



An Investigation of English Reading Skill Problems and the Enhancement Strategies of Secondary School Chinese Students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School

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Received: 19 September 2025; Revised: 04 November 2025; Accepted: 07 November 2025

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to investigate the problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School and to propose enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. This research was considered a mixed-methods research study conducted at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. The respondents were divided into two groups: 361 secondary Chinese students and 152 teachers at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School in the academic year 2025. Two research instruments were employed: 1) a questionnaire for investigating problems of reading skills and 2) focus group discussions for evaluating enhancement strategies. The data collected were analyzed through statistical and content analysis methods and presented in terms of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results indicated that: 1) The problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students were found at the highest level with mean scores ranging from 4.21 to 4.40, including difficulty understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, struggling with long and complex sentences, slow reading speed, and anxiety when reading English texts. 2) The enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills were categorized into four chapters: strategies for learners focusing on reading strategy awareness and fundamental skills development, strategies for instructors emphasizing diagnostic assessment and culturally responsive teaching, classroom management strategies creating reading-rich environments, and teaching-learning materials incorporating culturally relevant and digital resources.

Keywords: English Reading Skill Problems, Enhancement Strategies; Secondary school Chinese Students

1.Introduction

Reading is widely recognized as one of the most essential skills for acquiring knowledge and succeeding academically. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly Chinese high school students, reading proficiency directly influences their academic performance and access to global knowledge. According to Anderson (2003) and

Harmer (2007), reading not only develops language acquisition but also fosters critical thinking, vocabulary growth, and comprehension skills necessary for higher education and future careers. At Guangxi Overseas Chinese School, where students are expected to engage with English in various academic subjects, many continue to struggle with reading comprehension. Common problems include limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding long and complex sentences, inability to infer implied meanings, and lack of effective reading strategies. These difficulties result in slower reading speed, reduced comprehension, and low confidence, which in turn affect overall learning outcomes. Research on Thai and Chinese students in similar EFL contexts (Adunyarittigun, 2005; Phantharakphong & Photita, 2014) has shown that inadequate vocabulary knowledge, poor sentence structure awareness, and limited reading strategies contribute to weak comprehension. Thus, there is an urgent need to identify the specific reading challenges faced by Chinese high school students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School and to propose appropriate enhancement strategies. By doing so, educators can provide targeted interventions to strengthen students' reading ability, motivation, and academic success.

2. Research Objectives

The purposes of the study are:

1. To investigate the problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School.
2. To propose enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Concepts and Related Theories

The exploration of English reading skill problems and enhancement strategies for secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School is based on key concepts and theoretical frameworks that clarify the nature of reading comprehension, its challenges, and influencing factors in EFL contexts.

3.1.1 English Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to comprehend text content, requiring the application of various cognitive processes to gain meaning from text. Different experts define it differently:

- Birsch (2011) states it is the capacity to derive meaning from text.
- Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) claim it requires multiple skills like word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and prior knowledge, and extends to cognitive activities such as predicting, inferring, and evaluating.
- Anderson (2018) explains it as an interactive process where readers actively construct meaning.
- Mahapatra & Sabat (2016) describe it as an intentional, active, participatory activity occurring before, during, and after reading a specific literary work, involving complex cognitive functions and integration of various information sources.
- Tompkins (2011) defines it as the degree to which a text is understood, a creative process dependent on pragmatics, syntax, semantics, and phonology knowledge, requiring quick and fluent word recognition and influenced by cognitive development, prior topic knowledge, and self-correction ability.
- Rubbin (1994) views it as a complex cognitive process involving verbal reasoning (developing logical connections and drawing conclusions) and word meanings (comprehending vocabulary and semantics), emphasizing the inseparable connection between

reading and comprehension.

