

THE INFLUENCE OF HOME AND SCHOOL BACKGROUNDS ON LEARNERS' ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is an important skill that all learners must acquire for their academic success as they will be required to use the skill to understand written assignments and tests throughout their academic lives. It is also an essential skill that is required to navigate through this ever-changing society. This review paper explores how the home and school environment influence how English First Additional Language learners learn and acquire reading comprehension skills. The study is guided by the Cognitive Process theory, and it synthesises secondary literature on the influence of the home environment, the school, poverty, language barriers and classroom setting as contributing factors towards learners' poor reading comprehension. The findings revealed that learners' home environments play a crucial role in the development of reading comprehension skills because parents or guardians encouraged reading, monitored homework, and provided access to books. The findings also indicated that the school environment has a significant impact on learners' reading comprehension because it provides adequate reading materials, and structured reading programmes created better opportunities for learners to develop reading skills. The findings showed that many learners struggled because English is an additional language rather than their home language. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by synthesising literature looking at the influence of background factors on learners reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, vocabulary, home environment, school environment, Cognitive Process Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learners' home and educational backgrounds play a role in how they learn and develop, it also has an impact on how they develop vocabulary that is essential in reading for understanding (Kim, Crossley & Kim, 2022). Learning to read implies understanding the meaning, the knowledge that the written language wants to transmit to us. Hence the importance of working from an early age on the relationships between letters and sounds; as well as it is also vital to awaken children's interest in the discovery of the messages camouflaged behind the letters. It is not enough for children to see written material on the street, or in the classroom itself, but it must be interesting enough for them to want to discover the knowledge it transmits. Creating a positive environment that compels to interact with written language is essential for the development of reading. It is therefore important for the school and home backgrounds to create opportunities for learners to learn and discover the meaning of new words which are essential for reading comprehension. This review explores existing literature on the influence of home and school backgrounds on learners' English First Additional Language learners' reading comprehension skills. This broader perspective is in line with the Cognitive Process Theory which emphasises that learning is a cognitive process where learners process information and construct meaning through their experiences (Brayadi, Supriadi & Manora, 2022). In this case learners use the new information gathered at school to add to their existing knowledge from home which allows them to better understand the reading comprehension lessons that they are currently being taught (Mayer, 2024). This theory recognises the need for mental activities and processing of information while acquiring knowledge (McBride, Cutting & Zimmerman, 2022). Learners come to school with an acquired knowledge of listening and speaking through exposure to the language, this knowledge is added to the current lessons therefore the combination of this information contributes to learners reading comprehension skills.

Studies show that there are key factors that contribute to English First Additional Language learners' poor reading comprehension and the factors include: poor vocabulary, which means that learners are not exposed to many objects based on their vocabulary, read according to purpose, or read only because they need to pass an exam; fragility structure and lack of motivation on the part of teachers and learners in the development of skills (Maala & Mkandawire, 2022; Maala, 2022, Nairenge, 2025, Mamabolo, 2022). In a similar study, it was revealed that there are a number of challenges that learners face and that negatively influence reading comprehension, these difficulties include the difficulty of reading ambiguous words, when learners find an unknown vocabulary, they find it difficult to maintain their Text-focused attention and the limited time available to cognitively process the text, rendering them unable to understand what the passage or text was saying (Hezam, Ali, Imtiaz, Saifi and Islam, 2022). Children with low vocabulary levels and reading skills struggle with reading comprehension, children with lower vocabulary levels struggle with word comprehension, and the more they struggle, the more their interest will suffer, creating a vicious circle. Many children prefer other activities than reading, and that uninteresting text content can quickly turn a capable reader into a less than enthusiastic reader (Stewart & Correia, 2023). Many studies highlight the contributing factors towards EFAL learners poor reading comprehension, where they indicate factors such as poor development of vocabulary, difficulty in reading unfamiliar words and limited practice. Again, despite extensive research on how schools and policy makers can help to mitigate the challenge of English First Additional Language learners' poor reading comprehension skills. There is a gap on how the home and the school environment influences how learners learn and acquire reading comprehension skills. This gap restricts the development of reading comprehension skills by having a glance at how the home and school environments influence English First Additional Language learners' reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by synthesising literature on how both the school and the home environment contribute to learners' vocabulary development and how they learn reading comprehension skills from a cognitive process perspective. Precisely, it investigates the influence of home and school backgrounds on learners' English First Additional Language learners' reading comprehension skills. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How does the home and school environment influence EFAL learners' reading comprehension?
- In what manner does EFAL learners' prior knowledge influence their new learning of reading comprehension skills?
- Which strategies do EFAL learners use to learn reading comprehension skills?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of home and school backgrounds on learners' English First Additional Language learners' reading comprehension skills. This qualitative review paper explored secondary data from peer reviewed articles, conference article papers and books which range from the year 2022 to 2026. Sources were identified using educational web sides and keywords such as 'influence, home and school background, reading comprehension and English First Additional language were used.

