Fostering an Appropriate Stage for Teaching Implementation in EFL Students' Reading Comprehension by Developing Materials based on Oxford Word Level

Fazl Ahmad Habib, Windy Citra Negara, Linda Mayasari
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, SMAN 20 Surabaya, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya
fazlahmadhabib@gmail.com, windynegara52@guru.sma.belajar.id, lindamayasari@um-surabaya.ac.id

Abstract:
Reading skill relies heavily on the reader's comprehension. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the presence of more than one language creates variation in both context and content during the reading process. In Indonesia, EFL learners often rely on teachers who assist their reading comprehension by translating unfamiliar words. This occurs because many students are not yet familiar with the vocabulary used in texts. This study focuses on teacher-created materials designed to support students' understanding. The teacher used the Oxford 3000 word list to determine difficulty levels. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its methodology, consisting of two cycles: the first cycle applied the direct teaching method, while the second implemented problem-based learning. In both cycles, the teacher provided materials based on the Oxford word levels. The results indicated that students' reading comprehension and motivation improved. The study suggests that formative assessment should be further developed in future research.
Keywords: Reading Comprehension, EFL Classroom, Learning Method, Created Materials, Oxford Word Level

Abstrak:
Keterampilan membaca sangat bergantung pada pemahaman pembaca. Di kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), keberadaan lebih dari satu bahasa menciptakan variasi dalam konteks dan konten selama proses membaca. Di Indonesia, pelajar EFL sering kali mengandalkan guru yang membantu pemahaman membaca mereka dengan menerjemahkan kata-kata yang tidak familiar. Hal ini terjadi karena banyak siswa belum mengenal kosakata yang digunakan dalam teks. Penelitian ini berfokus pada materi buatan guru yang dirancang untuk mendukung pemahaman siswa. Guru menggunakan daftar kata Oxford 3000 untuk menentukan tingkat kesulitan. Penelitian ini menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) sebagai metodologinya, yang terdiri dari dua siklus: siklus pertama menerapkan metode pengajaran langsung, sedangkan siklus kedua menerapkan pembelajaran berbasis masalah. Pada kedua siklus, guru menyediakan materi berdasarkan tingkat kata Oxford. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman membaca dan motivasi siswa meningkat. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar penilaian formatif dikembangkan lebih lanjut dalam penelitian mendatang.
Kata Kunci: Pemahaman Membaca, Kelas EFL, Metode Pembelajaran, Materi Buatan, Tingkat Kata Oxford

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in language learning that supports the development of students' cognitive and linguistic abilities. In EFL settings, particularly in Indonesia, students often struggle to comprehend English texts due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar text structures, and a lack of confidence in interpreting meaning. In classrooms where both teachers and students navigate multiple languages, the process of reading becomes more complex and often relies on code-switching or word translation to achieve understanding. These challenges are frequently reported across Indonesian secondary schools, where students struggle with both vocabulary load and text complexity (Rosmiyati, 2022; Rianti et al., 2024). This problem shows the urgency for instructional strategies that address lexical limitations while promoting student engagement.

One promising approach to address these issues is the reading comprehension cycle based on schema theory, as proposed by Silva (2019). Schema theory views reading as an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the textual input. In this view, comprehension improves when learners can connect new information with their existing schemata—mental frameworks formed by prior knowledge and experience. The reading cycle informed by schema theory involves several stages: activating prior knowledge, introducing key vocabulary before reading, predicting content, confirming meaning, using authentic materials, and reinforcing concepts through thematic texts. These stages not only support lexical development but also enhance comprehension by scaffolding students' interaction with text structures and contextual meaning. By implementing this cycle, especially with vocabulary selected from the Oxford Word Level, teachers can offer structured yet flexible reading instruction that helps students navigate text complexity with greater confidence and understanding.

Reading Comprehension Cycle-based on Schema Theory (Silva, 2019)

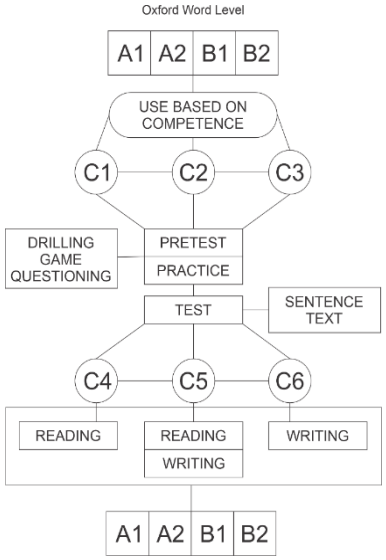
According to Silva (2019), effective reading comprehension in EFL classrooms is strongly influenced by schema theory, which views reading as an interaction between the reader's background knowledge and the textual input. This background knowledge includes not only cultural experiences and world knowledge but also an understanding of text structures and language patterns.

