



Enhancing Reading Proficiency Through Innovative Teaching Practices

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Abstract. Reading proficiency constitutes a cornerstone of academic achievement and lifelong learning, yet its systematic development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms continues to present substantial pedagogical challenges. This article examines a range of innovative teaching practices that have demonstrated documented effectiveness in advancing reading proficiency among EFL learners, with particular attention to theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical implementation considerations. Drawing on a synthesis of recent research in applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, and educational technology, the study analyzes five principal innovative approaches: reciprocal teaching and metacognitive strategy instruction, extensive reading programs, multimodal and technology-enhanced reading environments, genre-based and text-structure instruction, and collaborative reading frameworks. The analysis is situated within the theoretical traditions of schema theory, the Simple View of Reading, Transactional Theory, and sociocultural learning theory, which together provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for the reading comprehension gains produced by these approaches. The findings indicate that innovation in reading instruction is most effective when it simultaneously addresses decoding efficiency, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge activation, metacognitive strategy use, and learner motivation — dimensions that traditional comprehension-question pedagogies typically address inadequately. The article concludes by proposing an integrated pedagogical model for reading proficiency development and identifying priorities for future research in the field.

Keywords: reading proficiency, EFL, innovative teaching, metacognitive strategies, extensive reading, multimodal literacy, reciprocal teaching, reading comprehension

1. Introduction

Reading proficiency is one of the most consequential competencies that learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) must develop. It underpins academic achievement across all disciplines, enables access to the exponentially expanding body of knowledge communicated through English-medium texts, and constitutes a primary vehicle through which learners acquire vocabulary, grammar, and discourse knowledge incidentally through exposure to authentic language (Nation, 2009; Grabe, 2009). Despite its centrality to language education, reading instruction in many EFL

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classrooms continues to be dominated by approaches whose theoretical and empirical foundations are insufficiently robust to produce the deep, flexible, and self-regulated reading competence that contemporary academic and professional contexts demand.

The dominant model of EFL reading instruction in many educational contexts remains what Grabe and Stoller (2011) characterize as the "comprehension questions" paradigm: learners are assigned a text, required to read it silently, and then assessed through a series of literal and inferential comprehension questions whose pedagogical value extends little beyond measuring whether the text was read. This paradigm does not teach reading; it tests the outcomes of reading processes whose development is left largely to chance. The substantial body of research accumulated over four decades of reading instruction scholarship has established that genuine reading proficiency development requires systematic attention to multiple component processes — phonological decoding, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge activation, reading fluency, syntactic parsing, and higher-order comprehension and reasoning — that the comprehension questions paradigm leaves unaddressed (Alderson, 2000; Grabe, 2009).

The past two decades have witnessed the development and empirical validation of a range of innovative instructional approaches that more adequately address the multidimensional complexity of reading proficiency. These approaches draw on converging insights from cognitive psychology, applied linguistics, educational technology, and sociocultural theory to create learning conditions that are more finely calibrated to the needs of developing readers. The present article provides a comprehensive review and critical analysis of the most rigorously evidenced of these approaches, examining their theoretical foundations, implementation requirements, documented outcomes, and practical implications for EFL reading instruction. By synthesizing these insights, the article aims to contribute to the growing literature on evidence-based reading pedagogy and to provide a resource for EFL educators seeking to develop more effective and theoretically principled reading programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this analysis draw on four intersecting traditions in reading research. The first is schema theory, as developed by Bartlett (1932) and elaborated in the reading research literature by Anderson and Pearson (1984). Schema theory proposes that comprehension is not the passive extraction of meaning from text but an active, constructive process in which readers integrate the information encoded in the text with their prior knowledge, organized in the form of cognitive schemas — structured networks of knowledge about particular domains, text types, and discourse patterns. This framework has direct pedagogical implications: instructional approaches that activate and build readers' background knowledge schemas before and during reading substantially enhance comprehension outcomes. The distinction between content schemas (knowledge about the world) and formal schemas (knowledge about text structures and genres) further informs the genre-based instructional approaches analyzed below.



The second theoretical tradition is the Simple View of Reading (SVR), proposed by Gough and Tunmer (1986) and extensively validated in subsequent research. The SVR proposes that reading comprehension is the product of two separable component capacities: decoding — the ability to accurately and fluently recognize words in print — and linguistic comprehension — the ability to understand spoken language. The SVR has direct implications for reading instruction: it establishes that reading comprehension difficulties may derive from deficits in either or both components, and that effective instruction must address both (Hoover & Gough, 1990). In EFL contexts, where learners may struggle with both the decoding demands of a new orthographic system and the linguistic comprehension demands of limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, this framework highlights the importance of instruction that simultaneously develops both dimensions.

