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Reading Comprehension Difficulties among EFL learners

The Case of First year students, Department of English
University of Bejaia

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

*The person who encouraged me all the time: **My Father***

*The kindest person: **My mother***

*Thank you for trusting me, for your love, patience, guidance and
support*

My beloved brothers: ABDSELAM and HAMZA

My grand sister LYNA and her husband REDHA

My little sister AMINA who support me

My best friends: HAKIMA, MENOUNE, DARINE and AICHA

To all my family

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation is an attempt to investigate the reading comprehension difficulties that first year students, at the department of English, University of Bejaia encounter and to identify some of the reasons behind these difficulties. The target population in this study represents 225 students however; we have selected a sample of 110 students. As a research instrument to collect the necessary data, we have opted for the questionnaire which was designed and handed to the first year students of English at the University of Bejaia. The results reveal that first year students face difficulties in reading comprehension that are mainly due to their limited vocabulary and their lack of concentration.

Key words: *EFL learners, English language, Reading Comprehension, Reading skill.*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- **E.F.L:** English as a foreign language
- **E.R:** Extensive Reading

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Teaching foreign languages is an important element in education. In fact, in order to master the English language the four skills are essential; listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In EFL teaching history, since the grammar translation approach, reading was considered as a key element in learning English since it was considered as an effective way for improving literacy and language development in general. In other terms, being able to read opens the world up to learners who can gain an understanding of different cultures, histories and societies thus; it is considered as a critical skill. Moreover, reading helps students acquire new knowledge, and information of the language used in written texts, it can also help students enrich their language such as; new vocabulary, phrases, sentences structures... etc when they read different types of texts .For this, learners need to be actively involved in their reading class so as to expand their reading comprehension skill.

Unfortunately, many students neglect reading as a basic skill for developing their language proficiency. Furthermore, students have lost the habit of reading which is due to some reasons such as: limited time, new technologies ...Etc.

1. Statement of the problem:

Reading comprehension difficulties is a serious problem influencing the teaching and learning processes. As student at the department of English, we have experienced reading difficulties due to problems of comprehension mainly during the first year which is considered as a bridge between secondary school and university where all modules are taught in English. In this present research we will try to shed light on some reading difficulties faced by first year students of English at the University of Bejaia and to reveal some reasons behind this state of fact.

2. Questions of the Study:

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by first year students of English?

2) What are the reasons behind students' reading comprehension difficulties?

3) What are the reading strategies that would help students overcome their reading comprehension difficulties?

3. Aims of the study:

Throughout our research, we will attempt to:

- To investigate first year students' reading comprehension difficulties.
- To examine some factors behind students reading comprehension difficulties.
- To suggest some solutions to help the population under the study to overcome their reading comprehension difficulties.

4. Significance of the Study:

This study explored the reading comprehension difficulties that EFL learners face; this may help the students to ameliorate their reading. Hence, encourage them to enrich their vocabulary, improve their level in English and develop their understanding .The findings of this study would also complement other studies to add appropriate data about the effectiveness of reading comprehension in learning the English language.

5. Research Methodology:

According to the problem investigated in our research and the aim of the study, we adopted a descriptive method which enabled us to gather the needed data and answer the research questions. As Gay (1996) *“defines a descriptive method as evolving collection of data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning a current status“*,

6. Population and Study sample:

Population refers to any collection of specified of human beings , it contains a finite number of individuals , numbers or units in class however, a sample refers to a selected group of some elements from the totality of the population.(Wani,S.R (N.D)/Population and Sample/M.A.Edu/Research Methodology/Sampling).

The target population in the present study is 1st year students of English at the University of Bejaia. This population is composed of 225 students, divided into 12 groups enrolled for the academic year 2020-2021; at the department of English; however we have selected a sample of 110 students to conduct our research.

We have chosen this population because we consider that at this level, reading is of paramount importance in all modules. Besides, as students we have experienced the problem of reading comprehension during our studies. As a matter of fact, students who encounter reading comprehension difficulties may face serious problems influencing their foreign language development.

7. Data Collection tools:

In our research we have relied on a research instrument in collecting data, which is the questionnaire. It is used to collect factual information about someone or something from respondents; it also involves a set of questions that are addressed to the research informants for data collection purposes. As Domeyei (2007:101) states that:

“The popularity of questionnaire is due to the fact that they are relatively easy to construct, extremely versatile and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily accessible “

In this regards, the questionnaire was designed to 1st year students of English at University of Bejaia. This data collection tool was used in order to know and discover students reading comprehension difficulties, and shed light on some reasons behind these difficulties.

8. Organization of the study:

This work is divided into two main parts. The first part deals with the literature review, it represents the theoretical part. It contains one chapter divided into two sections. The first section deals with reading skill in the EFL context. The second section deals with reading comprehension difficulties.

The second chapter represents the practical part of our study. It consists of three sections: The first section deals with research methodology and the second deals with data analysis, and interpretation of the results. Finally, the third and last section deals with limitations, implications, suggestions and recommendations. The study ends with a general conclusion

Chapter one

Theoretical Background

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Introduction:

The first section sheds light on one of the four fundamental language skills which is reading.

This section provides the reader with some key definitions of the reading skill and reading comprehension, and then it highlights the purposes of reading as well as its different types, processes and models. Finally, we have tried to identify some reading strategies which are very important for enhancing and monitoring comprehension.

