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## EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES ON READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AND ASSESSMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOMS

**Dr Qurratulain Rehan**

*Assistant Professor*

Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore

Email: [qurratulain.rehan@kinnaird.edu.pk](mailto:qurratulain.rehan@kinnaird.edu.pk)

**Dr Mazna Toosy**

*Assistant Professor*

Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore

Email: [mazna.toosy@kinnaird.edu.pk](mailto:mazna.toosy@kinnaird.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

*Pakistani undergraduate students continue to struggle with reading comprehension skills: a prerequisite for academic success in higher education. The focus of this research study was to gauge students' and teachers' perspectives on reading comprehension and its assessment in undergraduate English Literature classrooms. It employed a mixed-methods design that included both a survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Convenience sampling was used to select 159 students of English Literature from five private universities for the survey. 18 English teachers from the same universities were interviewed using purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics was used for quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis involved deriving relevant themes. A key finding was that students understood the importance of reading comprehension for both their academic and professional success. Students mostly reported using strategies such as the identification of specific details, answering questions, and visualizing. Teachers stated that they frequently used prior knowledge, classroom discussions, and homework assignments. However, their use of graphic organizers, video instruction, and visualization was minimal. The modes of assessment included word-meaning recognition, vocabulary and spelling tests, and identification of details. Teachers highlighted the significance of reading comprehension in their English Literature classrooms. They cited the use of interactive approaches such as skimming, close reading, reading aloud, translation, and prediction. However, major difficulties they encountered included varied student proficiency, limited time, inadequate resources, weak foundational skills, and low motivation. These findings can contribute to enhancing students' reading comprehension skills by influencing curriculum design and pedagogical strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Reading Comprehension Skills, Reading Comprehension Strategies, Reading Assessment, Undergraduate English Literature Teachers*



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## **Introduction**

Reading skills refer to the ability to assign meaning to and comprehend or interpret texts for analysis. These skills act as a foundation (Grabe & Stoller, 2019) and are very critical in learning additional languages like English. Reading comprehension is essential for teaching English, especially at the undergraduate level, where students need to extend their capabilities and go beyond basic comprehension skills in order to achieve academic success. University-level reading demands are cognitively challenging, involving learning from texts, integrating information, writing, and critiquing content (Enright et al., 2000; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Brown (2004) argues that reading comprehension is indispensable for cultivating understanding, evaluative thinking, and independent thought in students. It also provides a means of evaluating metacognitive capabilities, e.g. predicting, questioning, paraphrasing, visualizing, evaluating, and summarising (Cohen, 1994; Hudson et al., 2005).

Scholarship on reading comprehension has been a central focus in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) reading pedagogy and research (Hyland & Jiang, 2021). There has been a great deal of focus on reading comprehension strategies and techniques. Urquhart and Weir (2014) propose that reading comprehension can be enhanced through careful reading at both global (understanding main ideas, supporting details, making inferences) and local levels (identifying vocabulary, syntax comprehension), as well as expeditious reading at global (skimming, search reading) and local levels (scanning). Additionally, Khalifa and Weir (2009) suggest operationalizing comprehension by recognizing vocabulary, understanding sentence meanings, identifying implied meanings, and combining information across sentences and texts.

According to Teele (2004), readers should aim to thoroughly understand the material they read. Skilled readers engage actively with texts using a variety of comprehension techniques. According to Block and Israel (2005), students should be taught specific comprehension strategies such as how to predict, visualize, infer, question, summarize and make relevant links and connections.

Duke (2005) stated that it was essential to teach certain strategies explicitly. Such strategies included modeling, naming, explaining, group and partner practice, and individually applying them. Adler (2001) focused on how effective readers are able to use visualization, while Teele (2004) highlighted the technique of relating textual information to present events. Other strategies used by effective readers included summarizing, challenging ideas, and making inferences for deeper understanding (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Serafini, 2015).

Seven main strategies to aid the reading comprehension of college students have been outlined by Lei, Rhinehart, Howard, and Cho (2010). They mention background knowledge and experience, learning aids, peer teaching, encoding, homework, classwork, and reading flexibility. Students who use these strategies are able to progress well and achieve success in their academics.



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According to Douglas (2015), reading assessment is an ongoing process, cyclical in nature, and takes place at each learning stage. It helps to evaluate the learning, skills, and progress of the students. The purpose of assessment is to provide useful feedback to students and motivate them further. It should also act as a validation of the learning experiences of students.

