Second Language Learners' Difficulties in Reading Comprehension: A Review

Sangeetha Selvathurai
Sekolah Kebangsaan Puteri Pandan, Maluri 55100, Malaysia Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43000, Malaysia

Hanita Hanim Ismail
Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43000, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: hanitahanim@ukm.edu.my

Abstract
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to achieve inclusive, equitable quality education for all, with SDG 4 emphasizing its importance for individual empowerment, economic prosperity, and social advancement. Reading comprehension is a crucial language skill for students to acquire, particularly in English language learning. Despite its importance, students often encounter challenges in grasping reading materials, such as making inferences and locating main ideas, due to the lack of comprehension tactics and difficulty maintaining focus. The objective of this review is to identify difficulties in reading comprehension faced by second language learners and propose effective teaching strategies for improved reading experience. Hence, by using the PRISMA framework, this review examined journal articles on reading comprehension across the globe through four phases: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. Out of 100 publications, 24 were selected for further evaluation. Besides taking into consideration of The selection was based on the timeframe (between 2017 and 2024), taking into account both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.Three databases were consulted, including Google Scholar, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Mendeley. Rather than focusing solely on identifying the difficulties of reading comprehension, this review also identifies the most effective strategies for optimal outcomes including the explicit teaching strategies, reciprocal teaching strategy, choice theory, multi fluency strategy and multi reading strategy. Reading comprehension is crucial in educational settings, enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. Future research should explore strategies, technology, and long-term effectiveness, as well as the impact of family engagement and home literacy contexts.
Keyword: ESL Learners, English Language Skills, Reading Difficulties, Teaching Strategies For Reading Comprehension, Education.

Introduction

In pursuit of global development, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have established an ambitious agenda to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all. SDG 4 highlights the importance of quality education as an element of individual empowerment, economic prosperity, and social advancement. Literacy and reading comprehension are considered to be vital skills that enable academic success and lifelong learning. According to Lee and Tan (2023), high-quality education is essential in developing literacy skills and in enhancing academic success, thus signalling the need for targeted interventions to become available to students globally, who all face problems relating to reading comprehension. Malaysia's education system is guided by the National Education Policy (NEP) and Education Blueprint (2013-2025), as part of an effort to address the achievement of national education goals and the improvement of learning outcomes. These standards place reading and language development as an integral part of the education system. The study of Ahmad et al. (2022) Lim (2023) investigate the usage of NEP and ELE programs as well as the usefulness of these programs in cultivating reading comprehension skills of Malaysian school students. These studies are helpful for understanding local schooling challenges and opportunities.

Reading is one of the skills that closely related with other skills like writing, speaking and listening skills. Reading comprehension is utmost importance to academic performance and it is one of the keys to individual growth. According to Hidayati (2018), in order to enhance the learning outcome, students are required to have deep reading practices and to understand readings.Yet, deep reading can be most challenging. Reading comprehension is defined as the skill in understanding propositions contained in a text as well as correctly predicting the meaning of the text (Mansor, 2017). This work is driven by the continuing problem of students' difficulty in developing the abilities needed for successful reading comprehension. Based on the Hidayati (2018), student's ability to process text is affected by the individual's natural abilities and characteristics, that is, making decisions. Therefore, it is significant to explore tactics to improve reading comprehension in order to overcome these issues.The aspects are identifying main ideas, locating specific facts, making inferences, understanding references, and grasping word meanings. These are very significant to learning students' overall academic achievement, and success in language acquisition.

