

IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF 7TH GRADE STUDENTS

Soliyeva Ruxshona

3rd-year bachelor student at Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Advisor: **Erkulova Feruza**, PhD, associate professor

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Abstract: Developing students' reading skills is considered an essential part of the learning process because it helps learners expand their vocabulary and better understand written texts. However, many seventh-grade students face difficulties in developing reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the main problems students experience in understanding English texts. The study was conducted in Norin district with 15 seventh-grade students. Data were collected through surveys, student interviews, and classroom observations with the assistance of an observer. The expected results indicated that some students have difficulties understanding long texts, possess limited vocabulary, and struggle to identify the main ideas of texts. Based on these findings, the study suggests that teachers should apply effective teaching strategies to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: reading comprehension skills, improving reading comprehension, EFL students, middle school learners, vocabulary limitations, identifying main ideas, reading comprehension difficulties.

7-SINF O'QUVCHILARINING O'QIB TUSHUNISH KO'NIKMALARINI RIVOJLANTIRISH

Soliyeva Ruxshona

Namangan davlat chet tillari instituti 3-bosqich bakalavr talabasi

Ilmiy rahbar: **Erkulova Feruza**, PhD, dotsent

Annotatsiya: O'quvchilarning o'qish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish ta'lim jarayonining muhim qismi hisoblanadi, chunki bu o'quvchilarga so'z boyligini kengaytirish va yozma matnlarni yaxshiroq tushunishga yordam beradi. Biroq ko'plab yettinchi sinf o'quvchilari o'qib tushunish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda qiyinchiliklarga duch keladilar. Shu sababli, mazkur tadqiqot o'quvchilarning ingliz tilidagi matnlarni tushunishda duch keladigan asosiy muammolarini aniqlashni maqsad qiladi. Tadqiqot Norin tumanida 7-sinfning 15 nafar o'quvchisi ishtirokida o'tkazildi. Ma'lumotlar so'rovnomalar, o'quvchilar bilan suhbatlar hamda kuzatuvchi yordamida olib borilgan sinf kuzatuvlari orqali to'plandi. Kutilayotgan natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, ayrim o'quvchilar uzun matnlarni tushunishda qiyinchiliklarga duch keladi, ularning so'z boyligi cheklangan hamda matnning asosiy g'oyasini aniqlashda muammolar mavjud. Ushbu natijalarga asoslanib, tadqiqot o'qituvchilarga o'quvchilarning o'qib tushunish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish uchun samarali o'qitish strategiyalarini qo'llashni tavsiya etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: o'qib tushunish ko'nikmalari, o'qib tushunishni rivojlantirish, EFL o'quvchilari, o'rta maktab o'quvchilari, so'z boyligining cheklanganligi, asosiy g'oyani aniqlash, o'qib tushunishdagi qiyinchiliklar.

СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЕ НАВЫКОВ ПОНИМАНИЯ ПРОЧИТАННОГО У УЧАЩИХСЯ 7-ГО КЛАССА

Солиева Рухшона

Студентка 3-го курса бакалавриата Наманганского государственного института

иностранных языков

Научный руководитель: **Эркулова Феруза**, PhD, доцент

Аннотация: Развитие навыков чтения учащихся считается важной частью образовательного процесса, поскольку оно помогает обучающимся расширять словарный запас и лучше понимать письменные тексты. Однако многие учащиеся седьмого класса сталкиваются с трудностями при развитии навыков понимания прочитанного. Поэтому данное исследование направлено на выявление основных проблем, с которыми учащиеся сталкиваются при понимании текстов на английском языке. Исследование было проведено в Нарынском районе с участием 15 учащихся седьмого класса. Данные были собраны с помощью анкетирования, интервью с учащимися и наблюдений на уроках при содействии наблюдателя. Ожидаемые результаты показали, что некоторые учащиеся испытывают трудности при понимании длинных текстов, обладают ограниченным словарным запасом и затрудняются в определении основной идеи текста. На основе полученных результатов исследование рекомендует учителям применять эффективные стратегии обучения для улучшения навыков понимания прочитанного у учащихся.