Reading assessment includes the use of summative or standardized tests and formative tests. Using a varied exam structure or format instead of focusing only on standardized tests is said to enhance the reading comprehension of students (Perera-Diltz & Moe, 2014). This is because it promotes a balanced approach as it encourages the use of both top-down strategies, which emphasize overall comprehension, and bottom-up strategies that focus on recognizing words and expanding vocabulary. Formative assessment techniques are more adaptable and flexible with regard to the growth in students' reading abilities. Descriptive rubrics can be created by teachers to assess the cognitive and metacognitive abilities. This would help align reading achievements with curriculum goals (Gipps, 1994; Caldwell & Leslie, 2013). Another major benefit of formative assessment is that it helps to increase students' self-confidence. It also aids in evaluating metacognitive abilities, such as predicting, questioning, paraphrasing, visualizing, evaluating, and summarizing (Cohen, 1994; Hudson et al., 2005).

Descriptive rubrics that assess students' cognitive and metacognitive skills can be developed by teachers to support critical and creative thinking. According to Gipps (1994) and Caldwell and Leslie (2013), these rubrics are necessary to evaluate various reading tasks and to match students' accomplishments with the curriculum goals. Rubrics allow teachers to assess the thinking processes that students employ as they work with texts on more sophisticated levels.

The key obstacles to implementing classroom reading assessments are teachers' attitudes and classroom environments. There is a strong impact on assessment practices from teachers' perceptions, as negative perceptions hinder proper evaluation (Breen et al., 1997; Veloo et al., 2016). Furthermore, problems tend to occur in the assessment process of large class sizes (Raman & Yamat, 2014). However, for educators to meet diverse students' needs, they need to consider whether a uniform assessment approach is appropriate and whether personalizing evaluation is feasible. The other challenge is that assessments must be accurate and reliable in a variety of contexts (Smith, 2003).

In order to eliminate these drawbacks, it becomes necessary to change attitudes, develop individual assessment plans, and help educators develop skills and tools to carry out effective reading assessments. Students require reading skills that can help them understand texts both at a literal and a deeper level. In addition, they need to be able to analyze, infer, interpret, and evaluate various texts. This also involves the use of higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking and creativity. Teachers then need to use appropriate reading strategies and assessment techniques.



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There has also been an increased understanding of how reading comprehension is a very sophisticated process and how central it is to the teaching of the English language and English literature since the close of the twentieth century, leading to the imperative of increased concern and efforts to develop better solutions. Smith (2003) has pointed to the significance of having assessment methods that are precise and can be manipulated to suit the different classroom environments, as the standardized models might not take note of the differences in student understanding. On the contrary, Huang (2022) explored the thinking and metacognition skills associated with reading comprehension and the significance of a more flexible approach to teaching that would benefit deeper engagement with readings. Such views indicate the necessity to have more mobile and situation-analytical measurement tools that would improve the abilities of students in reading.

In Pakistan, the instruction for the tertiary level or higher education is imparted in the English language (Muhammad, 2013). The learning texts and reference readings, including textbooks, are studied by the learners in English, and students must learn how to develop reading fluency to excel academically. Despite the adoption of modern methodologies in teaching and learning of language, higher education is entrenched in traditional assessment in Pakistan (Ashraf & Zaka, 2019). This dependence complicates the already challenging task of assessing the reading process in college students.

There have been some studies during the past few years on the reading comprehension abilities of university-level students in Pakistan and their problems. They have focused mainly on students of a particular department of a university. A quasi-experimental study by Younus and Khan (2017) was used to explore the impacts of strategy-based reading instruction on reading comprehension and metacognitive reading strategy awareness among Business Administration students of a private sector university located in Karachi, Pakistan. The findings showed that the experimental group gained better scores on their reading comprehension post-test and a higher development in metacognitive reading strategy awareness as opposed to the control group students. Khurram (2017) examined the reading strategies of university-level students of Pakistan studying mass communication and reported that students used top-down and bottom-up strategies. Nadeem and Omar (2018) investigated the reading strategies utilized by the first-year college students while reading dissimilar materials and their effects on academics. Their sample consisted of 269 first-year students of various faculties of the Arts and Humanities group at the Government College (Wahdat Road), Lahore. Findings indicated that students were not at all aware of reading comprehension strategies, which reflected a decline in their performance in a reading comprehension test. Ali et al. (2022) explored reading comprehension difficulties among students of the English departments of Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, and FATA University. They utilized a mixed method with the use of a survey questionnaire based on a Likert