1.1. Reading skill definition:

Reading is the action of getting and understanding information received from a written texts. Nunan (2003:68) mentions that *“Reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from text and their own background knowledge to build meaning “.*

Reading is an interactive process where the readers interpret the written information to share their different ideas in order to achieve an effective comprehension i.e. it is the process of interaction between the reader and discourse. In this respect, Goodman (1973:162) states that the learner (...)*” interacts with a message encoded by the writer. He concentrates his total prior experience and concepts he has attained, as well as the language competence he has achieved”.*

However, Alderson (2000) defined reading both as a process and a product. As a process, it is the numerous operations which happen during the process of reading, they include looking at print, recognizing words, deciding what they mean and how they relate to each other. As a product, reading is comprehension or the understanding constructed by the reader.”Although readers may engage in different reading processes, the understanding they end up with is the same...What matters, then, is not how you reach that understanding ,but the fact that you reach it”(Alderson.2000:04)

Furthermore, reading is a necessary skill for language learning because it has positive effects on different aspects such as: vocabulary knowledge spelling as well as learner’s writing.

1.2. Reading comprehension definition:

Reading comprehension is the ability to make a connection between texts, understand its meaning and integrate what the reader already knows. It is defined as the level of understanding; this understanding comes from interaction between the text and the reader. According to Lenz (2005:1) *“Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning from the text.”* It means that reading comprehension skill involves the reader’s ability to make a relationship between their background knowledge and their purpose of reading with the text’s meanings.

Moreover, Grabe and Stoller (2002) indicate that reading comprehension is processing words, forming a representation of general main ideas, and integrating it into a new understanding. In other words, reading comprehension is seen as a source of learning, it can be away for helping learners to learn new vocabulary and grammar, it makes reading enjoyable and informative, it helps students in developing their strategies and become a proficient readers who read with meaning. In this context, Brown (2001:306) states that *“Reading comprehension is primarily a matter of developing appropriate, efficient comprehension strategies”*.

1.3.Purposes of reading:

We read, for getting information but, we also read with other objectives or purposes. Each reader has his / her own purpose of reading and ability to gather meaning from the text. The main reading purposes are:

- **Reading to skim:**

In reading to search, we typically scan the text for specific piece of information or specific word. Similarly, reading to skim is a common part of many reading tasks, and a useful skill in its own right.

- **Reading to learn from texts :**

Reading to learn typically occurs in academic and professional contexts in which we find that learners learn a major extent of information from text .It claims abilities to remember main ideas, and link the text to the reader’s knowledge.

- **Reading to integrate written information and critical texts:**

This skill requires critical evaluation of the information to decide what information to integrate and how to integrate it for the reader's goal. In this respect, both reading to write and reading to critique texts may be task variants of reading to integrate information. Both claim abilities to compose, select and critique information from a text.

- **Reading for general comprehension:**

Reading for general comprehension is the most basic purpose. It requires very rapid and automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general meaning representation of main ideas, and efficient coordination of many processes.

1.4. Types of reading:

Throughout the long history of researching reading, only two main types of reading were distinguished by scholars.

1.4.1. Intensive reading:

Intensive reading is an activity that is usually done in the classroom under the guidance of the teacher where learners are reading for general understanding and practicing the language.

According to Palmer(1964:111)intensive reading means:“*Take a text , study line by line , referring at every moment our dictionary and our grammar comparing , analysing ,translating and retaining every expressions that it contains .*“

On the other hand, intensive reading is seen as a process of reading short, difficult texts in order to extract specific information. As Grellet (2010:4) terms it as “*an accuracy activity that involves reading in details, it is considered to be active reading it is looking for special details, it develop language skill* “

1.4.2. Extensive reading:

According to many researchers (Palmer.1964, Grabe.2002) extensive reading is considered as a powerful method for improving our language skills; it is basically quickly reading books, news papers, magazines or other materials which are easy and interesting. E.R is essential and important because it helps learners to improve their reading abilities and enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Besides, it helps learners to understand the language faster and better, and to develop

reading habits, in this regards Palmer (1964) claims that extensive reading is “*rapidly reading book after book*”.

1.5. Models of reading:

Reading model can be defined as a representation, of what goes on in the eyes and the mind when readers are comprehending or miscomprehending a text.

Many researchers: (Alderson2000; Clarke1977) have proposed three basic models of how reading occurs: bottom-up, top-down and the interactive model. It was agreed that the interactive model is the complete one in reading comprehension because it includes the interaction of both (bottom-up and top-down model).

The three main models of reading are:

1.5.1. The bottom-up reading model:

The bottom -up model emphasizes the written or printed text, which is also called data driven .This model assumes that the reader constructs meaning from words, letters, phrases, clauses and sentences found within, and then processes the text in a linear manner.

However, this model ignores the contribution of the reader background knowledge to reading comprehension as Alderson (2000:17) criticizes the bottom-up approach since it considers that “readers are passive decoders of sequential graphic phonemic”. Simply, in this model the reader begins with smallest units to the whole units and builds up the comprehension of what is being read. This model of reading focuses on decoding the language i.e. the learner is supposed to decode the words without understanding the entire text.

