



INVESTIGATING THE PROBLEMS AFFECTING EFL LEARNERS' READING SKILL AT GOVT. COLLEGE UNIVERSITY HYDERABAD, SINDH

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the problems affecting EFL learners' reading skill at Government College University Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. Out of four language skills, reading contains great importance as it opens the gateway to world knowledge. Reading is a dynamic and complex process in which a reader's thought and perception work together. This core skill helps to improve academic performance. The researcher used mixed method approach applying triangulation method. This study focused on n=150 EFL students and n=10 teachers of intermediate level at GC. University Hyderabad, Sindh. The researcher used questionnaire to collect quantitative data and conducted semi-structured interviews to know teachers' perceptions. Students were selected through simple random sampling while the teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS 25.0 version and teachers' interviews were analyzed thematically. The study reports that EFL learners are really facing comprehension problems which affect EFL learners' reading skill. The main problems which hinder their progress in reading comprehension are limited vocabulary, lack of interesting reading material and linguistic deficiency. Similarly, majority of students are unaware of reading strategies and activities. The results show that most of EFL learners at intermediate level lack of reading strategies and activities.

KEYWORDS: English reading skill, EFL learners, reading comprehension problems

Introduction

Background of the Study

In the current era, the English language has become the part and parcel of our life. People all over the world speak English as a common language. They use English as a language of research and trade. The fact is that most of the

books are published in the English language. Besides, the books of general information are also written in English. Therefore, reading skill contains the importance like a foundation of the building. Without reading skill, the material of advanced studies cannot be comprehended. Wixon & Weber (1987), define reading as a dynamic process in which reader, text and reading context interact

together to construct the meaning of the written text. The process of reading contains visual motor skills to perceive the symbols of language. According to Hung and Ngana(2015), reading is one of the language skills which can help the learners to improve their second language. So the students can improve their speaking, writing and vocabulary with the help of reading skill. In the process of reading comprehension, a reader understands the meaning of words and sentences in the given context. The reading activity works together with vocabulary, thinking and reasoning and does not work separately. That is why reading comprehension is a process in which the reader actively participates to comprehend English text. Most of EFL learners have problems regarding reading English text. The main issues they face during reading are limited knowledge of vocabulary as well as sentence structure (Gunning, 2002). In Pakistan, the English language is a medium of instruction in educational sectors. Likewise, people cannot deny the importance of English in business world. The business firms prefer to have those employees who have the capability of English comprehension so that they can understand English text received from the officials and the business dealers.

Research problem

In EFL reading classrooms, reading comprehension is the major issue that is often under discussion. Stauffer (1969) gives much importance to reading skill and says that the capability to understand the text is one of the dimensions, which is imperative for EFL learners. The activity of reading can open the windows of the world's knowledge. Therefore, the comprehension of reading text contains much importance in academic reading. The researcher observes that students at the intermediate level are not very good at their reading comprehension especially at the college level though they have studied English reading skills for more than ten years. So the main aim of the present research is to investigate the problems of English reading affecting the pace of EFL learners reading comprehension at Government College University Hyderabad, Sindh Pakistan.

The Questions of Research

The researcher formed the following questions to achieve the aim and objectives of the study:

1. What are the problems which affect the reading skill of EFL learners at Government College University Hyderabad?
2. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers concerning the problems EFL learners face in learning reading skills and their coping strategies at Govt. College University Hyderabad?
3. What are the possible remedial measures to improve EFL learners' reading skills at Government College University Hyderabad?

Research Significance

This research will highlight the main problems in learners' reading skill at intermediate level and it will help to improve not only learning but also teaching methods of English reading skill. This research will provide a conceptual framework for the teachers to make teaching reading comprehension skill effective and successful. It will also contribute to better and fruitful teaching at the department of English, GC. University Hyderabad, Sindh.

Review of Literature

The Literature review contains significance importance in research because it provides the researcher strong understanding of the research problems De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpert (2005, p. 123). In the past, the researchers belonging to different countries of the world conducted research on EFL learner's reading problems. Medjahdi, W. (2015) investigated EFL learners' reading comprehension problems and the reasons due to which EFL learners were unable to comprehend the written English text. The research instruments used by the researcher were questionnaire and interviews. The result of the study revealed that the learners were unaware of semantics so they faced problems to comprehend English text.

