

Pedagogical Strategies of Reading Comprehension: Insights Into Best Practices in EFL Classrooms

Basem Okleh Salameh Al-Hawamdeh

Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract—The present study targets undergraduates studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia who have limited exposure to the target language in real-life contexts or a lack of real-life exposure to the target language. The study aims to investigate the actual problems of reading comprehension and suggests pedagogical strategies that can be used to achieve the communicative competence requirement. Through a questionnaire, the methodology follows the responses of students facing challenges in reading skills and suggests strategies that can be helpful for them to achieve fluency and accuracy. The researcher used a qualitative method employing a questionnaire comprising closed and open-ended statements to gather data from students studying at the undergraduate level. A total of 107 participants responded to the questionnaire. The study focuses on developing the cognitive ability of the students in EFL classrooms using different techniques and strategies for classroom pedagogy. The findings will help teachers identify the problems and create a roadmap for classroom learning that develops accuracy and fluency in reading comprehension. Additionally, this paper also explores the problems of reading skills and possible solutions in the EFL context. It also focuses on exploring the pedagogical ideas and strategies that minimize the gap between acquiring the cognition and comprehension of English language skills. Additionally, the research suggests practical solutions showcasing real-life situations to expose students to language use.

Index Terms—reading comprehension, pedagogical strategies, best practices, fluency, accuracy

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an urgent need in today's global world, and English is considered the lingua franca for exchanging ideas and thoughts. To share ideas, one needs the knowledge and communication skills in English to be understood by others. In this process, reading skills and comprehension are considered necessary, which can lead to the accuracy and fluency of individuals when communicating in the English language (Alam, 2023). Cognitive skills enable one to understand concepts and tackle real-life challenges and problems (Khonamri et al., 2021; Kralik, 2023). Thus, the present study will try to create a pathway that allows teachers and students to use different techniques and strategies in classroom teaching and learning to grasp the nuances of reading comprehension (Al-Hawamdeh, 2023). This study will delve into the reading comprehension difficulties that EFL teachers and students face, and provide solutions to enhance their teaching and learning experiences.

The impact of reading motivation on comprehension is becoming more widely recognized. The foundation of reading comprehension growth is an understanding of reading processes that include planning, setting goals, using previous information, and allocating time, the latter of which also entails identifying and choosing the best tactics and resources. Also known as regulating, observing is paying attention to and knowing of task performance and self-examination. Last but not least, evaluation is described as assessing the outcomes and regulatory procedures of one's learning, which includes going back and changing one's objectives (Schraw et al., 2006); however, putting scientific data into practice remains difficult for various reasons. Although teaching fads are typically linked to reading achievement, research has continued to show that reading instruction has been based solely on just a few skills that include word recognition, main idea discovery, connections between causes and effects, juxtaposing and analyzing, and sequencing without context.

Teachers frequently employ certain reading strategies that students use to understand the original purpose of the texts they read. However, this begs to question what type of texts students typically read and what abilities are needed to derive meaning. Consider the kind of texts that students read, such as newspapers, books, short stories, and other literary works, as well as essays, poetry, reports, summaries, and textbooks. Following that is getting students to read a text for enjoyment. Then are the two principal methods of reading: first, there is skimming, which is the process of swiftly reading through a text to obtain the gist of it and get a broad understanding of the text. Second is the reading technique of scanning. More focused than skimming, it allows one to quickly search through a text for specific information. It is employed to extract certain details from the text. The fundamental purpose of extended reading is to read lengthy material, generally for personal enjoyment. This fluency exercise focuses mainly on a text's overall comprehension.

Intensive reading is utilized to obtain precise information from shorter texts. This exercise involves reading for text details more for finding the correct answer than anything else. These various reading techniques are not exclusive to one another. For instance, before choosing an answer, it is worthwhile to read a particular paragraph for the information you are searching for; therefore, one frequently skims over a section to get a sense of what is available in the text.