Key theories related to reading comprehension include:

- **Schema Theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983):** Comprehension depends on the match between readers' schemas and the text. Zhang and Guo (2020) confirmed that high school students with broader background knowledge performed better in comprehension.
- **Interactive Model of Reading (Rumelhart, 1994):** Combines bottom-up decoding with top-down processing. Grabe (2020) reaffirmed that balanced integration of decoding and contextual inference leads to effective comprehension.
- **Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 2019):** Long sentences and unfamiliar vocabulary reduce comprehension by overloading working memory.
- **Metacognitive Strategy Theory (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002):** Successful readers monitor their understanding and apply strategies such as skimming, scanning, and rereading. Nguyen (2020) demonstrated that explicit training in metacognitive strategies enhanced Vietnamese students' comprehension; Chantarath (2021) in Thailand showed that strategy training resulted in significantly higher comprehension scores.
- **Motivation Theory:** Guthrie and Klauda (2018) found that intrinsic motivation improves persistence; Li (2021) highlighted that Chinese students' reading motivation predicted success more strongly than vocabulary knowledge; Huang (2024) indicated that digital reading apps increased motivation but required scaffolding to improve comprehension outcomes.

3.1.2 Problems in Reading Comprehension

Reading difficulties refer to conditions where individuals face difficulty in reading, usually caused by unknown factors affecting the brain's information-processing and reception capacity. For children with reading problems, comprehension is often their primary challenge, though they may also struggle with decoding (Mahapatra, Iyoti & Sabat, 2016).

Text comprehension involves a complicated relationship between the reader and written language, relying on psychological processes like perception, attention, memory, learning, and motivation. Deficiencies in any processing ability may contribute to impairments in reading comprehension performance, but the nature and cause remain unclear (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Comprehension deficits could stem from sources beyond decoding, such as differences in sensitivity to story structure, inference-making, comprehension monitoring, syntactic processing, verbal working memory, and oral language skills (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

Methodological considerations are important when analyzing reading comprehension failure, especially the activities used to characterize and identify poor comprehenders. Oakhill and colleagues use the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) which assesses accuracy and comprehension together, but this makes it hard to determine if comprehension difficulties relate to decoding or higher-level processes. Nation and colleagues use separate measures of reading accuracy and comprehension to better identify specific struggles (Perfetti, 1994).

Large-scale data shows comprehension issues are widespread: only 36% of fourth-grade and 38% of eighth-grade students in the US had comprehension scores above competency level, with nearly 31% of fourth graders and 24% of eighth graders below basic level; 10-15% of eight-year-olds with normal decoding struggle with comprehension. In Nigeria, 58% of people with disabilities include dyslexia (31%) involving comprehension problems, and 15% of disorders in a Calabar survey were dyslexia-related (Onm & Ezekiel,

2019).

Richek, List, and Lerner (1989) identified five major components of reading difficulty:

- **Environment:** Family, school, social groups, and culture strongly influence learning capacity.
- **Emotion:** Poor readers often have emotional difficulties like low self-esteem and depression, leading to lack of confidence and fear of mistakes.
- **Physical element:** Hearing and vision impairments, and other physical issues.
- **Cognitive ability:** Dependent on IQ test levels.
- **Linguistic competence:** Vocabulary and sentence structure influence reading ability; without it, higher-level reading skills are hard to develop.

Gunning (2002) noted poor reading comprehension can result from lack of background knowledge, limited vocabulary, failure to use strategies, lack of basic decoding skills or fluency, lack of attention, and poorly developed thinking skills.

Mourtaga (2006) pointed out four main problems for Palestinian EFL students:

- Misunderstanding of the reading process, with teachers using bottom-up or grammar-translation methods, leading to slow reading, tunnel vision, and memory overload.
- Lack of overall language ability and English proficiency, resulting in insufficient reading practice.
- Disparity between Arabic and English, especially in vowels' spelling-sound systems.
- Issues with English spelling and sound system.

Tateum (2007) found lack of vocabulary understanding or difficulty with unfamiliar terms is common among Thai students; using dictionaries interrupts reading and reduces comprehension. Chonmaitree (2011) reported Thai pupils read barely eight lines yearly, making reading in a foreign language harder.

