INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909

Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026

AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF READING SKILLS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21916111

Received	Accepted	Published
30 January 2026	15 March 2026	21 March 2026

ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is an essential part of learning the language and the required English textbook is *the main teaching tool for Pakistani secondary school learners. The present investigation evaluates the reading skills of English language learners at the secondary level and English textbook in developing students' reading comprehension and scrutinized the relationship between the textbook's content, structure, and complexity and reading skills development. The objectives of the study are (1) to investigate the role of English textbook in developing reading comprehension at the secondary level and (2) to analyze the content, structure, and complexity of the English textbook in relation to reading skills development. A descriptive, quantitative research design was used. A structured questionnaire and a reading comprehension achievement test were used to gather data from 200 students of government secondary schools using convenience sampling. While the Chi-square test was utilized to ascertain the relationship between textbook features and students' reading comprehension achievement, descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were employed to examine students' perceptions. The results showed that students generally thought the English textbook was reasonably efficient in helping them strengthen their reading comprehension skills, especially when it came to comprehending main ideas, recognizing textual nuances, expanding their vocabulary, and increasing their enthusiasm to read. However, the majority of children showed poor to mediocre reading comprehension on the achievement test, indicating inadequate development of higher-order reading skills. The study comes to the conclusion that strengthening the structure, content, and instructional activities of textbooks can improve students' reading comprehension and facilitate more successful secondary English language learning.*

Keywords: *English language learners, Secondary schools, English textbook, reading comprehension, ESL.*

INTRODUCTION

The present investigation intends to evaluate how effectively English textbook supports the growth of students' reading abilities by examining its content, structure, and complexity. By examining the text options, thematic structure, linguistic features, and amount of cognitive demands, the study proposes to find out whether the resources are adequate to the learners' developmental needs and to the curriculum standards. Reading is one of the most fundamental capabilities for secondary

school language learners. Reading is also the cornerstone of academic achievement across all subject areas. It is a process that includes comprehension, interpretation, and critical analysis in addition to being a way to decode textual symbols.

English is vital for success in the classroom and at business as it is the worldwide language of communication, education, and technology. The development of reading abilities is especially crucial in nations where English is taught as a second or foreign language since reading provides the basis for both lifetime learning and general language ability. Globally, proficiency in the English language is now necessary for success in both the classroom and the workplace. Reading is unique among the four fundamental language skills; speaking, listening, reading, and writing because it facilitates information availability, improves comprehension, and fosters critical thinking. Textbooks are the main teaching tools in many public schools in Pakistan, where English instruction is required from the very beginning of schooling. Provincial textbook boards provide English textbooks that are designed to enhance vocabulary, literary appreciation, and reading comprehension. Concerns exist, nevertheless, over whether it actually support or limit learners' reading abilities.

At the secondary level, language learners typically lack suitable English reading skills. Since secondary school is a critical time in a learner's career transition, the researchers attempted to investigate the reading issues faced by secondary school English language learners and the state of learners at various stages of English language development.

On the basis of Jayadiningrat and Widiani (2021), reading is a sophisticated cognitive process that entails both producing meaning and describing signals. As a result, reading becomes a fundamental ability required to acquire a variety of specialized information (Damanik & Zainil, 2019; Hidayat & Rohati, 2020; Koch & Spörer, 2017). Reading has grown in significance and impacts many facets of life in today's sophisticated culture (Hidayat & Rohati, 2020; Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Salikin et al., 2017). Reading comprehension is essential because it enables students to comprehend topics rather than merely read mechanically (Mardiana & Hidayat, 2019; Oakhill et al., 2014). As a result, reading comprehension is taught to language learners in school, particularly in junior high school.

While using English textbook to improve reading abilities, teachers and language learners encounter a number of difficulties. It can be challenging to engage students and finish lessons in the scheduled time when teachers discover that the texts' level of difficulty does not always correspond with their reading proficiency. Teachers are left to provide extra content because the textbook frequently lacks explicit reading skills, various activities, and enough scaffolding. Conversely, learners find it difficult to understand texts that are not always applicable to their experiences, foreign contexts, and complex vocabulary, which lowers their motivation. Their capacity to acquire independent reading abilities is further hampered by a lack of practice and critical reading chances, which makes it more difficult for teachers and language learners to provide effective reading instruction.

One of the instructional tools used by teachers is textbooks (Kusumawardhani et al., 2020; Mizbani & Chalak, 2017). Textbooks are the common learning assistance used by teachers (Ayu & Indrawati, 2019; Mahayanti et al., 2017; Syamsi et al., 2013). Typically used in classrooms to enhance education and learning, textbooks comprise of illustrations, diagrams, texts, exercises, and other materials (Fen & Poh, 2015; Tayyeh et al., 2021).

