

# The Impact of ReadTheory.org on English Majors' EFL Reading Comprehension

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the effectiveness of ReadTheory.org, a free online reading comprehension platform, in enhancing the reading skills of English - major students as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at University of Finance - Marketing. Seventy-four English majors participated in a semester-long intervention where they completed ReadTheory exercises alongside their regular reading curriculum. Pre- and post-tests were administered to measure reading comprehension improvement. Additionally, a survey assessed students' perceptions of ReadTheory. The study found that ReadTheory use led to statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension scores. Students also reported positive experiences with the platform, indicating its potential as a valuable tool for EFL reading instruction.

**Keywords:** Readtheory.org; reading comprehension; EFL

## 1. Introduction

Developing strong reading skills is crucial for EFL learners. These skills unlock a wealth of information and resources, fostering academic success and personal growth. However, EFL students often face challenges in mastering reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall fluency. Traditional methods may lack the engagement and interactivity needed to fully support their learning journey.

Researchers have explored various methods to improve EFL reading comprehension, with a growing focus on technology-assisted learning (Liu & Xu, 2020). Online platforms like ReadTheory.org offer a wealth of engaging and adaptive reading passages with comprehension exercises tailored to different skill levels. This study examines the potential of ReadTheory.org to enhance reading comprehension in English major students who are EFL learners.

This study investigates the potential of ReadTheory.org, an online reading comprehension platform, to address these challenges. ReadTheory.org offers a unique blend of features, including differentiated reading passages, interactive exercises, and gamified elements. These features aim to make learning engaging and effective, potentially leading to improved reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and reading fluency for EFL students. By investigating the effectiveness of ReadTheory.org as a supplemental learning tool, this study contributes to the ongoing exploration of innovative methods for

enhancing reading skills among EFL students.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

Does using ReadTheory.org improve the reading comprehension scores of English major students who are EFL learners?

How do students perceive the usefulness and effectiveness of ReadTheory.org as a learning tool?

## 2. Content

### 2.1 Literature Review

Reading involves the process of decoding words or phrases so to derive the meaning. Through reading, learners are able to improve the level of proficiency in learning EFL for it is an intellectual task aimed at understanding texts. It is an interactive process that arises from the reader's relationship with the text, leading to an understanding of the text's meaning and main ideas. The main goal of reading comprehension is to try to organize the main ideas in the text and to find analytical methods that help achieve this goal. In this sense, there are two types of concentration on reading. Reading includes several types: scanning, skimming, reading for learning, reading for general ideas, reading for critical evaluation, reading for combining information (Carrell & Grabe, 2010). Reading for comprehension is a process that requires visual and semantic manipulation in addition to focusing on text structure. Reading learning, on the other hand, requires not only outlining the text, but also producing a variety of other information about different groups of data. Strong reading skills are essential for academic success, as they enable

students to access and understand course materials. Additionally, reading proficiency allows for personal growth and independent learning beyond the classroom setting (Alderson, 2000).

However, EFL students often encounter difficulties in developing reading fluency and comprehension. These challenges can stem from limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar cultural references in texts, and difficulties with decoding and processing written language (McLaughlin, 1987). Traditional teaching methods may not fully address these challenges, leading to frustration and a lack of motivation among learners (Anderson, 2003).

Recent research suggests the potential of technology-assisted language learning (TALL) to address these challenges. Marzban (2010) investigated the effect of computer assisted language learning on improving reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. Online platforms features that can promote engagement, cater to different learning styles, and provide immediate feedback, potentially leading to improved reading outcomes for EFL students (Lai & Wu, 2014).

## 2.2 Methodology

Seventy-four English major students at university of Finance - Marketing participated in the study which implemented a one-semester pre-test/post-test design. At the beginning of the semester, a standardized reading comprehension test was administered to assess baseline reading ability. Students were then introduced to ReadTheory.org and instructed to complete at least three passages and accompanying exercises per week. These passages and exercises were chosen to align and personalize with the students' reading level and the broader reading curriculum.

When the semester ended (after 10 weeks), the same standardized reading comprehension test was administered again to measure improvement. Additionally, a survey was conducted to gather students' perceptions of ReadTheory.org, including its usefulness, engagement level, and impact on their learning.

Paired-sample t-tests were employed to analyze the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores, determining if statistically significant improvement occurred. Survey responses were analyzed qualitatively by identifying themes and patterns in student feedback.

## 2.3 Findings

### 2.3.1 Reading Comprehension Scores

The core objective of this study was to investigate the impact of ReadTheory.org on the reading comprehension skills of EFL learners enrolled in an English major program. To achieve this goal, a paired-sample t-test was employed to analyze the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores of the 74 participating students. The pre-test served as a baseline measure of their reading abilities before utilizing ReadTheory.org throughout the semester. The post-test, administered at the semester's end, assessed any potential changes in reading comprehension after consistent engagement with the platform.