The importance of this study is that it is capable of serving both students and teachers. Better reading comprehension helps students link more powerfully to the content being taught at the same time, and aids them in improving their language (Hidayati, 2018). Educational researchers point to the importance of engaging novel and individualized teaching tactics with the aim of improving reading engagement and performance for teachers. By the use of advanced strategical techniques, teachers can rouse and intrigue students' curiosity that can lead to active participation, in the long run, enhance the educational performance. In the current educational environment, in the face of reading comprehension being a closely linked process to thinking critically, and reading content acquisition, it is essential to explore effective modes of teaching. Septia, 2022 mentioned applying amusing methods in teaching reading can motivate and empower students to reach a deeper level of text understanding. The existing study is a particular interest to educators and students wanting to develop a plan to help struggling readers, as well as to readers who want to learn how to read more confidently and efficiently. Ultimately the goal of reading and

teaching in education is to turn students into effective readers well equipped to read critically, analyze, and apply what is learnt from written sources. Reading comprehension is an essential study topic that earns more attention and new teaching approaches, considering its effect on overall academic achievement and lifetime education.

Despite the recognized importance of reading comprehension, students encounter various challenges in this domain, with experiences differing across educational settings (Hidayati, 2018). Based on an observation of students in Kuala Lumpur, an urban area in Malaysia, most continue to struggle with grasping the reading materials text, such as making inferences, determining primary ideas, and locating references. Some of the reasons include a lack of understanding of how to employ reading comprehension tactics and a loss of concentration during reading. However, the majority of students struggle to understand narrative materials from newspapers, journals, textbooks, and magazines (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021). As a result, this study aimed to investigate difficulties to comprehend primary reading comprehension and identify the best teaching strategies to avoid the reading difficulties. This review is guided by two research questions: (1) What are the primary difficulties that students encounter in reading comprehension?, and (2) What teaching strategies can be employed to avoid the difficulties identified in reading comprehension?

Methodology
This review employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 checklist, which consists of four steps: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion as shown in Figure 1. The versatility and comprehensiveness of PRISMA make it an effective instrument among researchers (Rafiq et al., 2021). As a result, the following are the goals in this study and procedures of the review.

(a) Identification Phase
The Identification phase as identified in the PRISMA 4 steps is the first step of the review. The search was done using three databases - Google Scholar, the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Mendeley. The tables were also created to analyze the connection with specific topics discussed in the identified papers, forming the basis of literature reviews. The data collected from these articles typically corresponds with the focus of the review paper. There are concepts associated with students' difficulties and reading comprehension. The search terms for each database in this study are presented in Table 1.
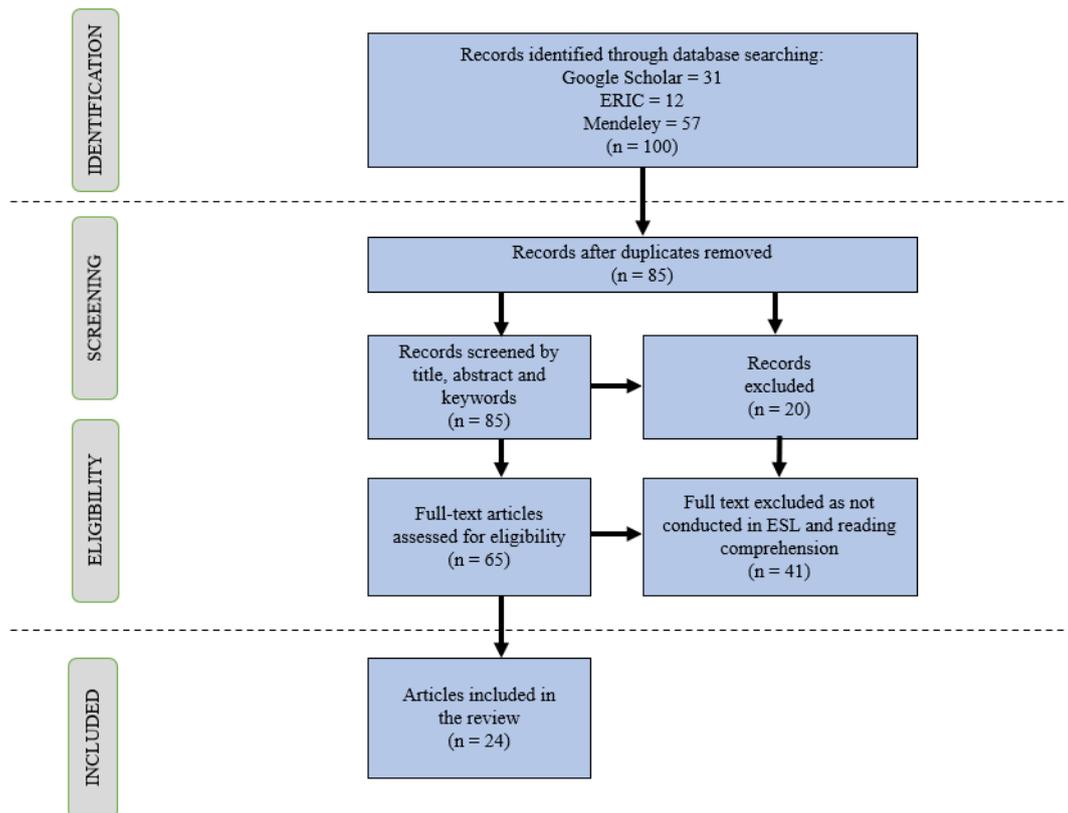
Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart for choosing a research article (2020)

