

# COMMON READING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL TERTIARY LEARNERS OF PAKISTAN'S

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**Abstract.** The present study explored the common reading strategies employed by Pakistani ESL tertiary learners to tackle down the reading comprehension problems. Reading comprehension plays a pivotal role in academic success, understanding the strategies learners adopt to address challenges is essential. The data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews with third and fourth-year undergraduates of Sindh University's English Department. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that undergraduates used a range of strategies to enhance their comprehension and tackle difficulties, including cognitive strategies such as scanning, skimming, rereading, intensive reading, predicting text, referring to the dictionary, and using contextual clues. Meta-cognitive strategies involved maintaining patience and recalling former ideas, while social strategies were driven by intrinsic, instructional, and exam-based motivations. The findings of the present study revealed that a combination of cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social strategies is crucial for improving reading skills and tackling reading comprehension problems. The study emphasizes the significance of a multi-strategy approach, as different strategies serve to address different aspects of reading comprehension. The findings gained from this study can inform teaching practices and assist educators design effective reading strategies that cater to the diverse needs of ESL learners, ultimately enhancing their reading proficiency and academic performance.

**Keywords:** *reading strategy use, comprehension performance, think-aloud, ESL, ESL reading*

## Introduction

Reading Strategies cannot be defined with one, single authentic definition as different scholars hold different views on it, hence it has multiple and various definitions. Afflerbach et al. (2020), define reading strategies as assistance to the readers to decode text, understand the words, and construct or derive meanings of the text. Well-developed cognitive strategies have been used in various research studies since ESL students need to reread, interpret, ponder, integrate, analyze, infer, critique, connect, review, and evaluate the ideas while reading the text to answer comprehension questions is concluded by Lapp et al. (2013). Noviabahari et al. (2023) opine that reading strategies are those plans that the reader employs to overcome hindrances and obstacles that he confronts while reading to construct the meaning of the text. According to McNamara et al. (2012), "reading comprehension strategies are cognitive or behavioral actions that are enacted under particular contextual situations, with the objectives of enhancing some aspects of comprehension", it is a common understanding that Reading is an indispensable and fundamental part of one's academic proceedings and it equally influences one's life outside the academic affairs. Tighe et al. (2019) believe that, Equipped with linguistic skills like grammar literacy and proficiency in

vocabulary, readers who intend to be well-organized need some strategies; to employ to get an optimum understanding of the text. The bulk of research is associated with reading and investigating reading obstacles and hurdles, however, research is still wanting in the area of reading strategies. According to Hoodless (2006), reading via which we perceive and understand the world, ideas, thoughts, and ideologies, along with a sight to delve into the past and foresight to envision the future, is "the most researched and most enigmatic of the so-called language skills".

### ***Problem statement***

There is a significant gap in existing literature regarding the most commonly chosen reading strategies among Pakistani tertiary-level students, specifically in the Sindh province where Sindhi is the native language and English has the status of official as well as a second language. Present literature emphasizes the most commonly chosen reading strategies for overcoming reading comprehension difficulties leading to a lack of interest in reading, affecting academic performance. This study includes two primary research gaps one a focus on the most common chosen reading strategies for overcoming reading comprehension difficulties and 2nd focus on school-level students globally, neglecting tertiary-level students. The research aims to address these gaps by investigating the most frequently chosen reading strategies among tertiary-level learners in the province of Sindh, presenting insights into challenges and the most commonly chosen reading strategies for improving reading comprehension.

### ***Research objective and research question***

The objective study is to identify the reading strategies commonly used by Pakistani ESL tertiary learners to overcome their reading difficulties. While the research question is What are the reading strategies commonly used by Pakistani ESL tertiary learners to overcome their reading difficulties?

### ***Literature review***

#### ***Reading***

Reading is a complex term to define. Leu et al. (2018) opine that it is difficult to provide a single authentic definition of reading as it is context-dependent. According to Bernhardt (2005), reading is an approach comprised of four components alphabet, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. While Nakamoto et al. (2008) define reading as "the process of getting linguistic information via print". Nunan (2012) defines reading as a dynamic process in which the intrinsic elements (the elements that are found inside the text) interact, associate, and correspond with the extrinsic elements (the elements that are found outside the text). According to Nassaji (2011), "Reading is a kind of complex cognitive skill that involves several sub-skills; processes and knowledge sources, ranging from the essential lower-level visual processes involved in decoding the print to advanced level skills and ability; involving syntax, semantics besides the discourse". Defining reading remains crucial as different researchers present the definitions in different ways.

