

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING COMPREHENSION AND VOCABULARY IN EARLY STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** This article provides a scientific analysis of the interrelationship between reading comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge among young learners. The study demonstrates that during the process of reading, the level of comprehension directly influences learners' lexical repertoire, while the richness of vocabulary, in turn, plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of reading comprehension. It is revealed that students with insufficient vocabulary face difficulties in achieving full understanding of a text, whereas those with a broader vocabulary demonstrate higher reading efficiency. The article also emphasizes the significance of employing various methods and strategies to develop reading comprehension, particularly highlighting the role of vocabulary-enriching activities. This research carries practical importance for improving literacy in primary education, fostering learners' language competence, and contributing to their cognitive development.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, vocabulary, young learners, literacy, language competence, text comprehension, lexical repertoire, primary education, cognitive development, learning strategies, vocabulary-enrichment methods, educational effectiveness.

## **Introduction.**

Language and its structural components hold a special place not only in social life but also in the development of the individual. The richness of thought is primarily determined by the breadth of one's vocabulary and lexical repertoire. Vocabulary is not limited to certain linguistic structures or grammatical patterns; rather, it is the product of the collective thoughts and emotions formed over centuries through a people's social, cultural, and historical experiences. For this reason, language units reflect a nation's worldview, traditions, beliefs, history, and way of life.

Moreover, language is considered a crucial factor that provides important insights into an individual's cognitive development. It serves as a vital system of signs in perceiving the surrounding environment, explaining events, and shaping social relations. As a social being, a person uses language in harmony with thought and applies it as the primary tool of both oral and written communication. At the core of this instrument stand words and vocabulary.

On this basis, the present article aims to scientifically investigate the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension among young learners, as well as to explore the methods of their development.

## **Main Part.**

Reading emerged earlier than the invention of print and even before the appearance of writing. In this regard, B.A. Blaha and J.M. Bennett emphasize that reading dates back to a



period prior to the formation of language itself [1], since humans had to “read” the world in order to survive. Reading is not only the recognition of words but also the ability of the reader to connect the content of the text with prior knowledge and linguistic experience. This process involves not only decoding and understanding phonological structures but also a deep comprehension of word meanings.

Considering the different aspects of reading, numerous researchers have provided various definitions. The primary reason for such differences lies in the fact that the process of reading is a complex mental activity invisible to the eye. In its most accurate and concise definition, reading is the process of directing, comprehending, and interpreting written symbols into meaning [2]. Undoubtedly, the extraction of meaning from a text and the interpretation of ideas depend on the mental, imaginative, and physical characteristics of the individual performing this process.

In young children, vocabulary is a crucial indicator of the level of reading comprehension, influencing their critical thinking, perception, and understanding of text content. Research shows that vocabulary independently makes a significant contribution to the development of reading comprehension [3].

Long-term and large-scale studies confirm the interrelationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. For example, a meta-analysis based on 499 correlations revealed that the early development of vocabulary and grammatical skills positively influences reading comprehension, word reading, and pseudoword reading performance [4].

From a broader perspective, an analysis of emergent literacies demonstrates that children’s vocabulary—particularly by the end of the second grade and in the third grade—is one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension. Studies related to the issue of socioeconomic status (SES) also indicate that vocabulary acts as a positive mediator in helping young children with limited lexical resources to derive meaning from texts and to grasp new meanings of words in context [5].

Vocabulary is the lexical stock of a language, that is, the totality of words, collocations, and phraseological units created and used by a people. According to scholar A. G‘ulomov, “vocabulary is the entirety of all words that make up the lexical fund of a language, and it reflects the level of its development” [6].

Thus, vocabulary manifests itself in two dimensions:

*General (national) vocabulary* – encompasses all words and expressions used in a language.

*Individual vocabulary* – the set of words actively used in a particular person’s speech.

*Lexical stock* – the general lexical fund of a language, which is the product of a people’s historical experience and thinking. As A. Hojiyev notes, “*the lexical stock is the basis of the language’s wealth, reflecting the socio-cultural life, worldview, and spiritual values of the nation*” [7].