Table 1
Keywords and Search String for Article Selection

Database	Keywords and Search String
Google Scholar	Reading comprehension difficulties
	Reading challenges
	Reading difficulties in ESl students
ERIC	Comprehension strategies for ESL learners
	Reading strategies
	Reading comprehension challenges
Mendeley	
	ESL reading challenges
	Text comprehension
	Reading skills
	Reading comprehension skill
	Enhancing reading comprehension

(b)   Screening Phase
Following the identification of articles, the screening phase is conducted. Salas-Zapata et al. (2018) proposed screening phase for publications that included determining if the search keywords occurred in the title and abstract, as well as ensuring that the research questions and article's originality were relevant to the issue. However, after finding the relevant articles, two steps were taken during the screening process.
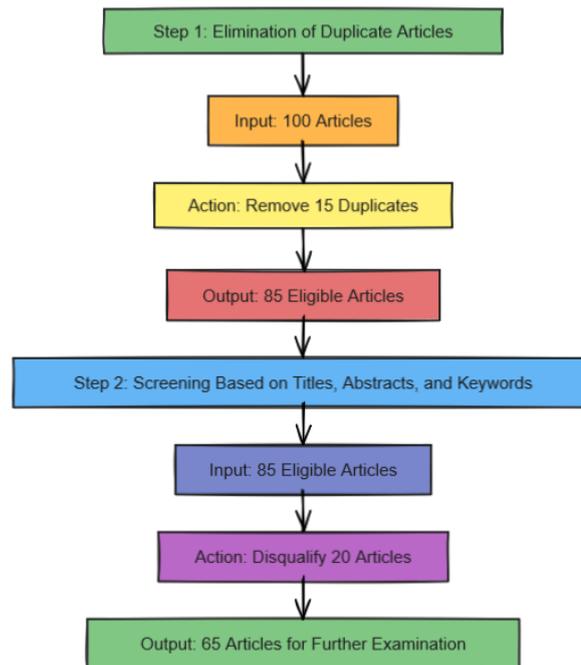
Figure 1. Steps of screening phase.

The initial step was to remove the duplicates detected across many databases. This stage has a total of 15 duplicate articles, leaving 85 eligible for subsequent screening. These 85 articles, which investigated students' difficulties with reading comprehension, were mostly selected based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords. As a result of this, 20 papers were omitted from the overall assessment since they did not meet the aims of the study. In total, 64 articles were listed for the eligibility phase. Table 2 lists the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to screen the 65 articles. There are 4 identities criteria in order to finalise the selection.

Table 2
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Types of Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Range of Publication year	Studies conducted between 2017 and 2024 (7 year timespan)	Studies conducted before 2012
Publication Types	Journal articles and book chapters	Conference proceedings, review articles, reports
Focus	Related to reading comprehension	Not related to reading comprehension

(c) Eligibility Phase
This review places a strong emphasis on difficulties associated with reading comprehension and teaching strategies for addressing them. Based on the evaluation of 65 articles that underwent the screening phase. In this eligibility phase, these articles were carefully

examined to see how much they met the requirements for selection. Table 3 informs the requirements.