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scale and semi-structured interviews. Their sample was 64 students and nine teachers. The problems were poor grammar, vocabulary, dictionary-dependency, lengthy sentences, and lack of exposure to English text reading

Sumaira et al. (2022) attempted to investigate the reading comprehension problems of undergraduate students in the Department of Computer Sciences (CS), Bahauddin Zakariya University. A reading test instrument was designed and pre-tested before it was used for the target population. The findings revealed the poor knowledge, insufficient vocabulary, and inadequate comprehension level of the students in using the Reading Strategies and applying them to the texts provided to them.

Awan and Abbas (2024) investigated the reading strategies generally employed by third- and fourth-year students of Sindh University's English Department using semi-structured focus group interviews. The interview data were analysed thematically, which showed undergraduates deployed several strategies to boost their understanding and overcome any difficulties they encountered, including cognitive strategies (scanning, skimming, re-reading, and intensive reading), predicting text, looking up in the dictionary, and using context.

Naz et al. (2024) studied the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among undergraduate students at a private-sector university in Karachi. A purposive sample of 300 students was used. There are three Main sections of MARS: Problem-solving, Support, and Global reading strategies. The instrument employed was the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) adapted from Shoerey and Mokhtari (2001). The results showed that participants were most aware of Problem-Solving Reading Strategies (PSRS), followed by those of Global Reading Strategies (GRS) and Support **Reading Strategies (SRS)**

The current study is deemed vital because the literature does not tell us how reading skills are currently taught and tested, nor who does so, and how they perceive strategies and assessment tools in teaching and measuring reading comprehension.

### **Research Questions**

1. The main research questions of this research study were:
2. What are the perspectives of English Literature students about the importance and use of reading comprehension skills at the undergraduate level?
3. What are the perspectives of English Literature students about the reading comprehension strategies or techniques employed by teachers at the undergraduate level?
4. What are the perspectives of English Literature students about the reading assessment methods used at the undergraduate level?
5. What are the perspectives of English Literature teachers about the strategies or techniques they use for reading comprehension skills and assessment at the undergraduate level?



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6. What are the perspectives of English Literature teachers about the role and significance of reading comprehension skills and assessment at the undergraduate level?
7. What are the perspectives of English Literature teachers about the challenges they face while conducting reading assessment at the undergraduate level?

### **Methodology**

This research study used a mixed-methods approach grounded in the pragmatic paradigm to thoroughly investigate reading comprehension skills and assessment in undergraduate English Literature classrooms. The mixed-methods approach utilized quantitative and qualitative data to gain insights from both students and teachers of English Literature at private universities in Lahore, offering a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

#### **Quantitative Phase: Student Perspectives on Reading Skill and Assessment**

To gain students' perspectives, a self-developed survey questionnaire was created. It was made up of three sections and comprised a total of thirty-eight items.

- Section 1: Importance and Use of Reading Comprehension Skills (17 items)
- Section 2: Reading Strategies Employed by Teachers (12 items)
- Section 3: Reading Assessment Methods in Literature Classrooms (9 items)

#### **Population, Sample, and Sampling Strategy**

The population consisted of undergraduate students studying literature in private universities of Lahore. The sample for the quantitative part of the study consisted of 159 undergraduate English literature students. They belonged to various private universities of Lahore district. A convenience sampling method was used to select 159 students. Convenience sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a kind of non-probability sampling in which the researcher has easy access to available respondents.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

The close-ended questionnaire was developed and administered to 159 literature students from five private universities in Lahore.

#### **Data Analysis**

Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze quantitative data to look for trends in student responses regarding reading comprehension skills, strategies, and assessment, and to provide a clear numerical view of how students viewed these topics.

#### **Qualitative Phase: Teacher Perspectives on Reading Comprehension**

##### **Research Tool**

In-depth interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of undergraduate English Literature teachers. An in-depth interview, unlike structured and semi-structured



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interviews, has a loose structure, does not have a pre-determined interview schedule, and allows the researcher the flexibility and freedom to ask additional questions and change the direction of the interview.

