

Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among English Majored Sophomores at A University in Vietnam

Ph.D. Tran Ngoc Duc, Ma. Nguyen Thi Lan
Hanoi University of Industry, Hanoi, Vietnam

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Accepted: 05 April 2023

Published: 30 April 2023

Publication Issue

Volume 10, Issue 2

March-April-2023

Page Number

890-905

ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is undoubtedly a fundamental skill, serving as a precursor to academic success, professional achievement, and lifelong learning as it enables language learners to acquire new knowledge and expand their worldview (Frey, Fisher, & Lapp, 2012) [11]. It is also considered the cornerstone of enhancing other productive skills, including speaking and writing skills, by facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary, syntax, and critical thinking abilities, all of which are crucial to effective communication and written expression. However, a significant number of learners encounter formidable challenges in comprehending written texts. This study endeavors to investigate the reading comprehension difficulties of English majored sophomores at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI) as well as identify the factors behind them using a mixed-method approach. The research participants consisted of 186 sophomores, using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the bulk of the participants have difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly with regard to certain aspects such as vocabulary, background knowledge, grammatical structures, and reading strategies. The study also uncovers several contributory factors that impede reading comprehension, mainly a lack of reading habits and a shortage of interest and motivation for reading.

Keywords : Reading Comprehension, Reading Difficulties, Sophomores, Factors, English Majored Students

I. INTRODUCTION

English is widely acknowledged as the global lingua franca, and its significance for academic achievement is indisputable (Azeroual, 2013) [3]. Reading has been

inextricably linked to academic success (Dabarera, Renandya, & Zhang, 2014) [9] due to the crucial role that comprehension plays in education (Hulme & Snowling, 2011) [17]. Consequently, effective English reading skills are now an essential requirement,

particularly for English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Moreover, as Attarzadeh (2011) highlights, possessing English reading proficiency is crucial to gaining access to published information [2]. This underscores the significance of reading, regarded as one of the most widely employed language skills in daily life, as evidenced by the pervasive use of the Internet. In fact, students often search the web for information, most of which is published in English. Despite its critical importance, reading comprehension is often considered a challenging skill to master due to its complex nature, which involves both the text and the reader's cognitive and linguistic abilities (Bernhardt, 2010) [4].

Notwithstanding the extensive research on reading comprehension difficulties, scant attention has been paid to the specific context of Vietnamese EFL learners. According to Tobing's (2013) findings, while reading a text, comprehension problems are common among EFL learners, but proficient readers are able to overcome these challenges by utilizing effective reading strategies [34]. As for English-majored students at HaUI, they are not an exception. They still confront some discernible problems when reading English texts, which hinders them from being successful in their learning process.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process aimed at improving learners' understanding of text (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) [15]. According to Koda (2005), reading comprehension in English refers to the cognitive process of extracting and integrating information from a written text, while applying readers' background knowledge and English proficiency [20]. In other words, it requires the reader to construct the meaning from the text by drawing on their prior knowledge actively, language proficiency, and reading strategies (Grabe, 2008) [14]. Further

research also stresses that reading comprehension is an active process that involves intentional thinking, enabling readers to make connections between their thinking processes, the textual content, and their own knowledge, expectations, and purposes for reading. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) further emphasized that reading comprehension involves various skills such as word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and prior knowledge to quickly extract meaning from text [15]. Without the use of these processes, readers may not fully understand the text and miss important information. Hence, a strong reading comprehension skill is essential for learners to obtain and understand information effectively.

Reading comprehension difficulties in previous studies

Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted in the field of reading comprehension, with a particular focus of the challenges that readers may encounter. Chawwang (2008) implemented a comprehensive investigation into the challenges of English reading faced by Thai English as EFL learners [7]. The findings of the study revealed that a significant majority of the students encountered obstacles when attempting to comprehend English texts. Nezami (2012) undertook an empirical study with the objective of delineating the primary challenges faced by Saudi students in their proficiency in English reading comprehension [26]. The research findings revealed an array of difficulties, including incompetence in skimming and scanning the reading material, lacking vocabulary knowledge, poor reading skills, and losing focus. Similarly, Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt, and Kamil (2003) stated that readers should have background knowledge, vocabulary, and other strategies to understand written texts [29].

Albader (2007) carried out research overseas which explored the difficulties faced by students when reading in a second or foreign language [36]. This research addressed various linguistic aspects, including syntax (grammar), phonetics (pronunciation), and semantics (meaning of words).

In a recent study by Qrquez and Abo-Rashid (2017), the researchers investigated the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by EFL students at a university in Jordan [31]. The findings revealed that the students faced various barriers during the reading process, including ambiguous words, uncommon vocabulary, and the need for specific time to process the text cognitively. Wutthisingchai (2011) conducted an empirical study aimed at verifying English reading comprehension difficulties [35]. The statistical findings identified motivation as the primary barrier affecting their reading comprehension. Insufficient prior knowledge and a lack of reading strategies were perceived as the second and third barriers by the students, respectively. According to the researchers, the difficulties in reading comprehension can be categorized into four groups: vocabulary, background knowledge, grammatical structures, and reading strategies.

