

# ENHANCING READING SKILLS TO B2 LEVEL IN ESL/EFL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** This article reviews the literature on strategies and interventions that have been shown to enhance reading skills for B2-level ESL/EFL students. The focus is on the role of vocabulary development, reading fluency, extensive reading programs, and the use of reading strategies such as inference, prediction, and summarization.

**Key words:** CEFR, extensive reading programs, vocabulary development, reading strategies, fluency.

Reading is a fundamental skill for language acquisition, and achieving a high level of reading proficiency is essential for academic success and effective communication in English. The CEFR categorizes language proficiency into six levels, from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient), with B2 considered an upper-intermediate level. B2-level students are expected to read and understand texts on a wide range of topics, including abstract and complex materials, and extract both explicit and implicit meaning from texts (Council of Europe, 2020). For ESL/EFL students, enhancing reading skills at the B2 level involves improving vocabulary, developing reading strategies, and increasing reading fluency. This article reviews current research on how these factors contribute to reading skill development and identifies practical methods for teachers to enhance B2-level reading proficiency.

Vocabulary size and depth are closely correlated with reading comprehension ability (Grabe, 2009; Nation, 2013). B2-level students typically have a vocabulary range sufficient to understand everyday texts, but they still encounter difficulty with more complex or specialized vocabulary. Research indicates that extensive

vocabulary knowledge—especially in terms of word frequency and collocation—significantly enhances reading comprehension. According to Coxhead (2000), academic texts require specialized vocabulary, which learners must acquire to achieve proficiency in academic reading.

Research on reading has categorized readers based on their use of strategies and reading comprehension outcomes, labeling them as good or poor, successful or unsuccessful, skilled or unskilled, and high- or low-proficient readers. Generally, researchers aim to identify the positive aspects of these categories. It is important to note the clear connection between a reader's proficiency level, their strategy use, and the results of the reading process. Skilled readers tend to be adept at using strategies because they apply both cognitive and metacognitive techniques, which enhance their comprehension. These readers not only utilize a variety of strategies but also use them more frequently than less successful readers. Effective strategy users benefit from both bottom-up and top-down reading approaches (Singhal, 2001; 2006). Furthermore, they excel in declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, which helps them determine which strategies to use, when to apply them, and how to do so effectively. A key trait of good strategy users is their ability to coordinate multiple strategies (Anderson, 1991). In contrast, poor strategy users tend to misunderstand the reading process—they are unaware of its demands and make less use of their cognitive resources. They exert less mental effort, struggle to monitor their comprehension, and apply fewer and less effective strategies while processing text.

There are various approaches to vocabulary instruction that have been proven effective. For example, direct teaching of high-frequency academic words, as well as incidental vocabulary learning through reading, has shown positive effects on reading skills (Schmitt, 2008). Additionally, the use of context to infer word meaning

(Haastrup, 2013) and strategies like guessing from context or word-part analysis have been found to improve comprehension in B2-level learners (Zhang, 2012).

Reading fluency refers to the ability to read texts smoothly and efficiently, with appropriate speed, accuracy, and prosody (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). At the B2 level, students must be able to read both silently and aloud with adequate fluency to comprehend the text without excessive cognitive load. The importance of fluency lies in the fact that it enables students to focus their mental resources on understanding the meaning of the text, rather than decoding individual words.

Fluency-building activities, such as repeated reading and timed reading exercises (Samuels, 2002), have been found to improve both reading speed and comprehension. Moreover, reading aloud and practice with varied sentence structures can help students gain confidence and reduce anxiety during reading tasks.

Extensive reading (ER) involves reading large quantities of text for pleasure, without the need for intensive analysis or vocabulary study. This approach has been shown to increase reading fluency and vocabulary acquisition, as students are exposed to a wide range of language in context. Research supports that extensive reading can have a significant impact on the development of reading comprehension and language skills, particularly at the B2 level (Day, Bamford, 2002).

Several studies have demonstrated that extensive reading programs help students to engage with authentic texts, which can build both vocabulary knowledge and the ability to read for gist. Furthermore, extensive reading allows students to gradually become more familiar with a variety of genres, writing styles, and cultural contexts, all of which are crucial for B2-level proficiency.

The integration of technology in language learning has opened new avenues for enhancing reading skills. Digital tools, such as e-readers, language learning apps, and online reading platforms, provide students with immediate access to a wealth of texts and vocabulary support (Chun, 2001). For instance, e-readers offer features such as instant dictionary look-ups and text-to-speech functions, which support comprehension and fluency development (Zheng et al., 2018).

Online reading platforms, such as extensive reading websites, also allow learners to select texts suited to their level and interests, promoting both motivation and language acquisition. Furthermore, web-based activities like interactive quizzes and comprehension exercises can provide instant feedback, helping students track their progress (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004).

Collaborative reading, in which students work together to analyze texts and discuss content, is another effective strategy for enhancing reading skills. Peer discussion fosters critical thinking and allows students to clarify misunderstandings, share interpretations, and reinforce learning. Studies have found that cooperative learning environments enhance both reading comprehension and motivation (Slavin, 1991).

Furthermore, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been used successfully to promote reading skills through real-world, problem-solving activities. TBLT encourages learners to focus on communicative tasks that require active engagement with texts, such as summarizing articles, comparing viewpoints, or solving problems based on information in a text (Ellis, 2003).

Enhancing reading skills to B2 level in ESL/EFL students involves a multifaceted approach that combines vocabulary development, reading fluency, strategic reading, and technology-based tools. By implementing evidence-based strategies such as extensive reading programs, inference-making, and collaborative learning, teachers

can significantly improve their students' reading abilities. Furthermore, with the support of digital resources and task-based activities, students are better equipped to tackle the complexity and diversity of texts they encounter at the B2 level.

As research continues to explore the most effective methods for reading instruction, it is clear that a balanced approach, integrating both traditional and modern techniques, is the key to fostering high-level reading proficiency in ESL/EFL learners.

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