

## Difficulties and Solutions of Reading English Facing Freshmen Students at Al-Balqa Applied University

Mohammad Akram Alzu'bi<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [dralzubi1978@bau.edu.jo](mailto:dralzubi1978@bau.edu.jo)

English Language and Literature Department, Ajloun University College, AL-Balqa Applied University, Ajloun, Jordan

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### **Abstract**

*The study aims at finding out the reading difficulties faced by freshmen students who learn English at several colleges at BU and suggesting solutions for these difficulties. To achieve this purpose, the study tries to answer the following research questions: What are the reading difficulties faced by freshmen students who learn English as a foreign language at BU? What are the proposed solutions for reading English difficulties? The sample of the study includes 400 students who learn English in the 1st year at different colleges at BU in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The researcher developed a questionnaire as a data collection instrument that included a number of items about difficulties of reading English answered by the participants. The study showed different reading difficulties faced by the students and suggested solutions for them.*

**Keywords:** Index Terms— Students' Difficulties, Reading, Freshmen Students.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Reading is an important skill that has many benefits in any society for several reasons. It is essential in our everyday activities, searching for jobs, developing our thoughts, and discovering new things. In addition, it develops the imagination and a good self-image. Besides, it improves spelling, language skills, and components of language. Furthermore, it is very important religiously, culturally, psychologically, and academically.

Reading could be defined as an interactive skill that the readers interact with the text and employ their experience to get meaning. Besides, it is a cognitive process of decoding symbols to derive meaning from the text. The reader should recognize three major components of reading which are decoding (when the reader translates a printed word into a sound), comprehension (when the reader understands the written text), and retention (when the reader remembers and retains what has been read). All of these components rely on each other; so comprehension relies on a mastery of decoding, and the ability to retain relies on a reader's decoding proficiency and ability to comprehend what is read.

From the researcher's experience, English students face many difficulties in reading and its components. For decoding difficulties, the students may have consistent difficulty in recognizing words (Klinger, 2011). Many researchers like Ardianto et al. (2024) approved that vocabulary mastery affects students' ability to reading comprehension positively. Also, they do not recognize the letters and the sounds they represent. Besides, they are slow readers when they read aloud, they ignore punctuation while reading, they have no phonemic awareness and they read without expression (Bangoy& Tan, 2024). For comprehension difficulties, they are confused about the meaning of words and sentences and have difficulty connecting what is read to previous knowledge, or have difficulty applying the content of a text to their personal experiences. They are unable to connect ideas smoothly, and they omit words when reading aloud and lack concentration during reading. For retention problems, they could not remember or summarize what they read (David, 2007). Furthermore, there are other

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<sup>1</sup> English Language and Literature Department, Ajloun University College, AL-Balqa Applied University, Ajloun, Jordan, Funded by AL-Balqa Applied University, ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5566-5446>

problems that students face during reading such as spelling well, reading for a long time, and enjoying reading the text they read.

Because there are many reading difficulties faced by readers in general and freshmen English students in particular, there is a need to limit the difficulties. So, the current study tried to determine the difficulties of reading that the freshmen English students at BU face then the study suggests solutions to improve their reading.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The main purpose of the study is to determine the reading difficulties faced by freshmen students who learn English at BU and find some solutions for these difficulties. To achieve the purpose of the study, the study tries to answer the following research questions:

What are the reading difficulties faced by freshmen students who learn English as a foreign language at BU?

What are the proposed solutions for difficulties in reading English?

### **Importance of the Study**

Most students at Jordanian universities have reading difficulties that face them in their English classrooms so English lecturers need to determine these difficulties and solve them. Thus, the importance of the study is not only arising from determining those problems but also finding solutions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited to EFL students in Jordan who taught English at departments of English at BU. Moreover, the study is limited to the instrument which was a questionnaire that may not include the all problems of reading facing students.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms were defined as follows:

Freshman Student is male and female student in his/her first year of college.

Reading Difficulties are the suggested problems in the scale of the current study that Freshmen Students at BU facing in reading.

Solutions are answers to problems of reading that were suggested by the researcher of the current study depending on the responses of the participants of the study.

Reading comprehension is the ability of students to find out the meaning of the text according to literal, inferential and critical comprehension.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many studies have been conducted about the difficulties of reading English facing Students either at schools or at universities worldwide. The current study selected some of them according to the purpose of the current study and the regions where the samples were selected from. The study started presenting the related studies that belonged to the difficulties of reading English facing Students at school. Then, it mentioned the related studies about the difficulties of reading English facing students at universities in or out of Jordan.

