

## The Perceptions Of Novice EFL Teachers On Addressing Comprehension Issues In Students' Reading

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### ABSTRACT

The main concern of this research is to expose the Perceptions of Novice EFL Teachers on Addressing Comprehension Issues in Students' Reading in junior high school setting. The research objective is to figure out the strategies of novice EFL teachers use to help students overcome reading comprehension issues. Qualitative research used as the research method with the case study design, involving two novice EFL teachers with advanced level and fewer years of experiences. Interview was used as the main instrument of this research, and Interactive Model by Miles and Huberman was also used as the technique of data analysis. The findings of this research expose that the novice EFL teachers face challenges in addressing students reading comprehension issues due to limited experiences and training. Despite these obstacles, they adapt by using strategies like pre-reading activity and vocabulary support. This highlights the need for targeted professional development to better equip novice EFL teacher in supporting students' comprehension.

## INTRODUCTION

Reading for EFL students is an essential skill in language learning, which provides access to develop vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and also cultural understanding. Through reading, students develop greater awareness of linguistic units and train core process for better language skills (Huetting & Pickering, 2019). Additionally, reading also offers contextualized language exposure that can assist in language development. Reading comprehension as one of the biggest skills in reading activity has a significant impact on academic success. Students who can understand complex texts in social studies for instance can increase students' academic achievement (Ozensoy, 2021). In EFL contexts, the reading comprehension skills become even more important. Some scholars report that reading proficiency and comprehension is one of the strongest predictors of academic success, particularly for EFL students (Bastung, 2014; Francisco & Madzaro, 2019; Yogurtcu, 2013).

However, in the actual fact, EFL students often face significant issues in reading comprehension, for instance lack of vocabulary limitations, cultural differences, and less understanding in contextual reading content. Vocabulary gaps make it challenging for students to grasp the meaning of sentences, particularly when they encounter unfamiliar idioms or technical terms (Hezam, et al, 2022). Cultural differences can further complicate comprehension, as texts may contain references or assumptions that are specific to native speakers' backgrounds, which EFL learners may not share (Erten & Razi, 2009). Hence, without proper English skill, students may struggle to understand the content of the text, which may lead to misinterpretations of the text.

Teachers as the educator and instructor play important role in managing students through better reading comprehension, especially in EFL context where language barriers are higher. Recently, Indonesia has seen a significant increase in the number of novice EFL teachers due to the growing demand for English proficiency. Novice EFL teachers are educators who are relatively new to teaching English as a Foreign Language and are still developing their skills and approaches. These teachers often bring enthusiasm and fresh perspectives to the classroom, but their limited experience can make managing diverse learning needs challenging (Amin & Rahimi, 2018). Unlike experienced teachers, novices are still exploring instructional techniques and learning how to adapt materials to their students' language levels. They frequently rely on trial and error to find effective strategies, making their classroom experiences both rewarding and demanding as they navigate through this critical early stage in their careers (Li & De Costa, 2018). Another challenges related to self-efficacy, teaching ability, classroom management, and lack of resources also a significant problem (Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Despite this increase, limited research has examined the specific strategies and perception of novice EFL teachers in managing reading comprehension issues.

Addressing reading comprehension issues can be especially challenging for novice EFL teachers due to their limited experience and training. Without a well-developed repertoire of strategies, novice teachers may struggle to identify the underlying causes of comprehension difficulties, such as gaps in vocabulary or cultural knowledge, and may lack the confidence to modify lessons on the spot. Additionally, many new teachers may not have received in-depth training on how to support students with varied reading levels, leaving them uncertain about the best ways to help struggling readers. This can lead to frustration for both teachers and students, underlining the need for targeted support and professional development for novice educators in EFL settings. Therefore, this research focused on a single research question "What strategies do novice EFL

teachers use to help students overcome reading comprehension issues?”. Understanding how novice EFL teachers perceive and address comprehension issues is vital for supporting both teachers and students. This research will expose the understanding of how novice EFL teacher use strategies to help students overcome reading comprehension issues and the specific challenges that students face in reading comprehension.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension can be defined as the process of constructing meaning from text by assimilating cognitive skills and prior knowledge. It is also considered an essential skill for language learning especially reading, it assists learners to understand and engage with written materials effectively. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension plays a crucial role in academic success, as it allows students to access knowledge across disciplines and improve their language proficiency. Several factors influence reading comprehension, including vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and reading strategies. Vocabulary knowledge is often cited as the most critical determinant of reading success, as limited vocabulary hinders students' ability to understand texts. As stated by Sulistiyarningsih, Ardianingsih, and Mardayanti (2023), mastering a large amount of vocabulary is the main and most important thing to understand English learning materials. As reported by Kusumawati, Puspitasari, & Rahayu (2024) the implementation of the SQ4R method is effective to improve students' reading comprehension.

