EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Challenges and Strategies: A Case Study of Champasack University in Laos

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a primary skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, but many of them face challenges that impede their language learning. This study investigates reading comprehension problems experienced by EFL learners at Champasack University (Laos), and suggests solutions to remediate these problems. A qualitative case study was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 10 final-year students to explore their experiences and coping strategies. This study highlights the important barriers learners face such as limited vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and summarizing and identifying main ideas. Strategies such as using a dictionary, context-guessing, and collaborating with peers are employed, but these are often not enough in the absence of structured support. Although they elevate pressing interest in redressing the factors that put children at risk for literacy challenges, with a focus on systematic vocabulary instruction focused on explicit instruction and teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies for teaching reading comprehension, the results also suggest the following possible interventions: Also, using digital tools and collaborative learning activities can alleviate reading anxiety and enhance learner motivation, creating a more bolstered learning environment. The study reaffirmed the need for targeted pedagogical intervention and that future work might discover how to make such strategies more effective over the long term and the part digital literacy plays in EFL pedagogy. Our findings provide valuable insights for educators and policy-makers, who might find it helpful in possibly improving reading comprehension outcomes for EFL learners across different learning contexts.

Keywords: Challenges, EFL Learners, Reading comprehension, and Strategies

1. Introduction

Learners understanding what they are reading is one of the major ways of learning English as a Foreign language as it helps the students to learn multiple English words and how write them grammatically hence improving their English-speaking skills. This enables the students to memorize new vocabularies and utilize the well in various situations enhancing greater understanding of English language as result of frequent usage (Binhomran & Altalhab, 2023). Still though, students may experience difficulties in constructing and differentiating good grammatical sentences, difficulty too in identifying the sources of textbooks can limit their understanding of the English language (Nurhayati et al., 2023). The inclusion of digital literacy into EFL pedagogy has the ability to solve these problems by utilizing a variety of textual materials and enhancing an environment of recurring learning (Rochanaphapayon, 2023).

Champasack University located in Lao People's Democratic Republic, plays critical role in the promotion of quality education and ethical standards in the country. The institution pays more attention to initiatives like the provision of morality and ethics training for prospective instructors which produces good results such as more accountability and discipline among learners. There is also more attention to the development of an ICT curriculum, which is seen by courses well-structured to address the local market of information and communication technology professionals. The university education strategies are highly influenced by the region's rich cultural heritage. Despite these crucial establishments, problems still occur in areas of enhancing social inclusion and increasing access higher education opportunities.

Reading comprehension has presented challenges for EFL students well beyond rote work — the simple grasping and processing of meaning from the English text. Limited vocabulary knowledge is one of the most basic aspects leading to such problems, as the learner cannot rely on contextual clues to guess meanings which causes a fragmentation and a partial and shallow understanding of the text (Nurhayati et al., 2023; "EFL students' difficulties," 2023). Moreover, complex linguistic elements such as convoluted syntactic patterns and idioms are additional roadblocks, as many students do not have adequate exposure to rich language structures. In addition, these difficulties, when combined with specialized or technical vocabulary that characterizes academic and general texts, make it difficult for the students to decode unfamiliar words and confirm their contextual meaning.

In addition to language barriers, the lack of structured reading systems compounds understanding. EFL learners are often left without direct teaching of procedures for reading, including skimming, scanning, and inferencing, needed to efficiently interact with texts (Azis & Wilymafidini, 2024; Maab et al., 2024). In addition, without metacognitive awareness, students may not be able to monitor their understanding of the text, recognize what they find difficult and change their reading approaches appropriately. Are they reading interpreters (those who read to understand all kinds of written words and texts) without the texts to read and understand? Moreover, these issues are compounded by the need to learn other school subjects in English, which adds to the cognitive load and decreases the efficiency in reading overall.