#### ***Reading strategies***

According to Souhila (2014), in academics students specifically those who are second or foreign language learners encounter impediments and obstacles that deter their understanding especially while they read any text, they struggle to achieve comprehension. Souhila (2014), further highlights that non-native learners often understand the meaning of the words or even sentences but they fail to comprehend the meaning of the text, as a whole researches show that such students who fail to comprehend the text lacking in employing reading strategies. According to Tercanlioglu (2004), a substantial number of research studies have shown a direct and positive relationship between reading strategies and reading comprehension. Lapp et al. (2013) in their study have deduced that using reading strategies enhances reading comprehension. According to McNamara et al. (2012), reading strategies prove to be most effective and rewarding for those readers and learners who are lacking in knowledge of reading, moreover, the strategies are equally beneficial for those who have lower or weak reading skills. Hence, such readers must use the reading strategies to get optimum reading comprehension. Employing appropriate and suitable reading strategies to achieve a better comprehension of the text is the distinguishing feature of efficient reading. Several researchers have concluded and found that efficient reading comprehension is the result of rightly employed reading strategies. Nordin et al. (2013) in their study deduced that efficient readers who used reading strategies had a better understanding of the reading strategies and they used the reading strategies more than the less efficient readers. The study shows that a reader requires understanding and employing appropriate reading strategies to be an efficient and competent reader of the text. The extensive studies and research present that reading strategies are crucially important for an efficient reader. Various researchers unanimously conclude that Reading strategies perform a pivotal role in reading comprehension.

## **Materials and Methods**

The present qualitative study involved five focus groups, each consisting of five third and fourth-year ESL tertiary learners from the English Department of Sindh University, chosen through purposive sampling. The primary instrument was a set of five short lessons from "English for Undergraduate," designed to evaluate the reading strategies employed by the participants. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, where participants discussed the reading challenges they encountered and the strategies employed to overcome them. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key reading strategies, which were categorized into cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social strategies. The study provided insights into how ESL learners navigate complex English texts.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Cognitive strategies***

#### ***Scanning and skimming***

Scanning and skimming are the two reading strategies that help readers to comprehend text more effectively and efficiently. Skimming helps for quick reading through a piece of text to get a general understanding and comprehension of its key ideas and overall structure. Moreover, Scanning, on the other hand, helps readers search

a text for precise information or keywords. Hence, this technique is helpful when learners need to find a definite piece of information quickly; for instance, a name, date, or statistic. The foregoing findings are in line with the study of Agustin et al. (2023) as well as Fatmawan et al. (2023), their studies notice that Scanning and Skimming these reading strategies play vital roles in reading comprehension of ESL learners. Similarly, the present study's participants from semi-focus group interviews expressed their positive views regarding the previously mentioned reading strategies. All the interviewees shared statements that revealed the significance and crucial role played by scanning and skimming reading strategies in the reading comprehension process (*Table 1*).

**Table 1. Participants' Views on Scanning and Skimming reading strategies.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P3	"I use scanning and skimming reading strategy to comprehend the text."
Focus Group 01. P4	"Well, sir, I do apply the same strategies (Scanning and skimming) whenever I face difficulty in reading comprehension."
Focus Group 01. P5	"I go for scanning and skimming which help me a lot to overcome such reading difficulties and problems."

### ***Intensive (reading every word)***

Engaging in intensive reading, characterized by a thorough examination of every word in a text, is a highly effective strategy for ESL tertiary learners. This approach focuses on a detailed analysis of the language, offering a variety of cognitive and linguistic advantages that contribute to language acquisition. Intensive reading is particularly beneficial for ESL tertiary learners as it promotes a deeper understanding of the language at the word level. By carefully examining every word, learners enrich their vocabulary and gain a nuanced grasp of the subtle meanings and nuances associated with different terms. This meticulous approach helps in building a solid foundation for language proficiency. The foregoing interviewees' statement aligns with the findings of Souhila (2014) study which underscores the consistency of concerns among ESL tertiary learners regarding the potential omission of important points during reading, contributing valuable insights to the broader understanding of language learning strategies. In a nutshell, the intensive reading strategy, characterized by a meticulous examination of each word in a piece of text, provides ESL learners with a comprehensive approach to language acquisition. From improving vocabulary and reading comprehension to refining pronunciation, fluency, and grammatical awareness, this strategy proves to be a valuable technique for ESL tertiary learners seeking a detailed and thorough understanding of the English language (*Table 2*).

**Table 2. Participants' Views on Intensive reading strategy.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P2	"Sir, you know that every word carries its importance therefore, it is necessary to study each word to comprehend a piece of text"
Focus Group 03. P4	"What I have experienced so far is that to comprehend a piece of text properly readers have to go through every word; however, I read every word in the text; to comprehend a piece of text".

### ***Rereading***

Re-reading is another common strategy used by undergraduate ESL learners. The study identified that undergraduates applied this strategy most of the time when they found themselves as being unable to connect the ideas (*Table 3*). Re-reading strategy is considered highly effective by ESL tertiary learners as it helps them to remember the

formal part of the paragraph and to maintain their reading flow. Re-reading, the practice of revisiting a text multiple times is an effective strategy that holds significant benefits for ESL tertiary learners. This approach extends beyond simple repetition, offering learners a variety of cognitive, linguistic, and meta-cognitive benefits. A notable advantage of re-reading lies in its ability to improve comprehension and vocabulary acquisition along with refinement of pronunciation and cultural awareness. ESL learners often face hurdles in understanding complex texts due to language barriers. By revisiting a text, learners consolidate vocabulary, sentence structures, and overall context. Moreover, each iteration comprehension deepens, leading to a more thorough understanding of the material. Re-reading, the practice of revisiting a text multiple times is an effective strategy that holds significant benefits for ESL tertiary learners. This approach extends beyond simple repetition, offering learners a variety of cognitive, linguistic, and meta-cognitive benefits. A notable advantage of re-reading lies in its ability to improve comprehension and vocabulary acquisition along with refinement of pronunciation and cultural awareness. ESL learners often face hurdles in understanding complex texts due to language barriers. By revisiting a text, learners consolidate vocabulary, sentence structures, and overall context. Moreover, each iteration comprehension deepens, leading to a more thorough understanding of the material. This finding supports the findings of Suh (2012), who similarly found that incorporating the re-reading strategy into ESL language learning provides a holistic approach to mastering the English language, from enhancing comprehension skills and improving vocabulary acquisition to refining pronunciation, fluency, and meta-cognitive skills.