A system known as the Single National Curriculum (SNC) guarantees that every learner in a nation or country receives the same education in every area. Everyone gets an equal opportunity in the country's educational framework thanks this type of system, which minimizes scholastic disparities brought forth, particularly in Pakistan, by madaris; private schools, and public or government schools. The term describes a single educational framework consists of the curriculum, the medium of instruction, and the methods for evaluating each student (Jahanzaib, Fatima, & e Nayab, 2022).

1.2 Objectives of the study:

1. To investigate the role of English textbook in developing reading comprehension at the secondary level.
2. To analyze the content, structure, and complexity of the English textbook in relation to reading skills development.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. How effectively does the English textbook develop students' reading comprehension?
2. In what ways does the content, structure, and complexity of English textbook support or limit the development of reading skills?

2 Literature review:

The ability to read is important not only to learn a second language, but also to be successful in school in general. Several studies have shown that good reading teaching enhances learners' vocabulary development, comprehension, and critical thinking skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Several studies of SLLs have shown that over 75% of the reasons that many students experience difficulties with reading comprehension are due to teacher-centered instructional practices, a lack of vocabulary, and an insufficient amount of authentic text (Nation, 2009). Many assessment studies have shown that reading textbooks play an important role in developing students' reading skills; however, the effectiveness of reading textbooks is influenced by the quality of reading exercise, the difficulty of the language, and the level of students' cognitive development (Richards, 2015). Although English is a mandatory subject in Pakistan, but in secondary level students have been observed to have weak reading skills, primarily because of rote learning and lack of attention to reading techniques (Mahboob, 2017). Effective textbooks should incorporate tasks and real-world resources that enhance students' communication abilities, claim McDonough and Shaw (2003). Reading is a cooperative activity that involves decoding, comprehension, and interpretation, claim Grabe and Stoller (2011). Resources that facilitate these processes through scaffolded assignments are necessary for effective reading education.

Grammar-translation approaches often dominate English textbooks, with little emphasis on reading sub skills like skimming, scanning, and inference, according to study done in Pakistan by Farooq (2012) and Mahmood (2011). Khan and Mahmood (2012) found that while the Punjab Textbook Board English textbooks featured reading passages, they rarely encouraged critical engagement. Similarly, some researchers found that comprehension exercises often favor recall over higher-order thinking. Reading comprehension in language learners involves several key skills and strategies that help readers extract meaning from text efficiently and appropriately depending on their purpose. Skimming, scanning, extensive, and intensive reading are some strategies that help to read text. The four language abilities are the main emphasis of language instruction and acquisition, and they play a significant and essential part in our everyday lives when it comes to communicating and receiving information through reading or listening to others. Speech and writing are the cornerstones of language instruction. Thus, while teaching a language in the classroom, we take these linguistic abilities into account.

Reading is an intentional action. One may read for informational purposes, to confirm preexisting knowledge, or to evaluate the ideas or writing style of another author. A person may read for pleasure or to improve their language skills (Bhattarai, 2020, p. 12). Reading has several purposes depending on the situation. Reading is regarded as the most important skill for teamwork in the classroom and in daily life, and this opinion is supported. English is required and frequently used as the language of teaching in higher education in order to search for information and gain knowledge (Sultana 2014). Reading is therefore being valued in the field of education. Additionally, it is regarded as one of the most difficult subjects and needs more focus in any educational setting. Amin, R. (2018) and colleagues claim that employing multimedia projectors as visual aids increases pupils' reading attention. A variety of visual aids, such as pictures and movies, enhance students in comprehending the text's conceptual potential. Additionally, visual aids help readers and the text develop a genuine

relationship. As stated by Yunus, Salehi, and John (2013), it speeds up and breathes life into the reading experience. There are different reading approaches that are as follows: predicting, visualizing, making connections, summarizing, questioning and inferring. Reading comprehension is the knack to evaluate literature, understand its meaning, and incorporate it with past knowledge. Reading comprehension, as defined by Partnership (2005), referenced in Diaz, S. & Laguna, J. (2013:137), is the process of deriving meaning from a text in order to comprehension.

3. Methodology

The present investigation is mainly quantitative in nature and descriptive in methodology. It is predicated on an evaluation of secondary English language learners' reading skills. To get information from the respondents, the researcher employed the survey method. Students' performance was assessed by achievement test. Their answers were characterized and statically examined using straightforward mean, frequency and percentage techniques and Chi- square analysis.