Indeed, the paradigms of learning that students confront and experience lack the cultural and linguistic scaffolding that educators can provide, frequent pedagogical opportunities to elevate comprehension strategies, and a sense of social connection that you can feel when working with a teacher or trusted peer. In many EFL contexts, instruction remains based in translation and rote learning, which as noted do not facilitate reading development. Through lack of engaging and meaning-focused learning opportunities, students' interaction with texts that promote deeper understanding are limited. Inadequate teacher training in effective reading strategies and a lack of well-adapted reading materials also explain the problems of reading in low-resource contexts. This can all be linked back to motivation, as students with negative experiences with reading (usually not being exposed to a range of interesting texts) quickly lose interest in reading and this leads back to lack of comprehension.

Although some studies have explored the relationship between language proficiency and reading comprehension in EFL contexts, much remain to be known regarding the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors that contribute to a more comprehensive model of reading comprehension. They also have studied vocabulary deficits in isolation as well as knowledge of grammar and anxiety, but few studies have measured the combined effect of these factors on reading comprehension. Additionally, there has been minimal exploration of enriching the efficacy of the pedagogical interventions through formal integration of the explicit reading strategies with the available vocabulary enhancement and affective support mechanisms into a comprehensive instructional model. Likewise, not much attention has been paid to tailor the interventions to the tertiary level of EFL learners, as in the case of Champasack University. Filling in these gaps is crucial for understanding evidence-based practices to promote this aspect of reading comprehension and other methods of English language learning and teaching.

Their poor performance in reading comprehension has been attributed to cognitive, linguistic, instructional, and environmental components. According to Hamouda (2021); Manihuruk (2020), one of the main problems is poor vocabulary knowledge, which impedes learners' attempts to deduce meanings within context and fail to grasp the texts superficially. Additionally, reading materials will include numerous unfamiliar words and use complicated sentence structures, which present challenges to understanding (Hezam et al., 2022). Second, insufficient grammar knowledge serves as a major problem area because learners who cannot properly build sentences and have difficulties decoding meaning (Hu et al., 2022; Hezam et al., 2022).

Inadequate reading strategies also contribute to comprehension challenges. Such learners in EFL context are often metacognitively weak meaning they lack the necessary skills to monitor their reading processes and make adjustments when needed, leading to higher levels of reading anxiety and lesser reading (Valizadeh, 2021). Additionally, without pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge, students are not able to link previously acquired information with new concepts, which leads to reduced comprehension (Alghonaim, 2020). In addition to this, Rugyema (2023) further highlights that a poor reading culture which is defined by sparse reading habits and limited access to varied texts, contributes to struggles with comprehension due to a lack of exposure to different genres and writing styles. These challenges can be overcome with diverse intervention strategies, such as vocabulary enrichment, direct grammar teaching, metacognitive strategies and a robust reading curriculum. Incorporating such practices into the learning process would cultivate a stronger base for reading comprehension and subsequently enhance the students' English competence as a whole.

The pedagogical strategies are currently reshaping into various ways, putting more emphasis on social sustainability, open pedagogical approaches and practical studies that argument learners ' participation and ensure informed interpretation of texts. Modern trends include combination of circular economy laws to promote social sustainability (Krasnokutska & Danko, 2024), the building of learner centered environments with in the field of environmental science (Ding et al,2023) and the enhancing of critical thinking ways to understand more about the comprehension of societal models ("Implications for Teaching", 2022). Though challenges of resource distribution still exist, the training of instructors and the enhancement of inclusivity ("Teaching Practices", 2023; Minasi, 2022).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Schema Theory

Schema concept stresses the importance of knowledge beforehand in understanding of text. Depending on this concept, learners understand reading materials by activating the available intellectual models and combine with them with new data. In EFL situations. absence of back ground knowledge usually disorganizes the process, making it difficult for readers to understand new concepts. This conceptual model emphasizes our identified ideologies such as Schema based pre - reading exercises,

that focus on knowledge beforehand so as to improve your understanding of texts (Bartlett, 1932; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

2.2 Metacognitive Theory

Metacognitive concept states the knowing of oneself and guiding of oneself in the educational processes. In summary understanding how to read meta intellectual ideologies for example planning, monitoring of oneself and evaluation of oneself facilitates students to know concepts which require understanding, be flexible with with their strategy and ponder on their progress. This research is based on this concept to digest how meta intellectual ideologies can lead to an insider engagement and improve reading results for EFL students Theory (Flavell, 1979).