First, insufficient lexical or vocabulary knowledge has emerged as one of the most persistent issues in the realm of reading comprehension. Indeed, vocabulary knowledge is a crucial element that facilitates reading comprehension by enabling students to decode words in a text efficiently. The correlation between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension is strong and indisputable (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008) [13], [23], and is described as a reciprocal relationship (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998) [6].

As Qian (2002) notes, a broader vocabulary range gives learners a larger database to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words [30]. However, limited vocabulary knowledge can hinder comprehension, even for those with basic comprehension skills (Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004) [18]. Ricketts, Nation, and Bishop (2007) found that students with limited vocabulary knowledge were more likely to grapple with understanding texts that contain unfamiliar words, specialized terminologies, synonyms, antonyms, or words with multiple connotations [32]. In comparison to students with

high comprehension skills, those with low comprehension demonstrated deficits in vocabulary and could read fewer words. Chou (2011) likewise concluded that a larger vocabulary repertoire positively affected students' reading comprehension [8].

Second, inadequate background knowledge has been recognized as a major obstacle in reading comprehension, impeding readers' ability to effectively comprehend and interpret texts. Previous research by Zhang and Shanshan (2011) established that background knowledge held a paramount role in facilitating the reading comprehension process [38]. It is regarded as one of the influential factors that significantly impacts the attainment of high reading comprehension scores, as evidenced by the findings of McNeil's (2011) study [24].

Background knowledge refers to a reader's prior understanding of the world, including cultural awareness. Prior knowledge is commonly known as background one, which encapsulates what a person knows about the content of a text. In other words, to comprehend a written passage efficiently, readers must establish a connection between new textual information with their existing knowledge, world knowledge, and personal experiences regarding the topic of the reading. Inappropriately employing prior knowledge is one of the reading comprehension problems that prevents students from successfully comprehending a written text (Gersten et al., 2001) [13]. In such circumstances, when learners' background knowledge is deficient, their text comprehension may be compromised, leading to potential contradictions with the information presented in the writing (Zhang & Shanshan, 2011) [38].

The ability to properly utilize and activate prior knowledge is a vital force that enhances students' understanding of text. Nguyen (2007) found that learners with prior knowledge are able to comprehend reading materials more easily, while those who have limited exposure to diverse or

unfamiliar reading materials may encounter difficulties in understanding them, often requiring multiple readings to achieve comprehension [27].

Third, a number of studies highlighted the prominent role of grammatical knowledge in reading comprehension (Mehrpour & Rahimi, 2010; Zhang, 2012) [25], [37]. Grammar is a fundamental component of any language, as it enables students to understand the time of action, such as whether it occurred in the past or present. There is ample evidence highlighting the importance of grammar in reading comprehension. Scholars such as Grabe (2008) and Givón (1995) emphasized that a solid grasp of grammar served as cues for text coherence, aiding readers in understanding text structures, meaning, and making inferences [14], [16]. Studies have consistently shown a strong association between syntactic or grammatical sophistication and reading comprehension.

The complexity of the sentence structure is the main problem when reading English academic texts. One common challenge that students often face in reading comprehension is encountering texts with complex grammatical structures. Academic articles, for instance, often employ very long and intricate sentences with several clauses or subordinating conjunctions (such as although, because, furthermore, however, etc.) that may pose significant difficulties for readers who lack knowledge of these grammatical structures.

Several studies have provided evidence that reading comprehension is closely linked to learners' ability to identify and correct syntactic errors. Subject-verb agreement is a common example of syntax, which explains the relationship between words (subjects and verbs) in sentence formation (Franck, Frauenfelder & Rizzi, 2007) [12]. The relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension was confirmed by Cain (2007), who further noted that it was mediated by factors such as vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and memory [5]. Without a solid understanding of grammar, EFL learners may struggle

to navigate through the intricacies of sentence construction, decipher the intended meaning of sentences, identify word relationships, and interpret the overall meaning of the text.

Finally, the absence or ineffective use of reading strategies can be a major contributor to poor reading comprehension. In the process of reading, students employed a variety of strategies to facilitate the acquisition, retention, and retrieval of information (M.Singha, 2001) [33]. As such, reading strategies are deemed critical for enhancing students' reading comprehension, as they equip them with the necessary skills to effectively handle their reading tasks.

The utilization of effective reading strategies has been found to have a positive correlation with learners' reading comprehension skills. Brookbank, Grover, Kullberg, and Strawser (1999) demonstrated that the application of various reading strategies resulted in improved reading comprehension proficiency among learners [39]. It also reported that reading strategies had a positive impact on the reading comprehension proficiency of readers, benefiting both proficient and less proficient readers.

Renowned researcher such as Machado (2010) underscored the significance of developing reading skills in learners [22]. The investigation into the differences between good readers and poor readers in utilizing reading strategies was a focal point for the researcher. Findings indicated that readers who were knowledgeable about and adept at using different reading strategies, including knowing what, when, how, and why to use them, were more likely to enhance their reading comprehension skills, whereas poor readers tended to read passively without utilizing comprehension strategies. Without adequate reading skills, learners might struggle with decoding letters and words, instead of focusing on comprehension and meaning.