In real life, people read for various reasons; therefore, when designing exercises, the questions and activities should be tailored to the material being studied and the reader's intended goal (Moreillon, 2007). Several techniques should be used when teaching reading skills in the classroom (Usama et al., 2024a). Moreillon (2007) states that:

Making connections is a critical thinking component; the brain looks for patterns. Because we connect new information with existing knowledge before integrating and organizing the new information, it is crucial to comprehend the significance of background knowledge to understanding. We bring our collective past experiences with us each time we interact with text. Every reader is unique, and every time he reads a particular work, he contributes his thoughts, personality, and life experiences. The reader contributes background information to the reading action. Every reading of the book and every reader's perception of it have the potential to be unique. (pp. 21-23)

Recognizing the many strategies used to build textual cohesion, mainly using reference and link words, is another field in which it is critical to prepare ESL learners. All the mechanisms in a text that allow for lexical relationships are referred to as references. Teaching anaphora, cataphora, and comparison are essential components of reference. With these allusions, texts may be readily deciphered as they consist of concepts rather than just standalone phrases. These serve as the text's connectors and are responsible for communication.

The concepts mentioned above serve as the theoretical foundation for reading skills. However, the real problem for teachers, whether teaching in an EFL or ESL classroom, is figuring out how to help students improve these abilities through strategies like skimming, scanning, and comprehensive reading. The best approach is to design activities to improve reading comprehension while focusing on group, pair, and thought-partner sharing so that the entire class can benefit and participate (Alam & Hameed, 2023). These activities should be interactive and engaging (Mahant et al., 2023).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is an essential language skill that enables students to understand ideas, concepts, and perceptions. It assists one in grasping the innate meaning of a text intrinsically and extrinsically. Indeed, teaching reading can be challenging for pedagogues because students are generally unmotivated in the EFL classroom. The reason behind this is the unavailability of language exposure in daily life. However, with the emergence of social media and other materials available on the internet, it is possible to expose a target language to individuals. Thus, the way individuals think impacts their behavior. The processing of thought is essential for learning a language, irrespective of the fact that behavior cannot persuade cognition, but cognition can persuade behavior.

Moreover, the incorporation of e-learning and integrated methodology helps in attention-seeking and grasping the innate structures of language. The study talks about the rotational model of methodologies that can cater to students and their needs in real-life language usage by implementing virtual use of platforms that can allow students to learn language skills (Alam et al., 2024). With the integration of writing and reading skills, students can minimize errors and develop vocabulary usage and comprehension (Usama et al., 2024). The present study focuses on individuals' mental processes how people perceive, think, remember, learn, solve problems, and direct their attention to one stimulus rather than another. The study suggests that the human mind is not a black box, and it is important these days to emphasize perception, thoughts, memory, learning, and attention (Usama et al., 2024b).

The practice of reading helps to advance both societal advancement and one's personal growth. A person is better prepared for effective involvement in social, religious, cultural, and political life by reading regularly and methodically since it improves one's intellect, emotions, tastes, and perspectives on life. A similar purpose of the present study is to better understand the reading patterns and preferences of rural teen readers and the cultures of reading that do or do not exist in the rural communities where those teenagers reside (Becnel & Moeller, 2015). In addition, by conducting a series of focus groups, the researchers sought to discover whether rural teen readers felt connected to mainstream young adult literary culture and how this connection might manifest itself.

Li's (2023) study states that academic success, innovation, and effectiveness in education or elsewhere can be improved with the help of critical thinking. The present research also focuses on improving critical thinking by asserting several teaching strategies for reading comprehension. The studies suggest practical activities that can be utilized in language classrooms to teach integrated skills (Alam et al., 2020; Alam et al., 2023a). The problem faced by teachers in the classroom revealed that the students need to be more motivated to read long paragraphs. The following research is critical as it foregrounds learners' motivation in classroom pedagogy (Naderi et al., 2021; Alam, 2025). The classroom situation provides vital points related to pedagogy, stating that the existing praxis is ineffective and there is a need to change the strategies and techniques of language teaching skills (Alam, 2022; Alam et al., 2022). Alam (2023) investigates the reflexive praxis of teaching vocabulary in an EFL classroom. The study explores the issues and challenges of pedagogy and suggests practical solutions. It is evident that teaching reading comprehension targeting cognitive ability poses numerous challenges; the present study is devoted to developing communicative competence using integrated reading comprehension.