2.3 Nation's Vocabulary Framework

Nation's Vocabulary model stresses the base role of knowing and understanding many new words in learning a new language. The model finds high frequency words as important for nurturing fluency and comprehension. This research uses this model to find out how a clearly and detailed manner of teaching new words can help to solve EFL students' problems with inadequate words of the new language to better their reading comprehension (Nation, 2001).

2.4 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that emotional factors including motivation, anxiety, and confidence play a critical role in language acquisition. A low affective filter facilitates understanding, and higher anxiety or low motivation presents obstacles. Not only that, but this theory underpins the focus of the investigation on techniques such as group discussions and collaborative learning, which, according to Krashen (1982), help alleviate stress and create a conducive environment for learning for EFL learners.

This following mind map (figure 1) summarizes the theoretical framework that we motivate below, as inherent to the modeling process as any data preprocessing.

Figure 1: Mind map of theoretical framework use

Thus, the following theoretical framework brings together cognitive, metacognitive, linguistic, and affective perspectives to comparatively tackle the complexity of reading comprehension in EFL environments. These theories offer different perspectives which can serve to help us comprehend the nuances presented by EFL learners and inform the approaches taken to finding solutions to the deficits observed. Integrating these two frameworks, this study offers a comprehensive approach to improving reading comprehension, addressing both learner-centered and pedagogical solutions

2.5 EFL Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension, as a type, is an essential sub-skill for those who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These are cognitive processes that serve as cornerstones for success in academics and professions, including interpreting text, integrating information with background knowledge, and drawing inferences (Comprehension of text, 2023). Strong reading habits have been linked to improved vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and general academic performance (Wulandari et al., 2023). Reading comprehension is influenced by multiple factors such as cognitive

ability, motivation, and access to appropriate educational resources, which warrants the need for adapting strategies for supporting diverse learner needs (Medranda-Morales et al., 2023).

2.6 Typical EFL Reading Comprehension Issues

There are many hurdles that EFL learners could face which interject in their reading comprehension:

- Limited vocabulary: Less vocabulary means difficulty in comprehending complex texts. Reading materials are rarely accustomed to high-frequency words, causing problematic in reading, and high-frequency words causes a problem as well to growth vocabulary (Sutarsyah, 2016) The explicit teaching of academic vocabulary is an important component for students, particularly for those who are at risk for reading failure (Westby, 2018).

- Lack of background knowledge: Understanding new information requires linking it to previous knowledge. When background knowledge is too low level, the reading will be surface level (An et al., 2024). For instance, researching schema-based reading pre-teaching strategies (such as THIEVES strategy) have shown evidence of improving outcomes by activating prior knowledge (Siddiek & Al-Faki, 2018).

- Ineffective reading strategies: The strategies that educators teach and the ones that learners actually use frequently do not match up, compromising comprehension. Ineffective strategies -- like decoding and translating -- predominate among learners, even though techniques like summarizing and prediction have greater effectiveness in enabling deeper comprehension (Akbari, 2017; Reading Strategies in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language, 2022).

2.7 Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension

Several strategies have been identified to overcome these challenges:

- Cognitive strategies: Summarizing, predicting, skimming, scanning, questioning. Summarizing teaches students to extract important ideas, and predicting activates prior knowledge and maintains attention. The studies illustrate that these strategies enhance comprehension and test performance, making them essential to EFL education (Dhakal, 2024; López et al., 2023).

