



English Reading Difficulties Faced by Students at Primary Level: Cross Comparison of Teachers' Perception and Students' Perception



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Abstract: *This research investigates the perspectives of teachers and students regarding English reading challenges encountered by primary school students in Gujranwala district, Pakistan, encompassing both public and private schools. The research categorizes the challenges into three aspects: pronunciation problems, speed problems, and comprehension problems. A total of 96 teachers and 320 students participated in the study. Findings indicate a notable difference between the perceptions of teachers and students. Teachers perceive a higher intensity of difficulties across all categories compared to students. Statistical analysis reveals a significant difference between the two groups' perceptions ($p = 0.026$), indicating that teachers have a more heightened awareness of the problems faced by students in English reading. These results emphasize the importance of addressing these challenges through improved teaching methodologies and resources, tailored interventions, and enhanced communication between educators and learners.*

Key Words: English reading difficulties, Primary level, Students' Perception, Teachers' Perception

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Introduction

As highlighted by Nunan (2002), the term "jargon" encompasses various linguistic elements, including lexis, phrasal words, and colloquial expressions. Proficiency in a language involves not only understanding syntax but also having a substantial grasp of its vocabulary. Language operates as a system

of rules that interconnect these linguistic components, predominantly words, into meaningful constructs. In many respects, words serve as the fundamental building blocks of a language, forming the very foundation from which language emerges. The value of possessing a rich and well-defined jargon with clear significance has long been recognized as pivotal for effective

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reading. To cultivate creative reading abilities, students must enhance their vocabulary. This enhancement not only facilitates reading comprehension but also expands their domains of expertise, thereby enriching their writing and comprehension skills.

Vocabulary emerges as the third crucial factor influencing the reading comprehension of secondary school students. As suggested by Archer (2003), a student's reading vocabulary naturally expands through the act of reading. Encountering new words in written text prompts the reader to decipher these unfamiliar terms, consequently incorporating them into their spoken vocabulary. However, for a term to be comprehended from written text, it must already exist within the reader's spoken lexicon. Proficient reading comprehension hinges on the reader's adeptness at decoding words (Fuchs, 2005).

In the context of Indonesian classrooms, writing is often underutilized as a learning tool, primarily employed for replicating knowledge rather than fostering its development. Consequently, students may find reading more challenging due to a lack of engagement. However, writing can play a pivotal role in honing productive skills, while reading comprehension serves as a receptive skill essential for acquiring new knowledge. Hence, struggling students are burdened with copious reading tasks.

Correspondingly, Joseph (2001) contends that explicit instruction on comprehension is imperative, as students grapple with comprehending text, deciphering word meanings, and inferring information. The struggles with understanding text may arise from an inadequate grasp of word or concept meanings, difficulty recalling factual details, an incapacity to deduce conclusions from the material, and an inability to synthesize disjointed fragments of information provided in the text.

Challenges persist for less experienced comprehenders, particularly in drawing conclusions from implicit information within a text, linking ideas coherently, and ascertaining word meanings through context. These reading comprehension issues are discussed across three research sources. Central to these studies, as articulated by Snow (2013), is the principle that the author's central message or main idea is often encapsulated in a single sentence within a paragraph or chapter. As students advance to higher grades, identifying the key idea becomes more intricate, as it might be explicitly stated or inferred from the text.

The English language holds a significant place in the global arena, serving as a bridge that connects people from different cultures and backgrounds. In Pakistan, a country with a diverse linguistic heritage, English has emerged as an essential tool for communication, education, and career advancement. However, students in Pakistan encounter a range of challenges while learning and mastering the English language (Muazzam, Muhammad, & Naseer, 2021). These challenges stem from cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors, and addressing them is crucial for enhancing language proficiency and promoting educational success (Thornbury, 2006).

Pakistan is a multilingual country, with several languages spoken across its provinces. Urdu serves as the national language and is widely spoken, but it coexists with a plethora of regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and more. This linguistic diversity can pose challenges for students when learning English, as they often face interference from their native languages. This interference can lead to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary errors that hinder effective communication.

One of the most significant hurdles for students in Pakistan is the lack of sufficient exposure to the English language outside of the classroom (Aamer, Muhammad, &

Masood, 2019). Practices of elementary school teachers for developing English language competencies among students. While English is the medium of instruction in many schools, it is not commonly spoken in everyday conversations at home or in the community. This limited exposure makes it difficult for students to practice and reinforce their language skills, resulting in an inability to speak confidently and naturally (Subon, 2013).