Table 3
Selection criteria for Eligibility Phrase

Time frame	Publication dated between 2017-2024
Sorting by relevance	a) Reading comprehension difficulties b) Reading challenges c) Reading difficulties in ESl students
Reviewing of articles	Education level-Primary education,Secondary education
Include citations	Worldwide

Some studies that looked at the issues raised were highlighted. Before reading the full papers, these studies were first filtered out where those which are unrelated to the specific areas of focus i.e. reading comprehension. It was also important to ensure that only relevant articles were considered for further analysis. After careful consideration, 41 research studies were eliminated, leaving 24 for inclusion review.

(d) Inclusion Phase
The review concentrated on the reading comprehension difficulties that students' faced and teaching strategies can be employed to avoid the difficulties identified. 31 articles were acquired from Google scholar, 12 from ERIC, and 57 from Mendeley among the chosen databases. These databases were picked because of the excellent papers they include, especially in the area of education. Every study sought to investigate different facets of students' challenges with reading comprehension and instructional practices that can be used to avoid the problems described.

Literature Reviews Findings
This review sought the answers to two research questions by analysing past articles related to the difficulties of reading comprehension and teaching strategies that can be employed to avoid the difficulties. For the first research question, the findings shed light on the primary difficulties that students encounter in reading comprehension. Based on the review, the primary difficulties identified are (1) students' lack of motivation and engagement, (2) their employment of ineffective reading strategies, (3) their difficulty in understanding complex texts, (4) their difficulty with fluency and decoding, (5) lack of support, and (6) their limited vocabulary. The second research question focused on identifying effective teaching strategies to mitigate these difficulties. The findings revealed several strategies that teachers can consider, which are their use of (1) explicit teaching strategies (2) reciprocal teaching strategy, (3) choice theory, (4) multi fluency strategy, and (5) multi reading strategy.

Students' primary difficulties in reading comprehension
Reading comprehension is a critical skill for academic success, yet a too many students have difficulty with it. Challenges that keep students from reading comprehension succeed. One of the biggest challenges in understanding what you read is motivation. The examination

of students' apathy has either gone to the source or established the impact. From one side, Lika (2017) and Prihatini (2020) indicated that there is a significant difference between deep textual engagement and reading comprehension, which come from less reading and comprehension. As noted by Prihatini, 2020, such unengaged readers struggle to identify central ideas and draw conclusions needed for making sense of the text. Disengaged readers, by contrast, cannot but engage with the texts in a meaningful way (Chua & Sulaiman 2021; Sari et al. 2020), since they exhibit negatively towards reading and comprehending material. Additionally, Vaughn et al describe a struggle with motivation exacerbates reading difficulties, making it a negative feedback loop of disengagement and poor results. Such motivation matters and it directly contributes to students' capacity to remember and comprehend the material they read.

Ineffective reading strategies can also lead to reading comprehension problems. When vital skills are ignored, students struggle to make sense of texts (Lika, 2017) -- predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, etc. This is congruent to the result that structured reading strategies enhance comprehension by providing a structure to interpret the text (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). Additonally, numerous students lack with clear goal-oriented and scaffolding for self-regulated learning. As noted by Kampylafka et al. (2023) students who are lacking in these skills might face great challenges when they want to evaluate their comprehension or try to adjust their reading strategies. In addition, students who neglect using strategic reading techniques are less likely to engage with the text, but instead will use a passive way of reading that hampers learning (Satriani, 2018). It proves that using a methodical and successful reading strategy is the key to improving students' reading comprehension and overall text engagement.