In the context of reading comprehension, EFL students often face difficulty interpreting cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and context-specific meanings, which can lead to misinterpretations or confusion. This highlights the need for culturally relevant materials and pre-reading activities to build background knowledge. To address comprehension issues, researchers suggest integrating explicit reading strategy instruction and scaffolding techniques into the curriculum. Encouraging extensive reading of varied and level-appropriate materials has also been shown to improve vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills. Teachers can further support students by using pre-reading activities, such as activating prior knowledge, and post-reading discussions to reinforce understanding. By implementing these strategies, educators can help EFL learners develop stronger reading comprehension skills and greater confidence in engaging with texts.

Reading comprehension issues often stem from limited vocabulary and language proficiency, particularly in EFL learners. A lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge hinders students' ability to decode and understand text effectively, as they struggle with unfamiliar words and complex sentence structures. Additionally, grammatical complexity in texts can pose challenges, especially for learners with lower proficiency levels, further limiting their comprehension. Addressing these foundational language gaps is critical for improving overall reading comprehension. This is in line with research by Alotaibi (2022) who revealed vocabulary limitations and difficulties in understanding the meaning of texts negatively impact on learners' reading comprehension ability. Likewise, the research results from Hezam, Ali, Imtiaz, Saifi, and Islam (2022) found that EFL Arabic students face problems in reading comprehension caused by a lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge thus hindering their ability to comprehend texts effectively.

Student motivation and confidence also significantly influence reading comprehension. Learners who lack confidence in their reading skills may avoid engaging with texts, which negatively impacts their progress.

Moreover, reading anxiety, often fueled by challenging materials or fear of failure, can reduce students' willingness to engage in the reading process. Educators must create supportive environments and use strategies to boost motivation, such as incorporating engaging texts and celebrating small achievements, to address these affective barriers. The above statement is supported by Rozaini and Anti's (2017) research which states that learning motivation and student confidence have a positive and significant effect on learning achievement. Although not specifically discussing reading comprehension, the learning achievement in question covers various aspects, including the ability to understand text.

### **Novice EFL Teachers**

Novice EFL teachers can be defined as a teacher who are in the early stages of their teaching careers, especially in teaching environment on public school, they are typically with less than three years of classroom experience. These teachers are often transitioning from formal teacher training programs to real-world teaching environments, where they must apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. As newcomers to the profession, they bring enthusiasm and fresh perspectives but may lack the confidence and expertise required to handle complex classroom dynamics effectively (Akcór & Savasci, 2020). Despite their enthusiasm, novice EFL teachers often face a range of challenges that can hinder their effectiveness. They may struggle with managing diverse student needs, creating engaging lesson plans, and adapting instructional materials to different proficiency levels. Classroom management can be particularly demanding, as these teachers may lack the experience to handle behavioral issues or maintain discipline effectively. Moreover, the pressures of meeting institutional expectations and navigating unfamiliar work environments can impact their confidence and professional growth. This relates to the results of research by Amin dan Rahimi (2018) & Salehi and Farajnezhad (2020) which found that there are pressure from institution to novice EFL teacher about the work and performance.

The transition from training to practice highlights the importance of effective pre-service education and ongoing mentorship. While teacher training programs provide foundational knowledge of pedagogical principles, many novice teachers feel underprepared for the realities of the classroom. Mentorship from experienced colleagues can play a crucial role in bridging this gap, offering guidance on instructional strategies, curriculum adaptation, and student engagement. Structured mentorship programs not only help novice teachers build confidence but also foster a culture of collaborative professional development. A model of teacher professional development that involves various parties, including novice and experienced teachers, in a constructivist and collaborative framework can improve teachers' abilities and foster self-confidence (Sumardjoko, 2018).