1.5.2. The top-down reading model:

Unlike the bottom-up model where the students’ background knowledge is not considered, the top-down approach focuses on the readers’ background knowledge in the reading process. It highlights the importance of the students prior knowledge and expectations in helping them to construct meaning from reading text (Alderson 2000).In this model the reader brings previous experiences and knowledge to the text ,they continue on reading as long as the text confirms their expectation i.e ,the reader begins with the largest element , uses background knowledge and puts down towards smallest units to build their understanding of what is being read in this sense, Clark et al (1977) maintain that the reader brings information, ideas and attitudes from the text, in which this knowledge is accompanied with the capability to make linguistic predictions.

Finally, this approach is recommended by many researchers among them: Nuttal (1996) who claimed that this approach is used when the reader interprets assumptions and draws inferences, because it is directly related to the readers' personal knowledge and experiences.

1.5.3. The interactive model:

Unlike the two previous models, the interactive model tends reader to use both knowledge of word structure and background knowledge to interpret the texts they read. This approach strikes a balance between the differing processes of bottom-up and top-down, in other words, an interactive process requires the use of background knowledge, expectations and context. The interactive model made an attempt to propose a model that would make clear how readers use various sources of information during the reading process. As Nunan (1989) states, both top-down and bottom- up are efficient and effective for reading in which the interactive process fills the gap between two models since it emphasizes both letters and background knowledge. This model accounts for both bottom-up and to-down models, since students are supposed to use the bottom-up model from their early reading, .Then, develop their accuracy and move to fluency and predictions using the top-down model.

1.6. Processes of Reading:

1.6.1. Lower -level processes:

The lower - level processes represent the automatic linguistic processes and are typically viewed as more skills orientation. There are three main processes seen as lower-level processes which are required for fluent reading comprehension. these processes are: **lexical access (word recognition)** which is the rapid and automatic activation of word meanings in the lexicon, **Syntactic parsing** which is the ability to take in and store words to gather so that basic grammatical information can be extracted to support clause-level meaning, and **semantic proposition** that is the process of combining word meanings and structural information into basic clause-level meaning units. When they are functioning well, they work together effortlessly in working memory, which is best understood as the network of information and related processes that are being used at a given moment. The words that are accessed, the information are cued grammatically, and the emerging meaning is all active for a short period of time in working memory. (William Grabe and Fredrika L Stoller 2002:21)

1.6.2. Higher -level processes:

The higher-level processes generally represent comprehension processes that make much more use of the reader's background knowledge and inferencing skills. Good readers construct a more elaborated interpretation of how they want to understand text meaning. Beyond understanding and interpreting the text, they establish purposes for reading, combine reading strategies make inferences, draw extensively on background knowledge, monitor comprehension, form attitudes about the text and author, and critically evaluate the information being read. The higher-level processes are ;**Text model of comprehension** (i.e. , the coordination of ideas to form a meaning of a text) , **situational model of reader interpretation** (i.e. ,interpreting the text in terms of reader's own goals , feelings ,and background expectations), **Background knowledge use**(i.e,using prior knowledge to interpret a text) , and **executive control processes** (i.e. , represent the way readers assess their understanding of a text and evaluate their success).

These processes do not operate effortlessly when readers encounter texts that are too difficult for them. Difficulties may arise when readers do not have adequate background knowledge, do not have the necessary linguistic resources or have not read enough in the language to have developed efficiencies in reading. It is only through extended exposure to meaningful print that texts can be processed efficiently and that students will develop as fluent readers. (William Grabe and Fredrika L Stoller, 2002:25).

1.7. Reading strategies:

Reading strategies is a way of making sense of what students read and achieve comprehension as Pani (2004) defines reading strategies as :*The mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively to make sense of what they read ... and more readers apply more strategies more frequently ... and more effectively than poor readers* “

However, effective readers use strategies to understand what they read **before, during** and **after** reading. Reading strategies are divided into three 03 stages:

a. Before reading:

In this stage the reader uses the strategies before reading to think about the topic, uses prior or personal knowledge, identifies the type of the material to be read, makes predictions about the probable meaning of the text.

b. During reading:

The reader uses the strategies during reading, to monitor his/her understanding by asking questions that he/she may focus on his/her attention on the important points in the text, think about and reflect on the idea in the text

c. After reading:

In this stage the readers are supposed to reflect upon the ideas and information in the text, make a relation between what they have read to their own knowledge and clarify their understanding of the text, to reconstruct and evaluate the information being read by retelling and summarizing the material which has been just read .

Reading strategies are necessary to be learned and taught in order to be applied and thus to improve the learner's in reading ability and comprehension.

Conclusion:

In this section, we have defined reading in order to understand the nature and the complexity of this skill. Besides, we discussed the different purposes and strategies that readers may use to obtain and achieve comprehension.

In the next section, we will deal with the main reading comprehension difficulties, encountered by learners in general and EFL learners in particular.

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Introduction:

Reading requires understanding or comprehending the meaning of print. In other terms, reading comprehension is an interactive process of getting information from the text and giving meaning to it. Thus, it requires motivation; mental frame works for holding ideas concentrations and good study techniques.

2. Reading Comprehension definition:

Comprehension is identified as an acquired skill that focuses on input understanding. According to Oxford English dictionary (2010) Comprehension is “*the action or act of comprehending with the mind; understanding;...; grasping with the mind; power of receiving and containing ideas*”, In other words this concept means to complete the understanding of writing, usually comprehension helps learners to develop their concentration and interest.