Ключевые слова: навыки понимания прочитанного, развитие понимания прочитанного, учащиеся EFL, учащиеся средней школы, ограниченный словарный запас, определение основной идеи, трудности понимания прочитанного.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a process of understanding and interpreting written text in order to extract meaning. Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts and is considered a complex skill requiring the coordination of various sources of information. Anderson et al. compared reading to a symphonic orchestra and explained it through three main ideas: first, reading is a holistic act; second, success in reading comes from long-term practice, similar to learning musical instruments; and third, like a musical score, a text may have multiple interpretations [1].

Reading is especially important for secondary school students, as they need to succeed in English entrance examinations. Therefore, the ability to read and comprehend texts effectively is crucial for EFL learners. Due to increasing academic demands, students must develop stronger reading comprehension skills [2]. However, a significant number of seventh-grade students encounter challenges when developing effective reading comprehension skills.

The objectives of this study are to identify the types of reading tasks in which seventh-grade students perform most effectively, to determine which types of reading tasks are most appropriate for seventh-grade students in terms of their level and age, and to examine students' attitudes and feelings toward engaging in reading practice during classroom lessons.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) In which type of reading tasks do students perform better? 2) Which type of reading tasks are suitable for the level and age of seventh-grade students? 3) How do students feel while doing reading practice during the lesson?

Classroom-based research is needed to explore seventh-grade students' reading comprehension and provide practical guidance for teachers. This study aims to identify the key difficulties students face in understanding English texts and to examine their attitudes toward reading activities. Based on the findings, the study proposes effective instructional strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension and engagement in the classroom.

Reading is a cognitive process involving three key elements: the reader, the text, and the interaction between them. There are three main models that explain second-language reading: the

bottom-up model, the top-down model, and the interactive model. There are also three main types of reading comprehension theories: mental representations, content literacy, and cognitive processes [3]. Chandran and Shah note that although reading is regarded as the most important skill in the academic sector, it is not always promoted successfully among students. If students fail to comprehend a text, language learning may not be successful as expected because reading supports all language skills [4].

Kholboeva recommends emphasizing critical analysis by encouraging students to ask questions and engage critically with texts, using diverse materials such as fiction, nonfiction, and multimedia resources, and integrating real-life events and discussions around reading materials to enhance contextual understanding [5]. Focusing on these areas can strengthen students' overall reading skills and prepare them for future assessments. In this process, the teacher's role is also an important factor in shaping students' attitudes toward reading tasks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The development of students' reading skills is a vital part of the learning process, as it expands vocabulary and enhances the understanding of written texts. Following the theoretical framework of Anderson et al. [1], reading is viewed as a process of constructing meaning from written texts through holistic action and consistent practice. This study is further grounded in the cognitive model discussed by Ahmadi and Pourhoseini Gilakjani [3], which emphasizes the interaction between the reader and the text.

Before conducting this research, the teacher usually provided students with academic and relatively long reading texts followed by true/false and matching-type comprehension activities. These activities were used to check students' understanding of the texts and to develop their reading comprehension skills. During these lessons, it became noticeable that many students had difficulty completing the tasks on time. One hour was usually given for completing the reading tasks. In addition, the reading materials were provided in paper form and consisted only of text.

Since the seventh-grade students were at an A1 level and had only recently studied basic tenses, many of them struggled to understand longer texts. Some students had difficulty recognizing basic vocabulary, while others found it challenging to identify the main idea or match information correctly. These difficulties indicated that the reading materials were not fully appropriate for their language level.

These classroom experiences encouraged the teacher to investigate students' reading comprehension difficulties in a more systematic way. To test the primary hypothesis that seventh-grade students struggle with long texts, limited vocabulary, and identifying main ideas, a mixed-method study was conducted. The research was situated in Norin district. The participants included 15 seventh-grade students who were selected because they were experiencing difficulties in developing reading comprehension skills within an EFL context at the A1 proficiency level.