- Metacognitive strategies: The self-monitoring, planning, and evaluating processes used to improve understanding are key. For example, self-monitoring allows learners to recognize areas of confusion and planning facilitates focused reading. More practices involving evaluation adapted to different types of texts can help me foster my metacognitive awareness and promote critical thinking (Kan et al., 2024) and so do Zhang (2024) in her perspective. Moreover, interactive methods involving group discussions, that can combine these strategies can lead to deeper understanding (Fadila et al., 2024).

- Social strategies: Group work, peer teaching, and other collaborative learning methods allow students to correct individual misconceptions, share the learning process from different perspectives, and foster critical thinking. Especially, group discussions have been proven to enhance test results and promote deeper engagement with texts (Mogea, 2023; Ahmada, 2020) Fostering students to ask for help and question with a thinking mind also ensures a healthy learning environment (Bakhtiyorovna, 2024).

2.8 Implications for Practice and Research Gaps

Though these strategies are effective, there are some gaps evident in the literature:

- There is limited research on how digital literacy can be integrated into EFL reading pedagogy, especially at under-resourced institutions like Champasack University (Rochanaphapayon, 2023).

- Lack of studies that examine the long-term effect of metacognitive strategies on reading proficiency of various populations of EFL learners.

- A need for further balancing of individual and social strategies that accommodate different learner preferences and reduce anxiety.

Reading comprehension in a foreign language reflects leveraging diverse strategies and overcoming the complexity of the foreign language encountered in the texts of the literature. Lack of vocabulary, limited content knowledge, and poor strategies are key contributors. Yet, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies can also present viable solutions. We encourage future research to bridge theory and practice thereby ensuring application of successful strategies that are accessible and adaptable for the needs of diverse learners.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

To investigate reading comprehension in relation to EFL learners' challenges and strategies at Champasack University, this study adopts a qualitative research approach using a case study design. The qualitative approach used allows a deep understanding of students and instructors experiences, which integrates linguistic, cognitive and affective, as well as cultural and educational experiences which are unique to the university (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). According to (Yin, 2018), a case study design provides an in-depth analysis of these problems in a particular and well-defined context. Only semi-structured interviews are used to collect data, giving a rich and flexible account of participants' perspectives. This approach gives you a holistic insight into the challenges and practices in EFL teaching and learning plus practical suggestions for enhancing pedagogy.

3.2 Participants

A sample of 10 students who had the highest GPA in the last years of two EFL classes at Champasack University was selected; five of them were from one class, and five from the other class. Purposive sampling was applied to select students from different academic background and learning experiences. These students read English texts as part of their academic work and were able to reflect on the difficulties and strategies they encountered while reading. The Curated selection allowed to establish a clear balance within their learning experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool with 10 final-year EFL participants. The interviews focused on listening for the students' struggles with reading comprehension, the approaches they took to overcome these struggles, and what ideas they had for enhancing their reading comprehension. The semi-structured format facilitated open and rich dialogues, wherein participants had the opportunity to express their experiences. The interviews, which were conducted over Zoom, provided both convenience and accessibility, while creating a friendly and supportive environment.

All ethical protocols were stringently adhered to in this study. Participants were informed of the intent and aims of the study and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Prior consent was obtained from all participants, all data were stored securely and pseudonyms were used in place of the real names to protect their privacy. The above measures served to ensure the ethical integrity of the research as well as the well-being of the participants.

Member checking was carried out to ensure the credibility of the study. Following the semi-structured interviews, participants were allowed to reread their transcripts to confirm if the documented responses were accurate. This process minimized misinterpretations and ensured that the data accurately reflected the participants' intended meaning. Such participant participation maintained the integrity of the research and enhanced the reliability of the findings.

To improve reliability all interviews were performed uniformly by a uniform interview instruction. This allowed to ask follow-up questions depending on each participant's unique answer, while ensuring they would all receive the same basic set of questions. Due to the regularity of the interview process, which also yielded reliable insights into the challenges and coping mechanisms of EFL students, the data collected were similar.