*Active vocabulary* – the set of words regularly used in a person’s daily speech. It includes the most frequently employed words. For example, items such as *student, book, family, school* belong to the active vocabulary. According to A. Karimov, “*the active vocabulary consists of units frequently used by the speaker in communication and regularly employed in speech*” [8].

*Passive vocabulary* – words not frequently used in active speech but still understood by the speaker. This includes obsolete words, historical terms, dialectal expressions,

neologisms, and rarely used terms. As Sh. Shukurov observes, “units belonging to the passive vocabulary are understood by the individual, but they are not actively used in speech” [9].

The richness of a language expands further with the emergence of new words entering social life. For instance, scientific and technological progress, social changes, and cultural exchanges introduce new words into the language. As A. Madvaliyev emphasizes, “the vocabulary is renewed in accordance with the changes in social life, becoming enriched with neologisms and terms” [10].

Reading comprehension is the process of receiving, analyzing, and interpreting information from a text during reading and integrating it into one’s system of knowledge. As researchers point out, reading comprehension is not merely reading words but involves perceiving their meaning, identifying semantic relations, and constructing new knowledge [11].

Reading comprehension reflects the learner’s ability to extract necessary information from a text, process it, and apply it in communicative contexts. According to A. Anderson, “reading comprehension is an interactive process occurring between the text and the reader’s prior knowledge” [12].

*Understanding words and sentences (decoding stage).* At this stage, the learner correctly reads letters and words in the text and understands their lexical meanings. C. Perfetti and J. Stafura argue that “decoding is the fundamental basis of reading, without which higher-level comprehension cannot occur” [13].

*Recognizing inter-sentential connections (local comprehension).* The learner identifies connections between sentences in the text, correctly interpreting reference words and conjunctions. In his model, W. Kintsch defines this stage as “local interpretation” [14].

*Understanding the overall meaning of the text (global comprehension).* The learner identifies the main idea, theme, and the author’s intention. At this stage, a semantic model of the text is formed. As C.E. Snow states, “global comprehension requires summarizing the content of the text and extracting the main idea” [15].

*Drawing inferences and analysis (inference stage).* The learner makes conclusions based on the text, uncovers implicit meanings, and attempts to interpret the author’s message. According to N. Anderson, “higher-level comprehension is defined by the process of inference” [16].

*Evaluation and application stage.* The learner expresses personal opinions based on the text and applies it to real-life experiences. In the PISA international assessment system, this stage is referred to as “using information from text” [17].

In the process of primary school literacy, special attention is paid to the stages of “conscious, correct, fluent, fast, and expressive reading”; among them, conscious reading is considered the leading one, as it is a crucial stage in understanding the content of a text [18].

Interactive methods (such as “Brainstorming,” “Insert,” “Cluster,” etc.) increase learners’ interest in text comprehension, fostering independent thinking, reasoning, and coherent expression of ideas [19].

In the process of comprehending a text, the learner passes through stages of recognizing words (decoding), understanding their meanings, and making semantic inferences. As G.A. Miller emphasizes, “the broader the learner’s vocabulary, the faster and more effective the process of text comprehension becomes” [20]. Thus, vocabulary is the fundamental basis of text comprehension.

*Semantic networks and associative relations.* From a psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary is determined not only by the number of words but also by their organization and interconnections within a semantic network [21]. This demonstrates that words in human cognition function through associative links. For instance, the word “book” is associated with concepts such as “reading,” “knowledge,” “school”, which facilitates faster comprehension of a text.

The development of vocabulary is determined not only by the quantitative indicators of words but also by their position within semantic networks and their associative relations. From a psycholinguistic perspective, words in the human mind function through specific semantic connections, which serve as an essential cognitive basis in the process of text comprehension. For example, recalling one word in association with related concepts enables faster and deeper understanding of a text. Therefore, in developing reading comprehension among young learners, it is necessary not only to expand vocabulary but also to cultivate semantic and associative relations between words, which is considered a significant scientific and methodological task.

*The Role of Vocabulary in Cognitive Processes.* Text comprehension requires the learner to engage in multiple cognitive processes simultaneously, such as perception, memorization, prediction, and the use of context. J. Cummins emphasizes in his research that learners with insufficient vocabulary often understand texts only superficially and are deprived of the opportunity for deeper analysis. Thus, vocabulary serves as a decisive factor in determining the effectiveness of cognitive processes [22].