The quality of English language instruction varies widely across schools in Pakistan. Some institutions lack well-trained teachers who are proficient in the language themselves. This deficiency can lead to improper teaching methodologies, ineffective learning resources, and an inability to address individual student needs. Moreover, the focus on rote learning rather than interactive and communicative approaches can further hinder language development.

Socio-economic factors play a significant role in shaping students' access to quality English education. Private schools in urban areas often offer better English language programs, while public schools, particularly in rural regions, struggle to provide adequate resources and trained teachers. This creates a disparity where students from privileged backgrounds have a higher chance of mastering the language compared to their counterparts. However, the format and requirements of these tests can be challenging for Pakistani students, as they demand a level of language proficiency that may not align with the education they have received (Zare, 2012).

In Pakistani society, making mistakes while speaking English can be met with ridicule or embarrassment. This fear of judgment often discourages students from practising the language openly, leading to self-consciousness and hindered progress. Societal pressure to be proficient in English adds to the stress, creating an environment where students might shy away from using the language altogether. The digital divide, characterized by unequal access to technology and the internet, poses a considerable challenge for English language learners. Online resources, language learning apps, and interactive platforms could significantly aid language acquisition, but students without access to these resources are at a disadvantage. This divide exacerbates the gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

While English proficiency is undoubtedly beneficial in today's globalized world, students in Pakistan face a range of challenges in learning the language. Cultural and linguistic diversity, limited exposure, inadequate instruction, socio-economic disparities, standardized testing, fear of mistakes, and the digital divide all contribute to these difficulties. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving curriculum reform, teacher training, increased access to resources, and a shift in societal attitudes towards language learning. By doing so, Pakistan can equip its students with the necessary language skills to succeed in academia, careers, and cross-cultural interactions on the international stage.

Table 1
Problems in pronunciation in government primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	0	0	0	38	22.8	22.8
Moderate	16	41.0	41.0	103	61.7	61.7

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
High	23	59.0	59.0	26	15.6	15.6
Total	39	100.0	100.0	167	100.0	100.0

The provided table illustrates a comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the pronunciation challenges encountered by students in English reading within public schools. The data is categorized into three levels of deficit: Low, Moderate, and High.

Among teachers, none reported perceiving a Low deficit in students' pronunciation, while 41% identified a Moderate deficit, and 59% noted a high deficit. In contrast, students' perceptions differ; 23% felt there was a Low deficit, 62% recognized a Moderate deficit, and only 16% perceived a high deficit. The table highlights a notable divergence in perspectives between teachers and students. While teachers appear

to emphasize a higher level of pronunciation challenges, with a majority identifying a high deficit, students, on the other hand, seem to perceive their own pronunciation struggles at a Moderate level more predominantly.

It's worth noting that a significant proportion of students (22.8%) did not acknowledge a Low deficit, indicating some degree of self-awareness regarding their pronunciation issues. The observed disparities between teachers' and students' perceptions underscore the importance of open communication and a comprehensive understanding of students' viewpoints to effectively address and improve English pronunciation skills in public school settings.

Table 2

Problems in reading speed of English language in government primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	0	0	0	42	27.5	27.5
Moderate	15	38.5	38.5	83	54.2	64.2
High	24	61.5	61.5	28	18.3	18.3
Total	39	100.0	100.0	153	100.0	100.0

The provided table presents a comparison between teachers' and students' perceptions concerning speed-related challenges experienced by students during English reading within public schools. The data is segmented into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High.

From the standpoint of teachers, none indicated perceiving a Low deficit in students' reading speed, while 38.5% observed a Moderate deficit, and a larger proportion of 61.5% identified a high deficit. In contrast, students' perceptions diverged; 27.5% believed there was a Low deficit, 54.2% recognized a Moderate deficit, and 18.3%

perceived a high deficit. The table underscores a noteworthy difference in viewpoints between teachers and students regarding reading speed challenges. Teachers appear to be more inclined to label the issue as a high deficit, while students predominantly view their reading speed challenges at a Moderate level.

It is interesting to observe that a substantial percentage of students (27.5%) acknowledge even a Low deficit in their reading speed, suggesting that students are fairly self-aware of their reading pace. The disparities in the interpretations between teachers and students emphasize the

significance of effective communication and mutual understanding to address reading

speed challenges in the context of English education in public schools.

