

The Role of Extensive Reading, Fluency, and Motivation in Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills of Undergraduates in an ESL Context: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This study explores the effect of explicit reading strategies on improving the reading comprehension ability of undergraduate students in India, where English is the second language (ESL). This study critically evaluates the applicability of different reading strategies, such as extensive reading, encouragement of the development of fluency, and encouragement of learner motivation which specifically deal with issues faced by ESL learners in the Indian context. Even though the English language is popular in academic and professional spheres, Indian ESL students have problems with reading comprehension because they lack the opportunity to interact with the English language beyond the classroom to enhance their reading skills. The present study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a literature review on the literature that talks about the role played by explicit reading strategies in Indian ESL setting in terms of books, theses, and journal articles. The results show the abundance of reading programs that positively impact vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension, resulting in the elevation of reading proficiency and the significant role motivation has on the interest of the students in reading materials. The study also highlights situational factors, such as how classroom dynamics were integrated, the type of training provided to teachers, and how technological development was used to enhance the efficiency of these interventions. The paper also postulates the means by which these strategies may be incorporated into the ESL curriculum, bearing in mind the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students. This research also provides recommendations for future studies, including conducting studies on longitudinal effects and cross-cultural comparisons.

Keywords: Explicit Reading Strategies, Reading Comprehension, Extensive Reading, Fluency, Motivation, ESL Curriculum Integration, Indian ESL Learners and Digital Resources

Introduction

In India, English is the second language (ESL) and is applied in academic, professional, and social contexts. Higher education requires proficiency in the English language, and numerous undergraduate study participants have problems with reading comprehension, which is a basic academic ability. In India, ESL learners experience problems such as lack of exposure to English beyond the classroom, inadequate use of quality sources, and absence of effective reading strategies (Giri et al., 2023). Comprehension of reading in ESL situations is more than a mere word decoding; it is a process that involves interpretation and a critical approach to reading texts, something that is not easy for Indian students with limited exposure to language in real life.

Cultural and linguistic barriers exist between English and native languages among students. Traditional teaching in India focuses significantly on rote learning rather than on analytical and critical reading skills (Sharma, 2022), which reveals the necessity of systematic reading strategies. Explicit reading strategies involve certain techniques that target reading competencies, reading decoding, vocabulary, reading fluency, and monitoring reading comprehension. These plans provide systematic means of understanding texts which leads to success in studies. It has been found that explicit instruction is one of the most effective means to help learners understand complex texts and apply the strategies (Mekuria, 2024). In India's ESL environment, strategising on the specific issues of students is becoming increasingly popular.

One of the best techniques for improving reading comprehension is extensive reading, as it enables learners to read a lot of text in an easy and stress-free manner. Studies have also found that extensive reading makes it possible to acquire vocabulary, reading fluency, and general understanding (Krashen, 2004). Extensive reading programs can be evaluated in India, where students exposed to English in the classroom are not usually exposed to English outside the classroom, providing them with a relatively long overdue chance to use the language in a meaningful way. Research on extensive reading among Indian ESL learners has shown that it has a positive effect on reading proficiency (Tabassum, 2023) and the ability to enhance vocabulary and comprehension.

Fluency is another significant factor in reading comprehension. Understanding depends on fluency, since readers who have difficulties with fluency are concerned with word recognition but not with the meaning of the text as a whole. Repeated reading and guided practice are useful explicit strategies that can supplement reading fluency in India, especially among ESL learners (Rao, 2018). These would give the automaticity that is required by the students to read and understand.

Motivation, other than fluency, is a primary factor in reading comprehension. It is also interesting to read when it is challenging, and learners who are motivated use reading strategies more frequently than the ones who are unmotivated (Dornyei, Z. 2001).

Studies have indicated that intrinsic motivation is essential for the formation of reading comprehension in the ESL setting (Adhikari and Shrestha, 2023). In India, where academic performance is the focus, intrinsic motivation may be built through the use of culturally appropriate reading materials. The learning environment should be favourable to motivate students and increase their understanding. Clear reading instructions should be prescribed to overcome the issues faced by Indian ESL students. Educators can enhance students' reading comprehension by emphasising extensive reading, fluency building, and motivation improvement. Evidence indicates that there is a necessity to prepare specialised strategies with regard to the learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of this review is to explore how these strategies can affect reading comprehension in Indian ESL classrooms, with a focus on extensive reading, fluency, and motivation (Pradhan, J.S. 2021). This review explores explicit reading strategies in the Indian ESL setting using books, theses, and journal articles with respect to undergraduate learners. It outlines effective strategies that emphasise extensive reading, fluency, and motivation based on reading comprehension as a developing multi-constructed procedure. This study examines how such elements can be incorporated into ESL classrooms in India.