Mohamed, S (2016) explored learners' reading problems and evaluated the current

reading practices in English reading comprehension. The instruments used for the research were questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The result of the research revealed that the learners were unaware of the strategies of reading skill and were facing problems in English reading comprehension. Moreover, the study revealed that many teachers were not aware of teaching strategies of reading skill and they were teaching EFL learners through the old method of teaching. Hamza Al-Jurrah & Nur Salina(2018)Conducted a study to investigate reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners in higher learning institutions. The study employed a quantitative method using test as numerical data to examine the difficulties faced by EFL learners. The findings indicated that the major difficulty faced by the Arabic EFL learners was inability to recognize the types of text. The research reported that reading comprehension difficulties affected their English language proficiency and academic performance. Doung Dara(2019) investigated English reading problems of Cambodian high school students through mixed methods approach. The researcher used a questionnaire and interview as research instruments. The findings reveal that lack of language knowledge and motivations were the main English reading problems. Tarique, Memon. Shumaila. A ,Syed Shah Waqar. A (2019) investigated reading difficulties which ESL learners face at the undergraduate level. The researcher used random sampling for this quantitative research. The result of this study confirmed the problems related to language knowledge, lack of reading strategies, motivation and background knowledge. The researchers concluded that reading material was the most important variable to impact students' interest and background knowledge.

Methodology

According to (Babbie, 1992) research design is a procedure of how a researcher decides to conduct the research. For this study, the researcher used a mixed-method approach to conduct the research. This study focused on problems affecting EFL learner's English reading skill at the intermediate level. In the first step, the research process starts with collecting quantitative data then

explained the quantitative result with in-depth qualitative data. The researcher used questionnaire to collect quantitative data from the learners of intermediate level. In the second step, qualitative phase starts as a follow up just to help and explain the quantitative result. The main purpose of this follow up is to know perceptions of EFL teachers regarding reading problems faced by EFL learners at Govt. College University Hyderabad Sindh.

Research Instruments and Sampling

The researcher used questionnaire and interviews for this study. The researcher adapted the questionnaire from the study conducted by Mohamed, S(2016) at Zawia University, Libya. The first part of questionnaire described demographic information like gender, level, age and college. The second part comprised 30 items/statements used for investigating the reading comprehension problems by using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" while researcher conducted semi-structured interview of ten (n=10) EFL teachers for qualitative research. The setting of this study is Govt. College University (Phuleli) Hyderabad Sindh, Pakistan The target population included n=150 EFL learners of intermediate level.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was the main tool in this study to collect the views of students. The views were regarding the problems of EFL learners faced in English reading skill. The motive of using the questionnaire was to get first the objectives of research namely investigating the problems which affect the reading skill of EFL learners. There are many factors which cause problems in English reading skill but the researcher focused on the variables. A semi-structured interview is one of the authentic tools that provide concrete data to the researcher about the study. Creswell (2009). In this study, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview of n=10 EFL teachers of Govt. College University Hyderabad. The principal purpose of conducting the semi-structured interview was to answer the second and third research questions. The aim of study was not only to explore teachers' views concerning the problems that EFL learners

face in English reading skill and coping strategies but also to suggest possible remedial measures to improve EFL learners' reading skill at GC. University Hyderabad.

Descriptive Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS 25.0 version. The

questionnaire consisted of 30 statements which were divided into three sections. The first section related to EFL learners' attitude towards reading skill. The second section described the use of learners' reading abilities and strategies and the third section described EFL learners' attitude toward teaching strategies of reading skill.

Table -1 Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire (SECTION-A)

S. No	Statements	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	MEAN	STD. DEV
(A)-Students' attitude concerning reading skill								
1	I find English reading skill simple	N	66	50	6	18	2.04	1.25
		%	44.0	33.3	4.0	12.0		
2	I enjoy reading additional materials (stories, magazines etc. written in English) out of class.	N	45	44	13	20	2.61	1.50
		%	30.0	29.3	8.7	13.3		

The statistics given above in Table -1 of the questionnaire (section -A) reveals that students have negative attitude towards reading skill which

is the main problem that prevents them to improve their reading skill.