Few related studies were conducted about the difficulties of reading English facing students at schools. Yaseen, (2013) conducted a study that aimed at showing the most reading difficulties for the tenth-grade students in the Nablus district. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher designed an interview and two questionnaires for teachers and students who learn English. The results of the study showed that the reading difficulties faced by students were high.

Another study done by (Hidayati, 2018) aimed at finding out the difficulties faced by first-grade students of Sman 1 Darussalam Aceh Besar. The instruments of the study were a test and a questionnaire. The study

showed different difficulties faced by the students such as difficulties in understanding grammar, poor mastery of grammar, and lack of reading comprehension strategies.

Moreover, Qurniawan, (2020) carried out a study to analyze the difficulties on reading comprehension faced by the eighth grade of SMPN 6 SAROLANGUN. The instruments of the study were an interview and observation. The study showed that students lack vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies. The study suggested solutions to treat the problems in reading.

In the Jordanian context, Albdour (2015) conducted a study that aimed at identifying the difficulties of reading facing the seventh grade students. The study tried to measure English language teachers' attitudes towards difficulties that students face in reading comprehension skill. The sample of the study was selected randomly. It consisted (85) male/female English teachers at AL Karak departments of education. The study shows that seventh grade students faced difficulties in reading comprehension skill like reducing the efficiency of comprehension process. To solve the problems, the study suggested some solutions like conducting training courses for teachers, and providing them with modern methods in teaching reading comprehension.

Nurmalasari & Haryudin (2021) investigated a study aimed at finding out the cause of the students' difficulties in learning reading and it tries to find solutions. The study used a test and a questionnaire to fulfil the purpose of the study. The result of the study showed the difficulties faced by the students like lack of vocabulary knowledge and decreased motivation. The study proposed some points to solve the problems in reading.

Finally, Tukan (2024) explained the reason behind difficulties of EFL students in reading. In his study, he claimed that students have difficulty in reading an English text because they did not practice reading so they should practice reading if they want to improve their English.

Few related studies were conducted about the difficulties of reading English facing students at universities. The researcher found two studies conducted in Jordanian universities (one is public and another is private). The first one was investigated by (Mohammed& Ab Rashid, 2017). They discussed EFL reading comprehension difficulties faced by 200 students at Yarmouk University (a public university) in Jordan. The researchers used a questionnaire consisting of the student's reading difficulties. The findings indicated that students faced several problems in the reading process, like unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to read and understanding the text.

Another study done by (Abu Abeeleh et al., 2021) aimed to investigate the reading comprehension problems encountered by students of Ajloun National University. The researchers used a questionnaire that included items about the reading problems faced by students. The sample of this study included 20 EFL students from the Department of English Language and Literature at Ajloun National University (private university). The main finding of the study showed that students have a high estimation of certain problems such as the complexity of the texts, anxiety, and word recognition (decoding).

In addition, the researcher found two studies conducted out of Jordan. In Arab EFL learners' context, Al-Jarrah& Binti Ismail (2018) conducted a study to show the reading comprehension difficulties among Arab EFL learners and find solutions to these difficulties. The sample of the study consisted of 100 students. The results of the study showed that the major difficulty was the inability to recognize the types of text. The study suggested that there is a need for shared efforts of English language teachers, instruction policymakers, and the EFL learners to solve the problem.

The second study conducted by Jayanti (2016) aimed at comparing students' and teachers' perceptions regarding students' reading difficulties. The sample of the study included 80 students at the English Department and 4 lecturers at the University of Bengkulu. The instruments of the study were a questionnaire and an interview to investigate students' reading difficulties. The findings of the study concluded that students and teachers agreed on some points and showed different perceptions on some points. The study suggested recommendations to improve students' reading comprehension.

The previous studies mentioned were conducted in different countries around the world. All of them have been approved that EFL learners have problems and difficulties while learning reading in schools or universities. Some of them suggested solutions for difficulties. The present study is conducted in Jordan as EFL country in

particular at university level because there are not enough studies about this field. The study is comprehensive because it included both the problems of reading and solutions. The scale of the study is perfect and completed and all of participants agree with each other when they responded to its items.

### **The Population and Sample of the Study**

The population of the study consists of the students who learn English in their 1st year at different colleges at BU. The researcher selected a sample of 400 freshmen students from the population to apply the treatment in the first semester of the academic year (2022-2023) randomly. The researcher asked the participants to answer a questionnaire about the difficulties of reading English to determine them in order to find solutions.