In conclusion, readers who lack effective reading strategies or fail to utilize them will struggle to overcome reading difficulties and will be unable to

comprehend the text effectively. It is, therefore, crucial for learners to develop good reading strategies, as this will enable them to process texts efficiently and attain a deeper comprehension of the material.

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the reading comprehension difficulties encountered by English majored sophomores at HaUI as well as provide more profound insight into the factors affecting the students' reading comprehension. In line with this aim, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are some possible difficulties in reading comprehension of English majored sophomores at Hanoi University of Industry?
2. What are some potential factors behind these difficulties?

III. METHODS

This study was implemented with a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to enhance the research's credibility. According to Dweik, Nofal, and Al-Obaidi (2019), a mixed method is useful since the qualitative data "allows for cross-checking the results obtained by the questionnaire" as well as "alleviating the potential pitfalls of each method" (p. 107) [10]. The questionnaire was administered to 186 English majored sophomores at HaUI to gather quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data. By employing both methods, the study aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the research topic and generate

meaningful data that could be generalized to a broader context. The use of a mixed-method approach helps ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Questionnaires were used as the main instrument for data collection. They were delivered to students via Google Forms™, with the content adapted from the research of Nga H. T. Nguyen and Tu K. Kim (2021) [28]. In the questionnaire, the statements of factors affecting students' reading comprehension were presented on the Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided/neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was delivered to students, and their responses were collected after one week. Researchers then grouped questions into the appropriate category and analyzed them thoroughly.

The second instrument used in the study was the semi-structured interview. The main reason behind selecting this instrument was to have a profound understanding of participants' responses and to collect detailed data regarding the participants' reading comprehension difficulties. Hence, 20 out of 186 students was haphazardly selected to partake in the interview.

The questions in the interview consisted of two main questions concerning the problems that learners encountered in reading comprehension tasks and the causes of these problems. The interview questions aimed at getting further explanations of the participants' previous responses. After appointments were made with students, the interview was implemented via calls and recorded for concrete evidence. After that, the students were numbered and grouped if they had relatively similar views on each issue.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors affecting English majored sophomores' difficulties in reading comprehension

Table 1. Background of studying English

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The number of years I have studied English has significantly impacted my English language proficiency.	45%	32%	12%	8%	3%

2. I find reading to be the most challenging English language skill.	15%	25.3%	28.6%	21.2%	9.9%
3. Reading plays a crucial role in my overall English language learning and academic success.	28%	42%	15%	10%	5%
4. I consider my current reading skill level in English to be average, requiring further improvement.	10%	20.4%	39.1%	18.3%	12.2%

Based on the provided statistics, a substantial percentage of participants held positive views on the influence of years of studying English on their language proficiency, with 45% strongly agreeing or agreeing. However, there was some uncertainty regarding the challenges of reading as an English language skill, with 28.6% expressing indecision or neutrality.

On the other hand, a considerable proportion of participants emphasized the crucial role of reading skills in their overall English language learning and academic success, with 42% expressing agreement.

Additionally, there was a need for further improvement in reading skills, as only 10% of participants considered their current reading skill level in English as average, requiring further enhancement, while 39.1% remained neutral on this statement.

In conclusion, the data suggested that the number of years of studying English, particularly in relation to reading skills, had a significant influence on English language proficiency among English majored sophomores. These findings highlighted the importance of reading in English language learning and the need for continued efforts to improve reading skills among the participants.

Table 2. Student’s attitudes towards English reading comprehension

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. I find English reading comprehension fairly simple.	5%	25%	10%	35%	25%
6. I often read authentic English materials such as books, stories, magazines, newspapers, etc. at home.	5%	20%	10%	40%	25%
7. I mostly use English-English dictionaries for understanding unfamiliar words during my reading activities.	10%	35%	5%	20%	30%

The findings from the Likert scale responses of English majored sophomores indicated that students' attitudes towards English reading comprehension were diverse and complex. While 30% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they found English reading comprehension relatively straightforward, a substantial proportion (60%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, indicating that a significant number of students found it difficult.

Additionally, only a quarter of the respondents (25%) reported reading additional English materials at home, while a majority (65%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, suggesting that many students struggled to find time for extra reading.

Furthermore, the use of English-English dictionaries for word comprehension also showed a notable divide, with 45% of respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing, but 50% expressing disagreement or strong disagreement.

These findings highlighted the need for targeted interventions to enhance English reading comprehension skills, promote the reading of authentic materials, and encourage the effective use of English-English dictionaries to support language proficiency among English majored sophomores.

Question one: What are the difficulties that you encounter in reading comprehension tasks?

