

DEFINING READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS STUDENTS FACE AND IMPROVING IT IN ELT

Muharram Turgunova

Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Foreign Languages,

The first year master's degree student

E-mail: muharramturgunova10@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is such an important aspect of the education that is required from all students to enhance their literacy skills and the process of learning vocabulary. That's why teachers pay attention to improve it in order to achieve good results with their students.

Key words: reading comprehension; literacy skills; interference in linguistics; mixed-method; reading speed; vocabulary.

Reading comprehension is such an important aspect of the education that is required from all students to enhance their literacy skills and the process of learning vocabulary. That's why teachers pay attention to improve it in order to achieve good results with their students.

According to the students' level of knowledge and skills, reading comprehension can be challenging for some of them in every degree and time. It is our obligation to guide our students in the acquisition of the reading skill; we have to make them meet the pleasure and challenge of reading in a foreign language; and it is only by understanding the nature of the reading process and the problems involved that we will be able to acquire the flexibility and resourcefulness to achieve our goal.

(Carlos Algreto Yorio: University of Michigan)

Comprehension is recognized as an acquired skill that is focused on the understanding of information. Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defines the comprehension as, the action of fact comprehending the mind understanding; ...grasping with mind, power g receiving and containing ideas". (Carrie Hill; The Arbutus Review; vol 2; No 1 (2011)).

Comprehension is the ability to take in information, analyze it in its respective segments and come up with an understanding of the input in a cohesive and accurate manner. Well-developed comprehension abilities involve interactive strategy use to come up with a meaningful understanding of the input. (Lin, 2010).

This research is organized to find out the problems related to comprehending in reading process, to analyze the role of different methods, types of reading exercises and interactive activities that are essential for the improvement of the students' reading comprehension skills and maintaining their confidence to handle the texts difficult to understand.

Moreover, this study looks at different reading approaches, the role of the vocabulary and grammar in achieving a great reading comprehension

This study sets out to answer the following questions:

- Why do students keep having difficulties on comprehending the context they have read?

- Can we use any methods or techniques to help students to deal with these comprehension problems?

- How to teach the ways of improving comprehension to the students who are learning English as a foreign language?

A group of students were engaged in an interview first, then during a month lessons and their reading skills and approaches to reading were observed and checked. After the observation the underlying problems and factors that can affect successful reading qualifications and standards were found.

Research on finding out the problems in reading and effective ways of improving students' reading comprehension was prepared according to the procedure used by Agnese Capodiecì at Department of General Psychology and Cesare Corroldi at University of Padova.

Traditionally, students' reading comprehension has been assessed by measuring and calculating how fast they read the text and how well they understand the context.

To check our hypothesis that shows the main problems and ways to achieve good reading skills, we have conducted a survey among randomly chosen pre-intermediate group of students at an educational center "Start21" on how to improve reading comprehension and how to approach problematic situations in reading.

The design was a mixed-method study and it enabled us to use a diversity of techniques, inductive and deductive reasoning, additionally, it helped us acquire more understandable and clearer results on topic.

Observations were carried out at Start21 Private Educational Centre in Namangan. A pre-intermediate group of students was chosen for this research. As reading comprehension is a fundamental cognitive ability for students, a major advantage of having good reading comprehension is that students can develop higher academic self-confidence, critical thinking and analytical skills.

A randomly chosen pre-intermediate group of students was recruited from Start21 Educational Centre where I work in as a part-time English teacher. Collected data consists of 24 face-to-face interviews with students and a survey on this topic.

The first step in this process was to have an interview with 10 IELTS instructors and teachers. We tried to know what problems teachers face when they teach reading. During the interview we found out that several problems and, at the same time, many useful methods and techniques which can be both effective and easy to use. While interviewing teachers, most of the teachers said that teaching reading and improving students' comprehension is challenging task because of lack of reading skills, inattentiveness, being unaware of wide range of topics like political, medical or relating to art.

According to the interview results, I found out that the major difficulty rooted from grammatical differences between English and Uzbek languages. For example, we know that most of the grammar rules and the order in parts of speech are totally same in Russian and English languages. But when it comes to Uzbek language, parts of speech like a verb, a noun, an adverb, an interjection, a pronoun and a conjunction come in different places. For example, "I went to school with my brother" = "Я ходил в школу с моим братом". Position of parts of speech will be almost same.