### **The Instrument of Study**

The researcher designed a scale as an instrument of the study. It is a questionnaire that includes 22 items about the difficulties and problems of reading English. Likert Scale was used in order to answer the questionnaire items based on these values: Strongly Agree: (5) points, Agree: (4) points, Neutral: (3) points, Disagree: (2) points, and Strongly Disagree: (1) point.

### **The Validity and Reliability of Instrument**

For the validity of the instrument, the researcher applied the content validity approach; the instrument was revised several times according to the comments made by instructors from Jordanian universities. For the questionnaire reliability, the researcher used Cronbach’s Alpha to calculate the internal consistency and provide information about the relationships between the individual items. The value of Cronbach's alpha (.871%) was high

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The participants of the study were asked to answer the questionnaire about the difficulties of reading English then the collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Packages of Social Science (SPSS), means, standard deviations, and percentages.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively by using descriptive statistics. The questionnaire was corrected by using the following categories to judge the estimation of the items. The highest mean indicates the areas students find most difficult.

**TABLE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE CORRECTING METHOD**

Estimation	Means
Strong	3.67- 5
Medium	2.34 - 3.66
Weak	1 - 2.33

Table (2) shows the findings about the difficulties faced by freshman students at BU. It contains the means, std. deviation of Reading Comprehension Problems, and the rate according to the questionnaire correcting method used above.

**TABLE 2: RESULTS OF STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

.No	Items	Mean	Std	Rate	rank
1	I do not have enough time to read inside the classroom.	4.69	.545	High	1
2	I could not differentiate between main ideas and supporting ideas in the reading text.	3.66	1.058	Moderate	17
3	The content is outside of my knowledge.	4.44	.623	High	9
4	Could not comprehend the meanings of the long sentences.	4.43	.622	High	10
5	The text contains complex structure.	4.39	.707	High	13
6	I feel nervous and frustrated when reading English text because of the noise in the environment.	2.33	1.153	Low	19
7	I do not adopt suitable strategies and techniques when reading text.	4.42	.731	High	11
8	I have not enough grammatical and syntactic knowledge.	4.47	.648	High	8
9	I am weak in the other skills of language specially reading.	4.41	.744	High	12
10	I have difficulties in reading aloud and pronouncing words correctly.	4.59	.647	High	4
11	I read slowly.	3.95	.852	High	15

12	I ignore punctuation marks while reading the English text.	4.53	.625	High	7
13	I cannot connect what is read to the previous knowledge.	4.41	.730	High	12
14	I cannot remember and summarize what is read or predict what comes next.	4.64	.737	High	2
15	I cannot understand new words or idioms in the reading text.	4.55	.692	High	6
16	The reading text consists of author's and students' cultural differences.	4.47	.693	High	8
17	I translate the text word by word and translating the meanings into my mother tongue.	4.58	.667	High	5
18	I lack of attention when reading an English text.	4.44	.734	High	9
19	The reading text is boring that contain boring activities.	4.37	.815	High	14
20	The reading text is not suitable for my level.	2.55	.522	Moderate	18
21	I do not rely on silent reading to fulfill understanding.	3.82	1.090	High	16
22	The English lecturer does not adopt suitable methods and procedures in teaching reading.	4.63	.707	High	3
Total	4.25	.382	High		

Based on the available data, the study found various difficulties faced by freshman students in the English language and literature department at BU when reading English texts. The highest three items that considered to be the most significant sources of students' difficulties are as follows: Firstly, students struggle with a lack of sufficient time for reading inside the classroom. The response rate indicates a high level of difficulty, with a mean rating of 4.69. Secondly, many students find it difficult to remember and summarize what is read or predict what comes next. The response rate also suggests a high level of difficulty, with a mean rating of 4.64. Thirdly, the English lecturer does not adopt suitable methods and procedures in teaching reading. The response rate indicates a high level of difficulty, with a mean rating of 4.63. On the other hand, the less challenging difficulties encountered are as follows: the lowest item is feeling nervous and frustrated when reading English text because of the noise in the environment, with a mean rating of 2.33. In addition, two items were moderate which are distinguishing between main ideas and supporting ideas in the reading text with a mean rating of 3.66 and when the reading text is not suitable for student's level with a mean rating of 2.55.

To address these difficulties, several solutions can be implemented as follows:

Implementing effective time management strategies.

Providing instruction on reading strategies to enhance comprehension and identification of main ideas, incorporating pre-reading activities to build background knowledge For example, the application of technological tools is positively influencing the reading comprehension (Acuña-Torres et al., 2024& Alzu'bi, 2012).