**Table 3. Participants' Views on Rereading strategy.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 04. P Sumera	“Thank you, sir; the first thing is that I often face such difficulties that impede my reading flow. Therefore, I use diverse reading strategies to solve such reading problems; I reread the first line or sentence of each paragraph and the whole paragraph of the last passage”
Focus Group 02. P4	“Yes, sir, it frequently happens, therefore we reread the text and highlight the main words; for example, the title, functional words, and connectors”.

### **Read-aloud**

Read-aloud is another prominent reading strategy among Pakistani ESL undergraduates. Read-aloud reading strategy is considered highly effective by ESL tertiary learners of Pakistan as it helps them in multiple ways. The different interviewees proposed different advantages of the aforementioned (Read-aloud) reading strategy. The read-aloud reading strategy helps ESL Learners to remember the formal part of a sentence while comprehending text as the majority of students reported that they forget the formal read part of the text when they move to the next paragraph. This particular benefit of the read-aloud reading strategy is supported by the following opinions of the respondents who in the semi-structured interview proposed the Read-aloud reading strategy. Similar suggestions and findings of this study have been found in the study of Alsubaie (2014). Similar to this study the findings of forgoing researcher indicated that read-aloud protocols help ESL tertiary learners to comprehend the text while improving their pronunciation and as an effective strategy for remembering the formal parts of paragraphs, since the majority of the readers have a fear that they may forget formal parts of paragraphs while moving to the next page. Moreover, this study suggested that readers often feel and believe that when they go through a piece of text they have understood or grasped the entire piece of text, and the very movement when they double-check their answer to the passages they prove to be wrong with the most of

their attempted answers. Therefore, readers read a text multiple times while shifting to a read-aloud reading strategy for the second reading (*Table 4*).

**Table 4. Participants' Views on Read-aloud strategy.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P1	"I read aloud text when I sense that I might forget the earlier part of the text; it helps me get the whole idea of the text"
Focus Group 04. P5	"I read aloud the text that helps me to memorize what I am reading besides highlighting the keywords, in this way, I overcome the said reading problems and difficulties."
Focus Group 05. P3	"Sir, I have experienced that the read-aloud protocol helps you to comprehend a particular text besides improving your pronunciations"

### **Predicting text while reading**

Another common reading strategy employed by ESL tertiary learners in Pakistan is predicting and guessing what will come next. ESL tertiary learners applied this reading strategy due to a lack of language knowledge which posed challenges for them during comprehending a piece of text. ESL tertiary learners often struggle with English text prediction due to several factors. Differences in syntax and sentence structure between English and other languages can confuse language learners. Lengthy and complex texts also pose challenges, as they make it difficult for learners to maintain concentration and retain information. Academic language, with its specialized terminology, jargon, and formal style, further complicates the comprehension process, along with references to unfamiliar cultural or historical contexts. The results obtained by Susoy and Tanyer (2019) favor the findings of the current study as the data of the present study suggest that Syntax, the structure of English sentences, including word order, verb tense, and sentence structure, differs from the structure of some other languages and this causes confusion and difficulty for ESL tertiary learners in understanding the intended meaning of the text. The perspectives are align with the aforementioned studies' findings suggesting that length and complexity hinder ESL tertiary learners as texts are lengthy or contain complex ideas or arguments which bring challenges for ESL learners in terms of maintaining concentration and retaining information, therefore; they guess and predict accordingly (*Table 5*).

**Table 5. Participants' Views on Predicting text while reading as a strategy in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P4	"I also try to predict and guess the meaning of significant words"
Focus Group 03. P5	Moreover, it is due to prior knowledge we easily guess and predict what is the central idea of the text and what is coming next in that particular text"
Focus Group 05. P5	"The problems of limited background knowledge can be somehow overcome by using guessing and predicting reading strategies"

### **Contextual clue**

Contextual clue plays a key role in helping readers understand scholarly texts. Academic writing is often dense, technical, and filled with complex vocabulary, making it difficult for readers to grasp the meaning of the text without contextual guidance. Contextual clues are words or phrases in the text that provide additional information about the meaning of a word or phrase. Contextual clue reading strategy encourages an interactive and dynamic reading experience. ESL undergraduates become actively engaged in the process of decoding the text, making connections between words and their contextual surroundings. This interactive engagement fosters motivation and promotes a more enjoyable language-learning experience. Contextual clue reading helps