As concluded by McNamara and Magliano (2009), understanding information to derive meaning is known as comprehension and is perhaps the foundation of cognition. They highlighted that this intricate cognitive process depends on virtually more advanced cognitive processes, including learning, thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. It takes comprehension to create long-lasting memories of experiences. Nezami's (2012) research study elaborates on how reading proficiency for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students calls for a strong command of English vocabulary and proficiency in scanning and skimming. Moreover, in reading comprehension, power and speed are also crucial. Nezami (2012) then presented a detailed study of EFL students in Saudi Arabia who generally struggled to forecast the meaning in a particular situation and summarized the piece's main points at the beginning level. That is, there are two methods to approaching reading comprehension: intensive and extensive. These methods incorporate some elements of education, such as severe computer-assisted practice, and are more beneficial for students working toward a specific goal (Alam et al., 2023b). Thus, it is closely tied to classroom instruction, which is the focus of this particular research.

The Chinese Ministry of Education's Proposal for Comprehensive Curriculum Reform and Cultivating Morality from 2014 states that instructors should concentrate on students' critical competencies and essential skills for 21st-century citizens. This comprehensive system has several dimensions, as Qi and Jiang (2021) discussed. There are four distinct core abilities in studying English: language proficiency, understanding of culture, reasoning ability, and learning competence. Since English is a second language in China, English language proficiency is unquestionably necessary for English education. There are five linguistic proficiency or language arts categories in English: hearing, talking, writing, interpreting, and viewing. The research statistically signifies the whole language approach, which says that teaching practices place less emphasis on in-depth conversation interaction and more on developing terminology and background knowledge (Cruz et al., 2012). They contend that the Whole Language approach needs to be reinforced by empirical research supporting the literature analysis. Then, the study evaluated the literature to demonstrate that interactive models that incorporate both processes from the top down and bottom up are supported by the most authentic empirical data.

In one of the more recent articles on the subject, Gofurova (2023) remarked that, in an ESL/EFL context, reading is a proactive skill that requires focus and effort. It entails guessing, forecasting, checking, and constantly asking questions of oneself, as was previously described. These are a handful of the tasks that must be completed by the participants in order for them to determine the aim of the piece of literature they are reading. Thus, this needs to be considered while designing reading comprehension exercises. Is providing students with structured exercise one way to assist them in developing their inference abilities? Another is to ask students to guess a text's outcome based on its title, illustrations, or the ending of a story based on the paragraphs that came before it (Ajmal et al., 2025).

Reading motivation means enjoying a book, being enthusiastic about an author, or being delighted by new information. Motivation influences and plays an essential role in reading and educational activities because motivation can be a primary key for people to try something (Wigfield et al., 2004). Encouraging learners to explore English requires attention-grabbing materials. However, such motivation is often lacking in non-native English speakers (Yeung et al., 2013).

According to one of the most enduring results in reading research, the breadth of students' vocabulary substantially correlates with their reading comprehension and general academic achievement. Learning new words is crucial for improving one's linguistic abilities. Thus, teachers should support their students in expanding their vocabulary. Teachers in Saudi Arabia encounter a significant barrier when it comes to teaching English vocabulary because vocabulary has a significant impact on reading abilities. According to psychometric research, vocabulary plays a key role in reading ability, and prior knowledge and vocabulary work together to trigger reading comprehension. For EFL students, the vocabulary size is crucial. Fluency can only be attained by knowing at least 3000 commonly used English terms. This association makes sense because for students to understand what they read, they need to have an extensive vocabulary and the capacity to utilize a variety of ways to determine the origins of new words when they come across them (Brown, 2004; Beg et al., 2025). Undergraduate university students who lack extensive word lists or efficient word-learning techniques frequently need help comprehending what is being said (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Understanding reading objectives varies, particularly in EFL contexts, or a reader reads a book for various purposes. Comprehension of a written text involves gaining the necessary understanding of that particular material as quickly as possible. One must use various reading techniques depending on their requirements and goals to extract the necessary meaning from the text, for instance, searching a newspaper for a specific piece of information or noticing a particular type of information (Gadušová et al., 2021). Finding the appropriate ad in the newspaper mentioned in the article shows that the reading goal has been achieved in each case (Gillet et al., 1990).

Students are instructed to read the material independently by the teacher before identifying the key theme and making conclusions based on the information provided. The researcher thinks these issues will be resolved if instructors utilize comprehension education effectively (Makebo & Ayele, 2022). If they desire to read, readers with good cognitive reading skills may spend little time doing so (Wigfield et al., 2004).