Wahyuningsih (2023) discovered that insufficient practices led to students facing challenges in several aspects. Initially, the data reveals that participants' forecasting skills were limited since they could not predict upcoming text and results based on the information given in the text. This problem aligns with the results of Prihatini (2020) and Lika (2017), who revealed that predicting states is a vital component in effective understanding. Additionally, students faced difficulties with questions because they were uncertain of what to inquire about in the text. In fact, Satriani (2018) made similar remarks about the value of questioning approaches in expanding understanding.. In addition, challenges to clarify arose when students did not understand complex language, concepts, or textual structures. This finding supports the study of Ganie and Rangkuti (2019) who showed that the more words are kept from us, the harder it becomes to understand anything. Students also have difficulty extracting relevant information or concepts from the book and summarising them effectively. This result is supported by Miyane (2020), who stressed the relevance of effective of good summing abilities for understanding. In the literature, these issues were previously openly addressed.

There is also a large list of previous studies outlining the problems that pupils encounter while attempting to grasp difficult materials. Textual complexity can impact learners' challenges with sentence patterns, coherence, and vocabulary range (Chandran & Shah, 2019; Chua & Sulaiman, 2021; Gergelyová & Vančo, 2021; Lika, 2017). As a result, Sari et al. (2020) stressed that knowing text organisation was critical to comprehending broad themes and details. This may be seen, for example, in senior high schools when students

struggle to grasp the reading (Fauziah, Munir, & Aswandi, 2017), and it occurs at all levels of schooling. Even though these studies examine other dimensions of the problem, like the difficulty of singular sentences, levels of engagement and the coherence of the entire text. This emphasises the need to do research into and sheer implementation of better education techniques that focus on text structure and providing more syntactic dose of complexity to enhance the reading comprehension of more students.

Reading comprehension and decoding difficulties are other important factors to consider. According to Gedik and Akyol (2022), reading accurately is important for struggling students who might notice that they often read very slowly and there are also many substantial errors that stop them from understanding the text. In the same line, Vaughn et al. (2019) discovered that challenges decoding words might occupy mental resources that could otherwise be used for understanding. Furthermore, several basic difficulties such as incorrect reading and linking concepts influence comprehension and call for multimodal therapy (Cain 2022). Furthermore, students with inadequate English competence confront significant hurdles.According to Ramadhianti and Somba (2023) and Hezam et al. (2022), these students struggle to grasp English-language text due to their inadequate language skills. Because of their unfamiliarity, they struggle to understand and comprehend reading information. According to Miyane (2020), students who struggle with decoding often find it difficult to keep up with the reading pace, resulting in understanding gaps. The aforementioned publications also emphasised these problems.

According to Akçamete and Dağli Gökbulut (2018) and Vaughn et al. (2019), inclusive educational environments may not provide adequate help for students with reading issues. The absence of personalised interventions in these settings impedes the progress of struggling readers and the efficacy of teaching for the rest of the student body. Bano et al. (2018) emphasise that participating in parent participation is critical to developing specific reading habits that will lead to improved comprehension abilities. However, inconsistent reading and limited parental participation are thought to worsen reading comprehension difficulties and the severity of these impairments, respectively. According to Hayati and Puspitaloka (2022), there are additional obstructions to reading issues for students during online learning. Distractions, poor instructor guidance, and a lack of computer proficiency are a few of these issues. These barriers also make it more difficult for students to obtain the help and resources they require to successfully address their reading issues. Finally, a lack of support, including the absence of specialised treatments to help children in inclusive settings, low levels of parent participation in reading intervention, and virtual learning environments offer problems for students suffering with reading.

Finally, insufficient vocabulary is a significant obstacle in comprehension when reading. According to Ganie and Rangkuti (2019), students with a limited vocabulary struggle to read texts, particularly those with complex language and concepts. According to Satriani (2018), this difficulty increases by the fact that frequent encounters with new terms might create frustration and disengagement. Furthermore, Miyane (2020) showed that students with a restricted vocabulary are unable to comprehend the text's deeper meanings, resulting in limited reading and poor remembering. This was another huge reading comprehension concern.