### **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research method with a case study design to explore the perceptions and strategies of novice EFL teachers in addressing students' reading comprehension issues. The research setting was in the junior high school context, the students proficiency level in pre-intermediate, and the socio cultural setting where English as foreign language. The research involved two novice EFL teachers selected through purposive sampling to ensure participants had relevant teaching experience and familiarity with the study context. The participants were in advanced level and fewer teaching experience. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility to probe deeper into the teachers' experiences and

insights. In collecting the data, researchers spent 30 minutes for each participants and several specific questions about reading comprehension. To address the validity and reliability, the researchers did the observation and verified the participants by member checking. The data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification to identify patterns in the novice EFL teachers' responses.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Common reading comprehension issues among EFL students

#### Extract 1

Teacher A:

*"there a lot of students who have limited vocabulary."*

*"..when they find unfamiliar words, they stop reading and get confused"*

*"They tend to translate words by words..which leads to misunderstand the meaning"*

#### Extract 2

Teacher B:

*"The common problem is the students often do not know the meaning of the words".*

Both novice EFL teachers identified significant challenges related to reading comprehension that their students commonly face. A primary issue highlighted by Teacher A is the limited vocabulary among students, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels. This deficiency leads to confusion when students encounter unfamiliar words, often causing them to stop or become perplexed, which ultimately hinders their overall understanding of the text.

Teacher A also noted that students frequently engage in word-by-word translation, a practice observed across various educational stages, from elementary to university. This method of translating each word individually disrupts their reading flow and prevents them from grasping the contextual meaning of sentences, leading to misunderstandings. Teacher B succinctly echoed these challenges by mentioning "less vocabulary" and "less understanding," emphasizing that these issues collectively contribute to a significant barrier in students' reading comprehension.

Overall, the responses indicate a clear need for targeted vocabulary instruction and the teaching of effective reading strategies that encourage contextual understanding, rather than reliance on literal translations. By addressing these foundational challenges, novice EFL teachers can better support their students in developing essential reading comprehension skills.

### 2. Adapting materials through comprehension issues

#### Extract 3

Teacher A:

*"I always tend to see the students' ability and interest"*

*"..I always choose text with simple and understandable sentences"*

*"I try to use the relevant and interesting topic for their enthusiasm"*

#### Extract 4

Teacher B:

*"I often choose reading text with familiar vocabulary for my students"*

In their responses regarding how they select or adapt reading materials to make them more comprehensible for students struggling with reading comprehension, both novice EFL teachers emphasized the importance of considering students' abilities and interests. Teacher A highlighted a thoughtful approach to choosing texts by selecting materials with simple language and easily understood sentences, particularly for

younger students with limited vocabulary. The inclusion of illustrations serves as a valuable aid to help students visualize the content.

Furthermore, Teacher A makes a conscious effort to choose topics that are relevant and engaging, tailoring selections based on the students' age group, such as using short stories about animals for elementary students and more relatable texts for high school or college students. To support students when using more complex materials, Teacher A prepares summaries and lists of key vocabulary to prevent overwhelming them and to ensure they can follow along. Teacher B, who teaches elementary school, also focuses on visual aids by providing texts with pictures and underlining challenging words to draw attention to them. Additionally, Teacher B employs read-aloud techniques, reading the text aloud with appropriate intonation to model proper pronunciation and comprehension. The integration of technology, such as using an LCD projector and resources like Read Aloud Asia, further enhances the reading experience by providing access to a variety of stories and engaging materials.

Overall, both teachers demonstrate a commitment to adapting reading materials in ways that make comprehension more accessible and enjoyable for their students, highlighting the significance of tailored instructional strategies in fostering reading development.

### **3. How to encourage students' engagement with comprehension issues**

#### **Extract 5**

Teacher A:

*"I encourage students to interact with text and using interactive approach to improve students' confidence"*

*"I often ask the students about the topic or keywords to connect them with the text"*

*"I involve them in discussion with simple question to which support them to think about the text"*

#### **Extract 6**

Teacher B:

*"I ask the students to read the reading text several times until they understand"*

*"If there is a difficult part of the text I will help them"*

Both novice EFL teachers described effective strategies to encourage student engagement with texts and address difficulties in reading comprehension. Teacher A emphasized an interactive approach that aims to build students' confidence while fostering their active participation in reading. Before diving into a text, Teacher A prompts students with questions related to the topic or key vocabulary, helping them make connections to the content. During the reading process, Teacher A facilitates discussions by posing simple questions that encourage students to make predictions and think critically about the text, thus keeping them actively involved. Additionally, Teacher A teaches essential reading strategies such as skimming for main ideas and scanning for important details, while providing positive reinforcement for students' efforts to ensure they feel supported. If students still struggle, Teacher A offers summaries and key vocabulary assistance and encourages them to retell the story in their own words, making reading a more manageable and enjoyable experience.