3.4 Data Analysis

A flexible method appropriate for identifying and interpreting patterns in qualitative data, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data extracted from the semi-structured interviews. The first was to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Second the researcher read through transcripts carefully to familiarize himself with the data. Key statements were coded in order to highlight common themes and insights regarding reading comprehension difficulties and strategies.

4. Results

From the data, once determined, the individual codes were grouped into broader categories based on the most salient findings of the study, such as "vocabulary limitations," "collaborative strategies," and "grammatical difficulties." Sub-topics within these topics were explored to provide a deeper understanding of the linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors influencing participants' reading comprehension. The approach showed systematic away which ensured that the evaluation was bedrock on the experiences of who participants, ultimately providing rich insight into the challenges and solutions faced by EFL learners.

Table 1: General information of participants

Participant	Field of Study	Years Learning English	Practice Reading Frequency
1 (Harfa)	General English	More than 6 years	Sometimes
2 (Pang)	General English	More than 6 years	Sometimes
3 (Kingkeo)	General English	4–6 years	Rarely
4 (Lany)	General English	More than 6 years	Always
5 (Khambae)	General English	More than 6 years	Sometimes
6 (Chomphet)	General English	4–6 years	Always
7 (Sek San)	General English	1–3 years	Sometimes
8 (Tonka)	General English	4–6 years	Sometimes
9 (So Phit)	General English	4–6 years	Always
10 (Loungnapha)	General English	More than 6 years	Rarely

Everyone in the study is taking General English, and most have studied English for over six years. Regardless of how often they read, even if they tried to read every day, practices differed significantly. This means that even learners similar in experience level have different levels of engagement in reading, which may affect their reading comprehension.

Table 2: Reading habits and preferences

Participant	Preferred Text Type	Enjoy Reading	Reasons for Enjoyment
1	Novels/Stories	Yes	Confidence, better speaking
2	Novels/Stories	Yes	Helps change accent
3	Novels/Stories	Yes	Improves vocabulary understanding
4	Novels/Stories	Yes	Learns new vocabulary, finds English fun
5	Novels/Stories	Yes	Easier language development
6	Novels/Stories	Yes	Improved speaking and comprehension
7	Novels/Stories	Yes	Motivates learning
8	Novels/Stories	Yes	Improves pronunciation
9	Novels/Stories	Yes	Better comprehension and pronunciation
10	Novels/Stories	Yes	Helps remember vocabulary and improves understanding

Everyone who participates says they love reading English novels and stories and cite benefits from improved vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence. This reflects their desire for texts that are engaging and easy to follow and, therefore, for something that is both ultimately 'fun' and 'valuable' in language development.
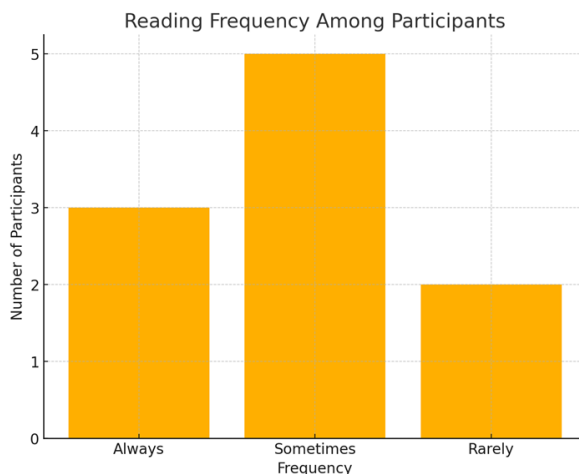

Figure 1: Reading frequency among participants

Table 3: Challenges in reading comprehension

Challenge	Frequency of mention (out of 10 participants)
Understanding new vocabulary	10
Complex grammar structures	5
Long or complicated sentences	9
Lack of background knowledge	2
Staying focused	1