The reading cycle informed by schema theory involves the following stages:

1. Activating Prior Knowledge
   Students comprehend texts more effectively when they connect new information with their existing knowledge. This background knowledge may include their life experiences, general world knowledge, or familiarity with the structure of certain texts. Pre-reading strategies like class discussions, images, or concept maps help activate these mental frameworks (schemata) before reading.
2. Introducing Key Vocabulary Before Reading
   Identifying important vocabulary before students read a text helps strengthen their understanding. When learners encounter related vocabulary in various texts about the same topic, their lexical knowledge becomes more stable, which supports deeper comprehension.
3. Predicting Content and Confirming Meaning
   Good readers make predictions while reading and check them against what the text actually says. This ongoing process involves noticing word patterns, initial letters, or familiar sentence structures. These decoding strategies support schema activation and help readers make sense of the text step by step.
4. Using Authentic Materials and Realia
   Teachers should avoid over-simplifying reading materials. Instead, using real-life texts and objects provides meaningful exposure to natural language use. Authentic resources help maintain student motivation and connect learning with real-world contexts, which strengthens schemata.
5. Reinforcing Concepts through Thematic Texts
   Reading multiple texts that share a similar topic and vocabulary helps learners build connections across ideas. This repetition supports the development of conceptual networks, allowing students to link new information with what they already know.
6. Avoiding Over-Simplification of Texts

Simplifying texts too much can reduce their learning value. Rather than removing complexity, educators should prepare students by offering scaffolding, pre-reading support, and vocabulary assistance. This builds learner confidence and supports comprehension of more authentic content.

7. Breaking the Cycle of Reading Difficulties
   Struggling readers often face a cycle of failure, low motivation, and avoidance. To overcome this, teachers must activate relevant schemata, select accessible yet meaningful texts, and provide repeated exposure to connected themes. These strategies help learners build confidence and gradually improve their reading skills.



Picture 1. A Framework of Reading Comprehension Cycle based on Schema Theory, established by using the Oxford Word Level

Furthermore, according to Antonija Blaži Ostojić (2023), reading involves multiple levels of language processing, including decoding, sentence interpretation, and discourse comprehension. For learners in EFL contexts, vocabulary load is one of the primary challenges, making the selection of appropriate word levels crucial. The Oxford 3000™ word list offers a structured way to present vocabulary aligned with CEFR levels (A1–B2), helping teachers design level-appropriate reading tasks. This aligns with Sidik and Masek (2021), who found that the strategic use of vocabulary within students' lexical range significantly improves comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. By integrating a curated vocabulary list into reading instruction, teachers can ensure better alignment between learners' language proficiency and the text materials, leading to improved outcomes.

Traditional approaches, such as direct teaching, tend to limit student participation and reflection. On the other hand, PBL, as Adianti (2021) emphasizes, shifts the focus to learner autonomy by fostering collaborative problem-solving and knowledge construction through real-world tasks, collaborating in groups, and constructing meaning actively (Adianti, 2021). PBL has proven to be an effective strategy to enhance reading comprehension in EFL contexts. Studies by Rosyidin et al. (2022) and Akuba & Pido (2025) show that PBL helps students improve their understanding of texts by making reading activities more contextual and inquiry-driven. Moreover, Rianti et al. (2024) demonstrated measurable gains in reading scores after implementing PBL in a high school setting, while Hadi et al. (2023) report positive student

perceptions toward PBL as an engaging and effective method for reading instruction. These findings support the integration of PBL as a pedagogical approach that not only enhances comprehension but also encourages active learner involvement and critical thinking.