The research design involved three primary data collection instruments. First, a Google Forms survey consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions was administered to 17 English teachers. The purpose of the survey was to identify teachers' perspectives on students' reading comprehension difficulties, including problems with long texts, limited vocabulary, and identifying main ideas. The survey also explored commonly used teaching strategies and challenges faced during reading lessons. Using only multiple-choice questions allowed structured and easy-to-analyze data to be collected.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students to examine their specific attitudes and feelings toward reading practice during lessons. The interviews explored whether

students liked reading English texts, what they found most difficult, whether they understood the main idea after reading a long text, what helped them understand a text better, and how often they practised reading English outside the classroom.

Third, classroom observations were carried out with the help of a partner teacher invited as an observer. The observer monitored students' participation, engagement, and interaction with reading tasks during lessons. This observation provided practical guidance on how students engage with English texts in real time and helped identify difficulties such as limited vocabulary, problems understanding long texts, and difficulty identifying the main idea.

Before analysis, all collected data were checked for completeness. Quantitative data from the teacher survey were analyzed using percentages. Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns. Data from different sources were compared to increase the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS

The results of the survey revealed several important findings.

1. How many years have you worked in the teaching field?
17 responses



Figure 1. Teachers' teaching experience.

Figure 1 shows that most respondents (58.8%) are early-career teachers with 0-2 years of experience, while 29.4% have 3-5 years of experience. The purpose of this question was to identify the teaching background of participants and ensure the reliability of responses from teachers working with seventh-grade students.

2. Have your students ever faced difficulties while doing reading activities?
17 responses

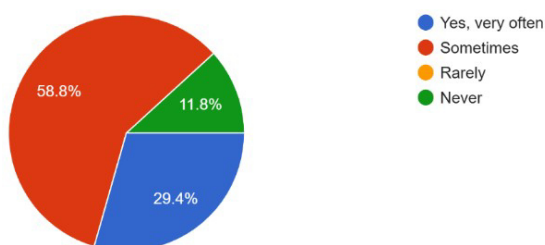


Figure 2. Frequency of students' difficulties during reading activities.

Figure 2 shows that nearly 88% of teachers reported that students experience reading difficulties very often or sometimes. The purpose of this question was to determine how frequently students face reading comprehension problems in classroom practice.

3. How do your students usually practice reading tasks during the lesson?
17 responses

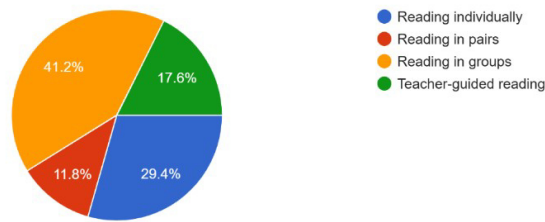


Figure 3. Methods used by teachers to practice reading tasks during lessons.

Figure 3 shows that group work (41.2%) is the most commonly used reading practice method, followed by individual reading and teacher-guided sessions. The purpose of this question was to identify the teaching methods commonly used to develop students' reading skills.

4. Are your students able to complete reading tasks on time?
17 responses

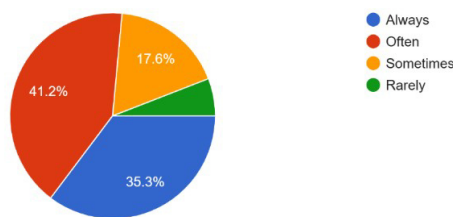


Figure 4. Students' ability to complete reading tasks on time.

Figure 4 indicates that most students often or always complete reading tasks on time, while some only sometimes manage to finish them. The purpose of this question was to examine whether students are able to complete reading tasks within the given time.

5. Have you ever noticed that your students feel bored during reading activities?
17 responses

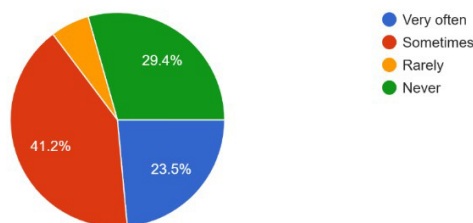


Figure 5. Frequency of students' boredom during reading activities.