*The stages of text acquisition are as follows:*

**Decoding** – recognizing and pronouncing words. If the vocabulary is limited, this stage requires more time.

**Semantic comprehension** – understanding the meanings of words. This process accelerates when the lexical repertoire is rich.

**Pragmatic comprehension** – drawing conclusions from the text and applying them to real-life situations. This stage is also dependent on a broad vocabulary.

The process of text acquisition takes place step by step, and at each stage, vocabulary plays a decisive role. First, at the decoding stage, the speed and accuracy of recognizing and pronouncing words depend on the size of the lexical repertoire, with limited vocabulary slowing the process. Next, at the semantic comprehension stage, understanding the meaning of a text directly relies on vocabulary breadth, enabling learners with richer vocabulary to grasp content more quickly and accurately. Finally, at the pragmatic comprehension stage, the ability to draw conclusions from the text and apply them to real-life contexts is also closely tied to vocabulary. Hence, vocabulary expansion enhances the efficiency of all stages of text acquisition and ensures a deeper level of understanding.

The period of primary education is a decisive stage in learners’ speech development. During this period, children acquire new words, learn to use them, and develop the ability to employ the resources of the language effectively. Research in psycholinguistics and pedagogy demonstrates that vocabulary expansion shapes learners’ abilities to comprehend texts, express thoughts, and engage in communication. Several factors influence the vocabulary development of learners:

**Environmental influence.** In developing vocabulary among young learners, the educational environment and the teacher’s activity play a crucial role. As L.S. Vygotsky states, “in a child’s development, the social environment and interaction with adults are the leading



factors” [23]. The social environment provides a natural field for shaping a child’s cognitive processes, moral views, and behavior, while communication with adults serves as the primary source for developing language, thinking, and social skills. Therefore, the roles of close adults—parents, teachers, and caregivers—are invaluable, as active communication with them directly influences the enrichment of a child’s thinking and social experience.

**The importance of reading and listening activities.** Reading books and listening to audio texts play a significant role in expanding students’ vocabulary. As S. Krashen argues in his *Input Hypothesis*, learners acquire new words more effectively when they encounter them in natural contexts [24]. Context reveals the semantic boundaries of words, links them to real-life situations, and facilitates memorization. As a result, learners acquire not only the lexical meaning of words but also their communicative value. Therefore, the use of literary works, fairy tales, poems, and dialogues in the classroom significantly enriches vocabulary.

**Play activities and creative tasks.** For primary school students, play is among the most effective methods of vocabulary development. During play, children actively use words and remember new expressions. As E.O. Smirnova notes, “*play is not only an enjoyable activity for children but also a natural source of speech development*” [25]. Through play, children acquire new words, learn to use them in communicative contexts, and develop interaction skills. Thus, play is one of the main pedagogical tools for ensuring children’s language and speech development.

**The use of multimedia.** Educational technologies are increasingly viewed as effective tools for vocabulary development. Video lessons, animations, and interactive programs help children memorize new words more quickly. According to R.E. Mayer’s cognitive theory of multimedia learning, the integration of words and images contributes to better understanding [26]. Visual aids add additional meaning to the text, clarify word content, attract learners’ attention, and make memorization easier. Therefore, the combined use of words and visuals is regarded as an important methodological approach that enhances educational effectiveness.

**Family environment and independent reading.** The family is also an important factor in vocabulary development. When parents read books with their children, engage in conversations, and answer questions, children acquire new words more quickly. The study by A.C. Hargrave and M.A. Sénéchal found that children who regularly read with their parents had significantly richer vocabularies [27]. Such practices not only enrich vocabulary but also positively impact text comprehension, speech activity, and the development of thinking.

Vocabulary development in young learners is a multifaceted process influenced by factors ranging from the learning environment to family upbringing and modern technologies. A psycholinguistic approach indicates that enriching vocabulary is a fundamental condition for fostering reading comprehension, communication, and thinking in learners.