Research Objectives of the Study

- To critically explore the effect of explicit reading strategies.
- To examine how extensively reading, fluency, and motivation can promote reading comprehension in the ESL setting.
- To determine the most efficient ways to respond to special dilemmas.
- To test the impact of teacher training, cultural variables, and technology.



The review paper is a systematic review of the available literature on explicit reading strategies in the Indian situation with regards to the role of extensive reading, fluency, and motivation in enhancing the reading comprehension ability of undergraduate learners studying English as a Second Language (ESL). The review process was organised and founded on the selection and evaluation of existing books, theses, and journal articles on the topic and synthesis of the obtained information.

Selection of Literature

The search strategy was extensive to locate and select the relevant articles, such as ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Research Gate academic databases. The keywords applied to find articles on the topic varied and included explicit reading strategies, reading comprehension, extensive reading, fluency, motivation, and Indian ESL learners in different combinations. Articles which involved ESL students in India and directly addressed the issue of reading strategies and how extensive reading, fluency, and motivation affected reading comprehension were chosen. To ensure that the latest and most up-to-date research was included, publications that were peer-reviewed and published not earlier than 2000 and not later than 2025 were prioritised. These papers were filtered through numerous academic journals and educational books that encompassed a wide spectrum of research and methodological perspectives. Other types of studies reviewed included qualitative and quantitative studies, experimental, descriptive, case studies, and others to have a comprehensive analysis of this topic.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Very specific inclusion criteria were formulated to narrow down research that particularly discusses the needs of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in the context of the Indian scenario. The articles that were used in the review were conducted in India, and they analysed how explicit reading strategies, such as extensive reading, development of fluency, and motivation, could help enhance reading comprehension skills. Only studies that measured or discussed the effect of these strategies on reading comprehension were considered. The publications reviewed were narrowed down to peer-reviewed

journals or academic press publications; hence, only authoritative and scholarly literature was used. Studies that were not centred on the Indian ESL context and reading comprehension were excluded. To maintain the academic integrity of the review, non-peer-reviewed publications and those published in nonacademic sources were excluded. The study also did not consider research on general language learning without a specific emphasis on reading comprehension strategies, as the study was aimed at assessing the reading strategies of ESL learners in India.

Data Extraction and Analysis

After removing irrelevant literature, data were extracted based on various important factors to achieve a holistic analysis. The kind of explicit reading strategies used in each study were examined, which comprised extensive reading strategies, fluency-building, and motivation-enhancing strategies. The results of these strategies were analysed regarding their impact on improving the reading comprehension of ESL learners. The research methods employed by the studies were also reviewed, such as the population of participants, which comprised undergraduate ESL learners. One of the checks performed to verify the robustness and validity of the findings was the research design and the use of reading comprehension measures. The concepts and underlying principles that laid down the guiding concepts for each study were also elicited by extracting the theoretical frameworks or models.

The most pertinent results of each study were selected and arranged in thematic groupings according to the research questions. This study investigated how extensive reading, the development of fluency, and motivation can help in the development of reading comprehension in the Indian ESL context. Particular attention was paid to studies which examined one or more of these components. The study also discussed the limitations of the studies, such as sample size, length of intervention, and generalisation of findings. This made it possible to critically and comprehensively evaluate the efficacy of the reading strategies reviewed, such that the effect of the reading strategies on reading comprehension could be realised.

Findings

The second part presents the results of the literature on explicit reading strategies, extensive reading, fluency development, and motivation on the development of reading comprehension skills among undergraduate students in the Indian ESL environment. This research will involve a critical analysis of the literature on reading strategies in India to inform the effectiveness, issues, and gaps in the existing ESL education practices in India.

Effectiveness of Explicit Reading Strategies in the Indian ESL Context

Explicit reading strategies have been effective in improving reading comprehension in ESL classrooms in India. Some studies have indicated that in cases where students are literally taught summarisation, prediction, questioning, and annotation strategies, their levels of interest in texts and comprehension levels improve (Patel, 2013). Through these strategies, students engage in processing information; hence, they understand the information rather than receiving it passively. As Mahapatra (2015) pointed out, direct instruction of skills such as making inferences and recognising key ideas can assist ESL learners in building their level of comprehension.