ESL learners understand unfamiliar words by interpreting clues within the text. This strategy enhances vocabulary, critical thinking, and overall comprehension by using surrounding information to infer meanings. It also promotes an intuitive grasp of language nuances and culturally appropriate usage. By examining context, learners can decode words, expand their vocabulary, and improve their confidence in understanding new content. On the other hand, the absence of contextual clues among ESL tertiary learners impedes their capacity to make inferences or draw connections between various parts of the text. Without contextual clues, the students are unable to identify implicit meanings, and relationships between ideas, or discern the author's intended message. or rather guide their understanding. This deficiency in contextual understanding often limits students' ability to engage in active, critical thinking and analysis, as they may miss important nuances or overlook key details within the text. The foregoing views depicted the importance of context clues that consolidate the study of Oakhill and Cain (2007) the foregoing study suggested that having rich background knowledge enhances the skill to infer meaning from text recognized as a predictor of reading comprehension at a range of developmental stages and is one of the prominent drivers of sophisticated reading. Further, Inferring aids in both ways in terms of predicting the meaning of words as well as ideas and situations (*Table 6*).

**Table 6. Participants' Views on Contextual clue in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P2	"I develop my meaning and understanding by guessing the contextual meaning of that particular piece of text"
Focus Group 04. P4	"Hence, to overcome such reading problems and difficulties the role of prior knowledge is very important besides the contextual clue of that particular piece of text"

***Unfamiliarity with culturally loaded words, jargons and technical terms***

Unfamiliarity with culturally loaded words, jargon, and technical terms has always remained a hurdle in ESL tertiary learners' understanding of cultural references or domain-specific terms in reading comprehension. This lack of contextual understanding always has impeded their comprehension and prevented them from grasping the intended meaning of the text. Reiterating the foregoing theme, Participant four's (Focus Group 01, P5) statement clearly depicts the scenario of ESL tertiary learners struggling with making inferences or drawing conclusions from context especially when they encounter unfamiliar terms, which affects their ability of comprehension to fully understand the piece of text. Figurative language and idiomatic expressions used in the text posed challenges for ESL tertiary learners. These expressions often are not in a direct translation in their native language, which creates obstacles for ESL tertiary learners in comprehending the text more specifically in interpreting the intended meaning accurately. This study's findings validate the result of Mehrpour and Rahimi (2010) who found that limited familiarity with domain-specific terminology poses hurdles in the comprehension of academic texts relevant to ESL undergraduates' field of study. ESL undergraduates may not be: well-versed in technical or domain-specific terms that are used in their discipline, which will ultimately impede their ability to comprehend the text and fully grasp the content (*Table 7*).

**Table 7. Participant's View on Unfamiliarity with culturally loaded words, jargons and technical terms in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P5	"Well, that's very crucial, when facing culturally loaded words or terms. For instance, you gave the

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example of ' dead fish or pink chit 'We are not familiar with such culturally loaded terms, hence we google them or look into the dictionary for their hidden or figurative meaning in this way we try to solve such reading difficulties and problems".

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### **Background knowledge**

In the realm of ESL undergraduate learners' reading comprehension, the significance of prior knowledge proves to be a critical determinant (*Table 8*). As highlighted by Participant three (3) from Focus group one (1) who vividly describes the challenges fostered by lack of background knowledge. Similarly, the fourth participant (4) from second focus group (2) articulates how encountering texts that require a certain level of background knowledge poses a hurdle to understanding. These findings are in line closely with the outcomes reported in the literature of Smith et al. (2021), who emphasized the crucial role of background knowledge in creating a mind map for readers, aiding in comprehending a piece of text. The study indicated that limited background knowledge leads to poorer comprehension of the text, as readers struggle to recall and link information effectively. Furthermore, the third participant (3) from second last focus group (4) reinforces the foregoing findings by expressing feelings of overwhelm and discouragement when faced with texts that require a certain level of background knowledge. The participant's view elucidates the psychological impact of encountering comprehension obstacles due to a lack of background knowledge. These opinions and views highlight the multifaceted nature of comprehension difficulties faced by ESL tertiary learners and underscore the importance of targeted interventions to enhance learners' background knowledge and comprehension strategies. Educators can use these valuable insights to develop instructional approaches that effectively meet learners' needs and support their development as proficient readers. The above mentioned perspectives consolidate the findings of O'Reilly et al. (2019) that limited background knowledge of ESL tertiary learners results in difficulties in understanding cultural references or domain-specific terms used in the text. This lack of contextual understanding can impede their comprehension and prevent them from grasping the intended meaning.

**Table 8. Participants' Views on Background Knowledge in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P3	"Lack of prior knowledge significantly affects my reading comprehension. When I come across unfamiliar topics, concepts, or vocabulary, it becomes challenging to grasp the main ideas and nuances of the text."
Focus Group 02. P4	"Sir, lack of background knowledge definitely impedes my reading comprehension abilities. When I encounter texts that require a certain level of background knowledge or familiarity with specific cultural or historical contexts, I find myself struggling to make sense of the content."