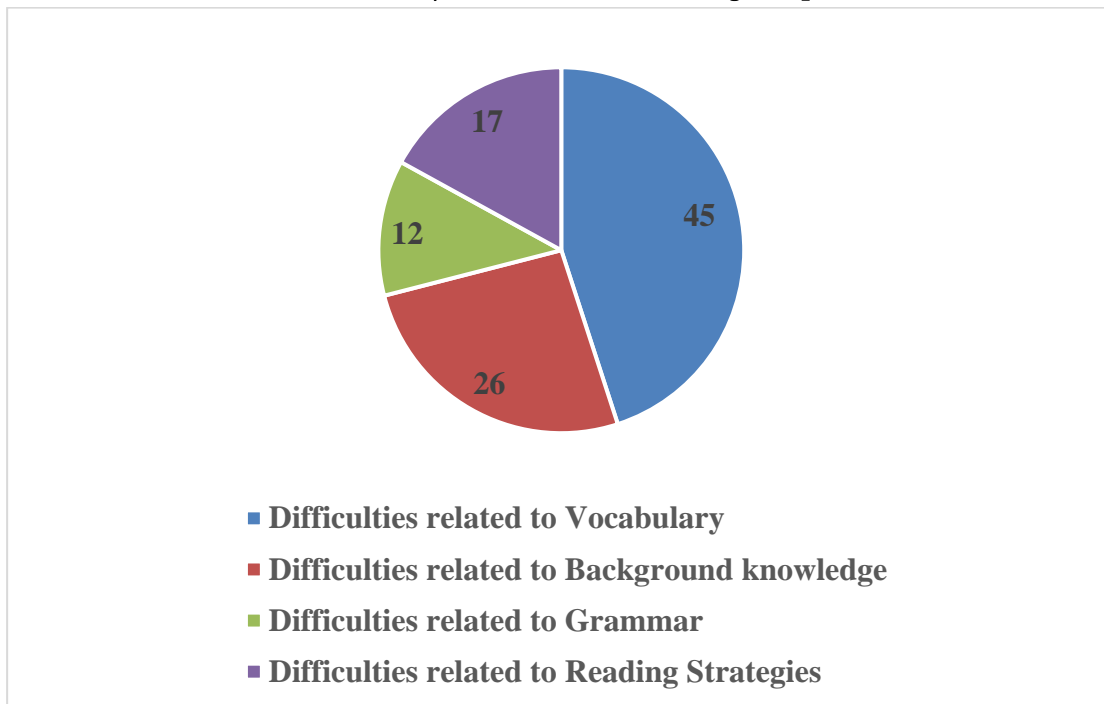


Figure 1. Difficulties Encountered by Students

This pie chart depicts the several reading difficulties encountered by students in their reading comprehension. The majority of students (45%) reported difficulties related to vocabulary, hindering their understanding of the text. Students noted that unfamiliar vocabulary and specialized terminologies posed obstacles to their comprehension.

“I did not understand the reading text because it had a lot of uncommon vocabulary and many technical words or jargon.” (Students S#1, S#5, S#14)

“I think I do not have enough vocabulary to translate a text; as a result, I cannot guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.” (Students S#9, S#13)

“Vocabulary is a major difficulty for me in reading comprehension tasks. I often come across words or phrases that I don't know, and it disrupts my flow of reading and understanding.” (Students S#6, S#15, S#20)

This is consistent with previous studies conducted by Nezami (2012) and Qrquez & Abo-Rashid (2017), which all reported similar difficulties in reading comprehension [26]. For instance, Qrquez & Abo-Rashid (2017) found that Jordanian university students faced challenges with uncommon and ambiguous words [31].

Meanwhile, a significant portion of students (26%) experienced certain difficulties related to inadequate background knowledge, limiting their understanding of the content and leading to boredom.

“I cannot explain the meaning of the text because I do not connect the topic and my personal experiences.” (Students S#2, S#19)

“I do not understand much about the content of the reading texts because of my limited background knowledge of the topics of the reading texts.” (Students S#4, S#7, S#17)

In addition, 17% of students reported difficulties related to reading strategies, including a lack of knowledge of effective strategies.

“I do not know how to decide what to read closely and what to ignore.” (Students S#12, S#15)

“When reading English texts, I translate every word into my native language.” (Students S#3, S#5)

“I struggle with effective reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning, which affects my ability to quickly locate information in the text.” (Student S#6)

The results are in line with those obtained in the study conducted by Wutthisingchai (2011), who stated that prior knowledge and a lack of reading strategies were perceived as sources of comprehension problems [35]. Similarly, Nezami (2012) identified lacking vocabulary knowledge and poor reading skills as major difficulties in reading comprehension [26].

Finally, 12% of the students mentioned encountering difficulties related to grammar. One of the interviewees, for example, shared that “I face difficulties with complex sentence structures. Sometimes, the sentences are lengthy and convoluted, making it hard for me to identify the main idea or follow the flow of the text. I also struggle with prepositions and their correct order, which affects my understanding of the sentence structure and overall comprehension.” (Student S#8)

Overall, these findings emphasized the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension difficulties, which encompassed vocabulary, background knowledge, grammar, and reading strategies. It underscored the need for targeted interventions that addressed these specific areas to support students in developing effective reading comprehension skills.