Data Analysis Technique

The reviewed literature was analysed through thematic data analysis. Key themes, recurring ideas and concepts relating to the influence, home and school background, reading comprehension and English First Additional Language were identified and coded. To ensure validity and reliability, the study used credible academic data sources and compared results from different literature. Identified themes included: environmental factors, the home environment, poverty, the school environment, language barriers in classroom settings and Vocabulary. Continues comparison of the findings helped to eliminate biases and improve consistency and relevance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reviewed discussions of literature highlights, the home environment, poverty, the school, language barriers in classroom settings and vocabulary as a foundation for reading comprehension as the main factors which influence reading comprehension skills among English First Additional Language learners.

The Home Environment

The literature consistently highlights the importance of family support, literacy-related activities, and parental involvement in fostering reading development. Learners who grow up in homes where reading is encouraged are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards reading and stronger literacy skills (Altun, Tantekin Erden & Hartman, 2022). Furthermore, the literature revealed that the home literacy environment indirectly influences reading development through vocabulary growth. Children who come from home environments where there is an exposure to books, storytelling and literacy activities are enriched in effective language development and they acquire reading comprehension skills (Ruth Janet, Miguel Angel & José Eduardo, 2024). Learners from literacy rich homes tend to enter schools with stronger vocabulary and are better prepared for reading instruction (Nag, Vagh, Dulay, Snowling, Donolato & Melby-Lervåg, 2024). In support, Norudin, Hassan, Mokhtar, Yasin and Ramli (2024) highlight that parents' levels of education also contribute to how well learners learn and develop reading comprehension skills. These findings show that educated parents are more likely to model positive reading behaviour, engage in literacy activities with their children and provide access to reading materials. These kinds of practices contribute to the development of reading habits and creates opportunities for children to interact with language in meaningful ways (Çaliskan & Ulas, 2022). This indicates that the home environment and parental support provide emotional encouragements and intellectual stimulation that contributes to children's confidence and motivation to read. The review further indicates that successful readers are often associated with supportive family environments where literacy is valued and encouraged. This finding is in line with the tenets of the Cognitive process theory, where it is highlighted that the learners acquire knowledge in terms of language and vocabulary from home, these knowledge is therefore going to be used at the classroom when learning reading comprehension skills, the prior knowledge together with the new information will then help them to better understand what they are currently learning. In the same light, poverty also plays a role towards the home environmental factors that influences learner reading compression as outlined below:

Poverty

This is one of the most important barriers to reading development. Poverty affects literacy development in several ways, including limited access to educational resources, poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition and reduced opportunities for language exposure (Buckingham, Beaman & Wheldall, 2023). Studies suggest that children from low-income households are often exposed to fewer literacy experiences than their more affluent peers (Watts, 2022; Abo Hamza, Tindle, Pawlak, Bedewy & Moustafa, 2024). This affects how quickly and effectively they grasp the reading comprehension skills as they are faced with limited access to books, educational materials, literacy supporting opportunities for vocabulary development and reading practice. As a result of these, the learners mostly begin formal education with weaker reading foundation (Gorski, 2026). Again, Mishra, Shrivastava and Kolandaisamy (2023) revealed that poverty related stress affects children's cognitive and emotional development. Environmental stressors associated with poverty may influence concentration, memory and overall academic performance, making it more difficult for learners to engage successfully with the reading tasks (Harms & Garrett-Ruffin, (2023). Furthermore, it is important to note the relationship between poverty and language development. Studies indicate that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently subjected to limited exposure rich and complex language interactions, this can affect badly affect their vocabulary development as well as how they develop reading comprehension skills (De Schutter, Frazer, Guio & Marlier, 2023: Abo Hamza, Tindle, Pawlak, Bedewy & Moustafa, 2024). Similarly, Okkinga, Gelderen, Schooten, Steensel and Slegers (2023) assert that vocabulary development is closely linked to reading comprehension, so such limitations lead to long term consequences for learners' academic achievement.

