

English Reading Difficulties Faced by Students at Primary Level in Punjab Province

Munib ul Muneer

M. Phil. Scholar Department of Education, Minhaj University, Lahore

Dr. Shafqat Ali

Professor, Department of Education, Minhaj University, Lahore

drshafqat.edu@mul.edu.pk

Shahid Iqbal

Subject Specialist, Quaid e Azam Academy for Educational Development Punjab Lahore,
Pakistan

Abstract

This research investigates English reading difficulties among primary-level students in public and private schools in the Gujranwala district, Punjab. Using a quantitative survey methodology, a stratified random sample of students participated, offering insights into their perceptions of specific reading challenges. The structured questionnaire, validated for reliability, included Likert-scale questions measuring difficulty levels in pronunciation, speed, and comprehension. Statistical analysis revealed significant findings, indicating that students faced pronounced speed deficits ($M=3.710$) as the most prominent challenge, followed by pronunciation deficits ($M=3.591$) and comprehension deficits ($M=3.589$). Further, a comparative analysis between public and private school students unveiled that while pronunciation and speed problems were comparable, public-school students encountered more significant comprehension problems ($p=0.000$). Gender-specific analysis highlighted variations in the challenges faced by male and female students. The study provides nuanced insights into English reading difficulties, informing targeted interventions and policy adjustments for improved literacy outcomes in the Gujranwala district.

Keywords: English Reading Difficulties, Speed Deficits, Pronunciation Deficits, Comprehension Deficits

Introduction

English reading is a cornerstone of global communication and education, playing a pivotal role in fostering intellectual growth and cultural understanding. Proficiency in English reading opens doors to a vast repository of literature, scientific advancements, and diverse perspectives. It enhances cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills, and language proficiency, laying the foundation for academic success and professional advancement. As a universal language in business, academia, and technology, English reading proficiency empowers individuals to access a wealth of information, connect with people worldwide, and participate in the global exchange of ideas. Moreover, literature provides a window into different cultures, fostering empathy and promoting a nuanced understanding of the human experience. In today's interconnected world, the ability to navigate and comprehend English texts is an invaluable asset that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.

Furthermore, English reading proficiency is essential for personal development and lifelong learning. It serves as a gateway to self-improvement, enabling individuals to explore a wide range

of topics, from history and science to philosophy and art. Reading in English broadens one's intellectual horizons, exposing them to diverse genres and styles of writing. This exposure not only enriches vocabulary but also enhances linguistic fluency and comprehension skills. Additionally, it fosters a love for learning, encouraging individuals to pursue knowledge independently. The habit of English reading contributes to a well-rounded education, empowering individuals to navigate the complexities of the modern world with confidence and adaptability. In essence, English reading is not merely a skill but a transformative tool that empowers individuals to thrive intellectually and contribute meaningfully to society.

Inadequate reading methods that aid in comprehension of the text are just one of the reading challenges that kids may have. This will improve their ability to remember and comprehend the text (Carver, 1992). As a result, students will eventually study and evaluate the text to address the issue at hand. For instance, after reading a simple text to start, readers are gradually given a difficult one to understand on their own. As a result, they can test out the optimal reading techniques that address their issues. Any exposure to English is beneficial for language students, according to Harmer (2001). At the very least, some linguistic components are retained in their minds as they learn the language.

Additionally, readers will have a hard time decoding words in such a text if they can't understand the entire text. Understanding the target language is typically necessary for reading comprehension. Understanding the text's words, phrases, and contexts is necessary for this. But in order to understand the words and sentences within the context and meaning of the text, comprehension often necessitates prior knowledge. Similar to this, Treheane & Doctorow (2005) illustrate how various issues can affect students' reading comprehension abilities.

Reading settings, helpful instruction on comprehension style, text kind, and knowledge of various reading comprehension tactics are examples of such issues. According to Childs (2008), reading widely and relying on background knowledge and comprehension are the two main factors that are connected to thinking, so the best guidelines for learners' success and achievement are thinking mechanisms and genuine interest in reading comprehension.

The variety of general knowledge and analytical abilities lead to the development of the capacity for thorough comprehension. The two processes of prior knowledge and comprehension, in their opinion, are intertwined in reading. While comprehension is the process of determining the meaning of words or phrases in the text, they define previous knowledge as the process that aids students in developing and extending their comprehension skills.

Readers need background knowledge, vocabulary, and other skills to comprehend written materials, according to Pang and colleagues. According to Biancarosa & Snow (2004), students who have trouble understanding what they read, including those with learning disabilities (LD) who have been found to have issues with background knowledge and English language skills, may also have trouble reading words or sentences. They may struggle to understand what they read, they may stop reading fluently, or they may be misusing or succeeding at tactics to help them understand the major ideas and the substance of a text.