**Sample and Sampling Strategy**

The sample consisted of eighteen English literature teachers working at the undergraduate level. They belonged to five private universities of Lahore district. The sampling strategy used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a kind of non-probability sampling in which the researcher uses their personal judgment to select the participants

**Data Collection**

The in-depth interviews were conducted with the voluntary and willing consent of the eighteen participants. They were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis purposes. Member checking was conducted to ensure the credibility of the research study.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis. The qualitative data were carefully coded and categorized, followed by the derivation of relevant themes. Thematic analysis involves carefully examining the qualitative data and identifying any patterns that might emerge from the data that form themes. The examination needs to be meticulous with focus on the words and structures of sentences. It involves a detailed process of coding the data, categorizing it (lumping common codes together), and finally deriving multiple themes.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation was made possible through the integration of qualitative and quantitative results in order to create a more holistic picture of reading comprehension instruction and assessment in undergraduate English Literature classrooms. Both the qualitative data and the quantitative survey data gave context-rich insights into how the teachers conceptualized instruction and assessment, as well as emergent trends in how students experience such methods. These approaches together confirmed and added to the study’s conclusions and provided useful information about the efficacy and hurdles of reading comprehension practices in Lahore’s higher education institutions.

**Results of the Survey Questionnaire**

*Table 1: Importance of Reading Comprehension Skills*

Questions	Percentages
1. What kind of a reader do you consider yourself to be at the undergraduate level?	Very Good + Good 80%
2. How important do you believe reading comprehension skills are in your academic work at the undergraduate level?	Very Important + Important 91%
3. How important do you believe reading comprehension skills are for practical work at the undergraduate level?	Very Important + Important 85.3%
4. Which of the following do you read as an undergraduate student?	Textbooks: 40.1%



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Research Articles: 26.1%

Table 1 shows that a vast majority, namely 80% of the undergraduate students believed that they were good readers. A vast majority, i.e. 91, agreed that reading comprehension skills were highly essential in their academic studies and 85% stated that they were important in their practical work at university. Textbooks were reported to be more widely read by students (40%) followed by research articles (26%).

*Table 2: Individual Use of Reading Comprehension Skills*

Statement	Percentage
i. I can spell and recognize the words	<b>88.1 %</b>
ii. I can look at the title, text structure, sub-headings, sub-sections, figures and captions.	<b>81.2%</b>
iii. I can reflect on the ideas of the text	<b>80%</b>
iv. I can comprehend the meaning	<b>77.6%</b>
v. I can re-read the text for better understanding.	<b>76.9%</b>
vi. I can select specific information.	73.1%
vii. I can organize information in points or graphically.	72.1%
viii. I can answer the questions.	71.7%
ix. I can visualize the events.	70.5%
x. I can memorize the meaning of words.	70.5%
xi. I can look at the text structure.	65.4%
xii. I can try to make inferences.	65.1%
xiii. I can do grammar tests.	64.7%

Table 2 reveals that the use of spelling and recognition of words was highest at 88% followed by identification of the title, text structure and other text features at 81% and the ability to reflect on ideas at 80%. These strategies including the ability to comprehend meaning (78%) and re-read the text (77%) were reported more by students compared to strategies such as the use of inferencing (65%) and grammar tests (65%).

*Table 3: Reading Strategy Used by the Teacher*

Statements	Percentages
<b>i. Provides background knowledge or experience</b>	<b>85.7%</b>
ii. Encourages class discussions	79.8%
iii. Gives homework and/or classwork relevant to the topic/text	74.8%
iv. Makes students do summarizing	67.6%
v. Practices the use of skimming and scanning reading strategies	67.1%
vi. Asks students to predict outcomes related to the text	66.6%
vii. Encourages peer teaching	63.4%
viii. Uses PQ4R (Preview, Questions, Read, Reflect, Recite, Review) technique in the class.	61.9%
ix. Promotes the use of visualization	52.6%
x. Uses SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) technique in the class	52.3%



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|---|-------|
| xi. Encourages the use of graphic organizers, concept maps or outlines. | 50.4% |
| xii. Uses video instructions  | 39.4% |

Table 3 shows that literature students report the provision of background knowledge (86%), use of class discussions (80%) and assigning of homework (75%) as most commonly used reading strategies used by their teachers. Summarizing, skimming and scanning are used to a lesser extent (67%). The use of visualization, SQ3R technique and graphic organizers was reported by only half of the students while videos were reported the least used (40%).