The School Environment

Schools play an important role in developing learners' reading comprehension skills. Schools that have adequate reading resources and create supporting teaching learning environment, help to offer effective teaching of reading comprehension skills to English First Additional Language learners (Lungu & Mkandawire, 2022). Li, Gan, Leung and An (2022) suggest that teachers' effectiveness in delivering reading comprehension instructions also has a big impact on learners' reading comprehension competence. In support, Nguyen (2022) declares that learners benefit a lot when their teachers have strong knowledge of how to deliver reading comprehension instruction to English First Additional language learners, these gives the teacher a better stance in offering opportunities for practice reading. However, other studies argue that effective delivery of reading comprehension instruction is dependent on teachers' understanding of reading methods and their literacy development (Nguyen, 2022). In agreement Judd (2024) indicates that teachers who experience challenges with implementing effective reading strategies often lack confidence in delivering reading comprehension lessons. These challenges contribute to the poor reading comprehension levels of English First Additional Language learners, predominantly in context where learners rely deeply on the schools for reading experiences. This also shows the importance of positive teacher learner relationships which contributes effectively learners reading success. Studies also highlight that there are major challenges that affect schools which are located in disadvantaged communities (Peltola, Huilla, Luoma & Oittinen, 2023; Garan, 2022). The learners in these communities are therefore in a disadvantaged state as opposed to their peers in developed communities. The challenges faced by these schools include inadequate resources, overcrowding in classrooms, limited parental involvement as insufficient library facilities all of which contribute towards the poor reading comprehension of learners. Learners' participant more when their school environment supports their needs in terms of providing reading materials and when they get assistance from their teachers. A positive school environment allows learners to learn reading comprehension skills and support more academic engagement. In addition, language barriers and classroom settings in schools also form part of the school environmental factors that contribute towards learner reading compression as outlined below:

Language Barriers in Classroom Settings

Recent literature indicates that acquiring reading comprehension skills in multilingual classroom is challenging for both teachers and learners especially when the learners must acquire these skills in a language that is not their home language (Gallagher, Beck, Ramirez, Barber and Buehl, 2023; Soares, Liu, D'Agostino, Nakamura & Freeman, 2025). Hezam, Ali, Imtiaz, Saifi and Islam (2022) assert that learners who are required to learn to read in a different language may experience comprehension challenges and literacy acquisition. In addition, Ebadi and Ashrafabadi (2022) emphasises that it can be challenging for learners to learn reading comprehension in a First Additional Language as opposed to learning to read in a home language. Concurrently, Xu and Krulatz (2023) found that teachers mostly experience difficulties with using multilingualism as a resource for teaching. In some situations, learners' home language is not effectively integrated into classroom lessons or code switching is minimal, which limits opportunities to build reading skills and linguistic knowledge of the learners (Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022).

Furthermore, literature indicates that teachers' planning plays an important role in tackling language related challenges. Many teachers experience challenges in delivering reading comprehension lessons due to the limited time they spend on preparing and understanding to content, this is due to the workload that teachers are faced with (Adao, Relleve, Salazar, Macawile & Chavez, 2023). These challenges limit the effectiveness of the teachers' reading comprehension lessons delivery which in turn hinders contributes to the learners' poor reading comprehension (De Ocampo, Tosino & Martir, 2024). The classroom factors such as inadequate resources and overcrowded classrooms also play a role in the poor reading comprehension of learners as the conditions of these classrooms restricts opportunities for individualised support and effective reading comprehension lesson delivery (Siyoba, 2023). Again, Mahmood (2022) adds that learner do also struggle with language related aspects of reading such as grammar, punctuations, vocabulary, comprehension and pronunciation, this is evident mostly when learners must read in a language that they