According to Cain, Oakhill, and Bryant (2000), reading comprehension problems are caused by students' poor recall, loss of reading comprehension methods, and failure to automatically recognize words and phrases. Such students might experience (limited reading comprehension strategies). Therefore, these causes contribute to reading failure. The authors Kamil, Borman, Dole, Kral, Salinger, and Torgesen (2008) contend that teaching reading comprehension strategies is one of the most crucial classroom intervention activities.

This attempts to raise readers' levels of reading comprehension as well as their ability to analyze and think when reading any content. They believe that effective instruction relies on teacher modeling, which includes explaining the reading comprehension-related skills and incorporating a variety of practices in the classroom (Akasha, 2013). Readers can use a variety of techniques to interpret texts, including as summarizing, identifying the essential ideas, paraphrasing, and data analysis.

These pupils frequently originate from lower socioeconomic homes, and the schools they attend frequently have lower ability ratios (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2004). The abilities required to comprehend materials inside basic text will be covered in order to further highlight the connection between reading and academic performance of students in elementary schools. Decoding, fluency, and vocabulary continue to be issues for basic school readers. Many struggling readers are reading at levels between 2nd and 5th grade because to inefficiency or a lack of these abilities (Archer, Gleason & Vachon, 2003). First, poor readers in elementary school frequently lack effective decoding abilities.

One-syllable words can be decoded by them, but multi-syllable words get harder and harder to decode. Most of these children lack the decoding proficiency and self-assurance necessary to read words they are unfamiliar with (Akram, Yang, & Aslam, 2020). Due to their poor decoding abilities, individuals also struggle to understand the word from its context, which could help them understand important vocabulary. Understanding difficult words is essential for learning the content, and if the words can't be read, the knowledge is lost.

In Punjab, Pakistan, students encounter several challenges when it comes to reading the English language. One prominent obstacle is the linguistic diversity within the region. Punjabi is the native language for a significant portion of the population, and many students may not have English as their first language (Raja, & Selvi, 2011). This linguistic difference can impede their ability to comprehend and read English texts fluently. Limited access to quality English language resources and proficient teachers is another hurdle (Tufail, Kanwal, & Badar, 2015). Rural areas, in particular, may face a scarcity of well-qualified English teachers and lack resources such as textbooks and supplementary materials. This scarcity can hinder students from developing strong reading skills in English (Nawab, 2012).

Moreover, there exists a cultural barrier as English may not always be prioritized in daily communication and local contexts (Laghari, Bughio, Kakepoto, & Memon, 2021). The lack of a conducive environment to practice English outside the classroom can hinder students from honing their reading skills effectively. The curriculum and teaching methodologies also play a significant role in the challenges faced by students. If the curriculum does not align with the students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it can lead to disinterest and a lack of motivation in learning English. Additionally, traditional teaching methods that focus solely on rote memorization rather than interactive and engaging approaches may fail to stimulate a genuine interest in reading English (Khan, & Khan, 2016).

In addressing these challenges, it is crucial to implement effective language policies, provide quality resources, and train teachers to adopt innovative teaching methods that make English learning more accessible and enjoyable for students in Punjab, Pakistan. Research on English reading difficulties faced by students at the primary level in the Punjab province is imperative for several reasons. Firstly, understanding the specific challenges students encounter in learning to read English can inform the development of targeted interventions and instructional strategies. This knowledge is essential for educators and policymakers to tailor their approaches, ensuring that teaching methods address the unique needs of students in the region.

Additionally, such research can contribute to the enhancement of teacher training programs. By identifying the common stumbling blocks in English reading comprehension, educators can receive targeted professional development to equip them with the necessary skills to address these challenges effectively (Haberman, et al., 2020). Furthermore, research findings can guide the creation and adaptation of educational materials, including textbooks and supplementary resources, to better align with the linguistic and cultural contexts of students in Punjab. Customized learning materials can play a pivotal role in fostering a more supportive environment for English language acquisition at the primary level (Akram, & Ghani, 2013).

A comprehensive understanding of English reading difficulties will empower educational stakeholders to implement evidence-based policies and interventions, fostering improved literacy outcomes among primary-level students in the Punjab province. This research is not only beneficial for the students but also contributes to the broader goal of enhancing the overall quality of education in the region.

The quantitative survey methodology for assessing English reading difficulties among primary-level students in Gujranwala involved a stratified random sample of students from both public and private schools. A validated structured questionnaire was used to know students' perceptions on specific reading challenges. Likert-scale questions measured the difficulty levels faced by students in learning English language. Data was statistically analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify common trends and variations between public and private school students. The findings aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of English reading difficulties in the primary education sector in the Gujranwala district.

Table 1.