### **Linking words and connectors**

Linking words or connectors is a reading strategy indicated by this study as being found in ESL undergraduates of Pakistan. ESL tertiary learners use this strategy when they are unable to connect the ideas in reading comprehension and further, they consider it one of the most effective strategies among other reading strategies for reading comprehension (*Table 9*). According to the statement provided by the interviewee it can be concluded that connectors play a vital role in the text as well as in learner's reading comprehension process. Aside from the suggesting of participants statement, most of the ESL tertiary learners often get assistance from connectors and linking words to connect the ideas, maintain coherence, and grasp the central idea and theme of the text.



Apart from these forgoing results of this strategy it further assists learners in guessing and predicting that what will come next.

**Table 9. Participant's View on Linking words and connectors in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 05. P1	“Sir, to connect the idea in reading passages I more often concentrate on the connector or linking words, For instance: however; but; and; since etc. such words illustrate or develop a basic concept of the text that what is the piece of text about that“

### **Referring to dictionary**

Above all, the most prominent difficulty faced by Pakistani ESL learners at the tertiary level is the dearth of Vocabulary. One of our respondents (Focus Group 02, P5) in a semi-structured interview concluded that most faced difficulty in reading comprehension ESL tertiary learners (*Table 10*). Getting assistance from the dictionary is one of the prominent reading strategies used by ESL tertiary learners in Pakistan. Second Language Learners (ELL) often encounter unfamiliar and new words while reading a piece of text. Encountering unfamiliar and new words is one of the hurdles faced by every Second Language Learner (ELL) whether be it the learner of English, Arabic, Spanish, or any other language. To overcome this difficulty the majority of undergraduates preferred to get help from the dictionary and considered it the most effective strategy for reading comprehension. Consistency across participants' responses replicates the findings of Chen et al. (2016) which shed light on the role of rich vocabulary and validates the participant's perspectives regarding referring/using a dictionary.

**Table 10. Participants' Views on referring to dictionary as a reading strategy.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 02. P5	“Well, sir, if I conclude which is the most reading comprehension difficulty or problem; it is right to say that dearth of vocabulary is the most frequent problem related to reading comprehension. Therefore, we frequently use the dictionary to know the usage of words”.
Focus Group 04. P2	“I use the dictionary to know the usage of words and their application to comprehend such text,”
Focus Group 05. P5	“Well, sir I use the dictionary to know the origin and usage of the terms, I also google if the dictionary doesn't satisfy my quest”.

### **Dearth of vocabulary**

Vocabulary knowledge is the core component of any language as it empowers individuals to decipher the meaning of words, understand nuanced expressions, and discern the subtleties of written discourse. Many researchers consider vocabulary knowledge as an essential variable that affects reading comprehension in both first and second-language learning. Moreover, a dearth of vocabulary has always resulted in a hurdle in reading comprehension for ESL learners (*Table 11*). The fifth participant from the second focus group through his views proposed the significance of vocabulary which indicates that vocabulary knowledge plays a pivotal role in students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the participant in his statement expressed that the difficulties posed by weak vocabulary can be easily overcome by referring to a dictionary, more specifically by knowing the use of words. The second participant's perspective from focus group four confirms the previous opinion of her class fellow further sheds light on the use of vocabulary which assists learners by familiarizing them learners with the application of words. Reiterating the foregoing participant no 5 from the last (5) focus group presented the views that replicated the ongoing theme. The findings of Chou (2011) are in line with the views of the participants which present the

magnitude of vocabulary affecting readers' comprehension. These views are further supported by the results discovered in the study of Ricketts et al. (2007) who similarly highlighted the role of vocabulary and application of words in one's reading comprehension process.

**Table 11. Participants' Views on Daerth of vocabulary in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 02. P5	“Well, sir, if I conclude which is the most reading comprehension difficulty or problem; it is right to say that dearth of vocabulary is the most frequent problem related to reading comprehension therefore we frequently use the dictionary for looking the usage of words”.
Focus Group 04. P2	“I agree with Erum, yet I use the dictionary to know the usage of words and their application to comprehend such text, therefore, I say that a sufficient amount of vocabulary also helps readers to comprehend a piece of text.”
Focus Group 05. P5	“Well, sir, the most important thing we believe and use that is the usage of vocabulary one must acquire or accumulate to overcome the reading comprehension problems apart from that there are so many we often use: Scanning, skimming, guessing, predicting with the contextual clue, previewing, etc”

### **Language knowledge**

The first and foremost component for an individual to know to speak, understand, read, and comprehend a piece of text is to have language knowledge as it is the core of any language. An individual without language knowledge cannot speak, understand, read, or write language. Participant from the first focused group emphasized one of the prominent and basic ideas that every language learner who seeks to have expertise and command in any language should constantly improve the language. He thought that language is all about practice, and continuous practice will lead and help every language learner to have fluency and expertise over the language (*Table 12*). The foregoing statement of the first participant from the first focus group suggests the idea of constantly improving the language. This statement further suggests that even when one possess good language knowledge or even have good command over language, there is always another dimension of that language which needs to be improved. Additionally, his statement suggested that this practice will assist language learners to hone their language skills and have more knowledge about language which will ultimately help the learner in multi-dimensions of language skills such as comprehension of text (reading), writing, listening and speaking. The statement of first participant from fourth focus group suggests the role and significance of having language knowledge. The participant has tried to depict language knowledge as an umbrella term that covers all the areas of language knowledge ranging from grammar knowledge to having proficiency in four basic skills (Listening, reading, speaking, and writing). Those students who do not have a strong foundation in language knowledge face multiple difficulties during comprehension of text. Lack of language knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, and structure hinders students' ability to extract meaning and engage critically with the material. Students, who do not possess robust knowledge of language have been found struggling in decoding unfamiliar words, parsing complex sentences, and discerning the intended message of the author.