Primary education serves as the foundation for students’ speech development, where expanding vocabulary and cultivating reading literacy are among the central tasks. Psycholinguistic and methodological studies show that the breadth of a learner’s vocabulary directly impacts the ability to fully comprehend texts and to express thoughts fluently. Therefore, reading instruction in primary grades should be integrated with various approaches aimed at vocabulary development.

Reading methodology in primary classrooms should not be limited to the formation of technical skills but must also prioritize vocabulary enrichment. Working with texts, employing play-based methods, and utilizing literary works and multimedia resources represent the main factors contributing to the expansion of children’s lexical repertoire.

Vocabulary knowledge and the process of reading comprehension in young learners are closely interconnected. Research demonstrates that learners with richer vocabulary grasp meanings in texts more accurately, acquire new knowledge more quickly, and derive greater enjoyment from reading. Thus, the choice of methods targeting vocabulary expansion in primary education constitutes a decisive factor in developing reading literacy.

The following are methods that contribute to improving reading comprehension through vocabulary enrichment in young learners:

**“Word Journey” Method.** Students trace the “journey” of a selected word. For example, they explore how the word “*water*” is used in a fairy tale, a scientific text, a poem, and a proverb. In this way, they come to understand the word’s different meanings across contexts.

**Advantage:** this method develops students’ skills in contextual comprehension and reveals the polysemy of words.

**Limitation:** in primary grades, its implementation requires substantial preparation on the part of the teacher.

*Example:* Word: “*Water*”

In a fairy tale: “*The water fairy helped the children.*”

In a scientific text: “*Water is the source of life; it exists in three states.*”

In a poem: “*Water flows, the mountains rejoice.*”

In a proverb: “*There is no life without water.*”

*Result:* The learner understands how the word “*water*” acquires different meanings in various contexts.

**“Word Robots” Method**

Each student creates a “robot” for a new word. For example, for the word “*book*”: the robot’s hand is “page,” its leg is “cover,” and its heart is “content.” This method illustrates the structure, function, and meaning of the word.

**Advantage:** develops imagination, creativity, and the perception of words as an integrated “body.”

**Limitation:** working with too many words can be time-consuming.

*Example:* Word: “*Book*”

Head: Title

Heart: Content

Hand: Pages

Leg: Cover

*Result:* The learner imagines the “book” as a robot, gaining a better understanding of its parts and significance.

**“Word Theater” Method**

Students dramatize new words. For example, they stage a short scene to demonstrate the word “*friendship*.”

**Advantage:** enriches vocabulary, helps children feel the meaning of words, and practice using them in real-life situations.

**Limitation:** requires time and space for preparation.

*Example:* Word: “*Friendship*”

Children perform a short scene: two friends argue, then reconcile and help each other.

*Result:* They experience the life-related meaning of the word “*friendship*.”

**“Word Mosaic” Method**

The teacher cuts key words from a text (on cards) and asks students to arrange them logically to reconstruct the full meaning. The words resemble “mosaic pieces.”

Advantage: strengthens the link between words and meaning, develops logical thinking.

Limitation: challenging to apply with long texts.

*Example:* Text: “*In spring, trees bloom. Birds sing. Children play in the yard.*”

The teacher cuts words into cards: “*In spring,*” “*trees,*” “*bloom,*” “*birds,*” “*sing,*” “*children,*” “*yard,*” “*play.*”

Students arrange them in order to reconstruct the text.

*Result:* Learners acquire skills in text construction and understanding the role of words in context.

### “Word Magicians” Method

Students are given a simple word (e.g., “*moon*”) and they “enchant” it by expanding with synonyms, antonyms, metaphors, proverbs, and poems.

Advantage: develops vocabulary, figurative expression, and artistic thinking.

Limitation: younger learners may struggle with understanding synonyms and metaphors.

*Example:* Word: “*Moon*”

Synonym: “*brightness*”

Antonym: “*darkness*”

Metaphor: “*a girl with a moon-like face*”

Proverb: “*Where the moon shines, there is no darkness.*”

Poem: “*The moon rose in silver light, brightening my heart.*”

*Result:* The learner becomes familiar with the multiple representations of a word, enhancing artistic thinking.