This study aims to improve reading comprehension by implementing teacher-created materials based on the Oxford Word Level through two instructional cycles: direct teaching and PBL. The study focuses on tenth-grade high school students in Surabaya and evaluates the results through pre-test/post-test scores and classroom observations. Through this design, the research seeks to determine the comparative effectiveness of structured vocabulary-based instruction and student-centered learning in enhancing reading performance.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Adopting Kemmis and McTaggart's (1998) iterative CAR framework, this study followed a four-phase cycle—design, implementation, observation, and evaluation—to refine teaching strategies dynamically. CAR allows for iterative improvements in instructional strategies and fosters active collaboration between teachers and learners to solve classroom-based problems (Zaitun & Izzah, 2015; Izzah, 2015). The research was conducted in two instructional cycles during the 2024/2025 academic year to ensure continuity and refinement of the intervention.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a public senior high school in Surabaya, involving 36 tenth-grade students. These students were classified into three advanced and three developing reading groups, based on their prior reading test performance and teacher judgment. Such grouping aimed to support differentiated instruction, which is defined as a common strategy in classroom-based action research to address varying levels of learner readiness (Fitrotin et al., 2022).

Instruments and Data Collection

To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, this study utilized the following instruments:

- Post-Test: These tests measured students' cognitive development, particularly their reading comprehension skills, before and after each intervention cycle. The use of posttest design is a widely accepted method in CAR to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies (Study.com, n.d.; Akuba & Pido, 2025).
- Observation Checklists: These checklists assessed students' affective and psychomotor domains, including indicators such as confidence, participation, group collaboration, and problem-solving. Observational instruments are essential in CAR to capture student engagement and behavioral responses to instruction (Fitrotin et al., 2022; Izzah, 2015).
- Field Notes: Throughout each session, the teacher-researcher recorded classroom observations and reflective insights. Field notes play a crucial role in identifying instructional challenges, contextual responses, and emerging patterns in student learning behaviors (PEARLL, n.d.).

By employing these instruments, the study ensured a holistic analysis of both academic outcomes and classroom dynamics, which are central to the reflective and improvement-oriented nature of CAR.

Classroom Action Research: Teaching and Learning Cycle

Cycle 1 – Direct Teaching Method

In the first cycle, the researcher implemented a direct teaching approach, characterized by a teacher-centered delivery model. The instructional material focused on recount text reading, and students accessed the content through their mobile phones. Despite the effort to make the materials available online, many students struggled to maintain focus and engagement during the lesson.

Students were given a posttest to measure their initial reading comprehension levels. However, classroom observations and field notes revealed that a significant number of learners appeared passive and hesitant to participate, reflecting a lack of confidence and interaction. This aligns with Silva's (2019) assertion that learners require schema activation. It includes background knowledge and vocabulary pre-exposure to meaningfully engage with texts. Unfortunately, the direct teaching method used in this cycle offered limited opportunities for scaffolding, peer interaction, or contextualized learning, which are essential elements in enhancing reading comprehension (Adianti, 2021).

The absence of collaborative activities also hindered the development of students' affective and psychomotor domains, as observed through their low participation and minimal group engagement. This cycle served as a baseline for identifying the need for a more interactive and student-centered strategy.

Cycle 2 – Implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Informed by the reflective evaluation of Cycle 1, Cycle 2 adopted a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach to promote active engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking. Students were divided into six groups based on reading proficiency—three advanced and three developing. Each group was given a problem-solving task involving jumbled vocabulary items that represented the answers to comprehension questions from a report text.

This activity was designed to activate learners' lexical and structural schema (Silva, 2019), enabling them to reconstruct vocabulary meaningfully and in context. After the initial task, students were regrouped into mixed-ability teams, encouraging peer tutoring and collaborative verification of answers. These interactive exchanges provided a platform for peer feedback, error correction, and deeper comprehension through social interaction, echoing the constructivist principles underlying PBL (Akuba & Pido, 2025; Adianti, 2021).

Moreover, the use of varied texts on the same topic allowed students to be repeatedly exposed to related vocabulary, reinforcing lexical acquisition and facilitating schema development (Silva, 2019). The shift to a PBL model transformed the classroom environment into a dynamic, student-driven space where learners were more confident, motivated, and participative.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from post-tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics to evaluate cognitive progress across the two cycles. Improvements in reading comprehension scores were taken as indicators of academic growth. Meanwhile, the affective and psychomotor domains were assessed qualitatively through observation checklists and field notes, focusing on student participation, group interaction, problem-solving behavior, and confidence levels.

Significant progress was noted not only in terms of test score improvement but also in the observed increase in student motivation, engagement, and collaborative skills. These findings affirm the benefits of integrating schema-based instruction and problem-based learning into reading pedagogy in EFL contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cycle 1: The Use of Direct Teaching

In the first instructional cycle, the teacher employed a direct teaching method to introduce vocabulary, grammatical structures, and the overall text organization of a recount text. The learning materials were developed using A2-level words from the Oxford 3000 word list to ensure lexical appropriateness for the students' proficiency. However, despite the level of adaptation, classroom observations revealed that students relied heavily on teacher-led translation and engaged minimally with the content.