Table-2 Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire (SECTION -B)

S. No	Statements	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	MEAN	STD. DEV
(B)-Students' reading abilities and strategies								
3	I try to guess the theme of text before starting reading	N	17	11	9	72	3.73	1.26
		%	11.3	7.3	6.0	48.0		
4	I can read a large text quickly to get an overall idea of it.	N	42	52	28	16	2.36	1.22
		%	28.0	34.7	18.7	10.7		
5	I can find out the main idea of a text during the reading.	N	73	16	12	21	2.43	1.62
		%	48.7	10.7	8.0	14.0		
6	I can differentiate between main idea and supporting ideas.	N	39	50	17	20	2.60	1.41
		%	26.0	33.3	11.3	13.3		
7	I can find out specific information from the text quickly	N	36	71	20	13	2.27	1.12
		%	24.0	47.3	13.3	8.7		
8	I can analyze long sentences and idiomatic phrases.	N	38	45	16	32	2.66	1.39
		%	25.3	30.0	10.7	21.3		
9	I can choose a title to a reading passage.	N	16	24	12	53	3.58	1.35
		%	10.7	16.0	8.0	35.3		
10	I have the ability to summarize a text after reading.	N	43	36	16	25	2.75	1.52
		%	28.7	24.0	10.7	16.7		

The statistics given in Table -2 of the questionnaire (section -B) highlights that majority of students are unable to get main idea and they cannot differentiate between main idea and supporting

ideas. Similarly, they do not know how to scan, summarize and analyze long idiomatic sentences or English text. The statistics points out that these problems affect EFL learners' reading skill.

Table -3 Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire (SECTION-C)

S. No	Statements	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	MEAN	STD. DEV	
	(C)-EFL students' attitudes regarding teaching strategies of reading skill								
11	My teacher tries to make reading delightful	N %	28 18.7	27 18.0	5 3.3	44 29.3	46 30.7	3.35	1.53
12	My teacher speaks only in English in class.	N %	31 20.7	24 16.0	0 0.0	55 36.7	40 26.7	3.33	1.53
13	My teacher uses A.V aids when teaches reading skill.	N %	71 47.3	59 39.3	8 5.3	5 3.3	7 4.7	1.79	1.02
14	My teacher arranges the class in groups/pairs to find the meaning of text through discussion	N %	67 44.7	34 22.7	14 9.3	14 9.3	21 14.0	2.25	1.46
15	Lesson of reading is divided into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.	N %	61 40.7	30 20.0	17 11.3	24 16.0	18 12.0	2.39	1.45
16	Before starting reading, teacher explains the background of text.	N %	4 2.7	7 4.7	7 4.7	34 22.7	98 65.3	4.43	0.97
17	My teacher asks different questions for the motivation of the reading text.	N %	23 15.3	13 8.7	9 6.0	42 28.0	63 42.0	3.73	1.47
18	My teacher asks us to make questions about text.	N %	58 38.7	36 24.0	11 7.3	21 14.0	24 16.0	2.45	1.51
19	When I face a new word, teacher helps to provide its meaning.	N %	2 1.3	3 2.0	6 4.0	56 37.3	83 55.3	4.43	0.78
20	My teacher points out my problems concerning reading skill	N %	25 16.7	15 10.0	13 8.7	33 22.0	64 42.7	3.64	1.52
21	I am satisfied with the reading taught by my teacher.	N %	19 12.7	10 6.7	11 7.3	48 32.0	62 41.3	3.83	1.37
22	My teacher encourages me to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues.	N %	43 28.7	42 28.0	18 12.0	20 13.3	27 18.0	2.64	1.47
23	My teacher tries to develop inference skills among students	N %	50 33.3	44 29.3	13 8.7	22 14.7	21 14.0	2.47	1.44
24	My teacher teaches us how to skim a text i.e. to get gist	N %	46 30.7	57 38.0	14 9.3	15 10.0	18 12.0	2.35	1.33
25	My teacher teaches us how to scan a text i.e. to get specific information.	N %	59 39.3	42 28.0	10 6.7	22 14.7	17 11.3	2.31	1.41
26	My teacher focuses language learning i.e. pronunciation, vocab, grammar and so on.	N %	38 25.3	21 14.0	7 4.7	43 28.7	41 27.3	3.19	1.59
27	My teacher teaches us critical evaluation of a reading text.	N %	34 22.7	10 6.7	21 14.0	43 28.7	42 28.0	3.33	1.51

28	My teacher teaches summarizing of a text.	N	41	52	16	17	24	2.54	1.41
		%	27.3	34.7	10.7	11.3	16.0		
29	My teacher provides me with a further reading list to read on my own.	N	36	59	11	23	21	2.56	1.37
		%	24.0	39.3	7.3	15.3	14.0		
30	I think my teachers need training and latest techniques about reading skill so that they may teach us in the best way.	N	45	25	9	37	34	2.93	1.59
		%	30.0	16.7	6.0	24.7	22.7		

The statistics given in **Table -3** of the questionnaire (section -C) indicates learners' attitude towards teaching strategies of reading skill. The percentage and mean of the given statements show that students at intermediate level do not have positive attitude towards teaching strategies of reading comprehension. Most of the students think that reading strategies like context clues, A.V aids, and skimming, scanning, extra reading material and reading activities are not used during the class of reading comprehension.