*Table 4 Reading Assessment Used in the Classroom*

Statement	Percentage
i. Scanning for specific details	67.8%
ii. Spelling in vocabulary	67%
iii. Identifying the meaning of words	66.9%
iv. Answering open-ended tests	66%
v. Generalizing ideas	65.8%
vi. Skimming for general information	64.9%
vii. Participating in questioning	63.5%
viii. Comprehending cloze test	54.2%
ix. Doing multiple choice test	48.8%

Table 4 reveals that the most commonly employed reading assessment measures were scanning for specific details (68%) and using spelling in vocabulary (67%). However, the use of the cloze test (54%) and multiple-choice test (49%) was reported to be used considerably less.

### **Analysis of Quantitative Data**

The majority of undergraduate students expressed a preference for reading textbooks, followed by research articles and novels. This aligns with the findings of previous studies, such as Serafini (2015), who also reported similar findings, where textbooks were also the most favored reading material among respondents. Moreover, Wahyuni et al. (2023) in their research study found that 54% of their 480 respondents read textbooks, followed by 20% who read novels/fiction, 5% who read reference books, and 21% who indicated reading all of the above.

In terms of individual use of reading comprehension skills, a significant proportion of students demonstrated a strong propensity to spell and recognize words (88%). Furthermore, many students reported regularly re-reading text for better understanding (77%), paying attention to text structure, selecting specific information (73%), answering questions (71.7%), visualizing events (70.5%), using inferences (65%), and doing grammar tests (64.5%). These findings are in line with the results of the research study conducted by Khatoon, Muhammad, and Shah (2022) on the reading comprehension of undergraduate and graduate learners, which revealed that almost all the learners



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frequently used almost all the reading techniques. Another finding similar to their work was that their study found that the strategy of reading again and again for better understanding (S-25) was one of the most commonly used techniques by university students for aiding reading comprehension. These findings also resonate with those of Sua (2021), who highlighted the importance of cognitive strategies like predicting, asking questions before reading, visualizing while reading, summarizing the story, and answering reading comprehension questions after reading for better comprehension.

Students employ reading techniques such as selecting information, visualization, and answering questions (Sua, 2021). Most students use the strategy of re-reading and focusing on the text structure, showing a proactive approach towards comprehension. These align with the classifications given by Sheory and Mokhtari (2001) regarding strategies that help to support students in understanding texts. They include cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies. The role of teachers is essential as their use of appropriate reading strategies in their classrooms facilitates students' reading comprehension. This research revealed that provision of background knowledge (85.7%) or experience and classroom discussions (79.4%) accounted for the main strategies being used by teachers to aid comprehension. Marzano (2004) highlighted how background knowledge, if used effectively by teachers, could enhance students' language capabilities and learning experience. If students have prior knowledge of the concept of global warming, they will be motivated to learn more about it through television, print media, and lectures to deepen their understanding (Naezak 2021). Haq, Khurram, and Bangash (2019) reiterate the significant role that prior or background knowledge plays in comprehension.

Nystrand (2006) states that discussions, whether student-led or whole-class in nature, help students to interpret and recall information from non-fiction essays in an effective manner. Van den Branden (2000) conducted research that revealed that whole-class discussions were more effective when dealing with complex passages as compared to small-group or pair discussions.

These findings highlight the importance of incorporating collaborative learning strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension skills and overall learning outcomes.

Another main finding of this research was that the use of graphic organizers, concept maps, and outlines (50.4%) and the use of video instruction (39.4%) appeared to be comparatively less in the classrooms. Khatoon et al. (2022)'s research study also indicated that the strategy of using visuals for enhancing understanding (S-15) was one of the least frequently used strategies. Research studies have shown that the use of an outline and concept mapping is positively correlated with improved reading comprehension (Ormrod, 2008). There is a positive effect of the concept mapping method on active learning, which leads to increased long-term retention of new material (Ormrod, 2008). Video instruction can present characters, setting, and action in a more captivating



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manner, and can represent more complex, interrelated issues. It is more memorable than a text-based instruction according to Choi and Johnson (2005), who found that there was a significant difference in students' motivational level for attention between a video-based learning and a text-based instruction.