Question two: What are the possible causes of these difficulties?

Table 3. Difficulties in Vocabulary

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I often struggle to learn new academic words or technical terms and find it challenging to remember their meanings.	25%	35%	20%	15%	5%
2. When I come across a lot of unfamiliar words in a reading text, such as in academic articles, I find it difficult to understand the overall meaning, even with the help of dictionaries.	15%	30%	25%	20%	10%
3. I tend to read word by word, which makes it hard for me to grasp the intended message of the writer in the text.	10%	20%	30%	25%	15%
4. I feel confused when encountering words with multiple meanings in different contexts, such as in ambiguous sentences or figurative language.	10%	25%	30%	25%	10%
5. I often face difficulties in completing	25%	35%	20%	15%	5%

exercises that involve vocabulary, such as word forms, synonyms, antonyms, or collocations.					
---	--	--	--	--	--

The results of the survey shed light on the complexities of vocabulary learning among English majored sophomores. The findings from the present study are consistent with previous research on vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. As noted by Gersten et al. (2001) and Martin-Chang & Gould (2008), vocabulary knowledge played a crucial role in facilitating reading comprehension, as it allowed students to efficiently decode words in a text [13], [23]. This was supported by the results of the survey, which revealed that a substantial proportion of English majored sophomores (60%) expressed challenges in learning new academic words or technical terms and remembering their meanings, indicating that limited vocabulary knowledge might hinder comprehension.

Similarly, the findings of the present study align with the research of Jitendra et al. (2004) and Ricketts et al. (2007), who found that students with limited vocabulary knowledge might struggle with understanding texts that contained unfamiliar words or specialized terminologies [18], [32]. The results of the survey showed that a considerable percentage of students (60%) reported difficulties in completing vocabulary-related exercises, indicating that vocabulary learning could be a daunting task.

In terms of reading strategies, the findings of the present study are in line with Qian's (2002) observation that a broader vocabulary range enables learners to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words [30]. The survey results showed that while some respondents (10%) tended to read word by word and found it hard to grasp the intended message of the writer in the text, a higher percentage expressed a neutral stance (30%), indicating that they did not face such challenges. This implies that there is variation in reading approaches among English majored sophomores, which is consistent with previous findings.

Finally, the mixed perception among English majored sophomores in dealing with words with multiple meanings, as revealed in the survey results, is consistent with previous research by Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) and Chou (2011), who emphasized the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension [6], [8]. Some respondents (35%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confused when encountering words with multiple meanings, while others disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggested that English majored sophomores might have different levels of proficiency in dealing with words with multiple meanings in different contexts, which is in line with previous studies.

Overall, the findings of the present study supported and extended the existing literature on vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, indicating that English majored sophomores faced challenges in acquiring and retaining specialized vocabulary, which might impact their overall comprehension skills.

Table 4. Difficulties in Background knowledge

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The role of background knowledge is crucial in general language learning and particularly in reading comprehension.	20%	60%	15%	5%	0%
2. I face challenges when reading texts on unfamiliar topics due to a lack of prior knowledge or familiarity.	5%	50%	30%	15%	0%

3. Insufficient background knowledge can hinder my ability to make connections, draw inferences, and engage in critical thinking while reading English texts.	5%	45%	35%	15%	0%
---	----	-----	-----	-----	----

The survey results presented in Table 4 shed light on the challenges students face in reading comprehension due to insufficient background knowledge. Consistent with previous studies by Zhang and Shanshan (2011) and McNeil (2011), the findings of the survey indicated that background knowledge were recognized as a crucial factor in general language learning and reading comprehension by the majority of English majored sophomores [38], [24]. The results revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents (50%) reported challenges when reading texts on unfamiliar topics due to a lack of prior knowledge or familiarity. This underscored the impact of insufficient background knowledge on English comprehension, potentially hindering students' ability to fully understand and engage with a wide range of English texts.

Moreover, the survey results indicated that a substantial portion of respondents (45%) acknowledged the limitations of insufficient background knowledge in their analytical and interpretative skills, as it could hinder their ability to make connections, draw inferences, and engage in critical thinking while reading English texts.

Table 5. Difficulties in Grammatical structures

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I often struggle to understand the main idea or key points in reading passages that contain complex sentence structures, such as subordinate clauses and relative clauses.	2%	35%	45%	15%	3%
2. I face challenges in determining the correct order of prepositions in sentences when completing reading exercises.	1%	5%	60%	28%	6%
3. I do not know how to classify the type of each word; that is also your problem when doing exercise.	12%	18%	40%	25%	5%

The survey results demonstrate a diverse range of difficulties related to grammatical structures in reading comprehension faced by English majored sophomores. The findings from the survey indicated that a significant percentage of English majored sophomores faced difficulties related to grammatical structures in reading comprehension. Specifically, 2% of respondents strongly agreed and 35% agreed with the statement that they struggled with understanding the main idea or key points in reading passages containing complex sentence structures, such as subordinate clauses and relative clauses. In contrast, a smaller percentage of respondents (3%) strongly disagreed, indicating lesser difficulty in determining the correct order of prepositions in sentences. Additionally, 30% of respondents expressed agreement or strong agreement with the statement that they did not know how to classify the type of each word, highlighting a distinct challenge in word analysis and classification.