**Table 12. Participants' Views on Language knowledge in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P1	“Though I have improved my language skills, there is so much left to cover and acquire. For example, one of the areas is reading; more specifically reading comprehension. Therefore, I need to improve my language knowledge for a better understanding”.
Focus Group 04. P1	“Well, sir, to overcome such reading difficulties or reading problems; language knowledge plays an important role in comprehending a piece of text”.

**Meta-cognitive reading strategies**

**Lack of patience and difficulty in completion of books**

The exploration into reading habits among ESL undergraduates reveals a significant challenge: the lack of patience and difficulty in completing books. Respondents' narratives illustrate the struggles faced in maintaining sustained engagement with reading materials, posing hurdles to comprehensive understanding and academic success. The third participant from the third focus group articulates this challenge, stating (Table 13). The Above-mentioned narratives of participants underscore the pervasive nature of this issue among ESL learners, highlighting its detrimental impact on academic performance and overall reading proficiency. These findings consolidate the existing findings of Jang and Henretty (2019) as well as Chiang (2016) that emphasize the significant role of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping reading habits, highlighting the importance of cultivating a sense of motivation and perseverance in the face of problems. The lack of patience and difficulty in completing books among ESL undergraduates can be attributed to different factors, including language proficiency, cultural differences, and competing demands on time and attention. Addressing the aforementioned challenges requires a multifaceted approach that considers individual learner needs and preferences while fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes sustained engagement with reading materials.

**Table 13.** Participants' Views on Lack of patience and difficulty in completion of books in ESL Reading.

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 03. P3	"Yes Sir, I frequently find it difficult to stay focused on reading for long periods. I lose my patience easily, and this makes it challenging to finish assigned texts or books."
Focus Group 04. P2	"Yes Sir, there have been times when I've struggled with patience while reading or felt difficulty in completing a book. This frequently occurs when the material is particularly dense or when I'm not fully engaged with the subject matter. Sir, as an ESL learner, reading in a second language can sometimes feel more laborious, especially when the text is complex or unfamiliar. In these particular situations, I find myself getting easily distracted or losing interest, which results in a challenge to stay focused and motivated to finish the book. Breaking down the reading material into smaller sections helped me stay concentrated and motivated."

**Forgetting previous ideas**

Forgetting former ideas when moving to the next page or paragraph is another prevalent challenge faced by ESL tertiary learners. Participants' narratives shed light on this recurring phenomenon, illustrating the disruptive impact it has on comprehension (Table 14). These personal experiences and findings align with the findings of Othman (2024) that elucidates the cognitive mechanisms at play, emphasizing the role of working memory in retaining and integrating ideas across text. The phenomenon of forgetting previous ideas when moving to the next page or paragraph is a manifestation of the limitations of working memory capacity, which hinders the reader's ability to construct a coherent mental representation of the piece of text. In summary, the aforementioned narratives and scholarly insights highlight the complexity of reading difficulties faced by ESL tertiary learners, more specifically the challenge of maintaining continuity of thought across text. Educators need to acknowledge and address this issue through targeted instructional techniques and strategies aimed at sharpening working memory capacity and promoting effective text-processing skills. By providing learners with the appropriate tools and techniques to tackle this challenge, educators can empower ESL tertiary learners to navigate complex texts with confidence

and proficiency, fostering a deeper understanding of the content and improving overall reading comprehension skills.

**Table 14. Participants' Views on Forgetting previous ideas in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 03. P1	"Yes, Sir I often face this difficulty that I forget the former part of a passage when moving to the next one. This usually occurs when the text is particularly dense or when I'm trying to read quickly to keep up with the material. To tackle this challenge, I've developed a few strategies. The prominent of them is to take brief notes or jot down key points as I read which assists me retain information and stay focused". additionally the participant said: "I've found that taking short breaks between passages to review what I've just read can be helpful in reinforcing my memory and preventing information overload"
Focus Group 04. P1	"Yes Sir, I agree with my class fellow that forgetting formal part in reading is a common difficulty as I myself have frequently faced it". "This often happens to me more particularly when I'm trying to read too quickly or when the material is particularly complex". Additionally the participant reiterated the affirmed strategies to overcome the foregoing difficult: "However Sir, to overcome this issue, I employ active reading techniques such as summarizing key points after each paragraph or section, this helps me consolidate information and maintain continuity as I progress through the text. Further, sir, short breaks and mental reviews also help in maintaining the ideas"