The third tradition is Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory of reading, which conceptualizes the reading experience as a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text in which meaning is constructed in the interaction between the two rather than residing in either. Rosenblatt distinguishes between efferent reading, in which readers focus on extracting informational content from texts, and aesthetic reading, in which readers engage with the lived emotional and experiential dimensions of their reading experience. This distinction has important implications for reading pedagogy, suggesting that a comprehensive approach to reading instruction should cultivate both efferent and aesthetic orientations, enabling learners to engage with texts as both information sources and as aesthetic and cultural objects.

The fourth tradition is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and its extension into reading pedagogy through the work of Palincsar and Brown (1984) on reciprocal teaching and subsequent collaborative reading frameworks. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolded support in cognitive development, and its application to reading instruction has produced some of the most rigorously evidenced pedagogical approaches in the field — particularly the reciprocal teaching framework, which operationalizes Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept through structured peer and teacher-mediated strategy instruction.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative synthesis methodology integrating a systematic literature review with critical theoretical analysis. The literature review encompassed peer-reviewed research published between 2005 and 2025, identified through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC using the search terms "reading proficiency EFL", "innovative reading instruction", "metacognitive reading strategies", "extensive reading", "reciprocal teaching", "multimodal reading", and "genre-based reading instruction". Inclusion criteria required peer-reviewed publication, focus on EFL or ESL reading instruction, empirical or theoretical engagement with innovative pedagogical approaches, and documented outcomes related to reading proficiency. The synthesis proceeds analytically, identifying patterns of evidence across the literature to evaluate each of the five instructional approaches under examination.



4. Innovative Approaches to Reading Proficiency Development

4.1 Reciprocal Teaching and Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

Reciprocal teaching, developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984), is one of the most extensively researched and robustly evidenced reading instructional approaches in the entire research literature. The approach involves structured, teacher-led small-group reading sessions in which four key comprehension strategies — predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing — are explicitly taught, modeled, and then practiced by students who progressively assume the role of discussion leader. The reciprocal structure operationalizes Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: the teacher initially provides substantial scaffolding for strategy use, which is gradually withdrawn as students develop independent strategy competence.

The evidence base for reciprocal teaching is exceptionally strong. Rosenshine and Meister's (1994) meta-analysis of 16 studies found effect sizes ranging from 0.32 to 1.36 on standardized reading comprehension measures, with particularly large effects for struggling readers. More recent applications to EFL contexts have confirmed the approach's effectiveness across typologically diverse L1 backgrounds (Zhang, 2010). The underlying theoretical rationale is compelling: comprehension monitoring — the awareness of whether one is understanding what one reads and the capacity to deploy repair strategies when comprehension fails — is the single most diagnostically significant difference between skilled and unskilled readers (Baker & Brown, 1984), and reciprocal teaching directly develops this metacognitive capacity through overt, dialogic engagement with the comprehension process.

Broader metacognitive strategy instruction frameworks — including the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) developed by Chamot and O'Malley (1994) — extend the principles of reciprocal teaching to a wider repertoire of reading strategies, including note-taking, graphic organizer construction, self-questioning, and elaborative inference generation. Meta-analytic research consistently demonstrates that explicit strategy instruction produces significant, durable gains in reading comprehension across learner age groups, proficiency levels, and L1 backgrounds (Pressley, 2002; Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

4.2 Extensive Reading Programs

Extensive reading (ER) — the practice of reading large quantities of text at a comfortable level of difficulty, primarily for meaning and enjoyment rather than for linguistic analysis — has been identified in a substantial body of research as one of the most productive routes to reading proficiency development available to EFL learners (Nation & Waring, 2020; Day & Bamford, 1998). The theoretical rationale for ER draws on Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which holds that acquisition occurs through exposure to comprehensible input at and slightly above the learner's current proficiency level, and on the extensive vocabulary acquisition research demonstrating that a substantial proportion of vocabulary is learned incidentally through reading (Nation, 2001).



The cognitive case for ER is compelling. Reading fluency — the ability to read accurately and rapidly enough to free cognitive resources for comprehension — develops primarily through practice with large volumes of text at the appropriate level of difficulty. Readers who read extensively develop larger sight vocabularies, faster lexical access, stronger syntactic parsing abilities, and richer background knowledge schemas — all of which contribute to improved comprehension of more challenging texts (Grabe, 2009). Research on ER programs in EFL contexts, including the landmark studies by Elley and Mangubhai (1983) in Fiji, Mason and Krashen (1997) in Japan, and the extensive research program of Nation and Wang (1999) in New Zealand, has documented consistent gains in reading speed, vocabulary knowledge, grammatical awareness, and overall reading comprehension.