In contrast, Teacher B adopts a more structured approach by implementing a method where students read aloud in turn, starting with individual sentences and gradually progressing to entire paragraphs. This step-by-step strategy allows each student to contribute to the reading process at their own pace, promoting a sense of ownership and involvement in the material. By giving every student a chance to participate, Teacher B

fosters a collaborative environment that can help mitigate anxiety associated with reading aloud while reinforcing comprehension through practice.

Together, these strategies reflect a commitment from both teachers to engage students actively and supportively in their reading journeys, highlighting the importance of both interactive discussions and structured reading practices in overcoming comprehension challenges.

#### **4. Strategies to assist students understand difficult text**

##### **Extract 7**

Teacher A:

*"I divide the text into small parts so they can understand before move to next part"*

*"I also use list of vocabulary before starting the reading activity...."*

*"I also apply close reading and group discussion..."*

*"Lastly, I encourage them to make summary"*

##### **Extract 8**

Teacher B:

*"I make list of vocabulary for them"*

*"...then I ask the students to translate the vocabulary"*

In their responses regarding the strategies, they employ to help students understand challenging texts, both novice EFL teachers outlined structured and interactive methods aimed at enhancing comprehension. Teacher A described a systematic approach by breaking down difficult texts into smaller, more manageable sections, allowing students to focus on understanding one part before moving on to the next. To prepare students for reading, Teacher A provides a list of important vocabulary and key concepts at the beginning of the lesson, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary tools to tackle the material.

Additionally, Teacher A employs the technique of close reading, where students read slowly and take notes on main ideas or significant information within the text. This method not only promotes careful consideration of the content but also encourages deeper engagement. Collaborative group discussions further enhance understanding, as students can share their interpretations and assist each other in clarifying complex points. Finally, by encouraging students to create summaries or retell the content in their own words, Teacher A fosters a process of internalization that significantly aids comprehension.

On the other hand, Teacher B incorporates a more communal approach to reading by engaging in shared reading experiences with students. This strategy involves reading together and incorporating a question-and-answer segment to facilitate discussion and reinforce understanding. To make the reading experience more engaging, Teacher B also encourages students to predict what might happen in the next paragraph, which not only fosters excitement but also promotes critical thinking and anticipation. Together, these strategies reflect a strong commitment from both teachers to create supportive and interactive learning environments that help students navigate and comprehend challenging texts more effectively.

#### **5. Assessing effectiveness of teachers' strategies for reading comprehension**

##### **Extract 9**

Teacher A:

*"I give some comprehensive questions after reading..."*

*"I ask them to make summary or retelling the text using their own words"*

*"I observe them in group discussion"*

##### **Extract 10**

Teacher B:

*"When they correctly answered the questions from the passage"*

*"When they are able to retell the story without reading the text"*

In discussing how they assess the effectiveness of their strategies in improving students' reading comprehension, both novice EFL teachers emphasized various evaluative methods. Teacher A described a comprehensive approach that includes observing students' understanding through multiple assessment techniques. After reading activities, Teacher A often administers comprehension questions in the form of discussions or short quizzes to gauge students' ability to accurately answer questions and grasp the main ideas of the text. Additionally, Teacher A requires students to create summaries or retell the text in their own words, which allows for a deeper evaluation of their comprehension beyond rote memorization. The level of student participation during group discussions is also a critical indicator for Teacher A; increased engagement and willingness to contribute are viewed as signs of improved understanding. Finally, Teacher A tracks the progression of students' comprehension skills by comparing their performance on tasks or comprehension tests over time, looking for measurable improvements.

Conversely, Teacher B employs a more straightforward strategy by asking students to retell the story or answer specific questions related to the text. This method serves as an immediate indicator of comprehension, allowing Teacher B to assess whether students can articulate their understanding of the material effectively. Together, these approaches reflect both teachers' dedication to monitoring and enhancing students' reading comprehension skills through direct engagement and reflective practices, ensuring that their instructional strategies are tailored to meet the needs of their learners.

The responses from the two novice EFL teachers reveal common challenges and innovative strategies in addressing reading comprehension issues among students.

