



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**An Investigation into the Factors that affect Students' English Reading Comprehension at Kohat University of Science and Technology, KP, Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to investigate the factors that affect student's English reading comprehension at Kohat University of Science and Technology, KP, Pakistan. The BS English students, 150 samples, were selected through a simple random technique for this study. The Sequential Explanation Mixed Method Study Design was used to collect data from the English Department, to explore students' perceptions of factors that influence reading comprehension. Analysis of the questionnaire was conducted using SPSS version 22, and interviews were analyzed through content analysis. The results were presented in tables. The findings of this study indicated that factors such as language expertise, poor command of vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, having poor grammatical structure, perspectives on themselves such as stressed, bored, or having personal problems, teacher influence, like teaching methodology, teaching content, and the environment, highly affect the student's comprehension ability.

**Keywords**

Factors, Metacognitive Strategies, Reading Comprehension

**Introduction**

English has the status of an international language and is used as a Lingua Franca throughout the world, offers a rich source of information, knowledge, and learning around the globe. In current years, English has come to be the language of globalization and dominating the whole world (Rehman, 2010). In Pakistan, it enjoys the status of being a second language as well as an official language (Roshan and Raisani, 2017). Considering the status of English in Pakistan, it is regarded as "the language for development at both the individual and national levels" (Shamim, 2011). In addition, it is the language of 'the domains of power-administration, judiciary, military, education, and commerce' (Rahman, 2010).

Despite all the efforts for English language learning and English being taught as a compulsory subject throughout the education system in Pakistan, students fail to comprehend the text in English. Difficulties in reading are faced by students even if they reach the post-graduation levels (Ali, 2019). Consequently, having more chances to read English writing materials does not always mean that every learner will read successfully and make use of the materials available since the level of comprehension

depends on various factors. Even reading some materials written in the readers' mother tongue is sometimes difficult to understand if the readers do not occupy the habit of frequent reading. At the same time, reading comprehension itself is perplexing, and it comprises of different components, processes, and factors (Galakjani & Sabouri, 2016). To identify whether EFL learners are successful or unsuccessful in reading depends on various factors.

There are some studies made on the factors that affect reading comprehension. But most of these studies focused on the primary and secondary level's problems on reading comprehension. Also, the amount of research on reading comprehension, while becoming more prevalent, still falls behind that of teaching BS students to comprehend the text and a consensus does not currently exist on which cognitive factor/s have the most effect on reading comprehension (Berkeley, Mastopieri, & Scruggs, 2011; Deshler, Hock, & Catts, 2006; Faggella-Luby & Deshler, 2008; Saenz & Fuchs, 2002).

Therefore, this study aims to explore student's perceptions of factors that affect their English reading comprehension at BS level in Pakistan as English holds a prominent place in the education system of Pakistan. English is certainly in demand because it is the language of international trade, media, services, science and technology and entertainment (Crystal, 1997).

### **Literature Review**

Reading is one of the four macro skills taught in an English language classroom, which requires a response from the reader through summarizing the main facts based on what was read (Zintz&Maggart, 1986, in Blay et.al, 2009). Reading is not just extracting meaning from the text but a process of connecting to the information given by the text. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the concept that a reader's background knowledge about what he is reading is one of the most critical factors in determining whether a student will understand what he is reading or not (Hirsch,E.D. (2006); Kamhi, A.,(2007).

Some studies have shown that the performance (reading comprehension) of the students is affected by several factors. Rizado&Tabuno, (1998)in Marquez (2008)in their study on the reading comprehension of Fourth year high school students of Iligan, made the following conclusions:1. Parents' monthly income and educational attainments have contributed to the reading performance of the student. 2. The kind of materials that the respondents read enhanced their ability to comprehend a text 3. The respondents' attitude towards reading differed from each other 4. The availability of reading materials at home and in school and the students' curiosity to learn enhanced their reading comprehension. Educational researchers have also focused on the teacher's behavior that should be effective in promoting student's motivation (Brophy, 1986 in Marquez, 2008).

Durkin (1993) stated that reading is a process when the interactions between the text and the reader occur. Reading is also intentional thinking that the reader tries to catch meanings from the text they are reading. Besides, comprehension is considered the core objective of the reading process that the reader aims to construct meanings through the text. Galakjani and Sabouri (2016) also proposed that reading is a critical skill that enhances the development of learners' literacy. In addition, Dawkins (2017) pointed out that reading performance has a connection with learners' academic achievement. It means that learners who read proficiently are usually successful in almost every academic subject, while those who rarely read seem to fail

to obtain reading comprehension ability. According to Horiba and Fukaya (2015), reading involves the coordination of the reader's linguistic knowledge and conceptual processing to help the reader build an understanding and conceptual meaning of the text. Hence, recognition of words and understanding of semantic contents are basic requirements for reading comprehension. At the same time, to increase the reader's comprehension level, a connection of ideas in different sentence structures is essential.