That's why most teachers say that it will be easy to learn English for the students who know Russian well. However, as some Uzbek students use difficult translation method, most of the time they will have a poor reading speed or bad rereading comprehension. In most schools or educational centers some teachers teach one method to students. In this method students start translating the sentence from the beginning but when they come to the main verb, they will translate back to the verb. Surely, by doing so it will be easy to translate the sentence. But as they develop their knowledge and learn complex grammatical structures and compound sentences, their reading speed will decrease and some problems will start to appear. It means that students' experience and knowledge of their own language affect the process of learning a foreign language. It is called as "interference in linguistics". It is the effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning. Linguistic interference will happen when one language affects the use of another. For instance, if a student who speaks in Uzbek learns Russian and English, he or she may wrongly use the words and grammar rules while speaking in these languages. For this reason, students cannot understand why they use articles (a/an/the) or why they add -s / -es to main verbs while using them with pronouns like he/she/it in Present Simple Tense. All of these will have an impact on learning and comprehending the context, words or sentences in a foreign language.

Importantly, when students who learned the mentioned wrong method of translating can start to learn the topic of relative clause, inversion or other complex grammar structures, they will have a hesitation in finding the main verb. Because as language requires the sentence to be exact, brief and easy to use, in the texts some relative pronouns that are used after a noun to introduce a clause can often be left out. In these cases, students will see several, sometimes, even more than three verbs, but will not know where to stop to translate back to the main verb for getting ‘uzbek translation’. This, of course, may cause some problems and pauses for students. Although students can find the main verb and translate the sentences with the help of this “easy method”, they cannot understand the core meaning of the context.

Finding out this problem, I decided to carry out a research on my students. First, as a teacher I wanted to know my students’ attitudes and interests to reading. I sent them survey questions created by [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) and learned their ideas about reading and some problems they face while trying to comprehend what the meaning is. In these research, I made an online survey created by [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) and it consisted of 4 main questions. They were:

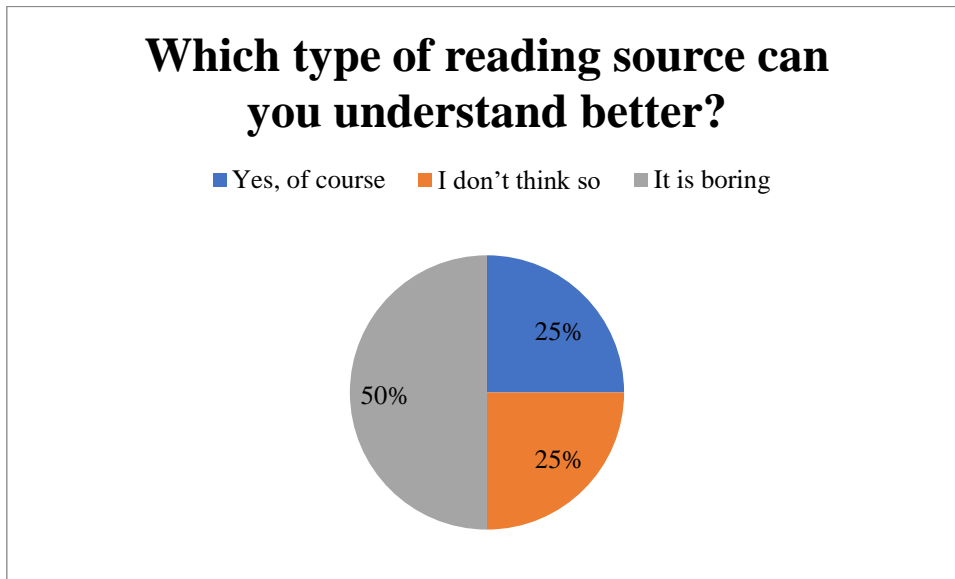
- 1) Which type of reading sources can you understand better?
- 2) What do you think what the reason is for a bad reading comprehension?
- 3) What is more important to improve reading comprehension?
- 4) Do you think that reading the same passage again and again can be useful for reading comprehension?

After students’ answers I found that most problems may occur because of not focusing on topic, lack of vocabulary and some wrong methods. That’s why I taught my students one of the effective methods that can help to improve reading comprehension. This method is called as “36-time rule”. In this method students will have to read the same text or the article 30 times inside, 5 times by doing reading out and, finally for the 36th time they will record their voice message which was recorded while reading the same reading passage. During a month we tested this method and results were pretty well. There was a noticeable increase in my students’ reading comprehension, interests to reading, additionally, in their pronunciation and vocabulary. That’s way i hope that this method can help many students who have problems related to comprehension in reading.