Common teacher assessment methods included spelling and vocabulary tests (67%), identifying the meaning of words (67%), scanning for specific details (68%), and answering open-ended tests (66%). Cloze tests (54%) and multiple-choice tests (48%) were used less frequently. Afferblach et al. (2020) pointed out the limitations of using standardized reading tests for assessing students' linguistic skills, phonemic, lexical, grammatical, reading aloud, vocabulary, and grammar skills. In addition, Dennis (2009) and Douglas (2015) emphasized that employing various formats of tests can also enhance students' comprehension skills by providing students with the best assessment tool. As Perera-Diltz and Moe (2014) have indicated, standardized assessment tasks do not enable teachers to utilize valuable top-down reading strategies in meaningful ways when assessing students' reading comprehension; formative assessment in students' reading comprehension is essential.

### **Thematic Analysis of the Qualitative Data**

#### ***Reading Comprehension: A Pre-requisite Skill***

Most research participants believed that reading comprehension skills were essential in the undergraduate literature classroom, as they fostered both their academic and personal growth. Their responses, such as "extremely important" or "absolutely essential," highlight how reading comprehension helps students to comprehend, evaluate, and think autonomously (Brown, 2004). Participants mentioned using reading skills beyond academic settings - their use in reading academic materials, following directions, and application of knowledge in real-world settings. In concerto, this is similar to knowing that reading comprehension is a panacea for students in every field, both academic and practical.

#### ***Varied Reading Strategies and Techniques***

English Literature Teachers reported the use of a wide range of reading strategies and techniques to meet the demands of their undergraduate literature classrooms. Collaborative, contextual, multimodal, and analytical approaches are these strategies that, in turn, create opportunities for deeper engagement and comprehension as well as critical thinking with which people learn in different ways. The examples of sample responses below highlight the use of varied strategies: Participant A used students' prior knowledge to figure out what context and main ideas are; Participant B focused on building students' understanding of symbolism and metaphor and Participant C stated that he used skimming, scanning, and even detailed reading techniques to enable students to extract surface information and go to deeper levels of meaning. These varied strategies correspond with what is found in the research literature (Afflerbach et al., 2020; Bereiter



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& Bird, 1985), suggesting a successful use of comprehension strategies to improve reading comprehension. *Since most of the content I teach is literature-based, tapping into the students' prior knowledge to infer the context and overall main idea of a text is one strategy.* (Participant A). *Developing the ability to understand symbolism and metaphorical language is another important strategy.* (Participant B). *Most of the time, I use skimming for gaining surface-level knowledge, scanning, and detailed reading techniques for understanding the deeper level meaning. Such techniques are approaches to reading that you can also employ to become a better and more accomplished reader.* (Participant C)

### ***Most Commonly Used Approach – Interactive Approach***

Most of the participants mentioned that the interactive approach for reading was powerful in facilitating active engagement, interpretation, and critical thinking. This allowed students freedom to read, explain, and discuss literature independently (albeit away from the central group) and better understand difficult texts. For example, Participant E expressed that their ability to use an interactive approach gave students autonomy in interpreting various kinds of literature within the classroom. Participant feedback supports Amatha (2013), who found that this approach is effective in improving reading comprehension through meaningful and productive learning experiences. *I most of the time use an interactive reading approach as such a kind of reading approach gives freedom to the students at the undergraduate level in interpreting, explaining, and discussing*

*any genre of literature in their own way.* (Participant E)

### ***The Vital Role of Reading Assessment in Undergraduate Literature Education***

Assessment, according to the participants in this study, was very relevant in the teaching of literature as it helped to determine how much a person understood through the reading of such material. This complements the findings of Bahtiar & Purnawarman (2020) that assessment is part of teaching English as a foreign language. The majority of the opinions of the participants expressed the important role of assessment in cultivating literate, competent students by helping teachers to understand and monitor students' understanding, modify instruction for understanding, and advance learning. *“Assessment is a compulsory aspect of English teaching as a foreign language and a necessity in cases when it is covered in the curriculum.”* (Participant F)

*“Evaluation can contribute to shaping literate pupils who are balanced and competent.”* (Participant H)

### ***Enhancing Reading Engagement and Comprehension Through Assessment***

It was also found that reading assessments influenced students' engagement and comprehension positively. Reading engagement involves students' motivation for reading and their active participation in reading tasks, which enhances student comprehension (Protacio, 2017).



