

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN TEACHING READING TO MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

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Annotation: *This article explores the challenges and solutions in teaching reading skills to multilingual learners. It highlights common difficulties faced by learners, such as limited vocabulary, varying language proficiency levels, and cultural differences. The study discusses effective teaching strategies, including the use of visual aids, differentiated instruction, and collaborative learning. The findings suggest that integrating culturally relevant materials and fostering a supportive learning environment significantly improve reading outcomes. The article provides practical recommendations for educators to enhance multilingual learners' reading skills and emphasizes the importance of teacher training for inclusive education.*

Key words: *Multilingual learners, reading challenges, translanguaging, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, inclusive education.*

Introduction: In today's increasingly globalized world, classrooms are becoming more linguistically diverse, making the teaching of reading skills a complex task for educators. Multilingual learners, who speak multiple languages or come from non-native English-speaking backgrounds, face unique challenges in developing reading proficiency. These challenges include limited vocabulary, difficulties in phonological processing, and the transfer of reading habits from their native language to the target language (Cummins, 2000). Furthermore, cultural differences and varying educational backgrounds often impact their comprehension abilities (García & Kleifgen, 2018).[7]

Effective reading instruction is crucial for multilingual learners as it directly influences their academic success and social integration (August & Shanahan, 2006).[1] However, traditional reading approaches are often insufficient in addressing the diverse needs of these students. Educators must adopt innovative strategies that integrate visual aids, culturally responsive teaching, and differentiated instruction to foster better engagement and comprehension (Ebe, 2010).[5]

This article aims to explore the challenges faced by multilingual learners in reading and present evidence-based solutions to address these difficulties. The study underscores the importance of inclusive teaching practices and offers practical recommendations to enhance the reading skills of multilingual learners in diverse educational contexts.

Methodology: This study utilized a mixed-method approach that combined qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions in teaching reading to multilingual learners. The methodology encompassed participant selection, data collection tools, and analysis techniques, while addressing potential challenges encountered during the research process.

Participant Selection: The study involved: 30 multilingual learners: Aged between 9 and 17 years from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, and Kazakh.

- 10 experienced English language teachers: Each with at least five years of experience working with multilingual learners. Participants were selected based on their exposure to English as a second or additional language and their willingness to participate in the research.

Data Collection Methods

1. Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with teachers and students to explore their perspectives on reading challenges and effective teaching strategies.

- Challenge: Language barriers during interviews with some students who had limited English proficiency.

- Solution: Interviews were conducted in both English and students' native languages to ensure accurate responses.

2. Classroom Observations: Four weeks of classroom observations were conducted to examine teaching methods, student engagement, and reading comprehension strategies.

- Challenge: Observer effect, where students behaved differently in the presence of the researcher.

- Solution: Multiple observations were conducted to ensure natural classroom behavior.

3. Reading Comprehension Tests: Pre- and post-tests were administered to measure the effectiveness of various teaching strategies.

- Challenge: Test anxiety among students, particularly those with lower language proficiency.

- Solution: Teachers were encouraged to frame tests as informal assessments to reduce stress.

4. Document Analysis: Reading materials, lesson plans, and assessment tools were analyzed to evaluate their linguistic and cultural appropriateness.

- Challenge: Many materials were not designed for multilingual learners, leading to cultural and linguistic mismatches.

- Solution: Recommendations were made to adapt materials for cultural relevance.

Challenges Identified in the Research Process

1. Linguistic Diversity: The vast differences in students' native languages made it challenging to develop a standardized approach to reading instruction.

- Example: Students from Cyrillic-script backgrounds struggled more with phonological decoding than those from Latin-script backgrounds.

- Recommendation: Incorporate phonics-based instruction tailored to students’ native language backgrounds (Nation, 2001).[10]

2. Cultural Disconnect in Reading Materials: Many reading materials featured contexts unfamiliar to multilingual learners, leading to comprehension difficulties.

- Example: Texts about holidays and customs specific to Western countries were difficult for students to relate to.

- Recommendation: Develop culturally inclusive materials that reflect students’ backgrounds (Gay, 2010).[9]

3. Teacher Preparedness: Some teachers lacked sufficient training in multilingual education strategies.

- Example: Teachers struggled to implement differentiated instruction for students with varying language proficiencies.

4. Assessment Challenges: Traditional reading assessments often failed to capture the progress of multilingual learners.

- Example: Standardized tests did not account for the linguistic diversity of the students.

- Recommendation: Use formative assessments and performance-based tasks to evaluate reading comprehension (Black & Wiliam, 1998).[2]

Solutions and Innovations Implemented

Translanguaging Practices: Students were encouraged to use their native languages alongside English during reading activities.

- Impact: Improved comprehension and engagement among students (García & Wei, 2014).

2. Differentiated Instructi[8]on: Teachers tailored reading tasks based on students’ language proficiency levels.

- Impact: Students at all proficiency levels demonstrated progress in reading comprehension (Tomlinson, 2014).

3. Culturally Responsive Materials: Reading materials were adapted to include culturally familiar contexts and narratives.

- Impact: Increased student engagement and comprehension (Gay, 2010).[9]

4. Collaborative Learning Activities: Group reading tasks allowed students to support each other and share linguistic knowledge.

5. Visual and Multimedia Support: Teachers used images, videos, and graphic organizers to support text comprehension.

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants’ rights and privacy:

- Informed consent was obtained from parents for minor participants.