Figure 5 shows that more than 60% of teachers notice student boredom very often or sometimes. The purpose of this question was to investigate students' engagement and interest during reading activities.

6. What types of reading activities are more suitable for 7th-grade students?
17 responses

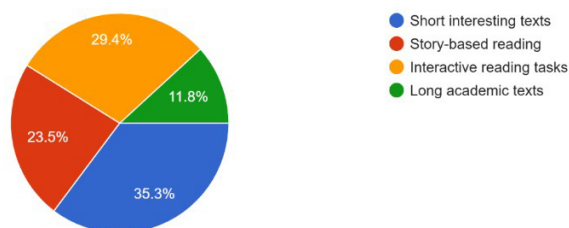


Figure 6. Suitable reading activities for seventh-grade students.

Figure 6 shows that short interesting texts and interactive tasks are considered the most suitable activities for seventh-grade learners. The purpose of this question was to determine which reading activities are appropriate for students' level and age.

7. Is it important to know students' levels before giving reading activities?
17 responses

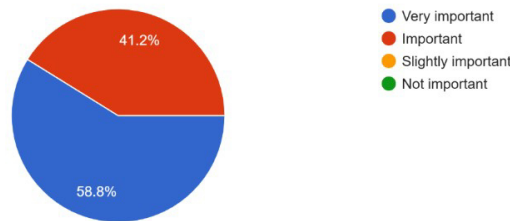


Figure 7. Importance of identifying students' reading level before assigning reading activities.

Figure 7 indicates that all respondents believe knowing students' reading level before assigning tasks is important. The purpose of this question was to identify the importance of level-appropriate reading materials.

8. If some students do not want to read long texts, what strategies would you use?
17 responses

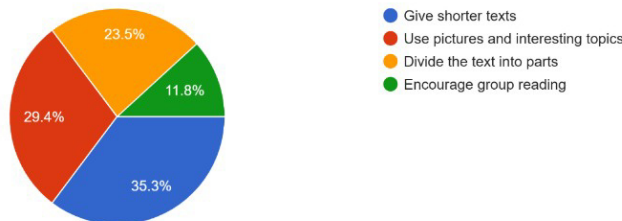


Figure 8. Strategies used when students do not want to read long texts.

Figure 8 shows that teachers prefer giving shorter texts or using pictures and interesting topics when students face difficulties with long texts. The purpose of this question was to identify strategies teachers use to support students with long reading passages.

9. Is it necessary to include reading activities in every lesson for 7th-grade students?
17 responses

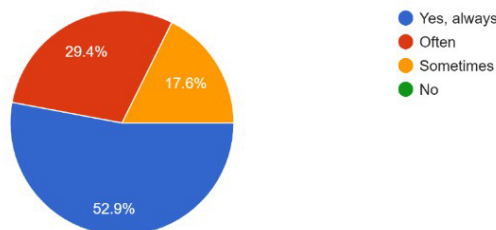


Figure 9. Necessity of including reading activities in every lesson.

Figure 9 indicates that the majority of teachers believe reading activities should be included in every lesson. The purpose of this question was to determine how often reading practice should be conducted.

10. In your opinion, what is the main purpose of teaching reading skills to students?
17 responses

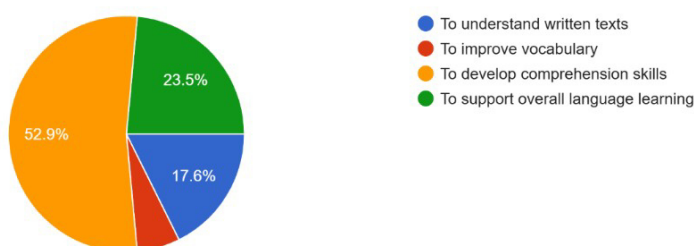


Figure 10. Main purpose of teaching reading skills to students.

Figure 10 shows that more than half of the teachers consider developing comprehension skills to be the main purpose of teaching reading. The purpose of this question was to identify teachers' main goals when using reading activities in the classroom.