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Participants found that graded assignments foster student engagement with texts, helping students to infer and to understand texts more deeply. Research on the relationship between reading engagement and improved comprehension skills over time (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015; Arizal et al., 2021) is consistent with this finding. “*Test is a vital element of English teaching as a foreign language and a necessity in the cases when it is covered in the curriculum.*” (Participant I). “*Evaluation is significant in helping create well-rounded pupils of literature.* (Participant E)

#### ***Assessments as Diagnostic Tools***

Many participants referred to the diagnostic possibilities of reading assessments — that is to say that reading assessments enable teachers to identify the strengths and areas for development for their students. Fan et al. (2021) propose ways of using assessments as diagnostic tools in language education, and this is an alignment of approach with Rethinasamy and Ramanair (2007). Teachers learn about students' strengths and weaknesses so that learning can be more effective by being more targeted and personalized to meet individual needs.

“*Assessment helps me to effectively identify areas of strength and areas of weakness of my pupils.*” (Participant E)

“*Learning improves to be focused and effective because when I realize the strengths and needs of my students, I can then adjust my training and support, thus achieving my goals.* (Participant B)

#### ***The Impact of Reading Assessments on Instructional Strategies***

Participants reported that reading assessments influenced the instructional strategies that they used in continuing to support learning outcomes. This matches what Venn (2007) argues that effective reading instruction should include both top-down and bottom-up comprehension skills. Teachers can use the results of assessments to guide instruction towards outcomes and create an environment that helps learners perform well.

“*The fact that pupils are not interested in reading in general is one of the most prominent reasons.*” (Participant D)

“*In short, evaluation can be viewed as a guide that can assist teachers in refining themselves. The strategies of teaching and assisting students to achieve the intended outcomes.* (Participant C)

#### ***Challenges in Reading Assessment***

Participants identified several stumbling blocks involved with classifying reading assessments correctly—including how time-constrained school schedules are, and how large class sizes are—and also how students are less interested in reading. Usually, strict syllabi and the fact that much content must be covered get in the way of thorough assessment, they noted. Moreover, large classes are also difficult to individualize assessment, especially given that students vary so much in their abilities and needs. Participants point out that students' lack of reading interest poses



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concerns regarding comprehension and engagement with assessment activities. Lastly, the language and literary skills of the student are also objectively assessed by an individual, which further complicates an already difficult task in a literature-based classroom at a learning pace.

*“Short deadlines, strict syllabuses, and the necessity to cover information are all these factors.”* (Participant A). *“The pace of the work can be hard to maintain. Comprehensive assessment is in line with the curriculum. The lack of interest in reading among pupils in general is named by the respondents as one of the most significant factors.”* (Participant A & B)

*“In a bigger class, it becomes hard to satisfy the needs of each student. It is hard to deliver individualized evaluation taking into consideration exceptional abilities.”* (Participant C)

## **Discussion**

The mixed-methods research offers a holistic explanation of reading comprehension in literacy classes at the undergraduate level by combining the observations of the teacher with the reports of students. The results support the idea that reading comprehension is regarded as the academic core competence. The teachers pointed out that it was something that they are going to do, and there is no doubt about it as far as the development of both academic and personal processes is concerned, and students have a strong preference for academic texts, mainly for textbooks. This convergence testifies to the truth of the claims made by Brown (2004) that reading comprehension facilitates independent thinking and further that it is not only an essential skill in an academic endeavour but also to the wider learning process. These findings are similar to other findings of Serafini (2015) and Imbaquingo and Cárdenas (2023). and Wahyuni et al., (2023) that reported trends in which the participants (students) had a tendency towards more structured academic texts, like reading textbooks, and difficulties with informal texts of understanding and comprehension. The agreement between educators lays emphasis on the necessity of teaching approaches that would aid in reading comprehension (Olifant et al., 2022).

The evidence also highlights how both instructors and students employ the application of understanding methods in a calculated and statistically sound manner. Teachers reported that they employed a collection of practices on a routine basis, including prior knowledge activation, instruction of literary devices, skimming, and scanning patterns. Simultaneously, students explained that reading texts repeatedly with attention paid to structure, extracting main information, and picturing events were common practices to increase their knowledge. These results largely coincide with the ones reported by Khatoon, Muhammad, and Shah (2022) and Sua (2021), who discovered repeated reading and visualization as popular and efficient tools to achieve deep comprehension. This reflects the categorization by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) that reading



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strategies can be divided into cognitive, metacognitive, and support, as both groups are employing a variety of strategies towards enhancing learning.