Even though the internal and external attributions are especially beneficial in the education field to identify causes of learners' academic achievement or failure, implementation of the stated variables in the field of foreign language learning to figure out the factors that promote or obstruct EFL learners' language learning success or failure would be advantageous (Phothongsunan, 2015; Yilmaz & Kahyalar, 2017). Consequently, based on the internal and external variables affecting EFL learners' academic achievement, Taladngoen et al (2020) study employed the internal factors of linguistic knowledge (ability) and learners' perceptions and the external factors of teacher influence, family influence, and environment to figure out which factor affects EFL learners' reading comprehension ability the most and the least.

### **Material and Methods**

The approach of this research project was sequential exploratory in nature so this study was conducted by utilizing mixed method research design that is both quantitative methods (questionnaire) and qualitative tools (semi-structured interviews). The focus of the research was to investigate the factors that students believe can affect their reading in comprehending the text at BS level. Therefore, keeping into account the nature of research question, mixed method was a more reliable approach to investigate it.

### **Research Sites and Sample**

Research sites include English department of Kohat University of science and technology in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The sample for the questionnaire comprised 150 BS students. They were learning English as a major subject. Moreover, nine students were selected for interview.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The study began with the administration of the questionnaire followed by interviews. The data collected through questionnaire was analyzed through using statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), Version 22. The data was presented in a descriptive manner in the form of tables by calculating frequencies and percentages for each of the items in the questionnaire. The information collected through semi-structured interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis.

### **Results and Discussion**

What factors do students believe can affect their English reading comprehension at Kohat University of Science and Technology?

This research question was responded by the BS students of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> semester through the questionnaire and in depth semi structured interviews. Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 below present the students' responses to the questionnaire items (section 1 and 2 of the questionnaire).

**Table 1**  
**Internal factors affecting the participants' reading comprehension ability**

NO	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	When I do not know the meaning of vocabulary or expressions in the reading, I do not comprehend the content of the reading.	22.7 %	31.8 %	13.6 %	21.9 %	2.7 %
2.	When I do not understand the grammatical structures of sentences in the reading, I do not comprehend the content of the reading.	12.7 %	25.5 %	15.5 %	36.4 %	10.0 %
3.	When I have little or no knowledge related to the reading content, I do not comprehend the main idea of the reading.	13.6 %	38.2 %	24.5 %	16.4 %	7.3 %
4.	I always feel bored when I have to read English-writing materials.	5.5 %	6.4 %	11.8 %	40.9 %	35.5 %
5.	When I am sick, I am distracted from reading.	24.5 %	35.5 %	20.0 %	13.6 %	6.4 %
6.	When I feel stressed or anxious, I cannot concentrate on reading.	40.9 %	42.7 %	10.0 %	6.4 %	4.5 %
7.	When I feel that the reading materials are too difficult, I want to give up reading.	14.5 %	31.8 %	22.7 %	18.2 %	12.7 %
8.	When I have personal problems, I lose concentration on reading.	31.8 %	40.9 %	14.5 %	10.0 %	2.7 %

Analysis of data revealed that internal factors could affect student's English reading comprehension. The result is shown in the table 1 above and it revealed that internal factors are responsible for affecting student's English reading comprehension. As 31.8% of students either strongly agreed or agree that when they do not know the meaning of vocabulary or expressions in the reading, they do not comprehend the content of the reading (item 1). This corresponds with the second statement, 36.4% students disagreed with the second statement, "When I do not understand the grammatical structures of sentences in the reading, I do not comprehend the content of the reading" (item 2). On the other hand, 38.2% of students agreed with the item 3 that they cannot comprehend the main idea when they do not have any knowledge related to the reading content. They disagreed (40.9%) with the boredom factor of item 4. While 35.5% of students get distracted when they are sick (item 5). Likely, 40.9% of them agreed that when they feel stressed or anxious, they cannot concentrate on reading (item 6). On the other hand, 31.8% (item 7) and 40.9% (item 8) of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they give up reading when they find reading material difficult and lose concentration when experience personal problems.