Overall, the survey results indicate that seventh-grade students frequently experience difficulties in reading comprehension. The most commonly reported challenges include working with long texts, limited vocabulary, and maintaining interest during reading activities. In addition, student boredom during reading tasks was reported by more than half of the teachers. To further explore these findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 seventh-grade students to gain deeper insight into their reading comprehension difficulties.

Table 1. Results of semi-structured interviews with seventh-grade students

Interview questions	Main responses	Number of students
Do you like reading English texts?	Yes, but texts are difficult	9
	No, because I do not understand the meaning	6
What is the most difficult part?	Understanding vocabulary	7
	Understanding long texts	5
	Finding the main idea	3
Do you understand the main idea after reading a long text?	Sometimes	8
	No	5
	Yes	2
What helps you understand better?	Teacher explanation	6
	Pictures	5
	Vocabulary list	4
How often do you practice reading outside the classroom?	Rarely	10
	Sometimes	4

The interview results show that the majority of students experience difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly when working with long texts and unfamiliar vocabulary. Most students reported that they are unable to fully understand the meaning of texts and often struggle to identify the main idea.

The data also indicate that students find teacher explanations, pictures, and vocabulary support helpful in understanding reading materials. Furthermore, most students reported that they rarely practice reading outside the classroom, while only a few indicated occasional practice.

Peer classroom observation showed that most students participated actively during group work and discussion. However, some students showed difficulty during individual reading and needed teacher support. The observer noted that students showed interest in the reading topic, especially during interactive activities. Some students struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and required additional explanation. Group work helped students understand the text better, while a few students needed more time to complete comprehension tasks.

Based on the observation, it is suggested that teachers use more pre-teaching vocabulary activities before reading, provide shorter texts, include more visual support to improve comprehension, and encourage students to practise independent reading.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that seventh-grade students experience significant difficulties in reading comprehension. The survey results showed that a large number of teachers reported students struggling with long texts, limited vocabulary, and maintaining interest during reading activities. These findings were supported by the interview results, where students identified unfamiliar vocabulary and understanding long texts as the most challenging aspects of reading. In addition, many students reported difficulty identifying the main idea, which suggests that comprehension problems affect overall understanding of the text.

The peer classroom observation further confirmed these findings. During the observed lesson, students showed better participation during group work and interactive activities, while some students struggled during individual reading tasks. The observer also noted that students required teacher support to understand unfamiliar vocabulary and complete comprehension tasks. These observations align with both the survey and interview data, indicating that vocabulary knowledge and text difficulty play an important role in students' reading comprehension.

Another important finding is related to student engagement. The survey results showed that more than half of the teachers observed student boredom during reading activities. Similarly, the observation indicated that students were more interested when short texts, pictures, and interactive tasks were used. This suggests that long and complex texts may reduce motivation and negatively affect comprehension. Therefore, selecting appropriate reading materials based on students' level is essential.

Furthermore, the interview results revealed that most students rarely practise reading outside the classroom. Limited exposure to reading materials may contribute to low vocabulary knowledge and weak comprehension skills. This finding highlights the importance of providing more reading opportunities both inside and outside the classroom.

Overall, the findings suggest that using shorter texts, pre-teaching vocabulary, and incorporating interactive activities such as group work and discussion can improve students' reading comprehension. In addition, visual support and level-appropriate materials may help students better understand reading passages and increase their engagement during reading activities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the reading comprehension skills of seventh-grade students using survey, interview, and classroom observation data. The findings show that students frequently face difficulties in understanding long texts, unfamiliar vocabulary, and identifying the main idea.

The results also indicate that limited vocabulary knowledge and low reading motivation negatively affect students' comprehension. In addition, students perform better during interactive activities such as group work and visually supported tasks compared to individual reading.

It can be concluded that reading comprehension skills can be improved by using shorter texts, teaching key vocabulary before reading, and applying interactive teaching methods. These strategies help increase student engagement and support better understanding of reading materials.

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