New vocabulary is a general challenge for anyone, and almost all participants find themselves at a loss in the face of long or complex sentences. The lower identification of background knowledge or focus as major issues, suggests that linguistic barriers, rather than cognitive or contextual barriers, are the primary barriers.
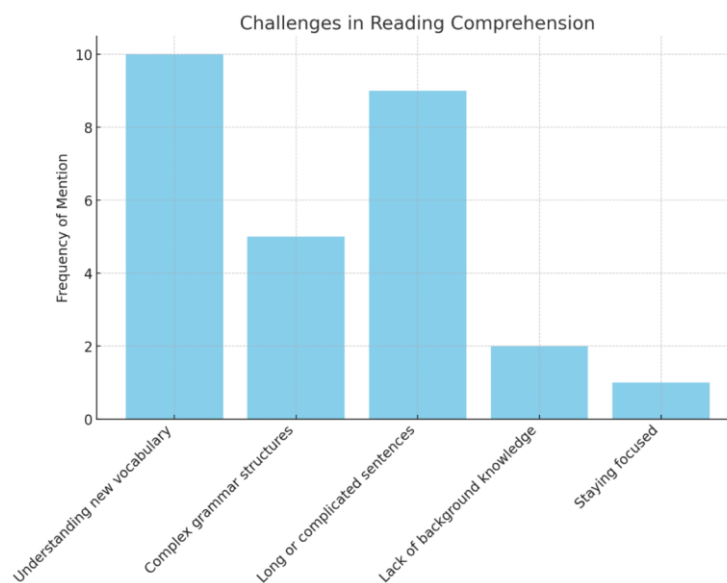

Figure 2: Challenges in reading comprehension

Table 4: Strategies for overcoming challenges

Strategy	Frequency of Use (out of 10 participants)
Using a dictionary	9
Guessing meaning from context	8
Asking someone for help	9
Rereading difficult texts	6
Taking notes	10

The most common strategies include using a dictionary and asking for help, showing that learners rely on external tools and support to overcome difficulties. Taking notes is another universal approach, indicating its perceived importance in retaining key information.

Figure 2: Strategies for overcoming challenges

Table 3: Suggestions for improvement

Type of Support	Frequency of Mention (out of 10 participants)
Vocabulary-building exercises	10
Practice with shorter texts	8
Group reading activities	8
Teacher guidance on reading strategies	7
Other suggestions (e.g., social media, games)	5

Participants make a forceful case for vocabulary-driven exercises and shorter texts to build their skills gradually. Other popular suggestions involve group activities and teacher support, indicating a desire for both collaboration and structure. They point to new technologies—social media, games, you name it—showing their desire for more immersive learning experiences.

5. Discussion

This study sheds light on the reading comprehension challenges of EFL learners at Champasack University and their strategies to cope with these challenges. The analysis shows that straining for vocabulary and syntactic complexity are the most important factors, which correspond to previous

studies highlighting the fundamental role of lexical and grammatical competence in reading comprehension (Qunayeer, 20212; Hu et al., 20222). Furthermore, the study demonstrates how learners can draw upon diverse strategies — e.g., dictionary use, contexts for guessing, and peer collaboration to improve comprehension — that have been shown in EFL literature to be effective (Rahman et al., 2023; Mahmud & Shaikh, 2023). The implications of the results indicate a need for pedagogical changes that incorporate interactive and scaffolded learning strategies to support richer engagement in reading and reduce difficulties associated with it.

5.1. Difficulty with Reading Comprehension

The one of the prominent challenges determined in this research is trouble in comprehending of academic vocabulary. With uncommon vocabulary, most of them had trouble, and as a result either guessed meanings or constructed partial understanding while relying heavily on dictionaries and translation tools. Importantly, the finding is in line with the previous studies suggesting that vocabulary knowledge is a major predictor of comprehension, and that lexical competence is highly associated with inferring word meaning through context (Qunayeer, 2021; Hu et al., 2022). Minimizing the meaning of each word and its variety of applications, vocabulary deprivation in oral and written texts can often lead to learners developing an acute sense of memorization without relocation of comprehension skills long into the future (Almuhammadi, 2020) Commonly, vocabulary is taught through memorization of word(hint), and followed by the image which is not effective and a lot of time ended up with prohibited repetition type of learning and does not let students to figure out the way to get the idea of processing to manage the new words properly and learnt this type of context, therefore, it is the only context to get same meaning from the same example.