Moreover, Reading comprehension has been defined by many researchers, accordingly, Grabe (2002) argues that the primary goal of reading is comprehension. They maintain that reading comprehension requires literal comprehension, background knowledge, the ability to study and learn from text and higher -level comprehension .It is seen as a process or product of complex interaction between the text and the reader .i.e., an interaction among the reader’s knowledge drawn from the text, the existing or prior knowledge that the reader has and the context of the reading situation.

In addition, reading comprehension skill is the process of understanding what you read, since it is the purpose of reading. Therefore, reading comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading and it entails a number of processes. In addition to that, reading comprehension is a source of learning, it can be a goal of helping learners to learn new vocabulary and grammar.

2.2. Reading comprehension Components:

2.2.1. Background knowledge:

Background knowledge is the foundation of all the knowledge that the reader brings to the act of reading or the knowledge that stems from previous experience. It plays an important and strong role in reading comprehension where we find that it helps students draw inferences, which develops critical thinking skills and make connections and understand the big ideas.

2.2.2. Inferencing:

It is the logical process of combining information within sentences in text, between sentences in text, or between prior knowledge and text (Baumann et al, 2003). For example, in order to understand who the word “he” is referring to in the text, the reader must combine information in that sentence with information in a previous sentence that referred to a male. (Roukaya. Belambri, 2013)

2.2.3. Strategies:

Effective and proficient readers use cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies such as setting goals before they begin to read, they use to ask themselves questions and to answer them while reading, and to reflect on what they read.

2.3. Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies:

Teaching reading comprehension is a difficult and demanding activity in improving the learner’s capacities.

Effective readers are flexible and have the capacity to be aware of choosing the appropriate reading strategy according to the definite text. However, good readers read according to the type of text they are going to read, thus there are different and diverse types of texts, it is to students to be careful in choosing their styles.

In addition to that, teachers should make learners practice and train, by showing them the main different types of texts for a better reading comprehension. Brown (2001:306) states that “*Reading comprehension is primarily a matter of developing appropriate, efficient comprehension strategies*”

To develop strategies in teaching reading comprehension, pre-reading, while-reading and post -reading activities have been suggested:

2.3.1. Pre-reading stage:

Pre-reading stage is a very important stage in which the readers tend to use their background that help them to understand what they read and the teacher uses a different techniques in order to make the reading activity more easier:

- a)-Ask questions related to the topic.
- b)-Prepare the learner for the content of the text.
- c) - Think of some vocabulary items that will appear in the text.
- d)-Help them to predict the content of the new text.

These steps may attract the interest of the students and help them for a better vocabulary. Also, the teacher should go from easy to difficult to reach a better understanding. This stage mainly seeks to:

- a)-improve the interest of students in the text.
- b)-improve vocabulary so students can complete the reading task successfully.
- c)-predict them what they are going to learn.
- d)-prepare them for the content.

2.3.2. While-reading stage:

While- reading strategy is used to help students to focus on aspects of text and to better understand it. Throughout this stage, the learners read the text silently and the teacher provides them with pieces of advices to make it easy and clear. As Richards (1990:87)claims that the while reading stage *“as an integration of top-down processes that utilize background knowledge and schema, as well as bottom-up processes that are primarily text or data driven”*

This phase attempts to:

- a)-develop the student's comprehension of the writer's purpose.
- b)-develop the student's linguistic knowledge.
- c)-help learners to develop their language performance.
- d)-help learners to integrate and identify main ideas and summarize information.

2.3.3. Post-reading stage:

At this last stage, the teacher has to evaluate the performance of the students in which he has to view if the goals of reading task are achieved or not , think about the understanding of the text and observe the new vocabulary and grammar and then evaluating the text .

After the reading comprehension phase, it is better to give the learners other activities for a better understanding such as asking questions about reading comprehension, make a creative discussions and quiz your classmates, true/false statementsetc However, his phase help learners to understand texts further, through critically analyzing what they have read and improve their reading by expanding their vocabulary knowledge.

2.4. Reading comprehension difficulties:

Reading comprehension is a complex and challenging skill for students to develop. According to Brown and Broemmel (2011) reading comprehension is one of the most serious problems for EFL learners.

In fact, students suffer from the lack of vocabulary, this problem may fall into various categories among them, learners may have difficulties in decoding ambiguous words in which they suffer from, complex sentences and sentences meaningful relationship for example; if the assigned material includes too many words, a learner does not know if they will focus on decoding rather than understanding.

Another type of difficulties that can be found among EFL readers is the existence of different meaning within the same word, i.e., words that have more than one meaning for example: the word "present" that can mean "gift" and "the act of existing" .The problem with such category is that learners know only one meaning of that word that can lead him to a wrong understanding of the whole sentence. One important category is represented ,poor reading comprehension skills leads to poor grades in which learners do not understand what

they read , it affects their ability to succeed in their studies also, the inability to attend to meaning while reading ,to apply comprehension strategies resulted from the poor reading comprehension .

Moreover, insufficient vocabulary leads to many obstacles in reading comprehension since lexis has a very important role for a successful reading. Reading a lot will help learners overcome problems of comprehension.