Explicit strategies are particularly practical when addressing the issues faced by Indian learners, including insufficient exposure to the English language in the classroom, vocabulary knowledge, and reading fluency (Krashen, 2004). Explicit strategies are more cognitive and interactive than rote memorisation and traditional methods, leading to better comprehension (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023). They discovered that explicit instruction of skills such as prediction and summarisation allowed students to comprehend the text of academic readings, which enhanced their reading comprehension performance.

Impact of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading practice or reading great amounts of text at a comfortable reading level for enjoyment and general understanding of reading has previously been known to be an effective strategy used to enhance vocabulary, fluency, and overall understanding of reading (Krashen, 2004). A couple

of studies have revealed that extensive reading programs have an immensely positive impact on ESL learners in India. Singh (2024) revealed that students who read widely in novels, newspapers, and other nonacademic materials achieved good vocabulary and reading comprehension development because they were exposed to more diversified language structures and contextualised vocabulary.

The problem is that there are no suitable materials in the Indian context. The texts that students can access are usually either too tricky or culturally foreign to their situation, which is why they are not able to identify with what they read (Gamit, 2017). This is opposed by students and teachers because a lot of time is spent on extended reading as compared to the academic workload. Mahapatra (2015) demonstrated that, in the case of universities affording students access to more amusing reading materials, such as contemporary fiction and short stories, students develop a more favourable attitude towards reading widely and are in a better position to understand and become competent readers.

Fluency and Its Role in Reading Comprehension

Fluency is important to understand what is read by the reader, and it is the simplicity with which the readers can read and understand. Indian ESL Research studies have also demonstrated that fluency-building activities involving reading, either through repetition or guided reading, may lead to colossal gains in reading comprehension. According to Rao (2018), students who did repeated reading were able to read faster and at higher levels. Fluency decreases cognitive load, and students are thus able to focus on inferences of text instead of attempting to decode text words (Gamit, 2017).

In addition to repeated reading, guided reading has been identified as a successful method for enhancing fluency. Scaffolding is used in this method to implicitly improve complex vocabulary and the meaning embedded in the text in the minds of students (Kumar and Wiseman, 2021). This strategy has been especially effective in Indian ESL classrooms, where most students have had little exposure to the language. Even though this method has proven to be effective, studies on the long-term sustainability of the fluency building program in Indian schools and

universities are lacking. Therefore, more studies should be conducted to establish whether fluency can be maintained in the long term without continuous intervention.

Motivational Factors

Motivation is a major factor in comprehending the reading and studying processes. Students need to be internally motivated to learn the language to engage not only in academic pursuits but also in daily life communicative situations. These outcomes, which Kheang et al. (2024) enumerate in case the students are intrinsically and to some degree extrinsically motivated, which help the students in better understanding the text are sense of purpose, interest and enthusiasm, engagement, persistence, and the awareness of the metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Perry et al. (2025) indicated that intrinsic motivation, which is based on curiosity and personal interest, has a significant effect on increasing reading performance. Lei Ma, & Zhao, Z. (2025) have discovered that there is a positive significant relationship between reading motivation and reading comprehension skills. They found that students who are more motivated to read have greater vocabulary recognition, key idea identification, and inferences. Therefore, motivation is a significant determinant of enhancing students' reading comprehension, as well as fluent and extensive reading and the application of suitable reading strategies.

Discussion

Cultural issues also considerably influence the efficiency of reading comprehension strategies in Indian ESL settings. The research discovered the following items that make the process of transferability in reading comprehension difficult:

1. Language diversity: The Indian school system is characterised by a variety of linguistic orientations of students, which makes it difficult to develop explicit reading strategies that would have an effect on all students.
2. Culturally relevant reading materials: Another problem in India is the lack of culturally relevant reading materials. Very complicated or culturally strange texts may hinder students' ability to interact with the material.

3. Classroom customs: The normal Indian classroom, which mostly involves rote memorisation and lectures, makes it difficult to embrace more interactive and critical reading techniques.

4. Socio-cultural factors: Explicit reading strategies are influenced by a number of contextual factors, such as socio-cultural factors, which determine their effectiveness in ESL Indian classrooms.