3.1.3 Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Skills

Multiple factors influence students' reading comprehension:

- **Text Complexity** (Dennis, 2008): Influenced by the reader's language proficiency and understanding of purposes and meanings.
- **Environmental Factors** (Dennis, 2008): Unpleasant settings or interruptions (TV, radio) make it hard for students to concentrate.
- **Anxiety** (Dennis, 2008): Pressure from exams, assignments, or homework affects reading for pleasure; some students struggle with test-related pressure.
- **Cognitive Skills and Processes** (Perfeti, 2005): Text comprehension involves many cognitive skills; impairments at word, sentence, and discourse levels cause comprehension difficulties in children.
- **Interest and Motivation** (Dennis, 2008): Boring reading content reduces concentration; Guthrie and Klauda (2018) found intrinsic motivation boosts persistence.
- **Medical Problems** (Hollowell, 2013): Undiagnosed issues like ADD, speech problems, and hearing impairments affect reading comprehension.
- **Decoding or Word Recognition** (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016): Readers struggling with decoding have more difficulty understanding passages; extensive vocabulary helps explain passages faster than relying on context clues.

Models explaining comprehension problems:

1. **Simple Approach to Reading** (Hoover & Gough, 2009): Reading Comprehension is the product of Listening Comprehension and Decoding. Automated word

recognition frees mental resources for in-depth text analysis (National Reading Panel, 2000). Listening comprehension strongly constrains reading comprehension and is a good indicator of it; issues are more common in younger and poor readers. Improvement in one encourages development in the other (Perfetti, 2005). However, reading comprehension requires more than decoding and listening comprehension, involving connecting text sections, forming conclusions, and engaging with the text (Mahapatra, Iyoti, and Sabat, 2016).

2. **Vocabulary and Prior Knowledge:** Reading comprehension involves understanding words, perceiving word-concept connections, organizing ideas, recognizing author's aim, analyzing context, and forming judgments. Students who learn to read early may struggle later due to lack of vocabulary; poor comprehenders have expressive and receptive vocabulary problems. Prior knowledge is essential; lack of cultural familiarity impacts comprehension more than vocabulary pre-teaching. Domain knowledge allows building an inference-rich mental model, but comprehension weaknesses persist even with familiar vocabulary and controlled domain knowledge (Mahapatra, Iyoti, and Sabat, 2016).

3. **PASS Procedure and Reading Achievement:** PASS (Planning, Attention, Simultaneous, Successive) is based on Luria's neuropsychological studies. Coding processes (simultaneous and successive) occur in occipital, temporal, and parietal lobes; planning (in prefrontal cortex) involves goal-setting, strategy selection, and monitoring, determining coding type (Mahapatra, Iyoti, and Sabat, 2016). Richek (1996) noted children with poor reading skills have low self-esteem. Jintana's (2005) research found reading issues include inability to read, comprehend, and learn concepts; Chanida's (2003) research showed Thai children struggle with reading without comprehension, failing to understand significance, communicate meaning, assess material, or synthesize concepts, leading to low exam scores, negative attitudes, and lost interest in English (Mahapatra, Iyoti, and Sabat, 2016). Reading for comprehension involves understanding direct and implicit meaning, expressing thoughts, creating frameworks, and summarizing, a critical curriculum objective (Hock and Mellard, 2005). University of Kansas researchers found self-questioning and visual imaging improve comprehension; using diagram/graphic organizers enhances reading ability based on learners, text features, and reading objectives (Hock and Mellard, 2005).

3.2 Related Research

3.2.1 Research in Thailand

Thai EFL learners face persistent reading comprehension problems:

- Wutthisingchai (2018) reported Grade 11 students struggled with vocabulary recognition and reading speed, hindering comprehension.
- Kongkaew (2019) emphasized Thai university students lacked effective strategies like skimming and scanning.
- Chantarath (2021) highlighted that technology integration improved comprehension but only with teacher guidance.
- Somphong and Yimwilai (2022) found vocational students relied heavily on translation, slowing fluency, and recommended authentic texts and strategy training.
- Kittikhun and Boonyaparakob (2023) confirmed Thai high school students had difficulties identifying main ideas, directly impacting examination performance.
- Chantharath and Srisuwan (2024) demonstrated that collaborative reading tasks improved inferencing and comprehension.