2.5. The importance of reading comprehension:

Reading is a habit that gives us knowledge and inspiration, makes the learners smart. Many experts like (Brown, Nunan, Pothitha...) argue that reading comprehension is important. According to Phantharakphong and Pothitha (2014:497) state that “*Reading is the single most important fundamental skill a person can acquire*”

The main goal of reading comprehension is to understand what the writer is trying to transmit and make use of information whether for fact gathering, learning a new skill, or for pleasure.

Thus, many studies throughout the history of teaching and learning foreign languages emphasizes the importance of reading comprehension and suggest various methods for reading comprehension instruction and different techniques or developing adequate reading.

Conclusion:

In this section, we have outlined a view of reading comprehension to understand the nature of this skill, and discussed the main strategies and components of reading comprehension. Besides, we have discussed some difficulties that some students face while reading, and have finally highlighted the importance of reading comprehension.

The following chapter represents our field work; it deals with the research methodology, data analysis and interpretation of the results.

Chapter two

**Research Methodology, Data Analysis and
Interpretation of the results**

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Introduction:

This chapter provides a description of the study under investigation, it deals with the research methodology and the main findings of the present research .Thus, this chapter is divided into three sections .The first section includes two main points: description of the data collection tools, the population and the sample.

The second section provides the data analysis, interpretation of the research findings with the discussion of the results. Then, the third section covers the summary of the main results. In addition, it includes the limitations of the study, its implications and some suggestions and recommendations.

Section One:

Research Methodology

1.1. Research method and data collection tools:

The present study is descriptive. It describes the main reading comprehension difficulties that exist among EFL learners at the University of Bejaia .In order to complete this investigation and get reliable and valid data; we adopted the mixed-method approach which consists of the qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Creswell and Plano, (2007:5)“*Mixed method approach involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies*”.

In this study, we have used a questionnaire as a research instrument to collect the necessary data. It is designed to first year students of English, at the University of Bejaia. It contains four (04) sections and seventeen (17) questions.

1.2. Population and Sample:

The selected participants in the present study are EFL students in the department of English at the University of Bejaia. The whole population consists of 225 first year students, enrolled for the academic year2020-2021 .However, since we cannot conduct a study with the whole population; we have selected a sample of 110 students.

The choice of this population is justified by the importance of developing the reading skill and overcoming the reading comprehension difficulties right from the first year so as to equip these students with the necessary skills to carry their studies in English. In other words, they will need to read different types of documents all along their studies.

1.3. The Students' Questionnaire:

1.3.1. Description of the Questionnaire:

A questionnaire is a research instrument used to collect specific needed data and information from informants. It represents a quick way to get the needed result. Furthermore, it allows the gathering of information from a large number of respondents. According to Brown (2001:6) *“a questionnaire is any written instrument which contains a series of questions and statements, which the respondents can answer, either by using their own words or selecting answers from those they are provided with”*.

This questionnaire is made up of seventeen (17) questions divided into two types. It includes both open-ended questions where the students are asked to answer with their own words and closed-ended questions where the students are required to choose one of the suggested responses. It was handed to 110 first year students and only 95 copies of the questionnaire were turned back. The questionnaire is composed of four (04) sections: The first section is about students' profile, the second one deals with students' reading habits and preferences and the third section is about the students reading comprehension difficulties. The last and fourth section is a space dedicated for the participants' suggestions concerning the topic under discussion.

1.3.2. The Aim of the Questionnaire:

The questionnaire handed to first year students, aims at discovering their reading comprehension difficulties. This is in order to help them develop their reading ability for a better understanding and therefore, to better their English language proficiency.

Section Two:

Data analysis and interpretation the results

2.2. Analysis of the Questionnaire:

- **Section one : The students' Profile**

Q1: Age

Table01: The students' age

Option	Number	Percentage
17 → 19years	52	54.74%
20 → 24years	43	45.26%
Total	95	100%

This table shows the age categories of students who took part in the completion of the questionnaire. The percentage shows that most of the students **54.74%** their age varies between 17 to 19 years old, and **45.26%** of the participants their age varies from 20 to 24 years old.

Q2: Gender

Table02: The students' gender

Option	Number	Percentage
Female	78	82.11%
Male	17	17.89%
Total	95	100%

From the results above shows that **82.11%** of the participants are females and **17.89%** of them are males. Generally, we notice that females are more interested in learning languages than males.

Q03: Is English language study your own choice?

Yes

No

Table 03: Students' choice to study English

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	89	93.68%
No	6	6.32%
Total	95	100%

From the results displayed above, we observe that English language is the choice of the majority of the informants **93.68%**. However, **6.32%** of them answered that English language is not their own choice. We can deduce that most of the students are interested to study English as it is their own choice.

Q 04: What is your favourite skill?

a) Listening

b) Speaking

c) Reading

d) Writing

e) No opinion

Table 04: Students' favourite skill

Option	Number	Percentage
Listening	31	32.63%
Speaking	19	20%
Reading	20	21.05%
Writing	22	23.16%
No opinion	3	3.16%
Total	95	100%

From the table, the statistics show that **32.63%** of the learners prefer the listening skill, while **23.16%** prefer writing and **21.05%** of the participants prefer the reading skill. For the speaking skill, we recorded **20%** of the answers and only **3.16%** of the informants do not have an idea about their favourite skill. The data obtained from this question indicate that the learners do not read much so that most of them prefer the listening skill.

