

## EFFECTIVE AND INTERACTIVE STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE READING AND COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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### Abstract

Reading comprehension is an essential academic skill and a key indicator of literacy development, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Traditional reading methods often fall short in engaging students and fostering deep understanding. This paper explores effective and interactive strategies aimed at improving reading comprehension, focusing on student-centered approaches such as reciprocal teaching, interactive read-alouds, literature circles, and the integration of technology. These methods support vocabulary development, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness, ultimately creating more inclusive and effective reading environments.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, EFL learners, interactive strategies, vocabulary, student-centered learning, educational technology

### 1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that goes beyond decoding words. It involves understanding, interpreting, and evaluating text meaningfully. For English language learners, especially in EFL contexts, reading challenges are often compounded by limited vocabulary and cultural unfamiliarity with the texts. Therefore, fostering comprehension requires more than passive reading; it demands the integration of engaging, interactive, and student-centered teaching strategies (Smith, 2020). This paper discusses evidence-based and practical strategies that educators can implement to enhance reading comprehension in diverse classrooms.

#### Importance of Reading Comprehension in EFL Education

In EFL classrooms, reading is not just a skill but a vital tool for both language acquisition and academic achievement. Comprehension plays a central role in helping learners grasp new vocabulary, understand grammar in context, and engage in critical thinking, all of which contribute to their overall proficiency in the target language. Through reading comprehension, students not only expand their language knowledge but also gain insights into cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and academic content that help them become well-rounded language users. For example, as students read texts, they are exposed to a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. When

encountering unfamiliar words, learners often infer meaning from the context, helping them retain new vocabulary more effectively. For instance, in a reading passage describing a community festival, students may encounter words like "parade," "vendors," or "celebration." By reading in context, they understand the meanings of these words and can later use them in similar situations.

Additionally, reading comprehension helps students understand grammatical structures in context. For example, when reading a story that uses past tense verbs to describe events, learners observe how verb tenses function to convey timelines, giving them a deeper understanding of grammatical rules. If a student reads a passage with sentences like, "She went to the market yesterday," they not only understand the meaning of "went" but also comprehend the structure of the past tense in English. Over time, students internalize these grammatical patterns, which they can apply when speaking and writing. Reading comprehension also enhances critical thinking skills, as students are often asked to analyze texts, draw conclusions, and make predictions. For instance, in an EFL classroom, after reading a short story or article, a teacher might ask students, "What do you think the character will do next?" or "How would you have responded in that situation?" These questions require students to use their understanding of the text and think beyond it, encouraging them to make inferences and connect the material to their own lives. This practice helps students develop problem-solving skills and the ability to analyze situations critically.

However, when reading methods are passive or rely solely on rote memorization, students may struggle to develop genuine comprehension. In traditional classrooms, students may be asked to simply read and regurgitate information without engaging in deeper analysis or making connections to the text. For example, a student may memorize the definition of a word but fail to understand how it is used in different contexts. This type of passive reading does little to foster critical thinking or retention of knowledge. It can lead to disengagement, as students feel disconnected from the material and fail to see its relevance.

One example of passive reading might be when students are asked to read an article about climate change without engaging them in discussions or reflection. They may simply read the text without fully understanding its implications or applying the information to their own lives. This approach can hinder their ability to make meaningful connections or retain the knowledge in the long term.

To address this, active reading strategies are essential. Techniques such as previewing the text, asking guiding questions, and encouraging students to make predictions help students stay engaged and improve comprehension. For instance, before reading a text about social media, a teacher might ask, "What do you already know about social media? How do you think it has impacted society?" These questions spark curiosity

and prepare students to approach the reading with a critical mindset, making them more likely to retain and understand the material.

In summary, reading comprehension is crucial in EFL education because it fosters language acquisition, enhances critical thinking, and contributes to academic success across subjects. When students actively engage with texts and apply strategies for understanding and analyzing content, they develop stronger language skills that extend beyond the classroom. Conversely, passive reading methods can lead to disengagement and hinder progress, underscoring the importance of creating interactive and meaningful reading experiences for learners.

Strategies to improve reading and comprehension

### **Interactive Read-Alouds**

Interactive read-alouds involve the teacher reading a text aloud to students while strategically pausing to engage them in discussions, predictions, and reflections. The teacher models fluent reading while also guiding students to actively engage with the content. This approach helps improve vocabulary, listening comprehension, and encourages students to build a love of reading. During an interactive read-aloud, the teacher might stop to ask questions like, "What do you think will happen next? Why?" to encourage predictions or ask, "What do you think the word 'humble' means in this context?" to support vocabulary development. After reading a section, the teacher might also ask reflective questions such as, "How do you think Wilbur feels now? Why?" to help students make emotional connections with the characters. This strategy not only improves comprehension but also encourages active participation and deeper understanding of the text.

### **Reciprocal Teaching**

Reciprocal teaching is a cooperative learning method where students rotate through four key roles—predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing—during group discussions. The teacher initially models these strategies, but over time, students take on more responsibility and lead discussions. The method fosters metacognitive awareness, helping students become more thoughtful and reflective about how they understand the text. For example, before reading a section of a book, a student might predict what will happen next based on clues from the text. Another student might ask, "Why did the character do that?" prompting others to think critically about motivations. If any part of the reading is unclear, a student might ask, "What does this word mean?" and the group works together to clarify it. Afterward, a student might summarize the section to make sure everyone has understood it. This collaborative approach enhances comprehension by allowing students to process and discuss the material together, building both individual and collective understanding.

### **Use of Graphic Organizers**

Graphic organizers are tools that help students visually structure information from a text, making complex or abstract ideas more accessible. These organizers help students identify key themes, relationships, and structures in the text, and allow them to visually represent their understanding. For instance, a story map might be used to help students outline the plot of a book, identifying key elements like the setting, characters, problem, events, and resolution. In comparing two characters or events, students might use a Venn diagram to explore their similarities and differences. Another example is using a concept web to explore a theme, such as mapping out different examples of courage in a novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Graphic organizers help students organize their thoughts and better understand the structure of the material, making it easier to retain and analyze information.

### **Integration of Technology**

Technology can significantly enhance reading comprehension by providing interactive and engaging platforms that cater to various learning needs. Digital tools like online leveled readers, interactive story platforms, and educational games can increase motivation and help personalize the learning experience. For example, Raz-Kids provides leveled reading books with audio support, allowing students to listen to the text while reading along, which improves both comprehension and pronunciation. Epic Books offers a large digital library with books at various reading levels, including interactive features like quizzes and audio narration. These digital resources can be customized to meet the needs of each student, providing real-time feedback and progress tracking. This integration of technology not only supports comprehension but also enhances students' engagement with reading through interactive and adaptable content.

### **Literature Circles and Book Clubs**

Literature circles and book clubs are structured reading groups where students read the same book and take on specific roles such as discussion leader, summarizer, connector, or vocabulary finder. This strategy promotes autonomy, peer collaboration, and in-depth exploration of texts. For example, the discussion leader facilitates the group's conversation, ensuring that everyone participates and helping guide the discussion toward key themes and ideas. The summarizer recaps the chapters or sections read, helping everyone recall the main events and ideas. The connector identifies links between the text and personal experiences, other books, or real-world situations, making the reading more relatable. The vocabulary finder identifies new or challenging words, looks them up, and shares the definitions with the group. These roles encourage students to engage deeply with the text, promote collaboration, and help students develop a better understanding of the material through group discussion and shared learning.

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