These findings indicated that grammatical knowledge played a significant role in reading comprehension for these students, consistent with previous studies by Mehrpour and Rahimi (2010) and Zhang (2012) [25], [37]. Grammar was recognized as a fundamental component of language, enabling students to understand the time of action and aiding in text coherence, structure, and meaning. Scholars such as Grabe (2008) and Givón (1995) emphasized the importance of grammar in reading comprehension, as it served as cues for understanding text structures and making inferences [14], [16].

Furthermore, the findings suggested that the complexity of sentence structures in English academic texts posed challenges for students, particularly in understanding complex clauses and word analysis. However, the incidence of struggles with grammatical structures among students was relatively low, and challenges might arise more in tasks that involved rewriting or summarizing, rather than in reading exercises.

Table 6. Difficulties in the lack of strategies

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I struggle with using effective reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and predicting.	12%	25%	28%	22%	13%
2. I find it challenging to apply strategies, such as annotating, highlighting, or summarizing, while reading.	8%	18%	30%	25%	19%
3. I have difficulty using context clues to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases in reading passages.	15%	20%	22%	18%	25%

Previous research consistently showed that reading strategies played a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension skills among learners (M. Singha, 2001; Brookbank et al., 1999) [33], [39]. These strategies, such as skimming, scanning, predicting, annotating, highlighting, and summarizing, were employed by students during the reading process to facilitate the acquisition, retention, and retrieval of information. Renowned researchers, including Machado (2010) emphasized the significance of developing effective reading skills in learners.

The findings from the survey conducted in this study revealed that a notable percentage of participants (ranging from 12% to 25%) agreed that they struggled with utilizing effective reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and predicting. Similarly, a significant proportion (ranging from 8% to 18%) found it challenging to apply strategies such as annotating, highlighting, or summarizing while reading. These findings suggested that a considerable number of participants faced difficulties in employing these critical reading strategies, which could potentially impact their reading comprehension skills.

On the other hand, some participants indicated a neutral stance (22%) and others expressed disagreement (ranging from 18% to 25%) with the statements related to reading strategies. This indicated that while some participants perceived challenges in utilizing these strategies, there were also individuals who failed to perceive these challenges to the same extent or agree with the statements.

In conclusion, the results of the survey highlighted the importance of reading strategies in the context of reading comprehension difficulties among learners. The statement aligns with the findings of studies conducted by Brookbank et al. (1999), which demonstrated the positive impact of reading strategies on

reading comprehension proficiency [39]. It also aligns with the research by Machado (2010) that emphasized the significance of developing reading skills in learners [22].

Table 7. Personal and Psychological factors

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Lack of reading habit negatively affects my reading comprehension abilities.	10%	20%	30%	20%	20%
2. Lack of interest in the reading material negatively impacts my ability to comprehend and retain information.	18%	25%	20%	15%	22%
3. Frustration with difficult or complex reading passages hinders my ability to comprehend the content.	15%	28%	18%	24%	15%
4. Anxiety or stress levels impact my reading comprehension abilities.	12%	20%	25%	18%	25%
5. I find reading exercises more enjoyable and effective when the content is relevant or personally meaningful to me.	22%	28%	20%	18%	12%
6. Motivation plays a crucial role in learning a language.	30%	25%	15%	10%	20%

Table 7 presents data on personal and psychological factors affecting reading comprehension abilities. The results indicated that a significant portion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements presented. Lack of reading habit was reported to negatively affect reading comprehension abilities by 10% strongly agreeing, 20% agreeing, and 30% being neutral. Lack of interest in the reading material was also seen as a hindrance, with 18% strongly agreeing, 25% agreeing, and 20% being neutral. Frustration with difficult or complex reading passages was reported by 15% strongly agreeing, 28% agreeing, and 18% being neutral. Anxiety or stress levels impacting reading comprehension abilities were reported by 12% strongly agreeing, 20% agreeing, and 25% being neutral.

On the positive side, respondents expressed that they found reading exercises more enjoyable and effective when the content is relevant or personally meaningful to them, with 22% strongly agreeing, 28% agreeing, and 20% being neutral.

Additionally, the majority of respondents believed that motivation plays a crucial role in learning a language, with 30% strongly agreeing, 25% agreeing, and 15% being neutral.

V. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate some difficulties faced by English majored sophomores at HaUI in reading comprehension, as well as the underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

Through data obtained from interviews and questionnaires, several difficulties related to reading comprehension were identified, including insufficient lexical or vocabulary knowledge, a lack of prior knowledge or inadequate background knowledge, poor grammatical knowledge, and the ineffective use of reading strategies. The study also identified several

contributing factors that hinder reading comprehension, including a lack of reading habits and insufficient interest and motivation towards reading.