Thematic Analysis of Semi Structured Interviews of EFL Teachers

The data of Semi structured interviews were included with questionnaire as an additional data in order to know the validity of the results of questionnaire .The conducted interviews of EFL teachers (n=10) at Govt. College University Hyderabad Sindh, were listened repeatedly for transcription and then coded. The tool of thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. The principal purpose of conducting interviews was to know the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the problems faced by EFL learners in English reading skill and to explore some remedial measures to improve EFL learners reading skill at Govt. College University students. In this section the answers of 2nd and 3rd research questions of the study were intended.

The interview questions concerning teachers' qualification, experience and their training were asked. In the response of these questions n=09 teachers reported to have postgraduate degrees in English literature while one was M.A in English linguistics .Most of the teachers attended teacher training programs and they had 8 to 27 years experience of teaching.

For semi structured interviews five (05) questions were asked related to English reading skill.

Q-1 What are the problems that your students face during reading comprehension?

Eight out of ten(N=8, 80%) teachers believe that the students are facing reading comprehension problems due to their lack of vocabulary, lack of reading strategies, and lack of grammar knowledge While two teachers (N=2, 20%) believe that the problem of EFL learners' in reading skill is due to poor grammar knowledge.

Q-2 What techniques and activities do you implement in your reading class?

In the response of using techniques and activities, five (n=5, 50%) teachers were in favor of grammar translation method .To them, this method is suitable because learners' basic grammar knowledge is not good and three (n=3, 30%) teachers believe in using easy text so that EFL students can understand well while two (n=2, 20%) teachers implement pair work technique. According to these two (n=2, 20%) teachers, students' participation in reading comprehension activities can improve their English reading skill.

Q-3 How do you support the students when they come across unfamiliar words during reading?

Regarding the third question, four (n=4, 40%) teachers think that context clues method is the best way to get the meaning of difficult words and context can help to know the meaning of unfamiliar words .Their point of view is that they help the students to be confident to get the meaning of difficult words while six (n=6, 60%) teachers are in favor of telling the meaning in Sindhi or Urdu . They gave the reason that most of

the students cannot understand compound and complex sentences because they are weak in language knowledge.

Q-4 How do you help them develop their reading skill?

In the response of fourth question, three (n=3, 30%) teachers believe that reading of EFL learners can be improved by reading paragraphs while seven(n=7, 70%) teachers think that EFL learners reading skill can be developed through interesting reading material such as; stories, magazines and novels.

Q-5 What can you suggest to improve EFL learners' reading problems?

In the response of the fifth question, eight (n=8, 80%) teachers suggests that the problems of EFL learners in reading comprehension can be improved by making reading habit through interesting reading material like stories, magazines and novels which would help the students to be motivated and their vocabulary and language skills will also be improved while two (n=2, 20%) teachers were in favor of reading syllabus textbook.

Results and Discussion

The main aim of this research is to investigate the problems affecting EFL learners reading skills at Government College University Hyderabad. The questions for this research were formulated keeping in mind the aim of study. The first question was designed to investigate the problems affecting EFL learners on reading skill while the second question was designed to explore the teacher's views concerning the problems that EFL learners face in reading skill and their copying strategies at intermediate level. The (section -A) of the questionnaire reveals that EFL students have negative attitude towards the reading skill. The descriptive statistics highlights the learners' thinking that English language is not simple for them and majority of learners do not enjoy extra reading material such as stories, magazines and novels.

The (section -B) of the questionnaire focuses on learner's reading abilities and strategies. The

mean and percentage of the statements point out that most of the students are unable to get main idea from a large text. They cannot differentiate between main idea and supporting idea given in the text. Similarly, the descriptive statistics shows that students do not have the ability to skim, scan summarize and analyze long idiomatic text. The (section-C) focuses on EFL learners' attitude towards teaching strategies. The result of this section reveals that most of the students are unaware of context clues method, skimming, scanning and inference skill. Moreover, the majority of students think that the EFL learn do not know how reading process is followed during the lesson of English reading comprehension. Hence, the majority of students are not aware of reading strategies and activities which put great effect on English reading comprehension.