**Table 2**  
**External factors affecting the participants' reading comprehension ability**

NO	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD
9.	The introduction of reading lessons by the teacher is intriguing, so I feel attracted to read.	26.4 %	50.9 %	19.1 %	0.9 %	2.7%

10.	When the teacher introduces reading content that I feel I can apply gained knowledge in the future, I am eager to read and pay more attention.	45.5%	41.8%	7.3%	3.6%	1.8%
11.	Reading activities that are outdated make me feel uninterested and lose concentration on reading.	12.7%	32.7%	25.5%	22.7%	6.4%
12.	The teacher has interesting reading teaching techniques that attract my interest in reading.	36.4%	42.7%	12.7%	4.5%	3.6%
13.	Family members have encouraged me to read in English since I was young.	20.0%	26.4%	13.6%	30.0%	10.0%
14.	My parents are strict and always demand me to read in English regularly.	16.4%	11.8%	19.1%	30.9%	21.8%
15.	Family members are aware of the importance of English reading, so they always provide English writing books at home.	14.5%	26.4%	24.5%	27.3%	7.3%
16.	My parents pay attention to my English learning and especially my grades in English reading related subjects.	14.5%	40.0%	21.8%	17.3%	6.4%
17.	When I read in a place that is too hot or too cold, I cannot concentrate on the reading.	18.2%	31.8%	26.4%	17.3%	6.4%
18.	When there are interrupting or loud noises when I am reading, I lose concentration on reading.	41.8%	40.9%	10.0%	6.4%	0.9%
19.	Insufficient light in the place where I am reading causes poor visibility of the reading texts, so I cannot concentrate on the reading.	30.0%	45.5%	17.3%	6.4%	0.9%

Similarly, the table 2 shows the result of external factors that students believe can affect their English reading comprehension. External factors were also asked from the students through the questionnaire.

As 50.9% of students agreed upon teaching methodology (item 12) and the start that a teacher takes. Students got interested in reading only if the start of a teacher is fascinating (item 9). Similarly, 45.5% of students agreed that if the material helped them in the future, they are eager to read and pay more attention (item 10). Item 11 shows, 32.7% of students lose concentration when the reading activities implied are outdated. On the other hand, 30.0% (item 13), 30.0% (item 14), 27.3% (item 15) of students disagreed with the statements that their parents or family members encouraged, demand or aware of the importance of English reading. Correspondingly, 40.0% of students agreed that their parents pay attention to English learning and especially to their grades in English reading related subjects (item 16). 31.8% of students cannot concentrate on reading in the place that is too hot or too cold (item 17). Likely, 41.8% (item 18), 45.5% (item 19) of students either strongly agreed

or agreed that they cannot concentrate on reading when the surroundings are unpleasant i.e. noisy environment or insufficient light.

The qualitative data also support the quantitative findings. Different responses were collected when asked about the factors that affect English reading comprehension, which is the first research question of the present study. As one of the student when asked about different factors, he commented:

There are various factors, which affect reading comprehension such as background knowledge, Vocabulary and grammatical structures. Background knowledge plays an important role in Understanding reading. In an effort to understand the text, we rely on our background knowledge to link what we already know with the text we are reading. Secondly, whether we have vocabulary skills or not affects our reading comprehension. We should be able to understand a word we know and its relationship to other words within the text. Grammatical structure is important to make a sentence meaningful and comprehensible.

Similarly, another student when asked the question, answered:

We need to understand the text in English because a student has knowledge about the features of narrative texts, they will be able to organize and process the text in ways that facilitate comprehension. These expectations and understandings help focus the readers processing of the text in ways that aid comprehension. He further elaborated, one should improve vocabulary. Knowing what the words you are reading mean can improve your ability to comprehend the meaning of the text.

The above comments reveal that mostly students rely on internal factors that help them in comprehending the text in English. Like many of them said that having a background knowledge helps them link with the current knowledge they are reading and helps in understanding. In addition, they commented on vocabulary that having vocabulary knowledge can easily help in understanding the text.

In depth, semi-structured interviews also reveal one major theme that reading comprehension is directly proportional to reading habit. As when asked, one of the student about reading habit commented:

It depends on how much I am in to the reading. The more I read the more my

Comprehension skill is developed. I cannot comprehend the text easily when I stop reading.

In addition, when one of the students was questioned about whether lack of fluency affects their reading comprehension or not? Student responded:

When I am not fluent in reading, I cannot understand long sentences and I failed to make connections among them.

The interview with one of the student indicates that difficult reading material also affects English reading comprehension and it supports the item7 (31.8%). The student commented:

I cannot comprehend the text when I found the reading material difficult. I usually get bored and give up on reading when I found it hard to understand the text.

Likewise, another student commented:

I cannot concentrate on reading when I am stressed or having some personal problems.

Hence, the data analyzed through questionnaire and interviews revealed that factors affect English reading comprehension. Categories like lack of vocabulary (31.8%), background knowledge (38.2%), having stress (40.9%) or personal problems (40.9%), distractions like noise (41.8%) and teaching techniques (42.7%) were the major themes analyzed through both the quantitative and qualitative data. The evidence provided by the data on the first research question, therefore, indicates clearly that factors affect English reading comprehension of BS English students at Kohat University of Science and Technology, KP, Pakistan.