3.1 Population:

Secondary-level English language learners enrolled in Tehsil Bhera, District Sargodha, government secondary schools made up the study's population. For the study, ten schools; five secondary schools for boys and five secondary schools for girls, were chosen. These educational institutions were selected to guarantee that both male and female students were represented. English teachers from the chosen schools took part in semi-structured interviews, with grade 9 students serving as the main participants. Students in Grade 9 who were following the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board's (PCTB) required English textbook were the participants.

3.2 Sample and the Sampling Strategy:

Convenience sampling was used in the study because it allowed the researcher to choose subjects who were easily available. Two hundred ninth-grade learners from 10 government secondary schools in Tehsil Bhera, District Sargodha, made up the sample. To guarantee representation of both genders, five schools for boys and five for girls were included in the selection process. Each school had about 20 learners chosen.

3.4 Study Area:

Tehsil Bhera in district Sargodha was the investigation's location, and secondary school students provided the data. Based on the local population, the researcher continued this examination. In order to assess the reading abilities of English language learners, the researcher had chosen two hundred English language learners and ten English teachers of the selected secondary schools.

Following schools are attended for collecting data.

Sr. no.	School name (Boys)	Sr.no.	School name (Girls)
1	GHS BHERA	6	GGHSS BHERA
2	GHS HAZOOR PUR	7	GGHS HAZOOR PUR
3	GHS MIANI	8	GGHS MIANI
4	GHS WAQAS ASHRAF SHAHEED	9	GGHS KALYAN PUR BALA
5	GHS CHAK SAIDA	10	GGHS WADHAN

3.3 Pilot testing:

At G.G.H.S. Kalyan Pur Bala, pilot testing is carried out to verify the reliability and validity of the instruments. Ten secondary school learners of G.G.H.S Kalyan Pur Bala participated in the pilot study that was done before the main investigation. The pilot study's objective was to evaluate the questionnaire and the reading comprehension achievement test's comprehensibility, applicability, and clarity. The instruments' arrangement and language were improved and unclear issues were

identified through participants input. The completed questionnaire and achievement test were given to the study's participants after the required changes were made.

3.5 Data collection tools and techniques:

To gather data, the following methods and instruments were employed: Questionnaire for students and Achievement test. Students were administered questionnaire of 17 items divided into two sections to gauge the students' responses about the English textbook whether it helped them in their reading comprehension or not. Section one contained seven items that evaluated at the textbook's function in reading comprehension development. Section two contained ten items that assessed the English textbook's content, organization, and complexity in connection to the development of reading abilities. A five-point likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 denoting disagree, 3 denoting neutral, 4 denoting agree, and 5 denoting strongly agree, was used to grade each questionnaire item, with the exception of item 1, which assessed the frequency of textbook use. Achievement test created by the investigator was taken from the learners to measure the learners' actual performance of reading comprehension. The test comprised two translation passages, multiple-choice questions (MCQs), comprehension questions of one reading passage. The passages were created to assess students' knowledge of the key ideas, their capacity to recognize supporting details, their ability to deduce meanings from context, their ability to respond to comprehension questions, their ability to accurately translate material, and their overall reading comprehension. The overall results were divided into five achievement levels: Fail (below 40), Poor (40 to 59), Average (60 to 69), Good (70 to 89), and Excellent (90 to 100). Students' answers were graded using a pre-established marking scheme.

Data Analysis

3.6 Data Collection Process:

The following steps are taken by the researcher to collect the primary data:

a) After visiting the selected schools, the researcher has asked the appropriate authorities for permission to talk with the students pursuing secondary education.

b) After building a rapport with the interested students, the researcher has explained the study's approach and suggestion.

d) The researcher has given them a test question paper.

d) After the exam is over, the researcher has collected the response papers.

3.7 Data Analysis Technique:

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 was used to analyze the gathered data. The results of the achievement exam and students' answers to the questionnaire were summarized using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The relationship between the achievement test results and the chosen questionnaire factors pertaining to the content, structure, and complexity of the English textbook was investigated using inferential statistics, namely the Chi-square test. In order to meet the test's assumptions, a few variables were recoded by merging response categories before doing the Chi-square analysis. While recoding was only used for inferential analysis, the descriptive statistics were computed using the original response categories. The Chi-square test's assumptions were evaluated after recoding by looking at the anticipated cell frequencies. Most studies revealed no predicted cell frequencies below five, and the majority of the contingency tables met the necessary assumptions. The lowest predicted cell frequency remained above one, showing that the breaches were insignificant, even though a small percentage of cells in a few tables had expected frequencies below five. As a result, the Chi-square test was thought to be suitable for examining the correlations between the variables.

