all students in significant skill.

### **3. Methodology and Data Collection**

Previous studies are available on the factors that affect reading comprehension and development strategies. However, in the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, this issue remains insufficiently addressed. The students have a serious problem concerning reading comprehension, but adequate studies have been conducted focusing on factors that affect EFL university students' reading comprehension. In this regard, it is expected that the results of the present study add knowledge in a special context that was not studied before. Accordingly, this study aims to identify factors that cause difficulty and influence EFL university students' ability in reading comprehension skills. It also tries to find solutions and identify some significant strategies to overcome these difficulties. This study involves contrasting the average of a randomly selected sample from the population with a specific value (Aroian et al., 2017). One sample T-test is used to identify differences between the average for each of the items used as key constructs of the study (lack of students' reading comprehension strategies, linguistic knowledge problems, and lack of cultural knowledge).

To accomplish the objectives of the study, the sample is taken from junior students in the English Department at the College of Basic Education, Salahaddin University-Erbil. For this purpose, 32 students have been selected randomly for the academic year 2022-2023. The reason behind selecting 3rd-year grades as a sample of the study is because they have been taught reading comprehension skills in the previous grades. Moreover, this study is beneficial for teaching staff in the English department and guides them to select and adopt useful strategies inside the classroom to support their students on how to achieve reading skills successfully. It would also be valuable for the faculty scientific committee to diagnose the process of improving reading skills of junior students at college of basic education.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that affect EFL university students' reading comprehension?
2. Which factor is more effective than the other ones?

3. Is there any significant difference between these factors?
4. What strategies should be used to overcome these difficulties?

#### a. Validity and Reliability of the Study

A number of specialists, who have PhD degrees in reading comprehension skills, were referred as jury members for the validity of the face and content of the questionnaire items, as well as the format of the questionnaire. Some items were improved, and others were modified according to the recommendations and suggestions of the jury members.

Cronbach's alpha, which assesses a construct's internal consistency, was used to assess the reliability of the study's results. For this measurement, a dependability "alpha" limit of 0.60 is the least acceptable value (Hair et al., 2003). Four reliability ratings are put forth by Hinton (2014) and Blbas (2019) excellent reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.70-0.90), moderate reliability (0.50-0.70), and low reliability (0.50 and below).

Table (1) shows the values of the Cronbach's coefficient estimate of the internal consistency of the measurement. The result for Cronbach's alpha is (0.806) which represents that all the constructs have passed the reliability where all  $\alpha$ -values have exceeded the recommended minimum value of Cronbach's alpha (Blbas et al., 2017).

Table (1) Reliability of Measurements for All Variables

Name of items	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Lack of student's Motivation	5	0.705
Lack of student's Reading comprehension strategies	5	0.719
Linguistic Knowledge Problems	3	0.721
Lack of Cultural Knowledge	2	0.711
All items together	15	0.806

The above table shows the values of the Cronbach's coefficient estimated for testing the internal consistency of the measurement. The result for Cronbach's alpha is (0.705) for *lack of student motivation*, (0.719) for *lack of student's reading comprehension strategies*, (0.721) for *linguistic knowledge problems*, (0.711) for *lack of cultural knowledge*, and (0.806) for all items together respectively. Table (1) represents that all the constructs have passed the reliability test where all  $\alpha$ -values have exceeded the recommended minimum value of Cronbach's alpha.

The results of the questionnaire are both valid and reliable. Its validity is supported by face and content validity, confirmed by a group of expert teachers, while its reliability is established through statistical analysis.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table (2) demonstrates the descriptive statistics for each item of the first factor "*lack of student's motivation in reading comprehension*". The average of each item, including (reading English texts inside the class makes me feel stressed, I think the other students have more abilities in reading comprehension than me, it makes me feel anxious when I am not well prepared for a reading task, and whenever I read in the classroom, I do not feel confident) is lower than three, indicating that students rarely have a lack of students' motivation (i.e; they are rarely unmotivated in reading English passages since they study at English department.) Furthermore, the mean of the item (I get upset when I cannot understand what I read in the English language) is close to three representing (3.031), which implies, students are sometimes demotivated from reading English passages.