- Participants’ anonymity was maintained throughout the research.

- Data were used solely for research purposes.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically, while quantitative data from tests were subjected to statistical analysis.

- Thematic Analysis: Identified recurring themes and patterns in teacher and student responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).[3]

- Statistical Analysis: Measured the improvement in students’ reading comprehension scores before and after the implementation of new strategies.

This extended methodology highlights the importance of using a multi-faceted approach to address the challenges faced by multilingual learners in reading. By integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, the study provides valuable insights into effective teaching strategies and offers practical recommendations for educators.

Results and Discussion: This section presents the key findings of the study and discusses them in the context of existing literature. The results are organized around the main themes identified during the data analysis: challenges faced by multilingual learners in reading and effective solutions implemented by teachers. Each theme is supported by qualitative and quantitative data, along with real-life examples and interpretations.

Challenges Faced by Multilingual Learners in Reading

1. Limited Vocabulary and Language Proficiency: One of the most frequently reported challenges was students’ limited vocabulary in English. Many multilingual learners struggled to decode unfamiliar words and comprehend complex texts. Pre-test results showed that 70% of students scored below the average in reading comprehension tasks. Teachers noted that students often hesitated to read aloud due to the fear of mispronouncing words.

- Example: In one observation, a student was unable to understand a text about environmental issues due to the presence of specialized terms like “deforestation” and “biodiversity.” This finding aligns with Nation’s (2001) argument that vocabulary size is a strong predictor of reading comprehension success.[10]

2. Cultural Disconnect in Reading Materials: The document analysis revealed that many reading materials were culturally irrelevant to multilingual learners. Stories and texts often featured contexts unfamiliar to the students, leading to a lack of engagement and comprehension difficulties.

- Example: A story about Thanksgiving dinner was difficult for students who had never encountered this holiday. When asked, students mentioned that they could not relate to the characters or the setting. Research by Gay (2010) supports the idea that culturally responsive teaching materials can improve student engagement and understanding.[9]

3. Phonological and Grammatical Difficulties: Many students faced challenges with phonological awareness and grammatical structures in English, especially when these differed significantly from their native languages. Teachers reported that students whose first language did not use Latin scripts required additional support in decoding text.

Effective Solutions Implemented by Teachers

1. Translanguaging as a Support Strategy: Teachers found that allowing students to use their native languages during reading activities helped bridge the comprehension gap. Translanguaging enabled students to clarify complex concepts and build connections between languages.

• Example: In one lesson, a teacher asked students to translate key words from English to their native language before reading a passage. Post-test results showed a 25% improvement in comprehension scores for these students. García and Wei (2014) emphasize the importance of translanguaging as a tool for multilingual learners, as it validates their linguistic identities and supports cognitive development.[8]

2. Use of Visual and Multimedia Aids: Visual aids and multimedia content were highly effective in enhancing students’ reading comprehension. Teachers reported that combining text with images and videos helped students grasp complex ideas more easily.

• Example: Before reading a text about endangered animals, the teacher showed a short video. Students were more engaged and demonstrated a better understanding of the topic. This finding is consistent with Echevarria et al. (2017), who advocate for the use of visual scaffolding in language instruction.[6]

3. Differentiated Instruction: Teachers adapted reading activities based on students’ language proficiency levels. Grouping students with similar reading abilities allowed teachers to provide targeted support.

• Example: Advanced students were given analytical reading tasks, while beginner-level students focused on vocabulary building. Post-test results showed that differentiated instruction led to a 30% improvement in reading comprehension scores for beginner-level students. Tomlinson (2014) highlights the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in addressing the diverse needs of learners.[11]

4. Culturally Relevant Reading Materials: Incorporating culturally familiar texts significantly improved students’ engagement and comprehension. Teachers selected stories and passages that reflected the students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences.

• Example: Introducing a story about Navruz celebrations sparked lively discussions among students and increased their interest in reading activities. Research by Gay (2010) supports the idea that culturally responsive teaching fosters better learning outcomes for diverse student populations.[9]

5. Collaborative Learning Activities: Group reading activities encouraged peer support and discussion, helping students overcome comprehension challenges. Collaborative learning fostered a sense of community and confidence among multilingual learners.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of adopting inclusive and innovative teaching strategies to improve reading outcomes for multilingual learners. The challenges identified in the research, such as limited vocabulary, cultural disconnection, and phonological difficulties, are consistent with previous studies (Cummins, 2000; García & Kleifgen, 2018).[4]

The success of solutions like translanguaging, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive materials underscores the need for teacher training in these areas. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment to build students’ confidence and engagement. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research on multilingual education and provides practical recommendations for educators seeking to enhance reading instruction for diverse learners.

Conclusion: Teaching reading to multilingual learners presents unique challenges, including limited vocabulary, cultural disconnection in reading materials, and varying levels of language proficiency. However, this study has demonstrated that effective strategies can significantly improve reading outcomes. Key solutions include translanguaging practices, differentiated instruction, culturally relevant materials, and the integration of visual and multimedia support.

The findings emphasize the importance of creating inclusive and supportive learning environments where multilingual learners can thrive. Teachers play a vital role by adopting flexible and innovative approaches tailored to the diverse needs of their students. By fostering collaboration, embracing students' linguistic backgrounds, and selecting culturally meaningful texts, educators can enhance reading skills and build learners' confidence. This research underscores the need for ongoing teacher training and curriculum development to address the dynamic requirements of multilingual education.

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