Suggested teaching strategies that can be employed to mitigate reading difficulties

The review also investigated how to address reading comprehension issues raised by the students. This is a key reading comprehension strategy known as summarising. When students have to weigh a text's core principles down to a short summary, they help themselves focus on and keep the most important topics of the passage. By condensing a text's core principles into a brief summary, students are better able to focus on and retain the most significant topics in the reading material. When a book is simplified to its fundamental components, students can better understand and recall its key concepts. Summarising is not only assist students in process and information flow but also help students remember and use it in various situations. Lika (2017) guides that breaking a complex and challenging texts into smaller, more manageable chunks is especially beneficial for helping students in getting this kind of content. Students who have had different language levels might be affected by so-called simplifying, since it gives them an opportunity to reconstruct the text in their own words, thereby enhancing language skills. In addition, students build their understanding based on previous experiences, and they draw from context clues to make their summaries, which help in the learning & retention of new terms, makes summarising vary indirectly address vocabulary issues.

Second, the questioning technique encourages student to ask and answer to text-based questions, which supports students active reading and critical thinking. This method converts passive reading into an interactive dialogue between the reader and the passage, greatly increasing understanding and retention. Teachers can inspire their students to understand more about the content by asking questions that reveal deeper meanings and link different portions of the text. According to Wahyuningsih (2018), this approach is helpful in reciprocal teaching, where students and teachers work together to create meaning through questioning. Contextual knowledge can be taught effectively as it helps students make links between literary elements and discover implications. Also asking clarifying questions helps bridge the gaps of language, making links to new language and ideas. Questioning, however, keeps the manageable parts of text by converting the huge, unmanageable texts into byte-sized questions-bean which helps the student perceive and memorize the content.

In addition, clarifying and anticipating are also helpful tactics for improving reading comprehension by addressing misconceptions and fostering involvement with the information. Clarifying is identifying and expanding on complicated words, phrases, or concepts in order to eliminate ambiguity and ensure complete comprehension. This method is essential for overcoming hurdles such as foreign terminology or intricate sentence patterns. Wahyuningsih (2018) emphasises the need for clarification in reciprocal education by immediately addressing areas of uncertainty and providing specific definitions and explanations. This improves students' overall language skills and allows them to overcome linguistic barriers. Clarification also contributes to the accessibility of the text by better explaining certain things and providing details that make the context more evident. When readers break down complex portions of challenging text into smaller segments with consolidations and clarifications for retention, they can understand it better. Predicting, however, more actively involves the students in the reading as they begin to form hypotheses about what will happen next in the text and are therefore motivated by their interest, because their curiosity will be stimulated. The approach encourages critical thinking and makes links between new information and information already learned, which makes it more user-

friendly and memorable. As highlighted by Wahyuningsih (2018), prediction as an inherent component of reciprocal teaching leads to better engagement with the text. It helps contextual knowledge and solves vocabulary problems by helping students deduce the meanings of terms they have not encountered before and anticipate story developments. Predicting keys help students navigate more complex materials by segmenting them into manageable pieces.

Then, Choice Theory trains and allows intrinsic motivation in self-directed learning, as when student is learning they have a free will which comes with a responsibility. It is founded on the idea that learners achieve the greatest understanding when they take ownership of their education and are held accountable for their progress. According to Messina (2023), to better understand how Commitment Theory could encourage students as participants in their own learning process and developing comprehension strategies from the lens of commitment. Choice Theory strengthens a more personalized, goal-oriented style of learning because it allows students to select which subjects they would like to study and set their own learning goals. This has been shown to be especially powerful when it comes to developing language skills, as students are generally working with things that they find interesting and relevant. It enhances localization as well as encouraging people to examine and question the meaning of texts. Similarly, the vocabulary extension is also a benefit of using Choice Theory since it allows students to choose materials that align better with their level of language ability and needs. By addressing text complexity in this manner, students can gradually expand the degree of challenge in the texts they are working to master, resulting in a sense of success and progress.