On the other hand, the overall result of all items of the first factor is found which is 2.406, which is near 2, indicating that students do not decide or rarely have a lack of student motivation.

Table (2) Descriptive Statistics for Lack of Student Motivation in Reading Comprehension

NO	Items	No. of Par.	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Mean	Std. D.
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Reading English texts inside the class makes me feel stressed.	32	9	28.1%	10	31.3%	8	25.0%	3	9.4%	2	6.3%	2.344	1.181
2	I think the other students have more abilities in reading comprehension than me.	32	7	21.9%	8	25.0%	15	46.9%	2	6.3%	0	0.0%	2.375	0.907
3	It makes me feel anxious when I am not well prepared for a reading task.	32	4	12.5%	13	40.6%	8	25.0%	7	21.9%	0	0.0%	2.563	0.982
4	I get upset when I cannot understand what I read in the English language.	32	1	3.1%	9	28.1%	14	43.8%	4	12.5%	4	12.5%	3.031	1.031
5	Whenever I read in the classroom, I do not feel confident.	32	13	40.6%	16	50.0%	2	6.3%	1	3.1%	0	0.0%	1.719	0.729
Overall		Lack of student's Motivation										2.406	0.595	

Table (3) shows the descriptive statistics for each item of the second factor which relates to the lack of utilizing of reading comprehension strategies by students. The mean and std. deviation of the items are found, including (it is difficult to distinguish between main idea and supporting idea in a reading text, it is difficult to make inferences (i.e guess meaning) based on information found in an English passage, and it is difficult to produce a good summary that contains the gist of an English passage) is lower than three, indicating that students are rarely having difficulty with reading comprehension strategies because their mean values are less than three and close to two.

While the mean value of both items “*when reading passages is hard, summarizing the main points of English texts will be challenging, and it is difficult to answer the questions whose answers cannot be found directly in English passages*” is close to three which entails that students sometimes have problems with strategies of reading comprehension and they do not know how to adopt them when they are reading English passages.

On the other hand, the overall average of the “*lack of students' reading comprehension strategies*” factor is 2.919, which is near to 3, indicating that students do not decide or sometimes have a lack of reading comprehension strategies.

Table (3) Descriptive Statistics Related to Lack of Student's Reading Comprehension Strategie

No	Items	No. of Par.	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Mean	Std. D.
			N	%	N	%	N	N	%	N	%	N		
1	It is difficult to distinguish between the main idea and the supporting idea in a reading text.	32	3	9.40%	8	25.00%	15	46.90%	6	18.80%	0	0.00%	2.75	0.88

2	When reading passages is hard, summarizing the main points of English texts will be challenging.	32	1	3.10%	8	25.00%	9	28.10%	9	28.10%	5	15.60%	<b>3.281</b>	1.114
3	It is difficult to make inferences (i.e guess meaning) based on information found in an English passage.	32	3	9.40%	10	31.30%	15	46.90%	3	9.40%	1	3.10%	2.656	0.902
4	It is difficult to answer questions whose answers cannot be found directly in English passages.	32	0	0.00%	10	31.30%	11	34.40%	9	28.10%	2	6.30%	<b>3.094</b>	0.928
5	It is difficult to produce a good summary that contains the gist of an English passage.	32	1	3.10%	12	37.50%	13	40.60%	4	12.50%	2	6.30%	2.813	0.931
Overall		Lack of student's Reading comprehension strategies											2.919	0.638

The next table (4) is the descriptive statistics of the third factor, “*linguistic knowledge problems*” The mean value of both items; (having new vocabularies creates problems to understand a reading passage, complex sentence structures make difficulty to comprehend the content of a reading text, and inability of identifying parts of speech (e.g.; noun, verb, adjective, adverb....) make problems to get the meaning of an English passage) is almost close to three, indicating that students sometimes confront linguistic knowledge problems in reading English passages.

As it is demonstrated in the below table, the overall average of *linguistic knowledge problems* is 3.063, which is near to 3, it means, students sometimes have difficulties with linguistic knowledge due to their unfamiliarity with linguistic units.