Table 3

Problems in English language comprehension in government primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	4	10.3	10.3	45	29.4	29.4
Moderate	12	30.8	30.8	90	58.8	58.8
High	23	59.0	59.0	18	11.8	11.8
Total	39	100.0	100.0	153	100.0	100.0

The table is divided into three levels of deficit: Low, Moderate, and High. The data showcases the frequency and percentage of respondents who hold each perception within these categories.

According to teachers' perceptions, 10.3% of them consider the comprehension problems to be at a Low deficit level, 30.8% perceive it as Moderate, and the majority of 59.0% believe it to be at a high deficit level. On the other hand, students' perceptions reveal a different perspective. Only 29.4% of students view the deficit as Low, while a

significantly higher percentage of 58.8% see it as Moderate, and a mere 11.8% perceive it as High. Evidently, there exists a notable dissonance between teachers' and students' viewpoints on the severity of comprehension problems. Teachers tend to perceive the problems as more severe compared to how students themselves perceive them. These differences in perception could potentially impact instructional strategies and support mechanisms implemented in public schools to address English reading comprehension issues.

Table 4

Problems in reading of English language in government primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	0	0	0	40	26.1	26.1
Moderate	14	35.9	35.9	94	61.4	61.4
High	25	64.1	64.1	19	12.4	12.4
Total	39	100.0	100.0	153	100.0	100.0

The table is categorized into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High, with corresponding frequencies and percentages of respondents for each perception.

According to teachers' perceptions, none of them indicates a Low deficit level in English reading difficulties. Instead, the majority of teachers, accounting for 64.1%, perceive the difficulties to be at a high deficit level. Conversely, students' perceptions reveal a different view. While 26.1% of

students believe the difficulties are at a Low level, a larger percentage of 61.4% view them as Moderate, and only 12.4% consider them to be at a high level.

The table illustrates a noticeable disparity between teachers' and students' viewpoints on the severity of English reading difficulties. Teachers tend to see the difficulties as more severe than the students themselves do. Such differences in perception can significantly influence the

design of appropriate interventions and support strategies to address these challenges effectively within public school systems.

Table 5

Problems in pronunciation in private primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	4	7.0	7.0	38	22.8	22.8
Moderate	31	54.4	54.4	103	61.7	61.7
High	22	38.6	38.6	26	15.6	15.6
Total	57	100.0	100.0	167	100.0	100.0

The table is categorized into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High, along with the frequencies and percentages of respondents reflecting each perception.

Teachers' perceptions reveal that 7.0% of them consider the pronunciation problems to be at a Low deficit level, while the majority of 54.4% perceive them as Moderate and 38.6% view them as High. On the other hand, students' perceptions show slightly different figures. A smaller portion of 22.8% of students see the pronunciation problems as Low, while a significant majority of 61.7%

perceive them as Moderate, and 15.6% consider them to be at a High deficit level. The table highlights a discrepancy between the perspectives of teachers and students regarding the severity of pronunciation problems. Teachers tend to regard these issues as more pronounced compared to students' viewpoints. Such variations in perception can significantly impact the development of targeted strategies and approaches aimed at improving pronunciation skills among students within private school settings.

Table 6

Problems in reading speed of English language in private primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	3	5.3	5.3	35	21.0	21.0
Moderate	28	49.1	49.1	96	57.5	57.5
High	26	45.6	45.6	36	21.6	21.6
Total	57	100.0	100.0	167	100.0	100.0

The table categorizes these problems into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High, accompanied by the frequencies and percentages representing each perception.

From the teachers' perspective, 5.3% of them perceive the speed problems as Low, while almost half (49.1%) view them as Moderate and a substantial portion (45.6%) see them as High. Conversely, students' perceptions show different figures. A smaller

percentage of 21.0% of students perceive the speed problems as Low, while a larger majority (57.5%) perceive them as Moderate, and 21.6% consider them to be at a High deficit level.

This table highlights a disparity between the viewpoints of teachers and students regarding the severity of speed-related problems. Teachers tend to regard these issues as more substantial compared to the

perspectives of students. These differing perceptions can play a pivotal role in tailoring effective strategies to address speed-related

challenges during English reading among students within private school contexts.

Table 7

Problems in English language comprehension in private primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	11	19.3	19.3	24	14.4	14.4
Moderate	20	35.1	35.1	100	59.9	59.9
High	26	45.6	45.6	43	25.7	25.7
Total	57	100.0	100.0	167	100.0	100.0

The table classifies these problems into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High, along with the frequencies and percentages reflecting each perception.