English reading difficulties faced by students at primary level as perceived by students

Grammatical issue	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pronunciation deficit	320	3.591	.200
Speed deficit	320	3.710	.356
Comprehension deficit	320	3.589	.876
Overall reading deficit	320	3.601	.689

There were three aspects of English reading problems faced by students i.e. pronunciation deficits, speed deficits, and comprehension deficit. Students were asked about these three deficits which they faced in English reading at primary level and their responses are shown in the table above. Table highlights that students faced speed deficits ($M= 3.710$) most of all other issue, pronunciation deficits ($M= 3.591$) at second level and they faced comprehension deficits ($M=3.589$) at least level. Above facts and figures depicted that primary students were of the view that English reading with proper speed is a big problem for primary students. These facts are depicted graphically in the graph below:

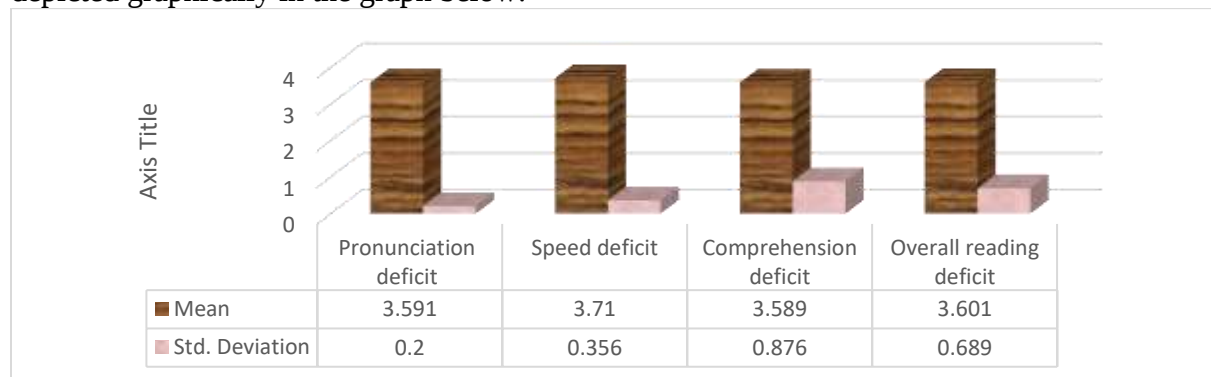


Figure I: English reading difficulties faced by students at primary level as perceived by students
Table 2.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding pronunciation problems faced by students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Public	167	3.4587	.70200	.118
Private	153	3.3379	.67190	

Above table highlights comparative view of public and private school students' pronunciation problems in English reading faced by primary students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that public primary school students faced more pronunciation problems ($M=3.4587$) in English reading as compared private school students ($M=3.3379$) and this difference between both groups was not significant ($p=0.118$). This highlighted that public and private primary school students faced pronunciation problems in English reading almost at the same level. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was accepted according to the pronunciation problems in English reading faced by students.

Table 3.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding speed problems faced by students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Public	167	3.6096	.62356	.494
Private	153	3.5595	.68570	

Above table highlights comparative view of public and private school students' speed problems in English reading faced by primary students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that public primary school students faced more speed problems ($M=3.6096$) in English reading as compared private school students ($M=3.5595$) and this difference between both groups was not significant ($p=0.494$). This highlighted that public and private primary school students faced speed problems in English reading almost at the same level. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was accepted according to the speed problems in English reading faced by students.

Table 4.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding comprehension problems faced by students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Public	167	3.6012	.56876	.000
Private	153	3.2601	.65958	

Above table highlights comparative view of public and private school students' comprehension problems in English reading faced by primary students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that public primary school students faced more comprehension problems ($M=3.6012$) in English reading as compared private school students ($M=3.2601$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that public primary school students faced more comprehension problems in English reading as compared to private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was rejected according to the comprehension problems in English reading faced by students.

Table 5.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding reading problems faced by students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Public	167	3.5565	.53689	.006
Private	153	3.3858	.57637	

Above table highlights comparative view of public and private school students' English reading problems faced by primary students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that public primary school students faced more problems ($M=3.5565$) in English reading as compared private school students ($M=3.3858$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.006$). This highlighted that public primary school students faced more problems in English reading as compared to private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was rejected as public school students faced more English reading problems as compared to private students.

Table 6.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding pronunciation problems faced by students as perceived by male students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	101	3.2337	.74421	.000
Public	66	3.8030	.45538	

Above table highlights comparative view of male public and male private school students' pronunciation problems in English reading faced by primary male students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that male public primary school students faced more pronunciation problems ($M=3.8030$) in English reading as compared male private school students ($M=3.2337$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that male public primary school students faced pronunciation problems in English reading more than male private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in

district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was rejected according to the pronunciation problems in English reading faced by male students.

Table 7.