Skimming is done at a pace that is three to four times quicker than regular reading and is used to discover a text's essential concepts swiftly. When they have much reading to do in a short period, people frequently skim. Additionally, skimming is used to determine if an article could be relevant to your research. Furthermore, several tactics may be employed during skimming. Some readers travel across the page or screen, reading only the first and final paragraphs while employing headers, summarizers, and other organizers. They might read each paragraph's headings, subtitles, pictures, and the first phrase in addition to the title, subtitles, and subheadings. This method might be helpful when looking

for specific knowledge rather than reading for comprehension. For example, finding dates, names, and locations is best done via skimming. It might also be applied to the analysis of tableaux, graphs, and charts (Wenjuan et al., 2021).

One may frequently use scanning while seeking important words or concepts in a text. People usually search for a specific answer because they know what they seek. When one scans, one swiftly moves one's eyes down the page in search of particular words and phrases. When one initially discovers a resource, scanning is also utilized to see if it will provide the answers needed. One may go back and skim the document after they have scanned it (Al-Nafisah, 2011).

Most non-English-speaking learners need more access to the English language. In other words, students have few opportunities to learn proper English outside the classroom. They can only use English in class when they are learning it. Progress has yet to be made in the area of reading comprehension. Despite this, several research studies on reading instruction reveal that learners' English reading proficiency is subpar. As a result, reading comprehension issues impact students' performance across the curriculum.

Additionally, learners not exposed to reading frequently adopt lousy reading habits and a negative attitude towards understanding. The present study has concentrated on learning a great deal about teachers' teaching trends due to the need for more studies that have examined how EFL teachers manage reading comprehension in real-world classrooms in various countries and regions. Reading comprehension in English has always been important for academic success. Nezami (2012) conducted a study looking at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) university-level EFL students. Investigations into reading abilities and comprehension of English revealed significant issues with semantic explaining, a lack of motivation, a lack of self-study activities, difficulties with skimming and scanning, issues with predicting and using prior knowledge, a lack of interest in cooperation and teamwork, issues with pronunciation and spelling, a limited vocabulary, issues with understanding meaning, and an inability to summarize text. This is because effective teaching practices can improve students' reading proficiency (Lone, 2011). The objectives of the present study are:

- To develop the cognition and comprehension of students in EFL classrooms.
- To understand students' problems with reading comprehension.
- To develop communicative competence among students using strategies and techniques in classroom teaching.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research uses qualitative methodology employing a survey-based questionnaire at the undergraduate level at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU, male campus) to understand and investigate the efficacy of strategies and techniques used in classroom pedagogy. The researcher administered a questionnaire among students to seek their feedback and observations. The observations in the study were based on a test of student competence focusing on enhancing the student's cognitive comprehension. A total of 107 students responded to the questionnaire that they received in the 2023-2024 academic session. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were checked through Cronbach Alpha and a pilot study before the data collection. The data collected was tabulated and analyzed through Excel to obtain the percentage.

Furthermore, the study explored the problems and possible solutions through respondents' input and feedback. The methodology is simple yet effective in language classrooms as it aims to develop strategies to grasp the knowledge and techniques of reading comprehension by targeting the students' cognitive abilities.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was tabulated and analyzed with the help of Excel and is shown in pie charts below. The questionnaire comprises close-ended statements followed by open-ended responses to get the responses from students at the undergraduate level in PSAU studying reading as a compulsory subject.