To enhance reading comprehension skills among English majored sophomores at HaUI, several effective strategies can be implemented. Firstly, it is vital to encourage students to develop consistent reading habits by setting aside dedicated time for reading every single day. This can immensely help them build their reading stamina and develop a habit of engaging with different types of English texts. Secondly, expanding vocabulary is paramount for better understanding texts. Students can actively enrich their vocabulary by keeping a vocabulary journal, where they can record new words and review them regularly. They can also use context clues to infer word meanings, by looking for clues in the surrounding words or sentences. In addition, practicing word usage in different contexts, such as through discussions, debates, and writing assignments, can help students internalize new vocabulary and improve their language proficiency. Thirdly, building background knowledge is essential for comprehending text meaning. Students can actively expand their knowledge on various topics by reading widely across different genres and disciplines. This can include news articles, magazines, books, and online resources. Engaging in discussions and debates on current events, social issues, and cultural topics can also help students develop their critical thinking skills and improve their ability to make connections between their prior knowledge and the content of the texts they are reading. Additionally, teaching specific reading strategies can greatly enhance students' comprehension skills. Strategies such as skimming, scanning, predicting, and summarizing can help students better comprehend texts by improving their ability to identify main ideas, locate key information, and make predictions about the content of the text. Teachers can provide explicit instruction on these strategies and provide opportunities for students to practice them in various reading tasks and

assignments. Moreover, fostering motivation and interest in reading can greatly influence students' comprehension skills. Engaging and relevant texts, multimedia resources, and opportunities for sharing thoughts and opinions can help students develop a sense of ownership and engagement with the reading materials. Teachers can incorporate authentic and meaningful texts, such as articles related to students' field of study or current issues, to make reading more interesting and relevant. Discussions, group activities, and presentations can also encourage students to actively engage with the text and express their opinions and ideas. Providing scaffolding and support is also crucial in improving reading comprehension skills. Teachers can implement pre-reading activities, such as activating students' prior knowledge, setting purposes for reading, and previewing the text. During guided reading exercises, teachers can provide support in decoding unfamiliar words, clarifying concepts, and guiding students to make connections between the text and their prior knowledge. Post-reading discussions and reflections can help students consolidate their understanding of the text and deepen their comprehension. Regular feedback on students' reading comprehension performance and providing opportunities for practice in different contexts, such as in-class assignments, homework, and assessments, can further reinforce and enhance their skills. By implementing these comprehensive strategies, English majored sophomores at HaUI can gradually improve their reading comprehension skills, which will not only benefit them in their academic studies but also in their professional and personal lives. Reading comprehension is a critical skill that enables students to access information, think critically, and communicate effectively, making it an essential aspect of their language-learning journey.

The present research is centered on English majored sophomores, future studies can investigate potential comparisons between English and non-English majors. Besides, further studies may uncover additional factors pertaining to reading comprehension.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express my deep gratitude towards Mr. Hoang Ngoc Tue, President of the School of Language and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, for his guidance, enthusiastic encouragement, and constructive feedback for this research work. Furthermore, we would like to be grateful to my English-majored sophomore students at Faculty of English language for their enthusiastic participation in the research.

VI. REFERENCES

- [1]. Al-Jarrah, H., & Ismail, N. S. B. (2018). Reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners in higher learning institutions. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(7), 32-41.
- [2]. Attarzadeh, M. (2011). The effect of scaffolding on reading comprehension of various text modes on Iranian EFL learners with different proficiency levels. *Social sciences and Humanities*, 2(4), 1-28.
- [3]. Azeroual, D. (2013). Investigating the Reading Difficulties of Algerian EST Students with Regard to their General English Knowledge. *Arab World English Journal*, 4(1).
- [4]. Bernhardt, E. B. (2010). *Understanding advanced second-language reading*. Routledge.
- [5]. Cain, K. (2007). Syntactic awareness and reading ability: Is there any evidence for a special relationship?. *Applied psycholinguistics*, 28(4), 679-694.
- [6]. Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (1998). What reading does for the mind. *American educator*, 22, 8-17.
- [7]. Chawwang, N. (2008). An investigation of English reading problems of Thai 12th-grade students in Nakhonratchasima educational regions 1, 2, 3, and 7. Unpublished master's thesis, Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University.
- [8]. Chou, P. T. M. (2011). The effects of vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge on reading comprehension of Taiwanese EFL students. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 8(1).
- [9]. Dabarera, C., Renandya, W. A., & Zhang, L. J. (2014). The impact of metacognitive scaffolding and monitoring on reading comprehension. *System*, 42, 462-473.
- [10]. Dweik, B., Nofal, M., & Al-Obaidi, M. (2019). An ethnic language and culture without a safe enclave: A socio-cultural perspective. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 19(1), 103-123.
- [11]. Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2012). *Speaking and listening standards. Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, Grades 3-5*, 107.
- [12]. Franck, J., Frauenfelder, U. H., & Rizzi, L. (2007). A syntactic analysis of interference in subject-verb agreement. *MIT working papers in linguistics*, 53, 173-190.
- [13]. Gersten, R., Fuchs, L. S., Williams, J. P., & Baker, S. (2001). Teaching reading comprehension strategies to students with learning disabilities: A review of research. *Review of educational research*, 71(2), 279-320.
- [14]. Grabe, W. (2008). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge university press.
- [15]. Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). A study of factors affecting EFL learners' reading comprehension skill and the strategies for improvement. *International journal of English linguistics*, 6(5), 180-187.
- [16]. Givón, T., & Gernsbacher, M. A. (1995). Coherence in spontaneous text. *Coherence in Spontaneous Text*, 1-277.
- [17]. Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2011). Children's reading comprehension difficulties: Nature, causes, and treatments. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(3), 139-142.