The implementation of effective ER programs requires access to adequately large libraries of graded readers calibrated to learners' proficiency levels, institutional support for autonomous reading time, and a classroom culture that positions reading for enjoyment as a legitimate and valued educational activity (Day & Bamford, 1998). Digital ER platforms, including e-readers with embedded dictionaries and vocabulary tracking tools, have extended the accessibility and pedagogical integration of ER by providing immediate lexical support and enabling teachers to monitor reading activity more effectively (Alisoy, 2025).

4.3 Multimodal and Technology-Enhanced Reading Environments

The proliferation of digital technologies has created new possibilities for reading instruction that extend significantly beyond the affordances of print-only environments. Multimodal texts — which combine written language with images, audio, video, interactive elements, and hyperlinked networks of related information — are increasingly the default format of contemporary reading in academic, professional, and personal contexts. Preparing EFL learners to read effectively in multimodal environments requires instructional attention to the specific comprehension and navigation skills that multimodal texts demand, which differ in important respects from those required for linear print reading (Kern, 2000).

Research on technology-enhanced reading instruction has identified several specific affordances that digital reading environments offer over print. Embedded vocabulary glossing — the provision of immediate definitions or contextual information for unknown words through clickable annotations — has been shown to enhance both incidental vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, particularly when learners have control over the timing and form of glosses (Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996). Text-to-speech functionality supports phonological processing and listening-reading integration. Interactive comprehension questions with immediate feedback and explanation create formative assessment opportunities that the print environment cannot provide. And the data analytics capabilities of digital reading platforms enable teachers to identify individual learners' difficulty patterns and adjust instruction accordingly.



Corpus-based reading instruction represents a further technological innovation with significant pedagogical potential. By providing learners with access to large databases of authentic language use, corpus tools enable learners to investigate how specific vocabulary items, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns function in authentic texts, developing the genre awareness and lexical knowledge that underpin skilled reading in academic and professional registers (O'Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). The increasing accessibility of corpus tools through web-based interfaces has made this approach viable even in resource-constrained educational settings.

4.4 Genre-Based and Text-Structure Instruction

Research in text comprehension has consistently demonstrated that readers' awareness of how different types of text are organized — the schematic structure of argument, narrative, exposition, description, and procedural discourse — substantially facilitates comprehension by enabling readers to form appropriate structural expectations that guide their interpretation of incoming information (Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Genre-based reading instruction makes this structural knowledge explicit by teaching learners to identify, analyze, and utilize the organizational patterns of specific text types — including academic argument, research reports, news articles, and narrative fiction — as tools for comprehension.

Explicit text-structure instruction has been shown to produce significant gains in reading comprehension, particularly for longer and more complex texts where comprehension requires the integration of information across multiple paragraphs or sections (Williams, 2005). Graphic organizers — visual representations of text structure that help learners map the organizational logic of a text — are a particularly effective tool for making text structure visible and analytically accessible. Research on graphic organizer use in EFL reading instruction has demonstrated consistent benefits for comprehension monitoring, information retention, and summarization quality (Chang, 2010). Genre-based approaches further develop learners' awareness of the social functions of different text types and the rhetorical conventions that govern them — knowledge that is essential for effective academic reading and that is rarely addressed in traditional comprehension-focused reading pedagogy.

4.5 Collaborative Reading Frameworks

Collaborative reading frameworks — instructional approaches that organize reading as a social and dialogic activity rather than as a solitary, silent process — draw on sociocultural learning theory to position comprehension as something that can be constructed through dialogue as well as through individual cognitive processing. Literature Circles, Reading Workshops, Book Clubs, and Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) represent different instantiations of this principle, each providing structured frameworks within which learners discuss, question, and collectively construct interpretations of shared texts (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998).



The pedagogical rationale for collaborative reading extends beyond the social dimensions of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Reading discussion creates conditions in which learners are required to articulate, justify, and revise their interpretations — a process that forces more precise and evidence-based comprehension monitoring than silent individual reading permits. Research on CSR in EFL contexts has documented significant gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and content knowledge, along with improved participation and motivation among learners who typically disengage from individual silent reading tasks (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998). The collaborative structure also provides an ideal context for the development of the inferencing skills, critical reading competencies, and evaluative response capacities that are essential for advanced academic literacy.