Comparison of public and private school students’ perception regarding speed problems faced by students as perceived by male students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	101	3.4455	.61506	.000
Public	66	3.8606	.55244	

Above table highlights comparative view of male public and male private school students’ speed problems in English reading faced by primary male students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that male public primary school students faced more speed problems ($M=3.8606$) in English reading as compared male private school students ($M=3.4455$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that male public primary school students faced speed problems in English reading more than male private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was rejected according to the speed problems in English reading faced by male students.

Table 8.

Comparison of public and private school students’ perception regarding comprehension problems faced by students as perceived by male students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	101	3.4673	.55733	.000
Public	66	3.8061	.52708	

Above table highlights comparative view of male public and male private school students’ comprehension problems in English reading faced by primary male students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that male public primary school students faced more comprehension problems ($M=3.8061$) in English reading as compared male private school students ($M=3.4673$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that male public primary school students faced comprehension problems in English reading more than male private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was rejected according to the comprehension problems in English reading faced by male students.

Table 9.

Comparison of public and private school students’ perception regarding reading problems faced by students as perceived by male students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	101	3.3822	.54120	.000

Public	66	3.8232	.40753
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Above table highlights comparative view of male public and male private school students' English reading problems faced by students at primary level as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that male public primary school students faced more problems ($M=3.8232$) in English reading as compared male private school students ($M=3.3822$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that male public primary school students faced English reading problems more than male private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was rejected as male public school students faced more English reading problems as compared male private school students.

Table 10.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding pronunciation problems faced by students as perceived by female students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	59	2.9797	.76762	.000
Public	94	3.5628	.48769	

Above table highlights comparative view of female public and female private school students' pronunciation problems in English reading faced by primary female students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that female public primary school students faced more pronunciation problems ($M=3.5628$) in English reading as compared female private school students ($M=2.9797$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that female public primary school students faced pronunciation problems in English reading more than female private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students" was rejected according to the pronunciation problems in English reading faced by female students.

Table 11.

Comparison of public and private school students' perception regarding speed problems faced by students as perceived by female students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	59	3.3424	.73536	.002
Public	94	3.6957	.61852	

Above table highlights comparative view of female public and female private school students' speed problems in English reading faced by primary female students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that female public primary school students faced more speed problems ($M=3.6957$) in English reading as compared female private school students ($M=3.3424$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that female public primary school students faced speed problems in English reading more than female private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference in English

reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was rejected according to the speed problems in English reading faced by female students.

Table 12.

Comparison of public and private school students’ perception regarding comprehension problems faced by students as perceived by female students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	59	3.1932	.67027	.322
Public	94	3.3021	.65286	

Above table highlights comparative view of female public and female private school students’ comprehension problems in English reading faced by primary female students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that female public primary school students faced more comprehension problems ($M=3.3021$) in English reading as compared female private school students ($M=3.1932$) and this difference between both groups was not significant ($p=0.322$). This highlighted that female public and private primary school students faced comprehension problems in English reading almost at the same level. Therefore, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was accepted according to the comprehension problems in English reading faced by female students.

Table 13.

Comparison of public and private school students’ perception regarding reading problems faced by students as perceived by female students

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Private	59	3.1718	.62419	.000
Public	94	3.5202	.50264	

Above table highlights comparative view of female public and female private school students’ problems in English reading faced by primary female students as perceived by students. Results given in the table showed that female public primary school students faced more problems ($M=3.5202$) in English reading as compared female private school students ($M=3.1718$) and this difference between both groups was significant ($p=0.000$). This highlighted that female public primary school students faced problems in English reading more than female private school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in English reading difficulties faced by students in public and private schools at primary level in district Gujranwala, as perceived by students” was rejected as the difference between public and private school female students was significant.

Main Findings:

1. Primary students in Gujranwala face challenges in English reading, with speed deficits ($M=3.710$) being the most prominent issue, followed by pronunciation deficits ($M=3.591$) and comprehension deficits ($M=3.589$).
2. Public and private school students perceive similar levels of pronunciation problems in English reading, with no significant difference between the two groups ($p=0.118$).

3. Both public and private school students report comparable levels of speed problems in English reading, and the difference between the groups is not statistically significant ($p=0.494$).
4. Significant differences emerge in comprehension problems, with public school students facing more challenges compared to private school students ($p=0.000$). Additionally, public school female students report more significant overall reading problems than their private school counterparts ($p=0.000$).

Recommendations

1. Given the prominence of speed deficits in English reading among primary students in Gujranwala, it is recommended to implement targeted intervention programs focused on enhancing reading speed. These programs could include structured reading exercises, use of technology-assisted learning tools, and dedicated classroom activities aimed at improving reading fluency.
2. Recognizing the significant comprehension challenges faced by public school students in English reading, it is advisable to implement comprehensive reading strategies within the public-school curriculum. This could involve specialized teacher training programs, interactive learning materials, and incorporating diverse reading genres to enhance comprehension skills.

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