are not proficient in. The studies further indicate that lack of parental support and school management teams may hinder the teachers' effectiveness in delivering reading comprehension lessons (Radebe, 2024; Barce, 2025). All in all, the findings indicate that language barriers and classroom settings influence learners' reading comprehension success. Effective teaching of reading comprehension skills not only requires teachers' competence but also a supportive environment that accommodates language differences and provides opportunities for learners to develop reading comprehension skills.

Vocabulary as a Foundation for Reading Comprehension

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that learners with a rich vocabulary are better positioned to understand, interpret, and engage with written texts (Rosyada & Apoko, 2023). Vocabulary provides learners with the ability to recognise words, understand their meanings, and connect textual information to their existing knowledge structures (Allen, 2023). The studies also indicate that vocabulary development is a contributing factor towards learners being able to read for understanding (Soomro, Abbasi & Abbasi, 2026; Brooks, Clenton & Fraser, 2023). This indicates that learners who understand the meaning of words found in words are better able to understand the texts that learners with a limited vocabulary. This is in line with Zhang and Zhang (2022) who suggest that vocabulary closes the gap between word recognition and reading comprehension. Again, Elvriza and Nurcholis (2025) ascertain that it important to expose learners to reading activities, particularly book reading to develop their vocabulary. Similarly, Vaughn, Boardman and Klingner, (2024) add that when learners are frequently exposed to texts, they are placed at a better place to enhance their vocabulary and reading comprehension. These findings are in line with the Cognitive Process Theory which views reading as an active process which entail that readers construct meaning by connecting the current information with their prior knowledge (Utami, 2025). Vocabulary forms part of the prior knowledge and helps learners in processing information, interpreting meaning and engaging with texts successfully (Hattan, Alexander & Lupo, 2024). In brief, learners with a strong vocabulary are more likely to understand the meaning of the texts they are reading. In addition, the reviewed studies indicate that supportive home and school environments promote literacy development by providing learners with opportunities for engagement, motivation, and exposure to reading activities. Conversely, unfavourable environmental conditions often limit learners' access to literacy experiences and negatively affect reading outcomes (Iqbal & Mehmood, 2024). This indicates that both home and the school environment should expose learners to vocabulary developing activities which support reading comprehension competence. Most of the above study have looked at how vocabulary development and prior knowledge helps to develop learners' reading comprehension skills while fewer studies have synthesised on how the combination of the home and school environment collectively influence how learners learn, develop rich vocabulary and acquire the reading comprehension skills. This study bridges this gap by synthesising literature on both the school and the home environment contribute to learners' vocabulary development and how they learn reading comprehension skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this review study highlight the important role of vocabulary development in teaching reading comprehension skills. Learners with a strong vocabulary can make connections with the text and construct meaning. Furthermore, literature revealed that frequent exposure to English First Additional Language and access to reading materials in the language can help to develop vocabulary which is essential for reading comprehension. Again, the study revealed that reading is a cognitive process where learners' prior knowledge helps them to make connections with the text which makes it easier for them to understand the current reading material. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by synthesising literature looking at the influence of background factors on learners reading comprehension. It highlights how the home environment, the school, poverty and language barriers in classrooms influence how learners learn reading comprehension skills. The findings of this study can provide a lens that can inform policy interventions which are aimed at improving learners' reading comprehension skills.

Contributions of the Study

This is important as it shows how the home and school environments influence how reading comprehension of EFAL learners takes place. By exploring these environments, the study highlights how these conditions can either support or hinder the development of reading comprehension skills. The results of this study can provide a lens that can inform policy interventions which are aimed at improving learners' reading comprehension skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could investigate other factors that may influence EFAL learners reading comprehension, these may include peer pressure, community support and digital platforms. Future studies may also include EFAL learners from various provinces, rural and urban schools and different socio-economic backgrounds to allow for generalisability of the findings.

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