3.2.2 Research in China

Chinese EFL learners also face distinct reading challenges:

- Wang (2019) concluded that rote memorization hindered fluency in reading.
- Liu and Zhang (2020) revealed that most students relied on dictionaries rather than contextual guessing.
- Chen (2021) reported that reading was perceived as the most difficult skill by Chinese high school learners.
- Zhou and Li (2022) found that vocabulary and grammar knowledge strongly predicted comprehension.
- Huang (2024) studied digital reading apps in China and noted that they improved motivation but not comprehension without explicit strategy training.

3.2.3 International Research

International studies across various EFL contexts present similar findings:

- Chandran and Shah (2019) in Malaysia reported that collaborative learning improved comprehension.
- Siahaan (2022) in Indonesia highlighted the importance of teacher feedback and strategy-based training.
- Tran and Le (2023) in Vietnam discovered that students often limited themselves to literal meaning rather than critical comprehension.
- Dixon et al. (2020) in the UK found that EAL learners progressed more slowly in comprehension than native speakers.
- Spencer and Wagner (2018) in the US showed that weak vocabulary and poor inference-making were the main obstacles for ESL learners.

3.3 Summary

Existing research consistently identifies vocabulary limitations, weak strategy use, cross-linguistic barriers, and low motivation as core reading problems for EFL learners, including secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. Theories such as Schema Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, and Metacognitive Strategy Theory explain why these issues persist, while empirical studies validate strategies like metacognitive training, collaborative learning, digital tool integration, and culturally responsive instruction. These findings underscore the need for a holistic approach targeting learners, instructors, classroom environments, and materials—forming the basis for the enhancement strategies proposed in this study.

4. Research Methodology

This research is considered the style of Research and Development which employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The case study in this research is Secondary Chinese Students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. The research methodology are as followed:

4.1 Population

In this research project, Guangxi Overseas Chinese School was used as a case study. The population in this research project will be divided into 2 groups: namely, 6,000 Chinese students and 250 teachers at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School in the academic year 2025.

The sample groups in this research project were divided into 2 groups; namely, 361 Chinese students and 152 Teachers at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School in the academic year 2025. The sample size (n) will be obtained through the Krejcie & Morgan. (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The respondents in this research were obtained through the simple random sampling technique.

4.2 Research instrument

The two main research instruments were: 1) a questionnaire was employed for the investigation of problems of reading skills of secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese school. All items /questions were evaluated for the correctness and suitability by the 3 specialists in terms of IOC value ranging from 0.66 to 1.00 and 2) a set of questions for 2 focus group discussion meetings were used for the evaluation and approval of the improvement methods of English reading skills of high school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. The correctness and suitability of the improvement methods were analyzed through the content analysis methods.

4.3 Data Collection

For this research project, the researcher herself collected the data and information from the sample groups. The sample groups were informed of the purposes of the data collection, then make an appointment with the researcher. The researcher must mail or submit a letter of permission signed by the researcher's advisor to the university in advance to ask for permission to collect the data.

4.4 Data Analysis

1 For the data and information from the questionnaire concerning problems of reading skills of secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. The data and information collected were analyzed and then interpreted and presented in terms of frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation (S.D.). In addition, the information and data from the 2 focus group discussion meetings were analyzed through the content analysis then used for the evaluation and approval of the enhancement strategies for reading skill problems. The Likert rating scales of the questionnaire are as follows:

- 4.21-5.00 = the highest level of problems
- 3.41-4.20 = the high level of problems
- 2.61-3.40 = the moderate level of problems
- 1.81-2.60 = the low level of problems
- 1.00-1.80 = the lowest level of problems

2 For the approval of the enhancement strategies of English for reading skill problems: The data information concerning the strategies were collected, interpreted and presented through the content analysis technique.