Simplifying sentence structures.

Creating a conducive reading environment with reduced distractions.

Providing explicit instruction on reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing to comprehend and identify main ideas in the texts.

Encouraging peer collaboration and group discussions can also foster a supportive learning environment where students can share their understanding and insights.

By implementing these solutions, BU can effectively support freshman students in overcoming their reading difficulties and improving their overall reading proficiency.

Based on the results, the researcher suggested the following:

Further research should be investigated to study the reading problems in English language from the perspective of teachers and parents.

Curriculum designers should design curriculums with different types of reading to encourage EFL students to read.

The instructors should reinforce and motivate their students to use libraries.

Teachers should adopt different learning strategies to encourage students reading for enjoyment in particular using extensive reading strategy (Alzu'bi, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to identify the challenges faced by freshmen students in the English department at BU as they learn English as a foreign language (EFL) and explore potential solutions to address

these difficulties. Through the quantitative analysis of questionnaires, a comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered by students in their first year of college has been obtained. The findings reveal that freshmen students encounter several obstacles in their English language learning journey like insufficient time for practicing reading skills, difficulty in retaining and summarizing information, and an inability to predict text progression emerged as the three highest struggles. Additionally, it was observed that some English lecturers do not adopt suitable methods and procedures in teaching reading, which may hinder students' progress. As seen in the findings of the study, the only suggested problem that rated the lowest mean score is item no 6. It means that the students did not face noise in the environment while reading.

To tackle these challenges, various solutions are recommended in the study previously such as allocating dedicated time for reading practice within the classroom can help students enhance their reading skills and manage their time effectively, employing effective comprehension strategies, for example, note-taking, breaking texts into smaller sections, and utilizing tools to improve retention and prediction skills, can aid in better understanding and summarizing of information. Moreover, English lecturers should train on teaching methodologies to employ appropriate techniques that align with students' needs and promote effective learning. Moreover, teachers should teach students how to access high-quality reading materials, enhance students' learning experience, and foster independent learning. Additionally, ensuring that reading texts are matched to students' proficiency levels ensures appropriate challenges and engages students effectively.

By implementing these solutions, students and lecturers can collaborate to overcome the identified obstacles and promote successful learning outcomes. The shared responsibility of both parties in addressing these challenges is crucial, as learning is a mutual endeavor that relies on the cooperation and efforts of both students and lecturers.

In summary, this research sheds light on the challenges faced by freshmen students in the English department and provides potential solutions to address these difficulties. By recognizing and actively implementing the suggested solutions, the students and lecturers can collaborate together to solve the problems and improve English language reading.

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**APPENDIX**

**THE READING DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS THAT FACING FRESHMEN STUDENTS AT BU.**

This questionnaire aimed at addressing potential areas of reading challenges to the Freshmen Students at BU. The researcher is grateful to you for your participation and he assures you of the confidentiality of your responses.

Please fill in the following Background information:

Name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

The name of the college \_\_\_\_\_

Level you study/ teach \_\_\_\_\_

The questionnaire indicates how important these problems are by responding to the degree of the agreement as follows:

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

No.	I face a problem in reading an English text because:	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
1.	I do not have enough time to read inside the classroom.					
2.	I could not differentiate between main ideas and supporting ideas in the reading text.					
3.	The content is outside of my knowledge.					
4.	Could not comprehend the meanings of the long sentences.					
5.	The text contains complex structure.					
6.	I feel nervous and frustrated when reading English text because of the noise in the environment.					
7.	I do not adopt suitable strategies and techniques when reading text.					
8.	I have not enough grammatical and syntactic knowledge.					
9.	I am weak in the other skills of language specially reading.					
10.	I have difficulties in reading aloud and pronouncing words correctly.					
11.	I read slowly.					
12.	I ignore punctuation marks while reading the English text.					
13.	I cannot connect what is read to the previous knowledge.					
14.	I cannot remember and summarize what is read or predict what comes next.					
15.	I cannot understand new words or idioms in the reading text.					
16.	The reading text consists of author's and students' cultural differences.					
17.	I translate the text word by word and translating the meanings into my mother tongue.					
18.	I lack of attention when reading an English text.					
19.	The reading text is boring that contain boring activities.					
20.	The reading text is not suitable for my level.					
21.	I do not rely on silent reading to fulfill understanding.					
22.	The English lecturer does not adopt suitable methods and procedures in teaching reading.					