Q 05: Which of these skills do you consider the most difficult?

- a) Listening
- b) Speaking
- c) Reading
- d) Writing
- e) No opinion

Table 05: Students' view about most difficult skill

Option	Number	Percentage
Listening	13	13.68%
Speaking	44	46.32%
Reading	6	6.32%
Writing	12	12.63%
No opinion	20	21.05%
Total	95	100%

From the result displayed in the above table, we notice that speaking is the most difficult skill with **46.05%** of the answers. However, **21.05 %** of the informants do not have an opinion about their difficult skill, whereas **13.68%** opted for listening, **12.63%** for writing, and the remaining **6.32%** opted for reading. We can say that speaking and listening represent the most difficult skills for the learners and they consider the reading as the easiest skill.

• **Section two: Students' reading habits and preferences**

Q 06: How do you consider your reading proficiency level in English?

- a) Very good
- b) Good
- c) Average
- d) Poor
- e) No opinion

Table 06: Students' English reading proficiency level

Option	Number	Percentage
Very good	9	9.47%
Good	55	57.89%
Average	26	27.37%
Poor	2	2.10%
No opinion	3	3.16%
Total	95	100%

From tableN°6, a high rate **57.89%** consider that their reading English language proficiency as good, **27.37%** of them rated their reading level as average. Moreover, **9.47%** of the informants answered that their level is very good and **3.16%** of them do not have opinion about their English reading proficiency level. Finally, only **2.10%**of the participants consider that their level is poor.

Q07: How reading is important for you?

- a) Very important
- b) Important
- c) Not important
- d) No opinion

Table 07: The importance of reading

Option	Number	Percentage
Very important	52	54.74%
Important	38	40%
Not important	4	4.21%
No opinion	1	1.05%
Total	95	100%

For this item, the majority of students **54.74%** consider that reading is very important, **40%** of them find it important, however **4.21%** of the participants find that reading is not important and **1.05%** of them do not have an idea. We can understand that most of the informants find that reading very important, because they are aware that from reading they can acquire new knowledge, enrich their vocabulary and better their spelling and grammar.

Q 08: Do you read?

Yes No

Table08: Students' reading habit

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	84	88.42%
No	11	11.58%
Total	95	100%

This question aims to know about the participants reading habits. We notice **88.42%** of the participants declared that they read and **11.58%** acknowledged that they do not read.

Q 09: If yes what kind of materials do you prefer to read?

- a) Journals
- b) Novels
- c) Short stories
- d) Other(s)

Table09: The students' preferred reading material

Option	Number	Percentage
Journals	10	11.90%
Novels	21	25%
Short stories	50	59.52%
Articles	3	3.58%
Total	84	100%

When asked about the preferred reading materials, most of the participants **59.52%** choose short stories; while **25%** of them prefer novels and **11.90%** of the participants prefer to read journals. A number of the informants added some other materials thus **3.58%** of the students like to read articles.

The main purpose of this question is to know what kind of reading materials students are interested in. So reading short stories is the option chosen by as a majority of the respondents because this type of material is easy to read and can help them develop their reading habits.

Q10: Are you fluent readers?

- Yes No

Table 10: Students' reading fluency

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	50	52.63%
No	45	47.37%
Total	95	100%

The obtained results reveal that most of the participants **52.63%** are fluent readers, however **47.37%** are not. We can say that some of the students read since they know the importance of reading in learning a foreign language however, some others do not read much in order to improve their fluency which is an important element in language learning to develop their reading habit as well as better their reading performance.

Q11: If No, because of:

- a) Unfamiliar vocabulary
- b) Lack of reading habit
- c) Lack of interest
- d) Other(s) difficulties

Table 11: The reasons behind students' poor reading fluency

Option	Number	Percentage
Unfamiliar vocabulary	9	20%
Lack of reading habit	27	60%
Lack of interest	9	20%
Total	45	100%

As recorded in the above table, most of the participants **60%** relate their poor reading fluency to a lack of reading habit. **20%** of them answered because of the unfamiliar vocabulary and the same percentage **20%** of the participants because of lack of interest.

Q12: In which language do you prefer to read?

- a) Arabic
- b) French
- c) English
- d) Others(s)

Table12: The preferable language

Option	Number	Percentage
Arabic	10	10.53%
French	34	35.79%
English	48	50.53%
Spanish	2	2.10%
German	1	1.05%
Total	95	100%

The results obtained from this question reveal that the majority of students **50.53%** prefer to read in English since they are students of English. For **35.79%** of the participants they selected the French language stating that is the most used language in the Algerian society. **10.53%** of the respondents prefer Arabic because they can understand it better than other languages, **2.10%** of the informants prefer German and **1.05%** of them like reading in Spanish.

Q13: What is your purpose from reading?

- a) To get knowledge
- b) To read for pleasure
- c) To enrich your vocabulary knowledge
- d) Other reason(s)

Table 13: Students' reading purpose

Option	Number	Percentage
To get knowledge	35	36.84%
To read for pleasure	12	12.63%
To enrich your vocabulary knowledge	48	50.53%
Total	95	100%

According to the results, the purpose of **50.53%** of the first year students in reading is to enrich their vocabulary knowledge, while **36.84%** of the students' state that their objective from reading is to get knowledge and only **12.63%** have chosen to read for pleasure.