- [18]. Jitendra, A. K., Edwards, L. L., Sacks, G., & Jacobson, L. A. (2004). What research says about vocabulary instruction for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 70(3), 299-322.
- [19]. Karasakaloğlu, N. (2012). The Relationship between Reading Comprehension and Learning and Study Strategies of Prospective Elementary School Teachers. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 12(3).
- [20]. Koda, K. (2005). *Insights into second language reading: A cross-linguistic approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- [21]. Logan, S., Medford, E., & Hughes, N. (2011). The importance of intrinsic motivation for high and low ability readers' reading comprehension performance. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 21(1), 124-128.
- [22]. Machado, J. M. (2015). *Early childhood experiences in language arts: Early literacy*. Cengage learning.
- [23]. Martin-Chang, S.Y., & Gould, O. N. (2008). Revising print exposure: Exploring differential links to vocabulary, comprehension and reading rate. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 31, 273-284.
- [24]. McNeil, L. (2011). Investigating the contributions of background knowledge and reading comprehension strategies to L2 reading comprehension: An exploratory study. *Reading and Writing*, 24, 883-902.
- [25]. Mehrpour, S., & Rahimi, M. (2010). The impact of general and specific vocabulary knowledge on reading and listening comprehension: A case of Iranian EFL learners. *System*, 38(2), 292-300.
- [26]. Nezami, S. R. A. (2012). A critical study of comprehension strategies and general problems in reading skill faced by Arab EFL learners with special reference to Najran University in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Education*, 2(3).
- [27]. Nguyen, H. T. (2007). Educating Vietnamese American Students. *Multicultural Education*, 15(1), 23-26.
- [28]. Nguyen, N. H., & Kim, T. K. (2021). Difficulties in reading comprehension of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University, Cantho, Vietnam/Khó khăn khi học môn đọc hiểu của sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ anh tại Trường Đại học Tây Đô, Thành phố Cần Thơ, Việt Nam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(3).
- [29]. Pang, E. S., Muaka, A., Bernhardt, E. B., & Kamil, M. L. (2003). *Teaching reading (Vol. 6)*. Brussels, Belgium: International Academy of Education.
- [30]. Qian David D. 2002. Investigating the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic reading performance: An assessment perspective. *Language Learning* 52 (3): 513-536.
- [31]. Qrquez, M., & Ab Rashid, R. (2017). Reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners: The case of first and second year students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, 8.
- [32]. Ricketts, J., Nation, K., & Bishop, D. V. (2007). Vocabulary is important for some, but not all reading skills. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 11(3), 235-257.
- [33]. Singhal, M. (2001). Reading proficiency, reading strategies, metacognitive awareness and L2 readers. *The Reading Matrix*, 1(1).
- [34]. Tobing, I. R. A. (2013). *The relationship of reading strategies and self-efficacy with the reading comprehension of high school students in Indonesia (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas)*.
- [35]. Wutthisingchai, S. (2011). *A survey study of English reading comprehension problems in academic texts as perceived by mathayom 5 students in the English program at Thai*

Christian School (No. 122086). Thammasat University.

- [36]. Yousuf B. Albader. (2007). Difficulties in Second Language Reading. School of Linguistics & English Language Bangor University.
- [37]. Zhang, D. (2012). Vocabulary and grammar knowledge in second language reading comprehension: A structural equation modeling study. *The modern language journal*, 96(4), 558-575.
- [38]. Zhang, Y., & Shanshan, H. (2011). Background Knowledge and reading comprehension. In *International Conference on Computer Technology and Development*, 3rd (ICCTD 2011). ASME Press.
- [39]. D. Brookbank, S. Grover, K. Kullberg, and C. Strawser, *Students Achievement of Student* Chicago, IL: Saint Xavier University, 1999.

Cite this article as :

Tran Ngoc Duc, Nguyen Thi Lan, "Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among English Majored Sophomores at A University in Vietnam", *International Journal of Scientific Research in Science and Technology (IJSRST)*, Online ISSN : 2395-602X, Print ISSN : 2395-6011, Volume 10 Issue 2, pp. 890-905, March-April 2023. Available at doi : <https://doi.org/10.32628/IJSRST523102149>
Journal URL : <https://ijsrst.com/IJSRST523102149> |