### **Discussion**

Most students studied agreed that, different factors are responsible for comprehension ability. Both internal and external factors are responsible for comprehending the text. These factors play an integral role in enhancing or impeding EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. These results corroborate with those of Taladngoen et al (2020), Iqbal et al (2015), Kiew and Shah (2020). This implies that factors such as poor command of vocabulary, lack of interest, background knowledge and grammatical structure affect comprehension ability of the student.

Reading is commonly regarded as a necessary ability for all language learners. Learners who read critically and extensively will be able to apply what they have learned to improve their speaking, listening, and writing skills. As a result, students should work on improving their reading skills because it will make it easier for them to access knowledge and information from both online and offline sources (Chavangklang & Suppasetserree, 2018). As a result, having more opportunities to read English writing resources does not guarantee that every student will read successfully and utilize the materials supplied, as understanding levels vary based on a range of circumstances. If the readers do not read frequently, even literature written in their home tongue can be difficult to understand. Reading comprehension, on the other hand, is perplexing in and of itself, as it is made up of a number of components, processes, and reasons (Galakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Durkin (1993) stated that reading is a process when the interactions between the text and the reader occur. Reading is also intentional thinking that the reader tries to catch meanings from the text they are reading. Besides, comprehension is considered the core objective of the reading process that the reader aims to construct meanings through the text (Taladngoen et al, 2020).

It all depends on various factors whether EFL learners can comprehend the text or not. The first internal factor is the ability, which covers learners' linguistic knowledge of English, such as grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Learners' linguistic performance usually indicates their linguistic competency as well as reading comprehension (Gan, Humphreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Yilmaz & Kahyalar, 2017; Galakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Another internal affecting factor is learners' perceptions toward themselves and other components that surround them. Learners' perceptions include feelings of interest, boredom, anxiety, sickness, and discomfort due to personal problems. The presence or absence of positive or negative personal perceptions toward self and surroundings will either promote or obstruct reading comprehension ability (Habibian, Roslan, Idris & Othman, 2015).

In addition to the internal factors, the external variables can also facilitate or hinder learners' reading comprehension performance. The first affecting factor is teacher influence, which can be any attributes related to the teacher. For example, teaching methods, teaching materials, the content of reading lessons, and the potential application of the learned knowledge in daily life can influence learners' reading comprehension ability. These variables link to learners' interest in reading. As Habibian, Roslan, Idris and Othman (2015) mentioned, the factors that cause a positive attitude to learners would lead them to succeed in the reading process. Another external factor is family influence. This affecting variable deals with assistance, encouragement, and support from the family members (Phothongsunan, 2015). The last affecting external variable is the environment. The environment has both advantages and disadvantages to learners' reading comprehension ability. As mentioned in Galakjani and Sabouri's (2016) study, reading under a supportive environment with enough light, mild temperature, and tranquility, learners will be able to concentrate more on their reading tasks. On the other hand, an unsupportive environment, such as insufficient light, extreme temperature, and interrupting noises, will distract learners from their reading tasks.

The most affecting internal factor that hinders English reading comprehension of the student is the "feeling stressed or anxious" (perspectives of themselves) and the least affecting internal factor is "feeling bored while reading English material". On the other hand, the most affecting external factors are "teacher influence" and the "environment" and the least affecting external factor is "demand of the parents to read in English" (family influence). These results are consistent with Taladngoen et al (2020).

The data from this current study suggested that to better understand the text and to develop proficiency in reading the text, students have to consider linguistic patterns, such as grammar and vocabulary, and should have a good command of the background knowledge. There is evidence in the data that if students have personal problems, they cannot concentrate on reading material. Also, teacher influence has a great impact on the learner comprehension skill. It is the teacher who develops interest of the student and motivates them to read critically and affectively.

## **Conclusion**

The data suggested many factors that can affect students' English reading comprehension. It discussed both internal and external factors and also, the most and least affecting internal and external factors. It discussed the views of students affecting their English reading comprehension. It was found that having a lack of vocabulary skill, poor understanding of the grammatical structures of sentences in the reading, having no background knowledge, difficult reading material, personal problems, teacher influence, family influence and the environment badly affect students' comprehension skill. Therefore, if these factors are improved and polished, a good comprehension skill will be developed.

Furthermore, the data from this current study suggested that to better understand the text and to develop proficiency in reading the text, students have to consider linguistic patterns, such as grammar and vocabulary, and should have a good command of the background knowledge. There is evidence in the data that if students have personal problems, they cannot concentrate on reading material. Also, teacher influence has a great impact on the learner comprehension skill. It is the teacher who develops interest of the student and motivates them to read critically and affectively.



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