### **Wrong answer to comprehension**

The qualitative findings presented here provide a compelling glimpse into the nuanced landscape of reading comprehension among ESL tertiary learners. Participants' narratives vividly illustrate the common experience of confidently answering comprehension questions, only to later find out that their interpretations were wrong (Table 15). These presented insights align with the seminal work of Kintsch (1994), which draws the fine line between rote memorization and genuine comprehension. Kintsch's theory addresses the essence of comprehension, emphasizing the need to go beyond superficial understanding and delve into the deeper layers of textual meaning. The alignment between interviewees' experiences and theoretical framework underscores the universality of the comprehension challenges and the enduring relevance of foundational research in this area. In conclusion, the aforementioned findings provide a rich tapestry of insights into the complexities of reading comprehension, illustrating the multifaceted nature of the student's journey. the forgoing findings suggest that educators need to focus on these insights and develop pedagogical approaches that foster not just surface-level understanding but genuine comprehension based on critical thinking and inquiry which will ultimately empower learners to navigate the labyrinthine corridors of textual meaning with confidence, curiosity, and a steadfast commitment to lifelong learning.

**Table 15. Participants' Views on Wrong answer to comprehension in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 03. P1	"Yes Sir, it has happened to me before where I thought I understood a passage and confidently answered questions based on my interpretation, but when I compared my answers with correct answers I found out that my answers were incorrect."
Focus Group 03. P3	"Yes Sir, I've often encountered situations where I thought I had a solid understanding of a passage and confidently answered questions based on that understanding, only to realize later that my answers were incorrect"
Focus Group 04. P2	"Yes sir, there have been instances where I believed I understood a passage and answered questions accordingly, but later I discovered that my answers were incorrect when I compared them to the correct answers"

### **Thesis statement**

In the intricate process of reading comprehension, learners employ different strategies to decode and extract the essence of a text. The shared views of participants from different focus groups draw valuable insights into different approaches (Table 16).

This holistic approach involves synthesizing information from different parts of the text, into a comprehensive overview that helps in understanding the text as a cohesive unit. This strategy involves reviewing the text, focusing on a thesis statement, and identifying keywords and themes that serve as anchors for comprehension. The statement further indicates the iterative nature of the reading process, acknowledging that a deeper understanding often requires several engagements with the text. However, those students who do not read the thesis statement struggle to grasp the central argument or main idea of a text which leads them to confusion and incomplete understanding of the text. This lack of reading strategy hinders students' ability to engage critically with the material. Learners fail to recognize the author's purpose or the overarching message being conveyed in the text. Moreover, the lack of reading thesis statements poses hurdles for learners to effectively organize and analyze the content of the text. The absence of a clear understanding of the central argument will result in discerning the supporting evidence or the logical progression of ideas within the reading materials.

**Table 16.** Participants' Views on Thesis statement in ESL Reading.

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P1	"Sir, I will divide the text into some portions, and I focus on the first and the last sentence of each paragraph".
Focus Group 02. P5	"Well, sir, I focus on the main words and the title or topic of the text, including the first sentence of each passage that makes almost the whole piece comprehensible to me".
Focus Group 03. P5	"Well, sir, in such a situation, we concentrate on the thesis statement besides highlighting keywords".
Focus Group 04. P3	"Well, sir, to comprehend such a piece of text, there are several strategies, but I get the idea by reading passage-wise".

### **Social strategies**

#### **Interest-based motivation (gaining knowledge)**

The motivation to gain knowledge becomes a strong driving force behind language learning. ESL tertiary learners, when faced with complex concepts or opposing ideas, are inherently motivated to be actively engaged in intense reading activities. The desire to gain knowledge, comprehend text, and differentiate between different concepts or terms motivates learners into a focused and purposeful reading experience (Table 17). Knowledge-based motivation extends beyond the confines of academic requirements. It inspires and ignites the spark of reading more specifically gaining knowledge in learners to further explore things. When learners come to realize the practical applications of gaining knowledge, such as understanding and having diverse and having command over different subjects, and topics like philosophical concepts such as 'Idealism and realism,' they are more likely to approach reading tasks with a genuine curiosity and eagerness to learn and broaden their intellectual horizons. Furthermore, this specific form of motivation fosters a sense of achievement. As ESL tertiary learners delve into intense reading to understand and grasp intricate ideas, the acquisition of knowledge becomes a tangible outcome. Gaining and understanding complex concepts and acquiring new information serves as a reward in itself and reinforces the idea that the pursuit of knowledge is intrinsically motivating. Gaining knowledge-based motivation also promotes a proactive and self-directed approach to learning. ESL tertiary learners are motivated by their self-eagerness desire to understand and acquire knowledge, and responsibility for their learning and exploring things (Education). They actively seek out opportunities for intensive reading engage in comprehensive exploration and demonstrate a commitment to their intellectual growth.

**Table 17. Participant's View on Interest-based motivation in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 02. P4	"When you try to understand the two opposite concepts, for example, explain the difference between 'Idealism and realism,' you go for the intense reading, and the motivation behind this is to know the difference between them".