The paired-sample t-test results yielded statistically significant evidence ( $p < 0.01$ ) of improvement in reading comprehension scores. The average pre-test score for the 74 students was 72.5, with a standard deviation (SD) of 8.2. This indicates a baseline level of reading comprehension across the participant pool. Following the semester-long intervention with ReadTheory.org, the average post-test score rose to 78.7, with a standard deviation of 7.1. This observed increase in mean score suggests a positive impact of ReadTheory.org on the students' reading comprehension skills.

The statistically significant p-value ( $p < 0.01$ ) further strengthens this conclusion. A p-value less than 0.01 signifies a very low probability (less than 1%) that the observed improvement could be due to chance alone. Therefore, with a high degree of confidence, we can reject the null hypothesis, which stated that there would be no difference in reading comprehension scores after using ReadTheory.org.

In essence, these findings provide compelling evidence that utilizing ReadTheory.org can lead to measurable improvement in the reading comprehension abilities of EFL learners. The observed increase in average score (72.5 to 78.7) demonstrates a positive shift in reading proficiency within the participant group. This statistically significant improvement suggests the potential value of ReadTheory.org as a supplemental tool for enhancing EFL reading comprehension skills within an English major curriculum.

### 2.3.2 Student Perceptions

Analysis of the survey data revealed several key themes regarding student perceptions of ReadTheory.org:

The survey results revealed a positive overall

student perception of ReadTheory.org as a learning tool for enhancing reading comprehension skills.

**Usefulness:** A significant majority (86%) of students agreed that ReadTheory was a helpful tool for practicing reading comprehension. This sentiment was echoed in several student comments. One student (Student 1) stated, “ReadTheory, with its personalized reading passages aligning with my reading level, helped me improve my ability to identify key points.” This highlights the platform’s value in catering to individual needs and promoting focused practice on specific comprehension skills. Another student appreciated the platform’s variety of content, stating, “The wide range of topics kept me engaged and exposed me to new vocabulary.” This suggests that the diverse range of passages on ReadTheory helps maintain student interest while simultaneously expanding their vocabulary base.

**Engagement(PositiveFeedback):** Students consistently reported that ReadTheory’s interactive exercises made it an engaging learning experience. One student commented, “The quizzes made me think critically about the passages and helped me solidify my understanding.” This indicates that the quizzes effectively challenged students to analyze the text beyond a surface level, leading to a deeper grasp of the content. Another student appreciated the platform’s immediate feedback mechanism, stating, “Knowing if I answered correctly right away motivated me to keep practicing.” This highlights the importance of immediate feedback for reinforcing learning and maintaining student motivation. The combination of engaging exercises and immediate feedback appears to contribute significantly to the platform’s overall effectiveness in promoting reading comprehension.

#### **2.4. Limitations and recommendations:**

While the overall student response to ReadTheory.org was positive, some limitations emerged during the study. A portion of the participants expressed concerns about the platform’s content variety. After consistent use, several students found the reading passages repetitive, suggesting a desire for a more extensive and diverse selection of materials. This repetitiveness could potentially hinder long-term engagement and limit exposure to a wider range of writing styles and subject areas.

Furthermore, a subset of students commented on the platform’s primary focus on multiple-choice question formats. While multiple-choice questions can be a valuable tool for assessing comprehension

of factual information, some students felt they limited the opportunity for deeper analysis and critical thinking. They expressed a desire for more open-ended exercises that encouraged them to delve deeper into the text, formulate their own interpretations, and justify their responses through textual evidence. The inclusion of exercises that require short answer responses, essay writing, or summarizing key points in their own words could address this limitation and promote a more holistic development of reading comprehension skills.

It is important to acknowledge that these limitations may not be universally applicable. Individual learning styles and preferences can influence student perceptions. However, these observations highlight areas for potential improvement within the platform and underscore the importance of integrating ReadTheory.org with other teaching methods that address these limitations.

#### **3. Conclusion**

This study found that utilizing ReadTheory.org in an EFL reading class for English major students led to a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension scores. The study also revealed positive student perceptions regarding the platform’s usefulness and engagement level. Students appreciated the variety of passages, interactive exercises, and immediate feedback provided by ReadTheory. However, some limitations were identified, such as repetitive content and a focus on multiple-choice questions.

These findings suggest that ReadTheory.org can be a valuable tool for EFL reading instruction, particularly when combined with other teaching methods that address identified limitations. Further research is warranted to explore how ReadTheory can be integrated most effectively within a broader EFL reading curriculum and to investigate its impact on specific reading sub-skills such as vocabulary acquisition or inference skills.

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