From these results we can deduce that most of the students read to enrich their vocabulary because it is an important element in language learning since it improves their reading comprehension and help them express their ideas in writing. Therefore, teachers should encourage their students to read as much as they can, in order to develop their reading habits and explain them the importance of reading for developing their English language proficiency.

• Section three: Students' reading comprehension difficulties

Q14: Do you find reading comprehension important?

Yes No

Table 14: Students' view about reading comprehension importance

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	91	94.79%
No	4	4.21%
Total	95	100%

The majority of the participants **95.79%** claimed that reading comprehension is important for learning the English language; however **4.21%** of them do not share this view and consider it not important.

From the reasons we have recorded the following answers:

- Comprehension improves our reading skill and develops the understanding of a text.
- Reading helps students to enrich their vocabulary.
- It enriches our brain "Reading is the food of our brain".
- It improves one's vocabulary and ability to analyse what they read.
- It helps them to improve their level in English.
- Reading without understanding is a waste of time.
- It improves fluency in pronunciation.
- Reading comprehension develops the writing skill.
- It increases the enjoyment and effectiveness of reading.

Q15: When you read a text and you do not understand you:

- a) Translate to another language
- b) Use a dictionary
- c) Stop reading
- d) Carry on your reading without understanding
- e) Other(s)

Table 15: Students' strategies for reading

Option	Number	Percentage
Translate to another language	50	52.63%
Use a dictionary	35	36.84%
Stop reading	3	3.16%
Carry on reading without understanding	7	7.37%
Total	95	100%

The results in the table indicate that the majority of the students **52.63%** when they do not understand they translate to another language, **36.84%** of them claimed that they use dictionary, while **7.37%** of the respondents carry on reading without understanding and **3.16%** of the participants stop reading .

Q16: What are the difficulties that you face when reading?

- a) Limited vocabulary
- b) Lack of concentration
- c) Poor comprehension
- d) Other difficultie(s)

Table 16: Students' reading difficulties

Option	Number	Percentage
Limited vocabulary	51	53.69%
Lack of concentration	32	33.68%
Poor comprehension	12	12.63%
Total	95	100%

The statistics above show that most of the students **53.69%** face difficulties related to a limited vocabulary, **33.68%** of them suffer from a lack of concentration and **12.63%** of the respondents face difficulties in their comprehension.

• **Section four: Further suggestions**

Q17: Would you please add any comments or suggestions concerning the topic under investigation?

Some of the students provided us with useful suggestions which are summarized in the following points:

- Programming reading sessions especially at the University.
- Give them opportunities to select and choose the kind of materials that they prefer to read.
- Teachers should give different types of texts to read.
- Encourage students to read and share their reading experiences with their mates.
- Teachers should encourage students to read and motivate them because it is important to positively reinforce progress and celebrate success.

2.2. Interpretation of the results:

In this study, the main purpose is to investigate the comprehension difficulties that first year students encounter when reading. Besides we aim at finding some causes behind these problems so as to suggest some solutions to overcome their reading comprehension

difficulties. These sections will state the main findings that we have observed from the research instruments used namely the questionnaire.

From for section one of the questionnaire, the results revealed that most of the first year students of English are between 17 to 19 years old and the majority of them are females. English is the choice of the majority of the participants, so we can say that they are interested and motivated to study. The most preferable skill for the informants is listening and the most difficult is the speaking skill, so we can consider that reading is the easiest one for them.

In the second section, we have discussed and discovered the main students reading habits and preferences. A majority of the participants consider their English level as good and average for some of them. Thus, we found that the majority of the participants claimed that reading is very important (**54.74%**), so we can understand that first year students are aware about the value of reading in mastering a foreign language. Furthermore, (**88.42%**) of the students declared that they read and they prefer short stories because it is easier to read this kind of material. The obtained results revealed that the participants are fluent readers (**52.63%**) however, (**47.37%**) of them declared that they suffer from a lack of reading habit. Moreover, the majority of the respondents prefer to read in English since they are students at the department of English and they have chosen to study this language.

In the third section, the results revealed that most of the students' found reading comprehension important because, it helps them to enrich their vocabulary and get new knowledge. Furthermore, we have noticed that all students use different ways when they do not understand words and claimed that they translate to another language and use a dictionary. From the results, we observed that most of the participants face some difficulties when reading in English as a limited vocabulary and the difficulty in concentration because of the lack of reading habit.

The following points summarise the main findings of the present study that answer our research questions:

Research question one:

- What are the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by first year students of English?

From the collected data, we observe first year students face some problems when reading in English language, as a limited vocabulary and the difficulty in concentration. The analysis of the students' questionnaire revealed that although these students face, they still enjoy reading.

Research question two:

- What are the reasons behind students' comprehension difficulties?

This question covers the causes behind these difficulties. The results of the present study indicate that these difficulties are mainly related to the students' lack of reading habit and their limited vocabulary.

Research question three:

- What are the reading strategies that would help students overcome their reading comprehension difficulties?

From the answer of the above question, we have suggested some strategies that would help students overcome their difficulties which are: selecting more appropriate texts to read, encouraging reading to acquire new vocabulary and knowledge, devote more time for reading.