5. An Integrated Pedagogical Model

The five innovative approaches reviewed above are not mutually exclusive but complementary, addressing different dimensions of reading proficiency that collectively constitute the full profile of a skilled reader. An integrated pedagogical model for reading proficiency development in EFL contexts would therefore incorporate all five dimensions within a coherent instructional framework. Pre-reading phases would activate background knowledge schemas and introduce relevant vocabulary and text-structure knowledge, preparing learners for the cognitive demands of the target text. During-reading phases would engage learners in metacognitive strategy use — predicting, monitoring, clarifying, inferencing — through reciprocal or collaborative reading structures. Post-reading phases would consolidate comprehension through discussion, graphic organizer construction, summarization, and evaluative response tasks that develop critical reading competence.

Extensive reading would provide the high-volume exposure necessary for fluency and vocabulary development across the full curriculum, supplementing the intensive reading of target texts with regular periods of self-selected reading at comfortable proficiency levels. Technology would be deployed strategically to provide vocabulary support, data analytics, and access to diverse text types, including multimodal and digital genres. Assessment would align with instructional goals, evaluating not only comprehension outcomes but also strategy use, reading fluency, vocabulary growth, and the quality of collaborative and individual reading responses. The consistency of this integrated model with the findings of Nuri and Ismayilli (2025) on student motivation is noteworthy: each of the approaches reviewed demonstrates that reading engagement and motivation are not preconditions for instructional effectiveness but outcomes of it — produced by instruction that challenges learners appropriately, provides adequate support, and makes the reading experience meaningful and successful.

6. Discussion

The synthesis of evidence reviewed in this article makes a compelling case for the pedagogical superiority of innovative, strategy-focused, extensive, and collaborative reading instruction over



the comprehension-questions paradigm that continues to dominate many EFL classrooms. The evidence base is particularly strong for reciprocal teaching and metacognitive strategy instruction, whose documented effects on reading comprehension are among the largest in the educational intervention research literature. The evidence for extensive reading is equally compelling, though its implementation demands — particularly the requirement for access to large libraries of graded reading material — may present challenges in resource-constrained contexts.

A critical issue that emerges from the synthesis concerns the relationship between innovative teaching practices and teacher professional development. The effective implementation of reciprocal teaching, genre-based instruction, and collaborative reading frameworks requires substantial teacher knowledge — of reading theory, of specific strategy instruction techniques, of text-structure linguistics, and of collaborative learning facilitation. Research consistently demonstrates that the effectiveness of instructional innovations is heavily dependent on the quality of teacher implementation, and that high-quality implementation requires both initial training and sustained professional support (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This has important implications for educational policy: investment in innovative reading curricula without parallel investment in teacher professional development is unlikely to produce significant improvements in learner outcomes.

The challenge of transfer — ensuring that strategies and skills developed through explicit instruction are applied independently in genuine reading encounters — is a further issue that the existing research has not fully resolved. Metacognitive strategy instruction research suggests that transfer is more likely when strategy instruction is embedded within authentic reading tasks, when learners are explicitly taught to monitor and regulate their own strategy use, and when instruction extends over sufficient time to allow strategies to become automatic (Pressley, 2002). These conditions require instructional coherence and longitudinal commitment that may be difficult to sustain within the fragmented, examination-driven curriculum structures that characterize many EFL educational contexts.

7. Conclusion

This article has reviewed and synthesized the evidence base for five principal innovative approaches to EFL reading proficiency development: reciprocal teaching and metacognitive strategy instruction, extensive reading, multimodal and technology-enhanced environments, genre-based and text-structure instruction, and collaborative reading frameworks. The evidence establishes that each approach, when implemented with fidelity and within a coherent pedagogical framework, produces documented gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and strategic reading behavior that substantially exceed those produced by traditional comprehension-questions instruction.

The integrated pedagogical model proposed in this article — combining pre-reading schema activation, during-reading strategy instruction and collaborative comprehension, post-reading



consolidation and critical response, and extensive reading for fluency development — represents the most complete current framework for reading proficiency development available in the EFL research literature. Its implementation requires investment in teacher professional development, access to diverse reading materials including graded readers and digital texts, and curricular structures that allocate adequate time to both intensive and extensive reading. Future research should investigate the specific implementation conditions that maximize the effectiveness of each approach across different EFL learner populations, proficiency levels, and institutional contexts, with particular attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by the Azerbaijani and Central Asian educational environments in which approaches of this kind remain underresearched.

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