RESULTS

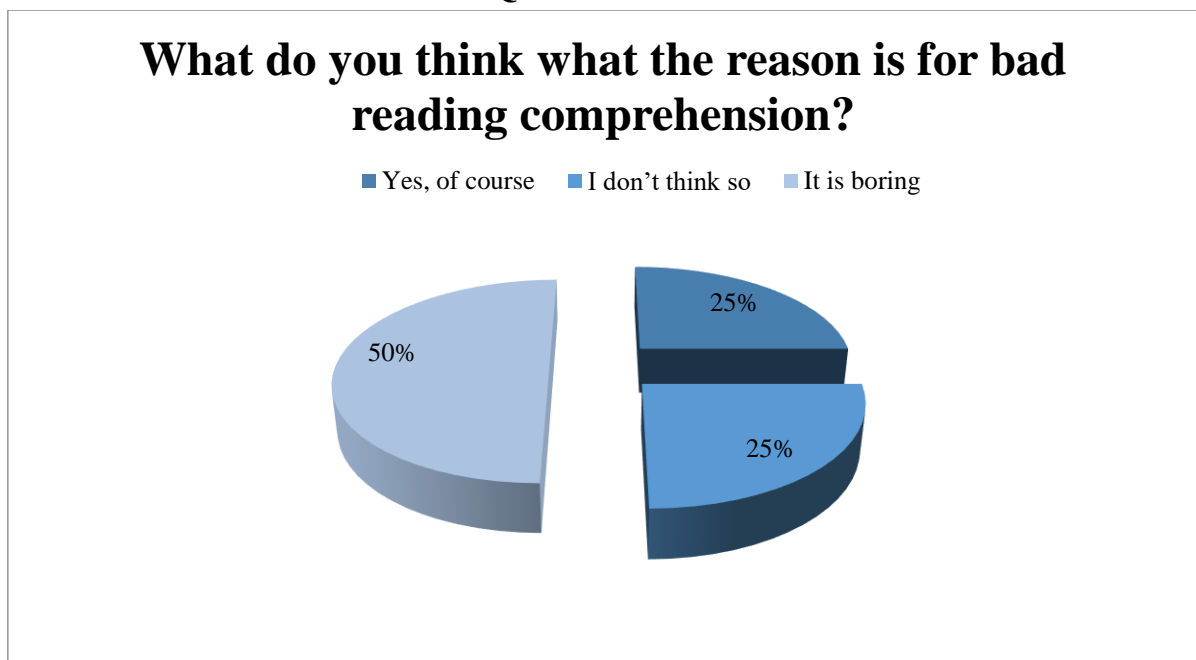
To find out more and clearer information about the reading comprehension problems that can be challenging for English learners, I have done an online survey created by [SurveyMonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) among in my pre-intermediate group. 24 students participated in it. It went as the following:

Question 1



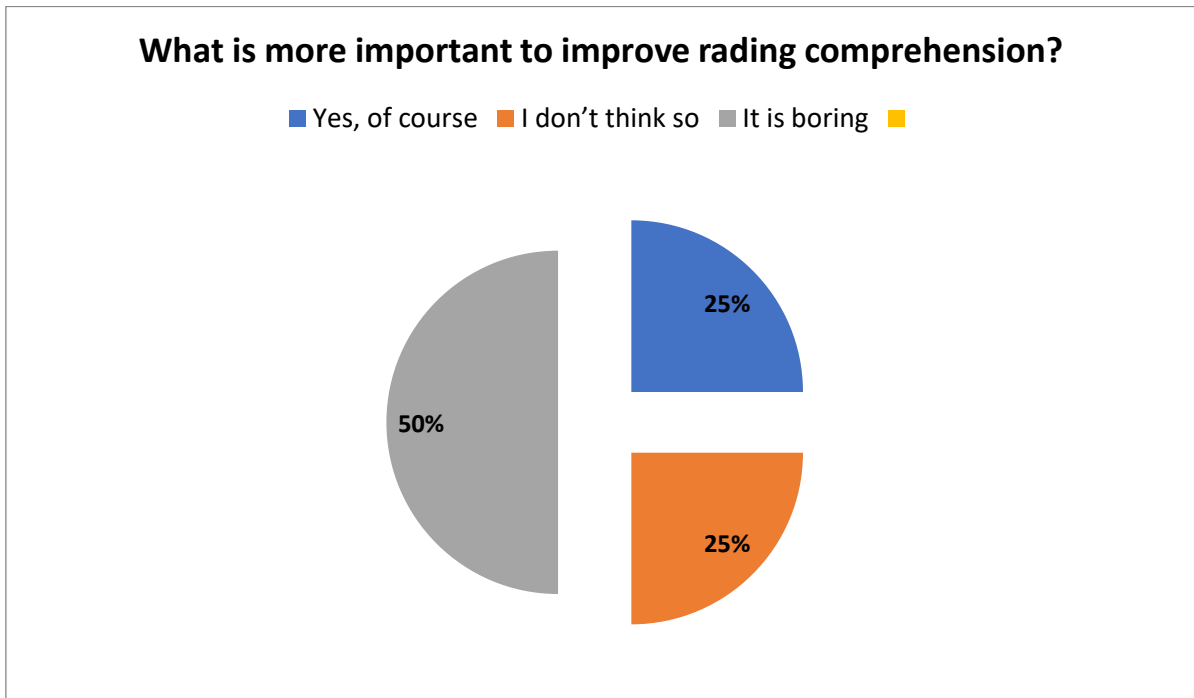
“Narrative” reading sources were told to be more understandable by 67% of the students, while “Scientific” and “Historical” ones were preferred by 12% and 21% of the them respectively.

Question 2



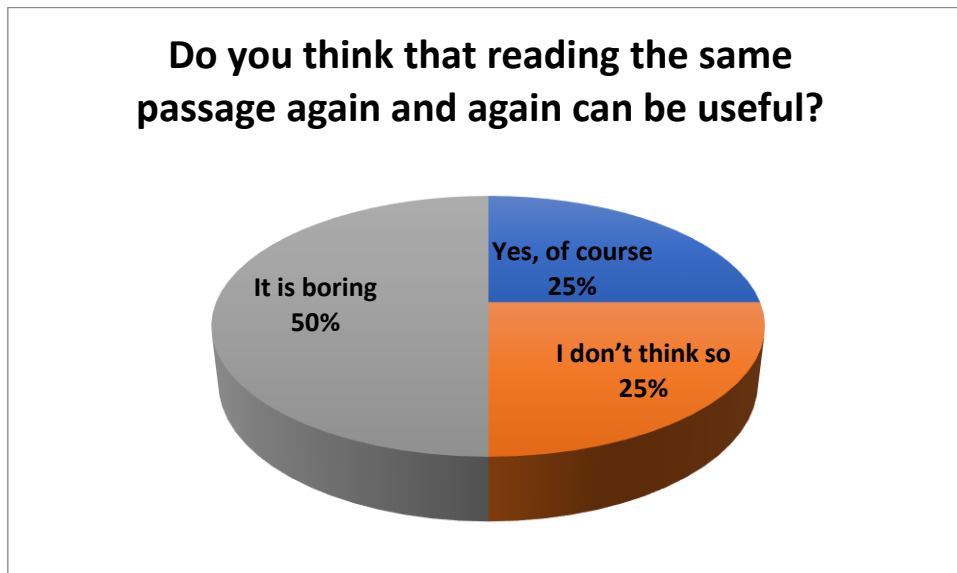
The second survey question showed that although 38% of the students said “Poor grammar” prevents from good understanding, most of the participants (54%) find “Lack of vocabulary” as the main bad factor for reading comprehension. Slow reading speed was thought to be influential by only 8% of them.

Question 3



44 and 35 percentage of the subjects supported “Critical thinking” and “Effective method” to develop reading comprehension while 17% of them thought “Focusing” to be crucial. The least quantity of the students(4%) are for “Wide outlook” to be accounted for.

Question 4



Interestingly, the half of the students informed that reading just 1 source repeatedly was boring for them while the others quarreled on whether it was beneficial or not, 50 to 50.

CONCLUSION

By conducting this research I found out that there are different types of students and, sometimes, it is extremely important to know their psychological, physical and emotional states. For this reason teachers will be required to be understanding, open-minded, clever and practiced. There are many factors that can prevent students from understanding the gist of the text or passage. Due to this reason, research on this topic will continue and a lot of skills, ideas and opinions will be shared.

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