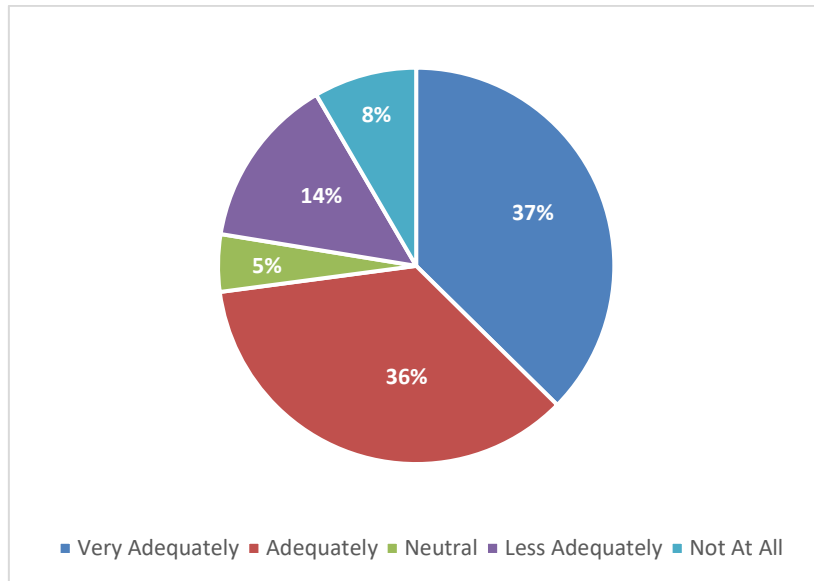


Figure 1. Level of Concentration While Reading Textbooks in the Classroom

The first question after the demographic information asked about the concentration level while reading textbooks inside the classroom. As one can see in Figure 1 above, most students said they felt focused while reading the textbook in the classroom. Moreover, 37% of students said that their concentration level was very adequate, 36% said adequate, 5% stayed neutral, and interestingly, 14% revealed less adequate, whereas 8% opted for not at all.

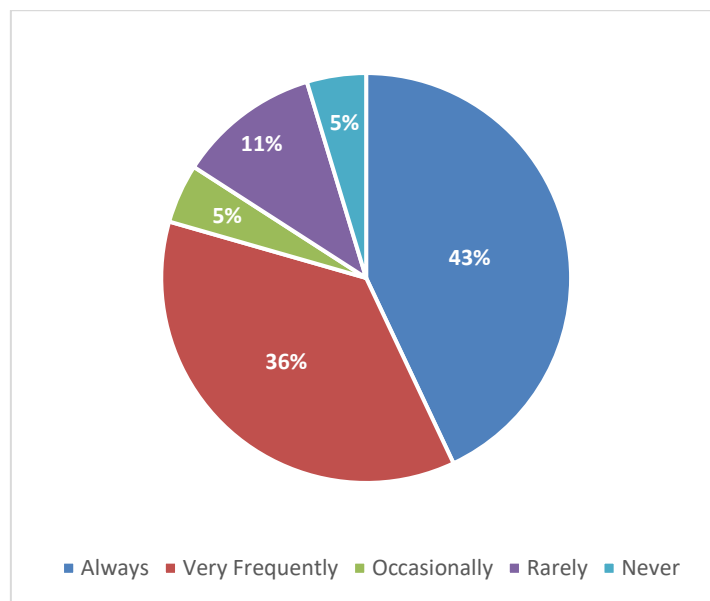


Figure 2. Problems and Issues Students Face in Reading

The second question discusses issues they face regarding vocabulary and understanding while reading in the classroom. The students at the undergraduate level revealed that they repeatedly faced problems in understanding whenever they encountered new words or concepts. The data revealed that 43% of students among all the respondents always felt that they faced problems when they came across a new vocabulary word while reading. Furthermore, 36% said they came across these words frequently, whereas 5% responded they came across them occasionally. However, 11% said they rarely came across these words, and a very insignificant number of students (5%) said they never come across them. This happens because of not reading text and newspapers frequently.

The next question is an extension of the above statements, and the students were asked about the issues and problems of unknown vocabulary. The researcher asked for the reasons why there were problems reading any of the textbooks from the syllabus. Students revealed that they did not know the exact pronunciation of the words and encountered problems spelling them. It was noticed during the data collection that students had problems with three or more syllable words and with silent phonemes either in the first or last position. Another issue was detected regarding those sounds that were unavailable in their mother tongue, and they could not pronounce those words. Instead, they are replaced with other sounds, for example, /p/ with /b/. As shown in Figure 3, 49% of the respondents said they always have issues with

unknown vocabulary, while 27% stated that it happened very frequently, 11% claimed it happened occasionally, 11% said it rarely happens to them, and only 2% claimed it never happens to them. More than one-third of respondents agreed that they cannot grasp the meaning when the words are new or have not understood them.