### **Instructional motivation**

In the realm of language learning, the role of the instructor appears to be a key factor in motivating ESL tertiary learners, particularly in the context of reading comprehension (Table 18). The instructor's guidance and directions serve as a beacon, providing learners with a clear path and goal in their language learning journey. By offering well-structured guidelines and insightful directions, instructors empower ESL undergraduates to tackle the complexities of reading comprehension with confidence and clarity. This sense of direction not only enhances comprehension skills but also instills a motivation to actively engage in the learning process. Furthermore, instructors hold the key to developing the intrinsic motivation of learners. Through their passion for the subject matter, personalized teaching methods, and genuine interest in the success of ESL learners, instructors foster an environment where learners feel supported and inspired. The privileges and benefits associated with the instructors' guidelines reinforce the idea that the instructor's role goes beyond imparting knowledge; it aims to foster a positive and motivating learning atmosphere. The impact of an instructor's motivation extends beyond the academic realm. When learners perceive that their instructors are committed to their progress, they are more likely to view language learning as a valuable and rewarding endeavor. This, in turn, influences their attitude toward reading comprehension, fostering a proactive and engaged technique to the material. Without instructional motivation, ESL undergraduates may face a range of adverse problems that hinder their engagement and progress in reading comprehension. The absence of instructional motivation may result in a lack of interest in the learning process, in surface-level engagement with reading materials, and limited information retention.

**Table 18. Participants' Views on Instructional motivation in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P5	"The instructor has a significant role to motivate the learners for reading comprehension".
Focus Group 03. P5	"The guideline and instruction of teachers carry the privilege and the reward for the reading academic; it is right to believe that the instruction of the concerned teacher keeps the motivation high for reading a specific piece of text."

### **Exam-based motivation**

Exam-based motivation serves as a driving force for reading comprehension among ESL tertiary learners, as reflected by insights from multiple participants (Table 19). The views reinforce the idea that the prospect of exams serves as a prominent external incentive, pushing learners to invest time and effort in reading activities as they desire to achieve favorable grades in their assessments. These insightful perspectives further highlight the practicality of exams as a measure of academic achievement, directly influencing the motivation of undergraduates to comprehend and internalize the content they encounter in their reading materials. Exam-based motivation introduces a sense of purpose into the reading process. Learners are compelled to work with texts not merely for the sake of academic requirements but also with the target of mastering the material for upcoming exams. This extrinsic motivation often leads to a focused and diligent technique for reading, as learners see the direct correlation between their efforts and

their potential for academic achievements. On the other hand, the absence of exam-based motivation in ESL undergraduates often results in navigating a landscape marked by inherent challenges and potential drawbacks. Without the external pressure of exams, learners may struggle to maintain a sense of accountability and wavering commitment to consistent study habits and the prioritization of reading comprehension tasks. This lack of structured incentives can result in procrastination or even ignorance of academic responsibilities, hindering the development of study skills and impeding overall progress in reading comprehension.

**Table 19. Participants' Views on Exam-Based Motivation in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 03. P4	"The examination is also one of the prominent motivations for reading text"
Focus Group 04. P3	"Well, sir, the reading motivation is based on the exam perspective."
Focus Group 04. P4	"Well, Sir, there is always the motivation behind every reading task. For instance, if we prepare for the exams, we read a lot to get desired grades in the exams; this makes every student and learner motivated for the reading".

### ***Intrinsic motivation***

Intrinsic motivation is the cornerstone in the realm of language learning, particularly in the context of reading comprehension for ESL tertiary learners. One of the participants from the first focus group eloquently articulated the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation, he stated (*Table 20*). The above insightful perspective highlights the inherent drive that arises from within learners themselves, propelling them to explore the intricacies of language with a genuine interest. Intrinsic motivation, characterized by a personal desire to learn and understand, serves as a powerful catalyst for ESL tertiary learners, developing a deep connection with the language learning and improving reading comprehension skills. This intrinsic motivation further leads ESL tertiary learners to explore texts not solely as academic requirements but as gateways to cultural understanding and personal development. Intrinsic motivation inspires a sense of curiosity and engagement, transforming the language learning experience from a simple educational task into a meaningful and self-driven journey. As learners engage themselves in texts with an inherent interest in the topic, they are more likely to invest time and effort, resulting in a more profound and lasting understanding of the language.

**Table 20. Participant's View on Intrinsic motivation in ESL Reading.**

Participant No	Verbal report
Focus Group 01. P5	"Well, sir, undoubtedly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays a vital role in reading comprehension. For example, if we are suggested or directed to study a particular novel related to English literature, there must be an intrinsic motivation that we learn something about English people."

### **Conclusion**

The study's thematic analysis of participants' interviews revealed that the majority of the respondents were facing multiple reading difficulties and following reading strategies are the most commonly employed by ESL tertiary learners to overcome the reading comprehension problems: skimming, scanning, intensive (reading every word), rereading, read-aloud, predicting text while reading, contextual clue, familiarity with culturally loaded words, jargons, and technical terms, sound background knowledge, familiarity with linking words and connectors, referring to dictionary, rich vocabulary, sound language knowledge, having patience in completing book, remembering former ideas, reading thesis statement, and maintaining Interest and intrinsic motivation. These

are the most frequent reading strategies which are commonly employed by Pakistani ESL learners at tertiary level. In conclusion, the participants reported that they employ various reading strategies to overcome various reading difficulties in reading comprehension.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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