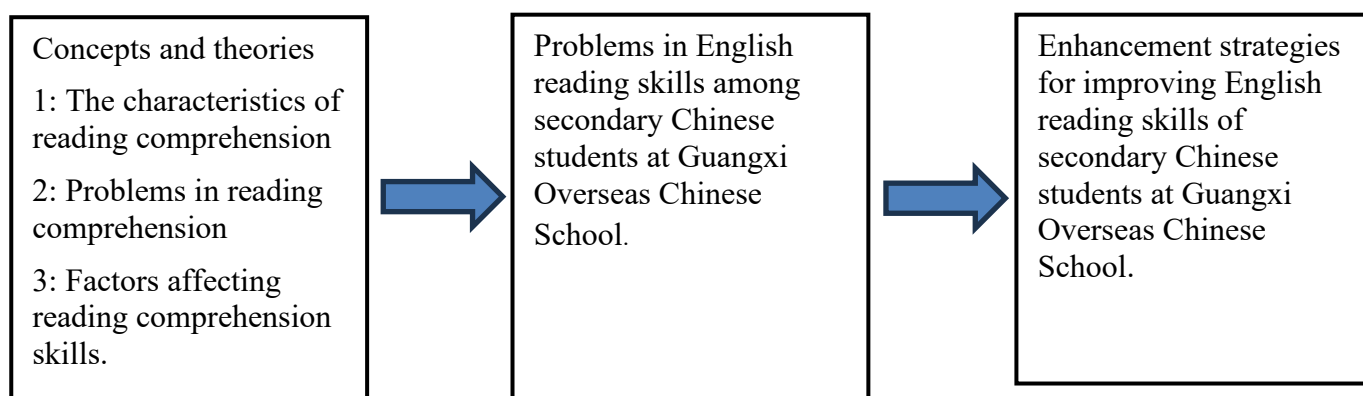


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5. Results

Objective 1: To investigate the problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School.

Table 1: problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. (Students)

Items	n=361	SD	Level of problems
1) I feel nervous or lose concentration when reading English texts	4.40	0.19	Highest
2) I cannot understand long and complex sentences.	4.38	0.15	Highest
3) I find it difficult to guess word meanings from context.	4.32	0.15	Highest
4) I struggle to identify the main idea of a passage.	4.32	0.13	Highest
5) I do not understand many English words when reading.	4.30	0.20	Highest
6) I read too slowly and cannot finish tasks in time.	4.26	0.14	Highest
7) I often translate directly from Chinese to English while reading.	4.26	0.17	Highest
8) I cannot understand implied meanings in texts.	4.25	0.21	Highest
9) I cannot connect sentences and paragraphs to understand the whole passage.	4.22	0.12	Highest
10) I forget what I have read after finishing a passage.	4.21	0.14	
Total	4.25	0.17	Highest

According to table 1, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English reading comprehension at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.21 (SD=0.14) – $\bar{X}$ 4.40 (0.19).

Table 2: problems in English reading skills among secondary school Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School (Teachers)

Items	n=152	SD	Level of problems
1) Your student cannot understand long and complex sentences.	4.40	0.17	Highest
2) Your student struggle to identify the main idea of a passage.	4.32	0.13	Highest
3) Your student finds it difficult to guess word meanings from context.	4.31	0.13	Highest
4) Your student does not understand many English words when reading.	4.30	0.21	Highest
5) Your student reads too slowly and cannot finish tasks in time.	4.25	0.12	Highest
6) Your student cannot understand implied meanings in texts.	4.25	0.21	Highest
7) Your student often translates directly from Chinese to English while reading.	4.25	0.21	Highest

8) Your student cannot connect sentences and paragraphs to understand the whole passage.	4.22	0.12	Highest
9) Your student forgets what I have read after finishing a passage.	4.20	0.18	Highest
10) Your student feels nervous or lose concentration when reading English texts.	4.20	0.16	Highest
Total	4.31	0.16	Highest

According to table 2, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English reading skills at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.20(SD=0.16) – $\bar{X}$ 4.40 (0.17).

Objective 2: To propose enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School.

The enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School are composed of 4 chapters ; namely, chapter 1: About Learners , chapter 2: About Instructors, chapter 3: About classroom management , and chapter 4: About teaching-learning materials and assessment : All the 4 chapters were approved by the three specialists (One Thai professors and two English native speakers) in terms of correctness and suitability of the contents meaning the constructed Enhancement Strategies of Listening Skill of Chinese Highschool Students was accepted and approved by the 3 specialists, then it could be used as a guideline for the improvement methods of English reading comprehension of undergraduate Chinese students in China.