3.7 Ethical Concerns:

The most precious treasures in study are ethical concerns, which should be followed. The researcher has sought permission from the appropriate authority because the study involves human individuals as participants. In this study, two hundred English language learners from ten different public schools joyfully and self-motivated have taken part. With the exception of the data that

is mentioned, all of the data produced for this study is unique to the researcher, who has taken every measure to avoid plagiarism.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Section 1:

Investigation of the role of English textbook in developing reading comprehension at the secondary level:

In this investigation, the data taken from the participants is analyzed through descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and mean scores). The mean scores, percentages and frequencies are presented below in the form of tables.

Table 1

Items	Never n (%)	Rarely n (%)	Occasionally n (%)	Weekly n (%)	Daily n (%)	Mean
1How often do you use the English textbook for reading practice?	40(20%)	54(27%)	42(21%)	35(17.5%)	29(14.5%)	2.715
Items	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean
2. The English textbook helps me to understand the main idea of a passage.	5(2.5%)	30(15%)	69(34.5%)	72(36%)	24(12%)	3.40
3. The exercises in the textbook improve my ability to find details in a text.	11(5.5%)	33(16.5%)	53(26.5%)	59(29.5%)	44(22%)	3.46
4. The textbook develops my ability to guess meanings of new words from context.	15(7.5%)	45(22.5%)	47(23.5%)	60(30%)	33(16.5%)	3.255
5. The textbook improves my ability to summarize texts.	19(9.5%)	32(16%)	54(27%)	66(33%)	29(14.5%)	3.27
6. Reading passages in the textbook are interesting and motivate me to read.	13(6.5%)	31(15.5%)	46(23%)	73(36.5%)	37(18.5%)	3.45
7. The textbook helps me to improve my reading speed.	13(6.5%)	37(18.5%)	61(30.5%)	61(30.5%)	28(14%)	3.27

Students' opinions about the English textbook's contribution to secondary reading comprehension development are displayed in Table 1. The results show that even if the textbook improves a number of reading comprehension skills, students still rarely use it for regular reading practice. Only a tiny percentage of students reported utilizing the English textbook regularly for reading practice, with 14.5% reporting daily use and 17.5% reporting weekly use, according to the data. On the other hand, 27% of respondents said they used the textbook infrequently, 21% said they used it occasionally, and 20% said they never used it for reading practice. For independent reading activities, the overall mean score (M = 2.72) indicates a comparatively low level of regular engagement with the required textbook.

Students' opinions of textbooks' contribution to reading comprehension were largely good, even though they were used infrequently. With a mean

score of 3.40, over half of the respondents (48%) agreed or strongly agreed that the textbook helped them understand a passage's primary idea. This suggests that the reading materials successfully enhance literal comprehension. In a similar vein, 51.5% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the textbook exercises enhanced their capacity to find particular features in a text, resulting in the highest mean score of 3.46 among the reading comprehension questions. This result implies that the comprehension exercises help students become more adept at deriving specific information from reading passages.

Regarding the textbook's contribution to the development of contextual vocabulary, summarizing abilities, and reading motivation, and reading fluency, students likewise expressed somewhat favorable opinions. A moderate degree of agreement is shown by the mean scores for improving summarization abilities (M = 3.27), encouraging students to read through engaging passages (M = 3.45), predicting the meanings of unknown terms from context (M = 3.26), and increasing reading speed (M = 3.27). Nonetheless, a sizable percentage of respondents chose the neutral response category for each of these items, indicating that not all students consistently believe the textbook is successful in fostering higher-order reading skills.

Table 2

Item	Fail n (%)	Poor n (%)	Average n (%)	Good n (%)	Excellent n (%)	Mean
Achievement test	15(7.5%)	62(31%)	60(30%)	59(29.5%)	4(2.0%)	2.875

The distribution of students' accomplishment test results, which were used to evaluate how well the English textbook develops reading comprehension at the secondary level, is shown in Table 2. With a mean score of 2.88, the results show that learners' overall reading comprehension skill was moderate. According to the results, the greatest percentage of learners (31%) had poor reading comprehension, followed by average (30%) and strong (29.5%) reading comprehension. On the other hand, 7.5% of the participants failed the achievement exam and only 2% achieved an excellent level of performance. These results imply that while a sizable portion of students demonstrated adequate reading comprehension, very few attained a high degree of competency.

4.2. Section 2:

Analysis of the content, structure, and complexity of the English textbook in relation to reading skills development:

The results of the achievement test and questionnaire administered to students using the Chi-Square test are displayed in this part as tables, followed by an explanation.