Students asked questions predominantly related to the literal meaning of unfamiliar words, with little evidence of higher-order comprehension or inference-making. During the posttest, many students appeared hesitant and lacked confidence in responding to comprehension tasks.

Affective engagement was low, as indicated by minimal participation and visible disinterest. Psychomotor responses—such as active note-taking, task completion, and group discussion—were also limited. Initial assessment results revealed an average score of 58.2, with a mere 16.7% mastery rate (6 students meeting KKM out of 36).

Table 1. Students' scores of cycle 1

Post Test	Score
Average Score	58.2
Number of Students Reaching KKM	6
Percentage of mastery	16.7%

These findings confirmed that the conventional method did not adequately support the development of higher-order reading skills or foster active involvement. Reflection on this cycle revealed the need for a more engaging and student-centered approach, prompting the decision to adopt Problem-Based Learning in the second cycle.

Cycle 2: The Application of Problem-Based Learning

The second cycle implemented a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model to foster engagement, collaboration, and learner autonomy. Students received a recount text followed by a jumbled-words activity, requiring them to rearrange the vocabulary items to form meaningful responses to comprehension questions.

Students were initially grouped according to proficiency: three advanced and three developing groups. After completing the activity within their original groups, they were reorganized into mixed-ability teams to facilitate peer correction and collaborative learning. This arrangement encouraged students to negotiate meaning, explain their reasoning, and reflect on their understanding through dialogue.

The use of PBL contextually promoted vocabulary use, higher-order thinking, and increased student confidence. Classroom observations documented enhanced affective and psychomotor responses—students were more active, collaborative, and inquisitive. Notably, their questions shifted from word meaning to content, inference, and author intent, indicating deeper engagement.

The average post-test score rose to 78.5, with 24 out of 36 students meeting or exceeding the Minimum Mastery Criteria, resulting in a mastery rate of 66.7%.

Table 2. Students' scores of cycle 2

Post Test	Score
Average Score	78.5
Number of Students Reaching KKM	24
Percentage of mastery	66.7%

These findings support the effectiveness of PBL in creating a meaningful, interactive learning environment, consistent with research by Adianti (2020), who emphasized PBL's role in developing not only academic outcomes but also soft skills such as collaboration and communication. Moreover, structuring reading materials based on the Oxford Word Level system ensured they remained approachable yet appropriately

challenging—a method supported by Untailawan (2021), who emphasized the significance of lexically appropriate content for EFL students.

Table 3. Students' scores comparison of cycle 1 and cycle 2

Cycle	Instructional Strategy	Average Score	Students Reaching KKM (≥75)	Mastery Rate (%)	Key Observations
Cycle 1	Direct Teaching	58.2	6 out of 36	16.7%	Low engagement, passive responses, and reliance on translation
Cycle 2	Problem-Based Learning (PBL)	78.5	24 out of 36	66.7%	High collaboration, increased confidence, and deeper inference skills

The shift from direct teaching to PBL resulted in a significant improvement in students' reading scores (from an average of 58.2 to 78.5) and mastery rates (from 16.7% to 66.7%). The interactive and collaborative nature of PBL fostered greater engagement, critical thinking, and independent learning compared to the passive, translation-dependent approach of direct teaching.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

This Classroom Action Research demonstrated that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) with vocabulary aligned to the Oxford 3000 Word Level effectively enhanced the reading comprehension of tenth-grade students at a senior high school in Surabaya.

In Cycle 1, the conventional direct teaching method, despite using appropriately leveled materials, resulted in limited cognitive gains and low student engagement, confidence, and collaboration. Students primarily focused on word-for-word translation and showed minimal active participation. The average posttest score was 58.2, with only 6 out of 36 students (16.7%) meeting the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM).

In contrast, Cycle 2's PBL intervention—characterized by collaborative problem-solving activities involving jumbled words, group discussions, and peer corrections—fostered a more dynamic and student-centered classroom environment. This approach led to:

- Cognitive Improvement: Significant increases in post-test scores (average 78.5), with 24 out of 36 students (66.7%) reaching or exceeding the mastery level. Students demonstrated better abilities to comprehend explicit information, infer meaning, and apply targeted vocabulary.
- Affective Growth: Enhanced motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate actively in reading tasks.
- Psychomotor Development: Greater collaboration, engagement in discussions, and effective problem-solving behaviors in both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups.