Another shared theme between the two datasets was that of interactive and collaborative instructional techniques. The lectures reinforced the idea that the students were free to act independently in understanding the content of literature, as well as the importance of classroom discussions in enhancing their comprehension of a previously unknown literary item. These findings complement the argument by Marzano (2004), according to which prior knowledge activation is an important correlate of language learning. Similar insights are provided by Naezak (2021), Haq et al. (2019), and Nystrand (2006), who claim that small-group and whole-class discussions can be adopted as a source of interpretation and recall. The results indicate that participatory and dialogue-oriented methods are pivotal to understanding, in particular, in literature classrooms where interpretation plays the most important role.

Despite the overall agreement identified in teacher and student responses, a number of gaps and practices that are not optimal were also evident. Most brilliantly, students reported such practices as concept mapping, graphic organizers, and video instruction as those that are rarely utilized; this result aligns with that of Khatoon et al. (2022), which reveals low use of visual strategies as well. In comparison, the effectiveness of concept mapping in facilitating comprehension and retention is observed in the previous studies of Ormrod (2008) and Eshuis et al., (2022), and such aspects as increasing learner motivation and promoting the ability to recognize complex concepts can be observed in studies of Choi and Johnson (2005) and Chi et al. (2022), which state that video instruction can lead to improved learner motivation and facilitate processing of a complex topic. Taken together, these findings indicate that different instructional methods that form the basis of instructional practice are commonly used, and that there can be a greater use of multimodal devices.

The research also proves the importance of assessment practices in both teaching and learning. As a teacher, there was no way around assessment, as they were considered essential in diagnosing one's strengths and weaknesses and in following up on the teaching. This finding is in line with those of Rethinasamy and Ramanair (2007) and Fan et al. (2021), who promote diagnostic assessments to individualize pedagogy. The student's answers explained some of the activities that are widely used in vocabulary, scanning exercises, and open exercises, which are balanced by multiple-choice format and cloze format that are utilized with lesser frequency. These results are in line with Afferblach et al. (2015), Dennis (2009), and Douglas (2015) (Maier et al., 2020) who propose a balanced and heterogeneous assessment strategy that includes the top-down and bottom-up understanding techniques. Perera-Diltz and Moe (2014) and Evenddy (2023), in their research, also emphasize the drawbacks of standardized assessment and aid in the development of literacy by using formative, process-oriented procedures.



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According to the current research, teachers and students agree that there are significant barriers to the propagation of efficient reading comprehension. Some of the institutional constraints that teachers mention include too much work, uncompromising syllabi, and too many students in the classroom. There are such perceived problems at the learner level as the decreasing level of interest in reading and a high margin of variability in literacy attainment. These answers support the general literature on barriers to reading instruction that point towards systemic barriers to instruction. The results imply the necessity of the instructional reforms aimed at enhancing freedom in pacing, a learner-centred approach to assessment, and the provision of the resources that facilitate meaningful engagement and understanding. According to empirical evidence (Filderman et al., 2020 & Swan et al., 2018), adaptive teaching methods can lead to significant improvement in outcomes of diverse learners as they have different preferences. With an increasing ability to prepare students to maximize academic and lifelong literacy proficiency, educators can better respond to challenges by accentuating the use of established best practices.

### **Conclusion**

This research study aimed to investigate how students and teachers perceived the use of reading comprehension skills and strategies in their English literature classrooms. Teachers widely agreed that it was essential to develop reading comprehension skills in undergraduate literature classrooms. They pointed out several benefits, including promoting meaningful connections with literary works to boost communication, cultural awareness, and academic success. Furthermore, they reported using a wide variety of pedagogical techniques to inculcate critical thinking, cater to different learning styles, and develop deeper engagement with literary texts. Incorporation of analytical, collaborative, contextual, and multimodal methodologies provided an enriching learning experience for students in their literature classrooms. According to students, the strategies their teachers primarily used were the use of background knowledge or experience, class discussions, and homework assignments. Minimal use was made of techniques such as video instructions, graphic organizers, concept maps, outlines, and visualizations. Reading assessment and the crucial role it played were also highlighted in this research study. Teachers usually used spelling and vocabulary tests, identifying the meaning of words, and scanning specific details for assessment purposes. These assessment tools helped highlight students' areas of strength and weakness, provided direct instruction, encouraged engagement, and guided their academic planning. However, the real challenge for teachers lies in conducting these reading assessments efficiently. Multiple problems, ranging from varying student skill levels to resource scarcity, highlight the need for specialized, original methods to accurately evaluate students' reading ability. This research study reiterates the importance of creating skilled readers in higher education and the critical role that strategic assessment methods play in achieving this goal.



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