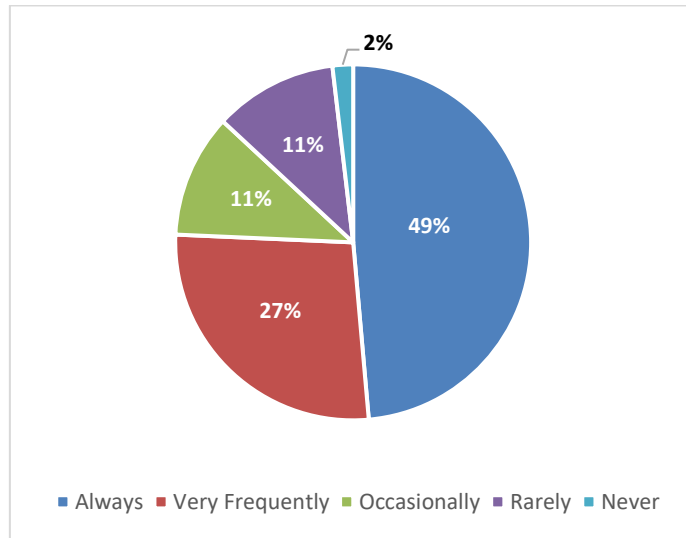


Figure 3. Issues With Unknown Vocabulary

The following questions seek information about strategies students use in the classroom to get the required comprehension from the text they read. Figure 4 reveals that only 27% of respondents agreed that they understand or comprehend what they read, whereas 27% said that they did not get the meaning of some words or phrases they read. 23% said they understood occasionally, 11% responded rarely, and 12% responded neutrally.

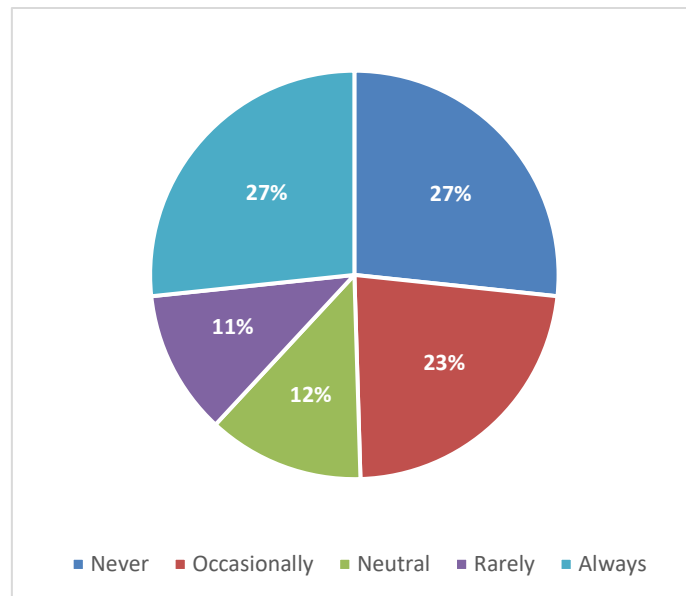


Figure 4. Habit of Taking Insights While Having Difficulties in Reading a Text

The above data in Figure 4 did not reveal students' reading strategies or how their instructors cope with diverse, homogeneous classrooms. The respondents noted the insights while using smartphones to translate the meaning into their mother tongue.

The following questions will ask about the strategies students use to get the meaning from the text they read in the classroom.

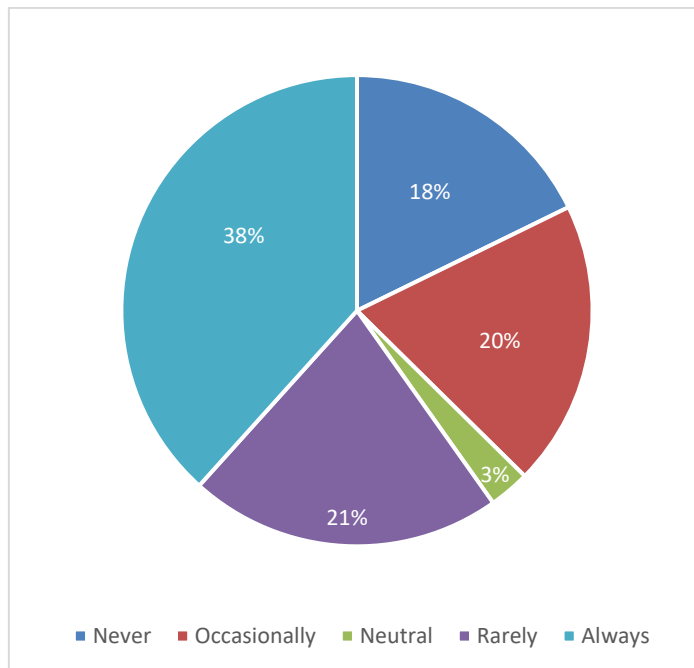


Figure 5. Text Summarizing to Understand or Comprehend the Meaning

During the data collection procedures, the respondents revealed that they use the technique of summarizing when they do not understand the text to get ample meaning out of it. The students use the internet and Google Translate to translate the text in their mother tongue to summarize and comprehend the syntactical meaning. Looking at Figure 5, interestingly, 38% of the participants stated that they summarized the text to understand its meaning, whereas 18% said they never do that. Meanwhile, 20% responded by saying they use summarizing to understand the text occasionally, 3% were neutral about summarizing, and 21% said they rarely use it at all.