### **Identified Challenges**

Both teachers identified limited vocabulary and the tendency to translate word-for-word as significant barriers to reading comprehension. Teacher A elaborated on how students often struggle when encountering unfamiliar words, which can lead to confusion and a lack of understanding of the overall text. This is particularly evident among younger learners, where vocabulary limitations can hinder their ability to grasp key concepts and ideas. Teacher B echoed this sentiment more succinctly, underscoring the direct impact of vocabulary deficits on students' comprehension skills. These insights indicate a pressing need for targeted vocabulary instruction and strategies that help students develop contextual understanding, rather than relying solely on translation. This is in line with the research from Jamali, Et.al (2021) which exposed that students who taught well in vocabulary can have better reading comprehension. Hence, the vocabulary and the reading comprehension has strong bond which both of two are supporting each other.

### **Instructional Strategies**

To combat these challenges, both teachers employed tailored instructional strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension. Teacher A emphasized a structured approach by breaking texts into manageable segments, providing vocabulary lists, and employing close reading techniques. This method allows students to focus on understanding smaller parts of the text before integrating their understanding into the larger context. Additionally, Teacher A's incorporation of group discussions and summarization tasks fosters an interactive learning environment where students can collaborate and support each other in overcoming comprehension difficulties. This is supported with the research by Sun, et al (2021) reading strategies of all the four categories reading may have contribution to the reading text comprehension. So, it is highly needed a strategy for teaching reading to make sure that the students can have better comprehension.



On the other hand, Teacher B's approach centers on shared reading experiences and interactive predictions, which actively engage students in the learning process. By reading together and facilitating question-and-answer sessions, Teacher B creates a communal atmosphere that can help alleviate anxiety associated with reading aloud and encourages students to participate more fully. This method not only promotes engagement but also helps students practice articulating their thoughts about the text, reinforcing their comprehension skills. A finding from Banditvilai (2021) can support this finding by stating that the strategies in reading activity be important for students reading comprehension.

### **Assessment of Effectiveness**

Both teachers demonstrated a clear commitment to evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies. Teacher A employed a multifaceted assessment approach that includes comprehension questions, summarization tasks, and tracking student participation in discussions. This reflective practice allows Teacher A to monitor progress over time and make necessary adjustments to instruction. Teacher B, while more direct in assessment, uses retelling and questioning to gauge students' understanding, which provides immediate feedback on comprehension. This is supported by the research from Oo, Magyar & Habok (2021) who found that teacher reflection on the instructional context of reading activity have an impact in raising students' comprehension in reading.

Overall, the insights gained from these interviews highlight the importance of recognizing common reading comprehension challenges faced by students and the necessity of implementing effective instructional strategies. By fostering an engaging and supportive learning environment, both teachers strive to enhance their students' reading skills, ultimately aiming to improve their overall comprehension. The responses underscore the need for ongoing professional development and collaboration among educators to share successful strategies and address the evolving needs of EFL learners. These insights can also inform future research and practices aimed at enhancing reading comprehension in diverse classroom settings.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, novice EFL teachers employ a variety of effective strategies to help students overcome reading comprehension issues. The insights gained from the interviews reveal a focus on understanding the specific challenges that students face, such as limited vocabulary and the tendency to translate text literally, which often hinders comprehension. To address these challenges, the teachers implement structured approaches, including breaking texts into manageable segments, providing vocabulary support, and utilizing close reading techniques that encourage careful analysis of the text.

Furthermore, the integration of interactive and collaborative strategies, such as group discussions, shared reading experiences, and prediction exercises, enhances student engagement and facilitates a deeper understanding of the material. These strategies not only help students connect with the text but also promote a supportive classroom environment where they can learn from each other.

Assessment plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of these strategies, with both teachers utilizing various methods, such as comprehension questions and summarization tasks, to monitor student progress and adapt their instruction accordingly. Overall, the research highlights that novice EFL teachers are committed to employing diverse and adaptive strategies to foster reading comprehension, ultimately enhancing their students' reading skills and confidence in navigating complex texts. This exploration underscores the

importance of ongoing professional development and collaboration among educators to continuously refine and share effective practices in addressing reading comprehension challenges in the EFL context.

Future research should explore how the strategies mentioned vary by cultural context or teacher training, and whether longer teaching experience leads to different approaches to reading comprehension. Future research also suggested by involving a larger and more diverse sample of novice EFL teachers across different schools or regions to increase the generalizability of the research findings. Including years of experience could also help highlight how perceptions and strategies evolve overtime.

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