6. Conclusion

For the investigation of the problems in English reading skills among secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School, it is indicated that the students rated the problems of English reading comprehension at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.21 (SD=0.14) – $\bar{X}$ 4.40 (0.19) . In addition, it is also indicated that the students rated the problems of English reading skills at the highest level at the range of $\bar{X}$ 4.20(SD=0.16) – $\bar{X}$ 4.40 (0.17) .

For the proposed enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School, the improvement methods of English reading comprehension of undergraduate Chinese students is composed of 4 chapters ; namely, chapter 1: About Learners , chapter 2: About Instructors, chapter 3: About classroom management , and chapter 4: About teaching-learning materials and assessment : All the 4 chapters were approved by the three specialists (One Thai professors and two English native speakers) in terms of correctness and suitability of the contents meaning the constructed Enhancement Strategies of Listening Skill of Chinese Highschool Students was accepted and approved by the 3 specialists, then it could be used as a guideline for the improvement methods of English reading comprehension of undergraduate Chinese students in China.

7. Discussion

1 The Problems in English reading skills in class

It can be concluded that both students and teachers at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School rated the problems in English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at the highest level. The problems in English reading skills of secondary Chinese students can be delineated through the facts that the contents of the English courses do not focus directly on reading skills practice and the lesson contents and activities for reading skills practice are not emphasized on specific situations. It can be accepted that Chinese students have little chance to participate in reading activities in daily life and they also have little chance to encounter

authentic English texts outside the classroom. They therefore get confused or frustrated at first due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures. They might not have confidence in reading skills or lead to hesitation when encountering academic texts.

Furthermore, one of the most pressing problems identified was vocabulary limitations and complex sentence structure comprehension, especially in real academic contexts. Many students feared encountering unfamiliar words or technical terms, leading to limited engagement in reading tasks. This reflects the findings of previous research, which observed that Chinese students often avoided challenging texts due to fear of incomprehension and low self-efficacy. Moreover, the findings from this research were found corresponding to related studies, which indicated that insufficient exposure to authentic English reading environments limited students' ability to develop reading fluency and comprehension strategies. Limited vocabulary knowledge and poor understanding of English syntactic patterns were significant obstacles. Students reported difficulty in understanding implied meanings and connecting ideas across paragraphs, especially in academic scenarios such as research articles or technical documentation. The lack of extensive reading practice outside the classroom contributed to this issue, as students rarely engaged in English reading for pleasure or academic purposes beyond assigned coursework.

Additionally, students demonstrated significant problems with reading time management, indicating inadequate development of reading fluency and over-reliance on word-by-word translation strategies rather than meaning-focused approaches. The research revealed that students struggled with metacognitive reading strategies, showing limited ability to monitor their comprehension, make predictions, or use context clues effectively. These problems are partly due to the lack of systematic reading strategy instruction and over-reliance on traditional grammar-translation methods in English language teaching. The findings also highlighted psychological barriers, with students experiencing high levels of reading anxiety and motivation loss when faced with challenging English texts, creating additional obstacles to reading skill development and academic success.

2 The enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School

The constructed "The enhancement strategies for improving English reading skills of secondary Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School" were composed of four chapters; namely, chapter 1: For Learners of English Reading, chapter 2: For Instructors of English Reading, chapter 3: For Classroom Management, chapter 4: For Teaching – Learning Material and Assessment. They were accepted and approved by the three specialists, then it could be used as a guideline for the improvement methods of English reading comprehension of undergraduate Chinese students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research instruments used for data collection included: A questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended items designed to measure reading challenges, confidence levels, and language use frequency, and a set of semi-structured interview questions that allowed for deeper exploration of personal reading problems and learning preferences.

New knowledge body

The findings from this study provided:

1. Comprehensive data on the specific English reading problems faced by high school students at Guangxi Overseas Chinese School.
2. The effective enhancement strategies that can be applied by students, teachers, and curriculum developers.

8. Suggestions

1 For the implementation of the research results into practice, It will be applied to the proposed English reading enhancement strategies in real teaching – learning situations to evaluate their effectiveness and student improvement.

2 For further research: It will investigate English reading problems students in different programs to compare issues and adapt strategies and methods.

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