Conclusion:

This section has presented the results obtained from the questionnaire, data analysis and interpretation. It shows that some students are motivated and enjoy reading because it develops and enriches their vocabulary. However, on the other side, it reveals that some students face reading difficulties mainly in understanding texts because of their limited vocabulary and their difficulty in concentration. Therefore, more attention should be given to reading at the university level. Besides, more effective reading strategies need to be used so that students could overcome their reading comprehension difficulties.

Section three:

Limitations, Implications, Suggestions and recommendations

This last section is devoted to the limitations we faced in conducting our research, as well as some implications of our study, suggestions and recommendations for future research.

3.1. Limitations of the study:

Reading comprehension is a wide field, however, we have focused in our study on the difficulties that hinder the first year students because they are starting their studies and they need reading comprehension to develop their language abilities.

In conducting this present research, we faced some difficulties in the respondents' answers because some of the participants answered in an inappropriate way (they answered randomly). Another difficulty related to time constraints since three months are insufficient to achieve the targeted goals. Besides, it was not easy for us to hand the questionnaire since the students were not available because most of the courses were conducted online due to the pandemic of Covid 19.

3.2. Implications of the study:

Reading comprehension is an important element for EFL students since they can get meaning and understand the reading material. Furthermore, they can acquire higher-level language proficiency (in a written form, vocabulary and oral) as well as they may develop their cultural background and knowledge.

According to our participants reading short stories is considered as an appropriate strategy to improve their English language ,because this would helps them develop their reading abilities in general and their reading comprehension in particular.

3.3. Suggestions and Recommendations:

From the present study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Some recommendations for teachers:

- To help their students and encourage them to read.
- To provide the students with the appropriate materials to help them develop their fluency in reading.
- To teach them to be active participants when reading.
- To teach the informants how to monitor their attention and comprehension through different reading practices such as; do pre-reading activities in order to activate their prior knowledge.

Some recommendations for students:

- To enlarge their vocabulary for a better understanding and comprehension while reading.
- To do more efforts by reading different materials starting by short stories that can help them get new vocabulary and knowledge.
- To provide them with more appropriate opportunities to practice reading.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion:

Reading is an important element in the learning process of any language. It offers a wide range of interesting information as well as a variety of language expressions and structures. The main concern of this research study is about reading comprehension difficulties encountered by first year students of English at the University of Bejaia.

This research work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter encompasses two sections. The first one is about reading in the EFL context where we defined the reading skill, its different types, models, processes, and the main reading strategies to teach it. The second section deals with the different difficulties that most of the students encounter and the importance of reading comprehension skill in learning a foreign language. However, the second chapter is the practical part of our research work. It is divided into three sections. The first section explains the research methodology, population and sample that the study is concerned with as well as the research instrument. The second section is about the data analysis and interpretation of the results. The third section states limitations, implications, suggestions and recommendations for reading comprehension skill.

Our study is descriptive. It describes the main reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners at University of Bejaia. In order to complete this investigation, we adopted the mixed-method which consists of the qualitative and quantitative methods based on the questionnaire through which we collected necessary data.

The main results of our study reveal that on one hand, some first year students of English at University of Bejaia face difficulties in reading comprehension mainly at the level of the lack of vocabulary and concentration. On the other hand, some others enjoy reading because; they consider reading as a way that can help them develop their vocabulary and improve their writing skill. In addition, also the results revealed that majority of the participants tend to read short stories.

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Appendix

Faculty of letters and Languages

Department of English

Questionnaire prepared y BENKHENNOUCHE Sonia

Supervised by Dr. Fadhela ALIOUCHOUCHE-KACI

Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

You are kindly invited to answer this questionnaire that aims to figure out the reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners in the department of English at University of Bejaia. Your answers will be very important for the validity of this research.

❖ Section one :Students' profile

1) Age:

2) Gender:

F

M

3) Is English language study your own choice?

Yes

No

4) What is your favourite skill?

a) Listening

b) Speaking

c) Reading

d) Writing

e) No opinion

5) Which of these four skills do you consider the most difficult?

- a) Listening
- b) Speaking
- c) Reading
- d) Writing
- e) No opinion

❖ **Section Two: Students' reading habits and preferences**

6) How do you consider your reading proficiency level in English?

- a) Very good
- b) Good
- c) Average
- d) Poor
- e) No opinion

7) How reading is important for you?

- a) Very important
- b) Important
- c) Not important
- d) No opinion

8) Do you read?

Yes No

If yes:

9) What kind of materials do you prefer to read?

a) Journals

b) Novels

c) Short stories

Others.....

10) Are you a fluent reader?

Yes

No

11) If no, it is because of:

a) Unfamiliar vocabulary

b) Lack of reading habit

c) Lack of interest

Others.....

12) In which language do you prefer to read?

a) Arabic

b) French

c) English

Others.....

13) What is your purpose from reading?

a) To get knowledge

b) To read for pleasure

c) To enrich your vocabulary knowledge

Others please specify.....

❖ Section Three: The students reading comprehension difficulties

14) Do you find reading comprehension important in learning English?

Yes

No

Why.....

.....

15) When you read a text and you do not understand you:

- a) Translate to another language
- b) Use a dictionary
- c) Stop reading
- d) Carry on your reading without understanding

Others.....

16) What are the difficulties that you face when reading?

- a) Limited vocabulary
- b) Lack of concentration
- c) Poor comprehension

Others.....

❖ Section four: Further suggestions

17) Would you please add any comment or suggestions?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your cooperation