The results of all three sections of questionnaire show that EFL learners' attitude towards reading skill is not positive and the essential reading strategies employed for effective reading comprehension are missing at GC. University, Hyderabad. Descriptive statistics define that majority of EFL learners are not good at vocabulary knowledge. They cannot comprehend English text quickly due to insufficient language knowledge. It is also pointed out that most of the learners are unaware of context clues method, reading process. A.V aids, skimming, scanning and inference skills. In addition to this, the majority of EFL learners do not have the experience of reading activities in the class.

After achieving the results of questionnaire, semi-structured interviews of EFL teachers were conducted. The principal purpose of interview was not only to explore reading problems more closely but also to fill the gap in research as there was a survey research and teachers' perceptions were not added to know the problems of EFL learners in the context of Hyderabad Sindh. One more reason to conduct this interview was to answer the second and third research questions.

The conducted interviews reveal that all (n=10) teachers have master degree in English and most of them attended teacher training programs

while two of them are teacher trainers. The result of interviews show that (n=8, 80%) teachers perceive that EFL learners face vocabulary problems when they come across unfamiliar words. The teachers inform that most of EFL learners are not good at language knowledge and reading comprehension strategies. While (n=2, 20%) teachers believe that the problem of EFL learners in reading skill is due to poor grammar knowledge.

When they were asked about teaching techniques and activities which they implemented in the class, five (n=5, 50%) teachers informed that they used grammar translation method for teaching reading skill. Three teachers (n=3, 30%) used easy reading material while (n=2, 20%) teachers used group and pair work technique in the class to teach reading comprehension skill.

Regarding the third question of how teachers support if students face unfamiliar words during reading. Four teachers (n=4, 40%) reported to use context clues method during reading while six (n=6, 60%) teachers support the students by telling the meaning in their L1. According to four teachers context clues is the best way to get the meaning of difficult word and its context can help to know the meaning of unfamiliar words. Their point of view is that they help the students to be independent to get the meaning of difficult words while six teachers are in favor of telling the meaning in L1. They gave the reason that most of the students cannot comprehend the text because of limited vocabulary knowledge. In the response of the fourth question of how teachers help students develop their reading skill. Three (n=3, 30%) teachers believe that reading of EFL learners can be improved by reading paragraph while seven (n=7, 70%) teachers think that EFL learners' reading skill can be developed through interesting reading material.

In the response of the fifth question eight (n=8,80%) teachers suggest that the problem of EFL learners in reading comprehension can be improved by making reading habit through interesting reading material like stories magazines and novels which help the students to be motivated and their vocabulary as well as language skills will

also be improved while two(n=2,20%)teachers were in favor of reading English text from syllabus. According to them if students feel problem, they should consult the teacher who will help them to solve their reading comprehension problem. The perceptions of EFL teachers and literature review reveal the possible remedial measures and indicate that EFL learners' reading comprehension skill can be improved by using reading comprehension activities and strategies.

The above discussion reveals that the perceptions of teachers in semi-structured interviews regarding EFL learners' reading problems support evidently to the findings of learners' questionnaires. Therefore, the result of this study is concluded along with recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the problems affecting EFL learners reading skill at Govt. College University Hyderabad Sindh, Pakistan through the perceptions of ten (n=10) English teachers and survey of n=150 EFL learners. The study reported that EFL learners were really facing the problems in reading comprehension and they confirmed the problems which affected EFL learners' reading skill. The main problems which hindered their progress in reading comprehension were limited vocabulary, lack of interesting reading material and linguistic deficiency. Similarly, majority of students were unaware of reading activities, strategies, skimming, scanning, and inference skill and context clues method. Besides, lack of reading process, reading skill was taught in a traditional way focusing on decoding. It is obvious from the results that students' negative attitude towards English reading de-motivated them. Most of EFL learners at intermediate level were unable to skim, scan, analyze or summarize English reading text. Hence, it is necessary to develop extensive reading habit to make EFL learners efficient in reading comprehension because it makes tremendous impact on academic performance.

This research based on findings makes a few recommendations to key stakeholders of GC. University Hyderabad, Sindh Pakistan. The study indicates that the best method of improving

reading skill of EFL learners at intermediate level is to develop a habit of reading among students. The reading culture can be promoted by setting up a book reading club. According to (Nuttall, 2005) the easiest way of improving EFL learners' reading skill is to develop the habit of extensive reading. Without improving the ability of teachers, the ability of students cannot be improved. So from time to time teachers training workshops should be held and teachers can maximize students' English reading skill by using updated and diversified teaching strategies.

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