In addition to problems with vocabulary, a number of participants reported difficulties with long or complex sentence structures, which is a recurring challenge described in the EFL literature as a significant barrier to reading comprehension (Widodo et al., 2022). Syntactic complexity, especially found in academic texts, is a real challenge for learners with an insufficient grasp of grammar. Aligning with previous research, the findings from this study indicate that learners need direct instruction in sentence structures and patterns of grammar to help them more efficiently decode complex texts (Hu et al., 2022; Hezam et al., 2022). When EFL learners do not receive grammatical instruction in EFL classes, it is easy for them to misunderstand the meanings of sentences, thus causing them to mistake the meanings of sentences, i.e., misinterpret.

One main aspect that contributes to this difference in reading comprehension is the education and cultural context. This meant that many were familiar with English references, nuances or cultural information that helped them process the text in the reading we'd chosen. This supports the studies that demonstrated the influence of cultural schemata on understanding, because people depend on their previous experiences and thinking systems to decipher something new (Bensalah & Guerroudj, 2020; Toti & Hamid, 2022). Where there are cultural gaps, learners fail to take on the material, leading to distortion or shallow comprehension. It has been revealed in some of the research that by embedding cultural knowledge into the language class, reading comprehension can be improved by assisting the learners to build relevant patterns with the aligned texts (Zahran, 2020; Sun & Tan, 2023). However, the demands of the EFL curriculum do not emphasize cultural exposure, which results in learners being ill-prepared to face reading materials requiring knowledge of wider background culture than they possess.

Moreover, limited exposure to English texts emerged as one of the major constraints faced by the participants, confirming earlier research regarding the role of Extensive Reading in language acquisition (Rugyema, 2023; Yudhana, 2021). In most EFL contexts, learners have limited access to a variety of reading materials, resulting in difficulty in developing fluency and flexibility across text types. The child also finds reading and writing very hard, which can be attributed to a weak reading culture and infrequent reading (Rugyema, 2023), which ultimately contributes to their being 'locked' into shorter

texts that serve their purposes rather than long reads which deepen engagement through continuous thinking. Previous studies also showed a correlation between extensive reading and learners' ability to process and acquire new information pointed out that exposing learners with different types of written text and knowledge structures are teaching them how to use the writer's tools (Rugyema, 2023; Yudhana 2021). It emphasizes the importance of structured reading programs in the curriculum, where they are exposed to various texts and can develop more complex comprehension skills over time.

5.2. Strategies Employed by Students

In spite of this, the study emphasizes how learners have strategies to enhance reading comprehension. Some of the most common strategies were the use of translation tools, (dictionaries and language applications). This aligns with prior research finding translation aids to provide gap-bridging vocabulary and facilitate immediate comprehension for learners (Rahman et al., 2023). However, while translation tools assist in the short term, leur trop d'utilisation peut faire obstacle à l'acquisition de lecture autonome, avec impliquant sur la capacité d'inférence des apprenants (Mahmud & Shaikh, 2023). Good vocabulary teaching should balance learners between using translation for lexical explanation of new words and using context to help learners derive the meaning with the ultimate goal of forming the meaning of words in the same brain region with other meanings of the same word for better remembrance/word retrieval and word comprehension retention in the brain.