### “Magic Box” Method

The teacher places different objects (e.g., pencil, clock, apple, book, key) in a box. Each student draws one item and uses it in a sentence or within a story.

Advantages: enriches vocabulary through tangible objects, develops creative storytelling, increases motivation through playful learning.

Limitation: in very large classes, there may not be enough items for everyone.

*Example:* The teacher puts objects in the box: apple, pencil, key, book.

A student takes an “apple” and makes a sentence: “*The apple is red and sweet; I picked it from the garden.*”

The next student takes the “key” and continues: “*I took the key and opened the garden; inside, there was an apple tree.*”

*Result:* The story continues in a chain, developing vocabulary and coherent sentence-building skills.

### “From Word to Picture, from Picture to Word” Method

Students are shown a picture. They collect words describing the elements in the image and then use those words to form sentences. Conversely, when a word is given, they illustrate it through drawing.

Advantages: connects imagination with vocabulary, ensures better memorization through visual learning.

Limitation: children who are less interested in drawing may be less active.

*Example:* Picture: “*Forest*”

Students identify words: tree, rabbit, leaf, bird.

Sentence: *"The rabbit is eating leaves under the tree, while the bird is singing in the tree."*

Next step: students are given the word "rabbit" and asked to draw it.

*Result:* Strengthens the link between text, imagination, and vocabulary.

### "Magic Keyword" Method

A key word is selected from a text. Students then create a new story inspired by this word or list at least five related words.

Advantages: helps learners understand the text more deeply, develops associative connections between words.

Limitation: if the keyword is too abstract, students may face difficulties.

Example: Keyword: "River"

Students suggest related words: water, boat, fish, shore, wave.

Story: *"I sailed in a boat, saw the fish, and my friend was waiting for me on the shore."*

*Result:* The keyword aids in text comprehension and promotes active use of new words.

### "Riddle-to-Story" Method

The teacher presents a simple riddle. The student who solves it must create a short story using the answer word.

Advantages: expands vocabulary through riddles, develops quick thinking.

Limitation: weaker students may struggle with creating stories.

Example: Teacher's riddle: *"Dressed in red, full of seeds inside."* (Answer: pomegranate)

The student who solves it tells a story: *"I opened the pomegranate, counted the seeds, and shared them with my sister."*

*Result:* Vocabulary is enriched while ingenuity and coherent storytelling skills are developed.

### "Alphabet Dictionary" Method

Each lesson focuses on a single letter. Students find words beginning with that letter and use them in sentences or short texts.

Advantages: facilitates learning new words based on letters, provides practice in text construction.

Limitation: with difficult letters (e.g., "X," "F"), it may be harder to find words.

Example: Letter: "B"

Students suggest: boy, garden, leaf, fish.

Sentence: *"The boy caught a fish in the garden and rested on the leaves."*

*Result:* Vocabulary and text-construction skills are practiced through letter-based learning.

These methods serve as effective tools for developing reading comprehension in young learners by enriching their vocabulary. If teachers apply them in combination, the learning process becomes not only more effective but also more engaging.

## **Conclusion**

Numerous scientific studies have proven that the process of reading comprehension in young learners is directly linked to their vocabulary development. Research shows that children with a broad vocabulary are able to grasp the meaning of texts more quickly and

accurately, and they are stronger at identifying the main idea. Conversely, learners with limited vocabulary often face difficulties in understanding texts.

The relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension manifests in two directions:

**Word knowledge → text comprehension.** The more words a student knows, the more effectively they process meaning while reading.

**Text comprehension → vocabulary growth.** Working with texts, learning new words, and using them in speech expand a learner's vocabulary.

In addition, teachers' creative approaches, a supportive family reading environment, and the use of multimedia tools play a vital role in vocabulary development. Collaboration between family and school fosters positive motivation toward reading, while regular reading habits steadily improve both vocabulary and comprehension skills.

In conclusion, vocabulary serves as the foundation for developing reading comprehension abilities. If systematic efforts to expand vocabulary are carried out at an early age, learners will achieve greater success in independent reading, text analysis, and the acquisition of academic knowledge in the future. Therefore, vocabulary development must be regarded as one of the priority tasks of primary education.

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