Table (4) Descriptive Statistics About Linguistic Knowledge Problems

No	Items	No. of Par.	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Mean	Std. D.
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Having new vocabularies creates problems to understand a reading passage.	32	2	6.30%	7	21.90%	12	37.50%	8	25.00%	3	9.40%	3.094	1.058
2	Complex sentence structures make it difficult to comprehend the content of a reading text.	32	1	3.10%	6	18.80%	14	43.80%	7	21.90%	4	12.50%	3.219	1.008
3	The inability to identify parts of speech (e.g.; noun, verb, adjective, adverb....) makes problem to get the meaning of an English passage.	32	3	9.40%	9	28.10%	12	37.50%	5	15.60%	3	9.40%	2.875	1.1
Overall		Linguistic Knowledge Problems											3.063	0.818

The below table (5) displays the descriptive statistics of the items of the last factor. The mean value of the first item, “*lack of cultural background knowledge*” is equal to three, indicating that students sometimes have a shortage of cultural background knowledge while they are reading English texts. On the contrary, the mean value of “*expressions that relate to language culture*” is 3.469, which is

near 4, which indicates that students often have difficulty with expressions related to language culture. The overall average of *lack of cultural knowledge* is 3.234, which is near 3, which means that students sometimes have a lack of cultural knowledge difficulties.

Table (5) Descriptive Statistics of Lack of Cultural Knowledge

No	Items	P.	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Mean	Std. D.
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Deficiency of cultural background knowledge (e.g, beliefs, customs, and foods of another country ) is a problematic situation to understand a reading passage.	32	3	9.4%	7	21.9%	12	37.5%	7	21.9%	3	9.4%	3.000	1.107
2	Expressions that relate to language culture (e.g; idioms, collocations...) make difficulty to comprehend the meaning of a reading passage.	32	1	3.1%	3	9.4%	12	37.5%	12	37.5%	4	12.5%	3.469	0.950
Overall		Lack of cultural knowledge											3.234	0.942

Table (6) below represents the mean of the first factor which is “*lack of students’ motivation*” which is significantly different from the means of both factors “*linguistic knowledge problems and lack of cultural knowledge*”. Whereas the other factors’ mean comparisons do not show statistically significant differences because their p-values are greater than the significant level of  $\alpha=0.05$ .

Table (6) One Sample T-Test for each item about Lack of Students’ Reading Comprehension Strategies, Linguistic Knowledge Problems, and Lack of Cultural Knowledge separately

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p-value
Lack of Student’s Motivation	2.406	0.595	-5.639	0.000
Lack of Student’s Reading Comprehension Strategies	2.919	0.638	-0.720	0.477
Linguistic Knowledge Problems	3.063	0.818	0.432	0.669
Lack of Cultural Knowledge	3.234	0.942	1.408	0.169

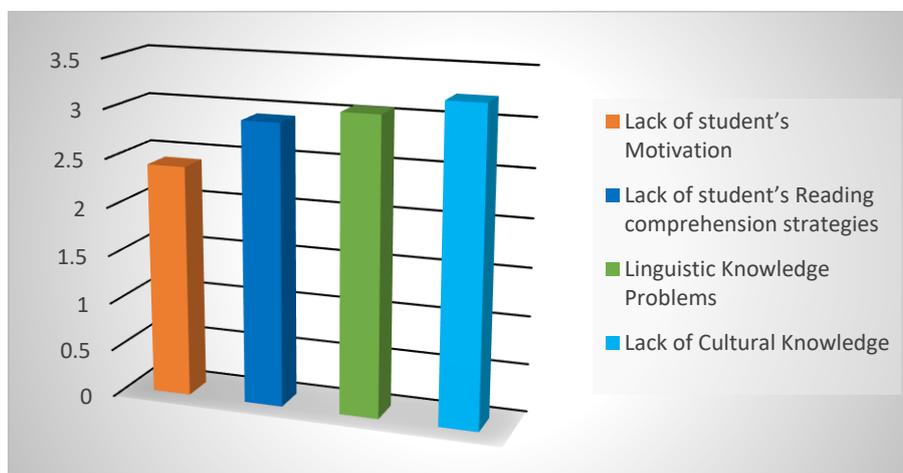


Figure (1) Displays the Statistically Significant Difference Among the Factors

The findings of the study are in line with the majority of the results of the studies conducted in this field such as Habibian, et al (2015), Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), Chandran and Shah (2019), Taladngoen et al (2020), and Mahmood (2022). Though these studies have been piloted in various contexts, the results confirm that the majority of EFL students encounter difficulties in comprehending English texts commonly.