Another widely reported strategy was collaboration with peers, which supports the literature on the benefits of cooperative learning in EFL settings (Mahmud & Shaikh, 2023; Sarshogh et al., 2024). Peer talks allow them to compare different interpretations of the texts, clarify misunderstandings, and reinforce learning through social interaction. According to the research, collective reading activities enhance comprehension by promoting deeper engagement with the material and alleviating reading anxiety (Mahmud & Shaikh, 2023). Moreover, group reading strategies enhance learning by encouraging learners to voice their ideas, enhancing cognition with respect to the reading of the text (Sarshogh et al., 2024). This was especially true when stronger readers worked with weaker ones, as struggling readers may find it difficult to add value to the learning process without being explicitly guided in achieving that goal (Al-Dokom & Al-Qeyam, 2024).

The personal reading habits reported by learners is in accordance with previous research that emphasizes extensive reading and its role in developing comprehension skills (Oktari et al., 2024). Students who read in English by their own choice (outside of their classes) tended to be more acquainted with different text structures and vocabulary. In turn, studies have shown that having a well-developed reading habit can help improve comprehension (Oktari et al., 2024) by providing learners with different types of linguistic input, re-enforcing grammar and vocabulary learnt, and developing fluency. Although many learners are motivated to engage with reading, motivation, and access to level-appropriate reading materials can prove a challenge for many learners, further emphasizing that educators must create such avenues of reading, along with access to diverse and level-appropriate texts (Rugyema, 2023).

5.3. Implications for Teaching Practices

There are various pedagogical implications that emerge from the findings of this study. First, instead of rote memorization, vocabulary instruction should be focused on contextual learning. According to research evidence, direct classroom vocabulay instruction using techniques such as the specialized sloga; restricts Vocabulary in Contexts and Repetition (VCR) have been shown to increase retention and utilization in reading activities, (Indriani et al., 2023). Second, reading comprehension lesson should include explicit grammar instructions to help learners deal with complex sentence structures more efficiently. Exposing the learners to the syntactic patterns of the genre can continue through instruction on markers of textual coherence, aiding comprehension skills and processing (Hu et al., 2022).

In addition to this scaffolding of reading tasks can be an important part of enabling learners to slowly build confidence and develop comprehension in incremental stages. Giving the learner simplified in context, replacing them with complex materials end by enabling them to utilize acquired skills at incremental pace to avoid frustration and help avoid anxiety (Lamu, 2024). This method is based on research that highlights differentiated instruction as a means of meeting varied learner needs (Wulandari et al., 2020).

Expand the role of technology in reading instruction. Moreover, digital platforms (interactive e-book, online reading programs) can also enable engagement through multimedia annotations, glossaries, or adaptive learning (Rattanasak, 2023). But students need to be taught to employ these tools strategically, not as passive instruments in the transformation of surface-level details into meaningful understanding.

What can educators do to promote reading of English language text? First, educators should implement extensive reading programs that encourage students to read widely. Motivating reading with providing various reading material, as well as encouraging reading on the daily basis, develop abilities like long-lasting comprehension (Rugyema, 2023).

6. Conclusion

The study will shed light on reading comprehension problems encountered by EFL students in Champasack University in regard to their limited vocabulary, complex grammar structures, and challenges summarizing and identifying the main idea. Though they used strategies to deduce word meanings (e.g., look up the dictionaries, guess the meanings by context, and seek help from the peers), these processes were qualitative and rather unstructured, indicating the instructional intervention needed in terms of vocabulary acquisition. These results highlight the necessity of structured interventions (e.g., explicit vocabulary instruction, targeted grammar instruction, and using cognitive and metacognitive methods such as summarization and self-observation). Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis further supports the view that digital tools and collaborative activities all contribute to creating an engaging and supportive environment for learning. By integrating digital literacy into the EFL syllabus and adopting a student-centered, scaffolded approach, we can promote better reading comprehension among English language learners to elevate their overall learning outcomes. More studies on these strategies' long-term impact and their effectiveness in EFL contexts with the integration of technology to enhance reading instruction should be investigated. Moreover, these insights add to the overall understanding of reading comprehension in EFL education while also providing practical recommendations for enhancing instructional methods and policy development.

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