Demand for Customisation: Global studies on reading comprehension strategies must be customised to the cultural and linguistic contexts of India. Approaches that worked in Western or East Asian schools may not be directly applicable in the Indian setting.

It highlights the use of explicit reading strategies, including summarisation, prediction, questioning, and annotation, as a means to improve comprehension among Indian ESLs. Research has repeatedly shown that these strategies prompt students to read actively through texts, and their comprehension and retention of information and material are enhanced (Kheang, 2025). Their power lies in the fact that they enable students to be independent and critical readers, as they should be engaged in the learning process.

A significant advantage of explicit reading strategies is that they can be adjusted to meet the needs of various learners. In this respect, scaffolding learning, which reduces complex texts to manageable ones since learners do not have a unified background and are not equally proficient in English, is one of the applications of these strategies in Indian ESL classrooms; therefore, such direct consideration can encompass these strategies (Xi and Norris, 2021). With the help of summation and prediction, it becomes easier to study the most necessary concepts, thus students will be less hesitant with texts. Students can also reflect on the reading process with the assistance of explicit strategies, which is an essential element of elaborated coherence.

Despite being good strategies, explicit reading strategies are imperfect. Lack of preparedness and training of teachers is one of the weaknesses identified in the literature. Teachers should have proper knowledge of the reading process and teacher training methods so that the practical application of these strategies can be achieved (Krashen, 2004).

In most cases, teachers in Indian ESL settings lack adequate training or exposure to modern pedagogical practices, even though they still long to apply explicit strategies both in the classroom and outside. The use of textbooks and conventional teaching methods could be the precursors to the implementation of explicit reading strategies that require more dynamic and student-oriented methods (De, 2020).

The success of explicit reading strategies in Indian ESL classrooms is also due to several contextual issues, including socio-cultural dynamics, classroom setting, teacher training, and diversity among learners. The Indian educational system is diverse with regard to students' linguistic backgrounds, background knowledge, and learning styles (Mahapatra and Mishra, 2019). This diversity is problematic when it comes to the formulation of explicit reading approaches that can cater to the needs of all learners within the classroom. Students with rural backgrounds or non-English-speaking schools can have a particularly hard time with English texts, and more individualised methods of teaching reading strategies are necessary (Naeem et al., 2023).

The conventional Indian classroom, characterised by rote learning in the form of a lecture model of teaching, is not able to critically engage with the texts. Such an arrangement is also capable of limiting the real application of explicit reading strategies, which are presumed to involve active interaction and cognition processing (Singh, 2024). Class sizes tend to be quite large, and teachers can hardly provide individualised attention or carry out group-based reading activities, which are essential to the effectiveness of peer learning and collaborative questioning (Lee et al., 2023).

New technologies provide additional ways to enhance the efficacy of explicit reading strategies. Digital resources and the Internet can be integrated into learning to improve the gap between old and new. For example, there are apps or websites that can assist learners in building reading and vocabulary skills, which means that they can engage with the texts in a more dynamic manner (Nghia et al., 2020). Second, online platforms allow differentiated instruction; that is, teachers would be able to differentiate instruction to meet the various levels of proficiency in students. Extensive reading materials

can also be used by these technologies, which cannot be easily accessed in printed form because they are not present in the Indian educational system (Dey et al., 2022).

The results are applicable in the comparison of world research on similar ways of enhancing reading comprehension in Indian ESL classroom. The literature has discussed explicit reading strategies as a way of improving learning among ESL learners in a number of studies conducted in other countries. A study in Japan and South Korea demonstrated that direct teaching of reading strategies, such as paraphrasing and making meaning, enhances comprehension and critical thinking abilities (Kenol & Hashim, 2022). Similar outcomes have also been observed in the European setting, whereby learners of varying levels of proficiency have gained through guided and facilitated reading (Jaidka & Dhar, 2024).

However, these studies are characterised by various issues that are unique to the Indian context. In classrooms with a vastly more pronounced cultural and linguistic diversity compared to many Western or East Asian ones, such as in India, it is considerably harder to apply a single size to explicit reading instruction (Chakraborty and Dey, 2024). English is occasionally taught as a language in most countries, although in India, most students acquire English as a secondary language, so reading comprehension is even more complicated (Suar and Rout, 2023). According to Nuttall, C. (1996). Another major barrier to the application of explicit strategies in real-life situations is the absence of exposure to real materials in the English language outside the classroom.