Table 3

Questionnaire Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Decision
Topics are relevant to my age	2.980	4	.561	Not significant
Topics are relevant to my interest	13.217	4	.010	Significant
Reading passages are organized logically	11.907	4	.018	Significant
The textbook provides variety of stories	22.457	4	<.001	Significant
The textbook provides variety of poems	8.575	4	.073	Not significant
The textbook provides variety of essays	2.489	4	.647	Not significant
Vocabulary level is appropriate	8.034	4	.090	Not significant
Passage length is suitable	9.185	4	.057	Not significant
Difficulty increases gradually	5.087	4	.278	Not significant
Exercises match the passage level	16.785	4	.002	Significant

The results of the Chi-square analysis exploring the connection between students' reading comprehension achievement and their opinions of the English textbook content, structure, and difficulty are shown in Table 3. The results demonstrate that while some textbook features were not statistically substantially related to learners' reading achievement, others were.

According to the analysis, students' performance on achievement tests was strongly correlated with how well textbook themes matched their interests (χ^2 = 13.217, df = 4, p =.010). According to this research, students were more likely to score higher on reading comprehension tests if they thought the material covered in the textbooks was engaging. Intriguing and captivating subjects seem to boost students' reading motivation, promote active engagement, and enhance their comprehension of reading passages. This emphasizes how crucial it is to choose reading materials based on students' interests in order to improve reading comprehension.

The logical arrangement of reading passages also showed a strong correlation with students' performance (χ^2 = 11.907, df = 4, p =.018). The results show that reading passages that are rationally ordered and well-structured help students understand the material better by making it easier for them to follow the ideas. Texts that are well-structured make it easier for students to comprehend supporting details, recognize the key concepts, and interpret textual information.

Of all the factors analyzed, reading achievement was most strongly correlated with the availability of a range of stories (χ^2 = 22.457, df = 4, p <.001). This result implies that exposing pupils to a variety of reading materials enhances their reading comprehension skills. A wide range of stories gives students a diversity of subjects, situations, and linguistic patterns, which boosts reading interest, increases vocabulary, and improves comprehension abilities. Textual diversity is a crucial component of a successful English textbook, as demonstrated by the strong correlation.

Additionally, there was a strong correlation between students' accomplishment and how well comprehension exercises matched the reading passages' level (χ^2 = 16.785, df = 4, p =.002). This finding suggests that students' reading comprehension skills improve when reading tasks match the passages' degree of difficulty. Appropriate exercises offer chances to successfully use comprehension techniques, promote critical engagement with readings, and reinforce learning.

On the other hand, there were no statistically significant correlations found between students' accomplishment and the topics' relevance to their age, the variety of poems and essays, vocabulary level, passage length, or the progressive escalation of textbook difficulty (p >.05). These results show that these textbook features were not significant predictors of students' reading comprehension ability in the current study.

5. Discussion:

The findings indicate that the English textbook has reflected reasonable support for comprehension and vocabulary recognition and does not develop higher order reading abilities such as critical analysis, fluency and summarization. The findings of students' achievement test have reflected few achievement results, although they have confirmed some improvements in comprehension and detail recognition.

The second part has emphasized that every aspect of a textbook has not an equal impact on academic performance. Higher accomplishment scores were shown to be strongly correlated with interest-based subjects, logical passage structure, a diversity of stories, and exercises that matched the text level, according to Chi-Square analysis. On the other hand, steady difficulty progression, age relevance, and the inclusion of poems and essays have not any discernible effect. Similar worries have been found in the teacher interviews in this section; several teachers have expressed reservations about the language and difficulty of the textbook while remaining indifferent regarding its appropriateness.

6. Conclusion:

It is concluded that secondary school English textbook in Punjab offers a foundation for reading instruction; it does not fulfill the developmental needs of learners. Although it is found that it makes its contributions in vocabulary acquisition and to some extent in comprehension, yet it is deficient for supporting in summarization, fluency, and critical

thinking, although it contributes vocabulary acquisition and literal comprehension to some degree. It is determined that textbook fulfills curriculum objectives, yet revision are necessary to satisfy the requirements of different learners. It is concluded through this investigation that complex vocabulary, passage length, cultural illusions, and deficient practice exercises are all prominent hurdles for effective reading learning.

7. Recommendations:

1. Update textbook reading passages to incorporate a greater range of real-world reading texts and reflect students' interests.
2. To improve higher-order reading abilities, revise reading passages and comprehension tasks.
3. Improve textbook reading passages' arrangement and order by using a methodical textbook study procedure.
4. Instead of depending solely on contextual guesses, include organized vocabulary support in reading passages.
5. Schedule reading exercises in the classroom to increase students' regular involvement with textbook reading.

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