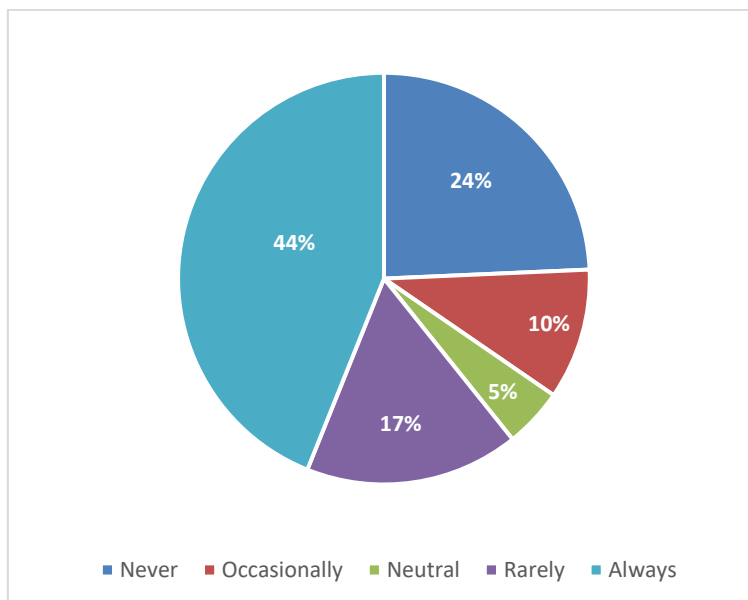


Figure 6. Paraphrase to Connect the Ideas While Reading

As Figure 6 above reveals, around 44% of respondents said they always paraphrase the text to connect the ideas at either the sentence or paragraph level while reading. 24% said they never paraphrase, and 17% chose the option rarely. 10% of respondents said that they paraphrase occasionally, and 5% chose option neutral. However, it can be understood that the respondents summarized the text with the help of Google Translate but only translated part of the paragraph to connect the ideas.

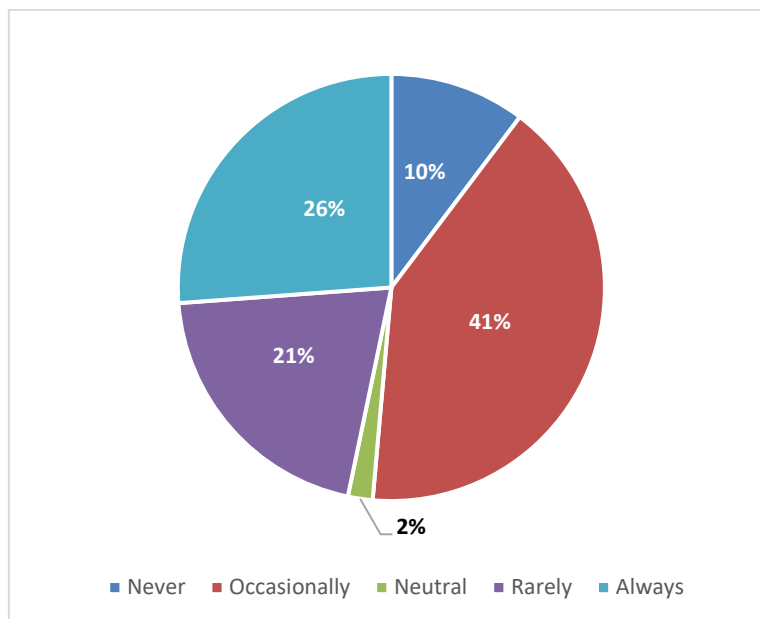


Figure. 7 Use of Dictionaries to Extract the Context and Make a Purposeful Reading

When the participants were asked how consistently they make use of dictionaries to get the meaning of unknown vocabulary, half of them responded positively, which is a large number. This reveals the problem of not knowing the meaning of complex vocabulary because they do not have a habit of reading outside of the classroom. Moreover, 10% of the respondents said that they never use dictionaries to infer the meaning of unknown words or phrases; 41% said they use them occasionally, and 2% chose to remain neutral. Finally, 21% said they rarely use a dictionary, whereas 26% said they always use it when encountering unknown vocabulary.