Despite these differences, the literature has led to the conclusion that explicit reading strategies can significantly influence reading comprehension. It is the challenge of ESL teachers to modify these techniques to the specific educational and cultural context as well as to address the needs of the heterogeneous student body.

The above findings can be used to make effective recommendations to ESL teachers in India to embrace the best strategies that may be applied in explicit reading. Teachers should first emphasise reading comprehension strategies before attempting to learn new strategies. Therefore, educators should

be trained in professional development programs to learn to embrace modern reading pedagogy, utilise digital tools, and differentiate in a diverse classroom (Mondal, 2019). It is also the role of teachers to read genuine reading content, such as novels, newspapers, and online articles, so that the readers can be interested and learn more by reading (Mahapatra, 2015).

Moreover, the curriculum must incorporate extensive reading programs to allow students to read more than they would have been able to read in the classroom. Offering students a selection of reading materials of varying difficulty levels helps them learn new vocabulary and enhances their reading comprehension (Singh, 2024). They can be printed and used together with more digital content, as they will have access to a greater variety of texts, including those they are interested in.

Fluency-building methods for teaching ESL should also be included in future studies. Repeated and guided reading have been found to enhance reading speed and comprehension. Teachers should assist students with reading aloud and provide feedback on the accuracy of their reading, articulation the words or talking, and understandability (Meganathan, 2019). This feedback loop serves the purpose of helping the learners to further refine their navigability in reading, as well as, strengthening their confidence in doing so.

The final response is the promotion of an attitude towards reading using motivational techniques. The Indian ESL classrooms are so high in extrinsic motivation that the teacher needs to work towards ensuring that he can generate more intrinsic motivation by making reading tasks pleasurable as well as meaningful. This is achieved through the incorporation of culturally related content, goal-setting techniques, and rewards for the milestones of reading attainment (Gao et al., 2024).

The current body of literature offers a great deal of helpful information regarding explicit reading strategies in Indian ESL markets, although there is much to be gained in certain aspects. Second, in-depth research is required to establish the long-term effects of explicit reading strategies on reading comprehension and academic achievement. These studies also attempted to comprehend the

sustainability of fluency and motivation-building methods from a long-term perspective.

Second, this study should investigate explicit reading approaches mediated by technology. Future research might focus on the impact of digital platforms and online sources on the capacities of students to read materials in the underprivileged areas of India where no physical access to textbooks is available. Research on teacher professional development in relation to digital literacy would also inform how technology can be easily incorporated into teaching reading. Cross-cultural studies of strategies used by ESL teachers can be conducted in India and other nations. These studies have the potential to offer valuable insights into how different education systems address similar problems related to reading instruction and provide recommendations on the best practices in ESL education.

Conclusion

The programs used to develop reading comprehension skills in the case of undergraduate ESL learners in India were explicit reading strategies, extensive reading programs, fluency-building techniques, and motivational techniques. The critical analysis of the existing literature indicates the opportunities of explicit reading techniques (summarisation, questioning, and prediction) to make students more engaged with the texts, achieve a better understanding, and promote self-reading. They allow students to understand and read texts critically, which is an important academic skill for students. However, all these strategies are effective in the Indian education system. The strategies are not universal in terms of their application, since application requires differences in the linguistic background of students, their past knowledge, and their respective learning styles. Another factor of teacher training and preparedness is also significant, as it is vital for the successful realisation of explicit reading strategies. Therefore, there is an immediate need to develop professional development programs to enable teachers to obtain the skills and knowledge needed to teach. Another aspect that has offered a promising direction of enhancing reading instruction is technology. Both urban and rural environments offer students the ability to use digital tools and

platforms to access various reading materials and interactive learning tools that stimulate the application of explicit reading strategies. In comparing the Indian and global contexts, it is evident that explicit reading strategies have demonstrated positive results in the global context, but in the Indian context, more individualistic and contextualised strategies are needed. Longitudinal studies and the incorporation of digital tools into reading pedagogy should be considered in future research to create, improve, and broaden the effectiveness of such strategies in institutions of higher learning. It is eventually a combination of explicit reading strategies, extensive reading, and fluency- and motivation-building procedures that can enhance reading comprehension in Indian ESL classes.

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