The Multi Fluency method is an additional strategy that incorporates a set of sub-techniques intended at enhancing different facets of fluency. The initial method is to establish links by associating the text with personal experiences, other writings, and global occurrences. It also helps people understand and remember much better, as it makes reading content more relevant and meaningful. According to Fauziah, Munir, and Aswandi (2017), such approach is vital for helping students make connections to how the text relates to their life experiences and the world at large. This allows learners to apply their knowledge in different contexts and deepen their understanding by making connections. There is also a benefit to practicing this dialogue and comparison type of exercise to improve language abilities. Connecting the new to the known helps in better understanding, through easier reception and recollection of the information. Engaging with accurate texts and activities will help students improve their vocabulary as well. This idea of representing new concepts and experience enables the reader to relate and understand the topic.

Furthermore, scaffolding also allows students with supportive structures that help them gradually accomplish self-sufficient understanding. That approach invloves guidance and assistance that gradually decreases as learners develop their skills. This is supported by Fauziah, Munir, and Aswandi (2017), who highlight how scaffolding facilitates the advancement of students' abilities by enabling students to modify and enhance their previous abilities in reading comprehension. According to Chandran and Shah (2019), breaking up texts and offering guided practice will help students to pinpoint critical aspects in texts. According to Saraswati, Dambayana, and Pratiwi (2021), certain activities are more effective in enhancing the ability to infer. This approach is particularly advantageous for language development because it provides individualized assistance to address the specific needs of each student. Scaffolding also facilitates context understanding by reducing reading complexity, as well as providing contextual assistance and cues. By helping learners to

disciplined with introduction of new words, this method codifies and structures that the new words are not only included but also remembered. It supports the learning process and breaking down a challenging text into smaller, manageable passages while providing the steps to walk through the text. This scaffolding builds students' confidence and independence as readers by gradually reducing their dependence on supports that expand their comprehension abilities.

In conclusion, enhancing reading comprehension through interactive reading activities, motivational strategies, and individualized approaches is necessary for student engagement and academic success. According to Chua and Sulaiman (2021) and Sari et al (2020), this interactive component ranging from multimedia resources, engaging activities, or gamification can enhance the pleasure and enjoyment of reading. In addition, motivational tactics such as setting goals and giving rewards are encouraging active participation. As stated by Ramadhianti and Somba (2023) and Hezam et al. (2022), students can overcome language barriers and positively engage with the subject matter. There is a strong body of research that suggests bilingual texts, visual aids and culturally relevant and familiar resources enable students to process subject matter better in the home language and make links to what they are learning at school. " Gergelyová and Vančo (2021) along with Ramadhianti and Somba (2023) also make recommendations concerning regular reading and variety in using resources. Regular reading activities boost up the comprehension of students. Practice often, and listen to English contexts to help improve your understanding. Implementing these key strategies, teachers can effectively support students facing reading difficulties and create an inclusive environment that empowers all learners to thrive.

Conclusion

Comprehension in reading can be regarded as an important competency in most educational settings as it assists learners in grappling with and consuming texts in many disciplines. This enhances their ability to be critical, to solve problems and to communicate effectively. Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill as it supports students in understanding works of literature, expanding horizons of knowledge, and utilizing that knowledge in different situations. Such competencies are of great importance in English classes, since English is used in reading not only in literary criticism, but in everyday communication. People can overcome their culture of reading comprehension by first knowing that they have a problem and also knowing that researchers who study comprehension problems have the same problems, frustration can be reduced and motivation to work can be increased. Teachers can use these findings to design interventions that will help their students increase their reading comprehension skills. Teachers can further make it possible for students to navigate current barriers, build confidence in reading, and become independent learners by creating an interactive reading environment within the classroom. In turn, this will enable improvement in students' reading skills over time.

Future research should also look into reading comprehension strategies in different academic contexts to identify the best practices for different groups of students. As technology encroaches in the education field, future researchers should explore how digital resources influence students' comprehension of what they read. In addition, longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of these techniques. To understand the challenges faced by students who are non-native English speakers or who have learning disabilities in order to deliver tailored solutions. Finally, by exploring the

significance of family engagement and home literacy contexts, one can better understand how to support students beyond the school day.

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