Regarding the first study question “*What are the factors that affect EFL university students' ability in reading comprehension*”, the analysis of the data has revealed that there are four essential factors that have an impact on EFL students' ability to understand English texts which are lack of student's motivation, lack of students' reading comprehension strategies, linguistic knowledge problems, and lack of cultural knowledge.

Then, the researchers compared the factors and identified which one was the most effective compared to the others. Depending on the statistical results, it has been found that the lack of cultural knowledge is the most effective factor with a mean of 3.234 and a p-value is 0.169. The second effective factor as shown in the results is the linguistic knowledge problem with a mean of 3.063 and a p-value of 0.669. However, the third factor which is the “*lack of students' reading comprehension strategies*” is less effective with the obtained mean of 2.919 and the p-value is 0.477. It is worth mentioning that the least effective factor among others is the lack of students' motivation with the obtained mean of 2.406 and a p-value is 0.00. This is the verification of the second research question. Moreover, based on the statistical analysis, it is revealed that there are statistical differences between the first factor with each of the third and fourth factors. While there is no statistical difference between the other factors as comparing their means. That is the answer to the third research question “*Is there any significant difference between these factors?*”.

The fourth research question was “*What strategies should be used to overcome these difficulties?*” For this purpose, the researchers have proposed four vital strategies as a solution to the challenges faced by students in understanding English texts, and to support them to enhance their reading comprehension skills. Firstly, the students should have practical reading skills by a professional teacher by providing reading materials, and the time for reading should be included in the department's schedule. Secondly, teachers must help EFL students develop their background knowledge, teach text structures, convince them to be ready, and assess students' reading skills. Thirdly, it is the responsibility of the teachers to teach reading strategies to students and how to use reading comprehension strategies successfully. Finally, teachers should choose suitable texts for students that enable their comprehension development, for instance, selecting different kinds of texts that include word recognition and comprehension difficulty that meet students' reading ability. These solutions were also proposed by Habibian, et al (2015).

## 5. Conclusion

The study identified four main factors influencing the improvement of EFL university students' reading comprehension skills. Cultural knowledge emerged as a significant factor, impacting students' understanding of English texts and creating difficulties. Therefore, students need to possess knowledge and background information on culture and traditions to better comprehend the context of the readings provided to them. The study also concludes that instructors should implement strategies to assist EFL students in effectively comprehending the content. To enhance students' reading comprehension skills, several key strategies have been discussed, including scanning and skimming for quick understanding, extensive and intensive reading for detailed and broad comprehension, and techniques such as predicting, summarizing, and evaluating to aid comprehension and retention.

Furthermore, the reciprocal teaching strategy, which involves teacher-student dialogue, can be employed to model and practice comprehension techniques. Visualization also plays a crucial role

in enhancing memory retention by encouraging students to create mental images of the text. The study further emphasizes the misuse of various reading comprehension models, such as the bottom-up approach (focusing on word recognition), the top-down approach (utilizing prior knowledge), and the interactive model (which combines both). Therefore, effective pedagogical tools should be implemented to meet students' learning ambitions, with reading being prioritized by instructors to improve key language skills.

## 6. Recommendations and Suggestions

This study recommends that students actively engage in the reading process by using a variety of strategies to identify the factors that influence their ability to deeply comprehend what they read. In turn, college instructors should identify the areas where students struggle and develop a strong reading comprehension curriculum. Concurrently, the curriculum should be designed to address students' needs and incorporate effective teaching methods that promote the development of reading competence, ultimately helping students acquire a new language.

Finally, the researchers suggest that future studies conduct an experimental investigation into the factors that challenge students' reading comprehension skills. One potential study, titled "The Impact of Cultural Factors on Improving Students' Reading Comprehension Skills," could involve multiple universities, a large sample size, and various data collection tools.

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