V. FINDINGS

The entire process of studying reading skills and the challenges experienced by EFL learners has been quite illuminating and informative. Arabic-speaking students generally suffer from reading in English because of a lack of vocabulary to express their views and opinions, as revealed by their lack of regular exposure to numerous words and phrases. Students frequently struggle with spelling and pronunciation for the above-mentioned reasons. Due to this gap, students frequently mispronounce words, making the sentence context useless. Furthermore, they also need to recognize the advantages of using interactional group discussion techniques. The biggest issue is that students need to appear motivated or inspired to read extra books, which is the root of all other issues. Furthermore, EFL students regard prediction as a serious worry since they must discuss difficult words with their peers and show little interest in using the prediction process.

The problem with participants revealed in the study is that they need to be using dictionaries. Instead, they depend on Google Translate in their mother tongue. The contextual meaning of the unknown vocabulary is sometimes lost, and they need to get the required meaning from the text they read. Sometimes, Google Translate misleads the students and provides them with the literally translated meaning, which is inappropriate. Alam et al.'s (2024c) study can be beneficial when receptive skills are practiced with the help of activity-based strategies; students will become more engaged, interactive, and communicative in real-life contexts.

Under challenging circumstances, it is sometimes seen that those being felicitated must explain new concepts or make sense of their confusion. The unexpected finding in summarizing whole texts for general comprehension tasks is that EFL students are typically relatively sluggish and need help to complete a job of sufficient length in a lecture. Since they tend to be naturally introverted, their laziness prevents them from giving their opinions, facts, or summaries. Another obstacle is a need for word strength, which makes it much harder to grasp the text's main points in their proper context. Their lack of enthusiasm for learning new words worsens the pitiful situation and renders understanding unfair and untrustworthy (Ahmad & Alam, 2024). The problems can be solved by introducing new strategies, techniques, and classroom approaches like integrating artificial intelligence and blending technology to supply ample practice to teach students how to use language skills in their daily lives. Alam et al.'s (2024a, 2024b, 2024c) study provides ample aspects of integrating AI in classroom pedagogy that can be crucial for achieving learning outcomes in teaching reading comprehension.

VI. CONCLUSION

Reading skills are most important for developing students' communicative competence (McGroarty, 1984; Alam, 2024). Hence, it is vital to improve the instructional method of the pedagogy to gain or attain the required proficiency. However, it is seen in the language classroom as the most neglected skill. The research will provide different exercises and strategies

for teaching reading comprehension skills to help students achieve better learning outcomes in this competitive environment. The study discovers the problems and suggests a practical solution for classroom teaching. Students need to be more comfortable with comprehension and, therefore, can only develop cognition with significant practice of eclectic strategies and ample repeated classroom exercises. The study will be significant in the EFL context as it will suggest troubleshooting the issues students and teachers face. The outcomes reveal that the practice of teaching deductively could be more effective in EFL classrooms, and there is a need to change the praxis of teaching. Wilhelm's (2006) strategies are practical and can be used in classroom pedagogy to achieve comprehension and cognition while and after reading English language texts. The imagination and visualization power among students will be increased, and they can infer text in a better way to use these skills in their daily communication. Students fall short of the mark, specifically in skimming and scanning comprehension, due to a lack of interest in pre-reading exercises and studying at home. Due to the poor speed of skimming and scanning, they cannot do the assignment in the allotted time. The challenges with expression are further intensified by grammatical errors, which are hastened by the lack of attention and poor language in descriptive responses. The survey conducted for the present study is limited in numbers, and to change the strategies in the curriculum, a large sample size is needed. The governing body needs to conduct more extensive surveys for policy changes.

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Basem Okleh Salameh Al-Hawamdeh is currently working as an Associate Professor of English in the Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Alkharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He holds a Ph.D. in English Language Teaching (ELT). His areas of interest are Applied Linguistics, Pragmatics, Teaching Methods, Blended Learning, and Pedagogic Theory. He has published research articles and papers in Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals. He has been teaching English for over 10 years (E-mail: hawamdehbasem1@gmail.com).