Teachers' perceptions show that 19.3% of them perceive the comprehension problems as Low, while 35.1% consider them to be at a Moderate deficit level, and the highest proportion of 45.6% views them as High. On the contrary, students' viewpoints exhibit slightly different statistics. A smaller portion of 14.4% of students perceives the comprehension problems as Low, whereas a significant majority (59.9%) perceive them as Moderate, and 25.7% view them as High.

The table underscores a divergence between teachers' and students' perspectives on the severity of comprehension problems. Teachers tend to see these issues as more pronounced compared to students' perceptions. Such differing viewpoints play a crucial role in shaping targeted interventions and strategies to address comprehension challenges during English reading among students within private schools.

Table 8

Problems in reading of English language in private primary classes

	Responses of Teachers			Responses of Students		
	N	%	Valid %	N	%	Valid %
Low	5	7.0	7.0	29	16.8	16.8
Moderate	27	49.1	49.1	110	66.5	66.5
High	25	43.9	43.9	28	16.8	16.8
Total	57	100.0	100.0	167	100.0	100.0

The table categorizes these difficulties into three deficit levels: Low, Moderate, and High, alongside the corresponding frequencies and percentages for each perception.

From the teachers' standpoint, 7.0% of them perceive the English reading difficulties as Low, while a substantial portion (49.1%) sees them as Moderate, and 43.9% view them as High. In contrast, students' perspectives

reveal slightly different figures. A smaller proportion of 16.8% of students perceive the difficulties as Low, while a significant majority (66.5%) consider them to be at a Moderate level, and another 16.8% perceive them as High.

This table emphasizes a difference in the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the severity of English reading

difficulties. Teachers tend to see these challenges as more significant compared to students' viewpoints. These contrasting perceptions influence the design and

implementation of targeted strategies and interventions aimed at mitigating English reading difficulties among students within private school environments.

Table 9

T-test in English reading difficulties as perceived by teachers and students

	N	M	S. D.	p
Teachers	96	4.019	.531	.026
Students	320	3.578	.518	

According to the data, teachers (96 respondents) have an average mean perception score of 4.019 with a standard deviation of 0.531. In contrast, students (320 respondents) have a slightly lower mean perception score of 3.578 with a standard deviation of 0.518. The significance value (Sig.) of 0.026 suggests a statistically significant difference between teachers' and students' perceptions of the reading problems. This indicates a divergence in how teachers and students perceive the challenges faced by students in English reading at the primary level, with teachers having a slightly higher mean perception score compared to students.

Main Findings

1. Both public and private school teachers perceived a higher intensity of pronunciation problems among students compared to the students' self-perception. This suggests that teachers are more attuned to the difficulties students face in correctly pronouncing English words during reading.
2. Teachers from both types of schools also reported more speed-related reading problems among students than the students themselves acknowledged. This indicates that teachers observe a greater challenge in students' reading speed, possibly influenced by syllable recognition and

- language processing issues.
3. Both groups, teachers and students, recognized higher levels of comprehension difficulties in English reading. However, teachers perceived these problems to be more intense than the students did. This could point towards potential issues in text understanding and contextual analysis.
4. Teachers across public and private schools observed more intense difficulties in English reading among students than the students perceived themselves. This consistent trend signifies that educators are more aware of the challenges students face in reading English texts, encompassing pronunciation, speed, and comprehension.
5. The study revealed a significant difference in perception between teachers and students regarding English reading difficulties. Teachers consistently perceived a higher level of difficulties compared to the students' own assessment. This finding emphasizes the importance of effective communication and understanding between teachers and students regarding language challenges.

So it is concluded that the study found a notable discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of English reading difficulties. Teachers tend to have a more

critical view of students' struggles in pronunciation, speed, and comprehension. This highlights the need for open dialogue and targeted interventions to bridge this perception gap and address students' actual needs effectively.

English reading difficulties are prevalent across both public and private schools in Gujranwala district. However, educators' heightened awareness of these difficulties underscores the urgency for tailored teaching approaches, focused remedial strategies, and comprehensive curriculum enhancements to support students' language development.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings it is recommended that teachers should receive regular training and professional development workshops to enhance their understanding of various reading difficulties. This will enable them to better diagnose and address specific challenges students face.

Incorporating interactive and communicative teaching methods can facilitate improved pronunciation, reading speed, and comprehension. Engaging in activities that encourage speaking, listening, and critical thinking can make the learning process more effective.

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