These findings align with Silva's (2019) schema theory, which emphasizes activating students' background knowledge and contextual vocabulary, and support previous research (Adianti, 2020; Untailawan, 2021) demonstrating that PBL combined with level-appropriate vocabulary scaffolds facilitates deeper learning and learner autonomy.

4.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Teachers:

- Implement Problem-Based Learning strategies to promote active, student-centered learning and critical thinking in reading classrooms.

- Use leveled vocabulary frameworks such as the Oxford 3000 Word List to ensure reading materials match students' proficiency levels, reducing cognitive overload and enhancing accessibility.
- Organize mixed-ability groupings in collaborative tasks to encourage peer teaching, scaffolded learning, and mutual support.

For Curriculum Developers:

- Design reading curricula that integrate problem-solving tasks rooted in authentic and meaningful real-world contexts to increase learner engagement.
- Provide clear guidance for selecting and sequencing texts based on learners' lexical proficiency to scaffold comprehension effectively.

For Future Research:

- Replicate this study across various schools and grade levels to confirm the generalizability of the PBL approach combined with lexical leveling.
- Investigate the long-term impact of PBL on students' autonomous reading habits and vocabulary retention.
- Explore the potential of digital PBL platforms to enhance engagement and provide personalized feedback.

By adopting PBL alongside carefully leveled materials, educators can support EFL learners in developing robust reading comprehension skills while fostering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor growth.

REFERENCES

Books

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1998). *The Action Research Planner* (3rd ed.). Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Parkinson, J. (2012). *Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance*. Oxford University Press.

Frau-Meigs, D., Kotilainen, S., Pathak-Shelat, M., Hoechsmann, M., & Poyntz, S. R. (Eds.). (2020). *The Handbook of Media Education Research*. John Wiley & Sons.

Journals

Fitrotin, D., Mardiyana, I. I., Koesmini, A. D., & Rukmiyati. (2022). Improving Students' Reading Comprehension Using Word Card Media in the Indonesian Language. *Maktab: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Teknologi*, 2(4), 1049–1058.

Izzah, L. (2015). Classroom Action Research in Action. In *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (COTEFL)*.

Umar, U. (2017). Media pendidikan: Peran dan fungsinya dalam pembelajaran. *Tarbawiyah: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, *11*(01), 131-144.

Jayapada, G., Faisol, F., & Kiptiyah, B. M. (2017). Kearifan Lokal dalam Cerita Rakyat sebagai Media Pendidikan Karakter untuk Membentuk Literasi Moral Siswa. *BIBLIOTIKA: Jurnal Kajian Perpustakaan dan Informasi*, *1*(2), 60-62.

Proceedings

Lugmayr, A. (2011, September). Applying" design thinking" as a method for teaching in media education. In *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments* (pp. 332-334).

Skripsi/Thesis/Disertasi

Horvath-Plyman, M. (2018). *Social media and the college student journey: An examination of how social media use impacts social capital and affects college choice, access, and transition* (Publication No. 10937367). [Doctoral dissertation, New York University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global

Internet

Akuba, T., & Pido, N. W. (2025). The Effectiveness of Using Problem-Based Learning Methods in Improving Students' Reading Comprehension. *EDULINK Journal*. Retrieved from https://ejournal.uniska-kediri.ac.id/index.php/EDULINK/article/view/5738

Hadi, A., et al. (2023). Investigating High School Students' Perceptions on The English Teacher's Use of Project-Based Learning in Teaching Reading Comprehension. *EFLE Journal*, Universitas Jember. Retrieved from https://jurnal.unej.ac.id/index.php/EFLEJ/article/view/44287

PEARLL. (n.d.). Action Research for Language Educators. https://pearll.nflc.umd.edu/action-research-guide/

Rianti, R., et al. (2024). Improving Students' Reading Comprehension of Narrative Text Through Problem-Based Learning. *Jurnal Ide Guru*. Retrieved from https://jurnal-dikpora.jogjaprov.go.id/index.php/jurnalideguru/article/view/730

Rosmiyati, E. (2022). The Implementation of Problem-Based Learning Model to Improve Reading Comprehension Achievement. *HOLISTIC Journal*. Retrieved from https://jurnal.polsri.ac.id/index.php/holistic/article/view/4512

Rosyidin, M., et al. (2022). The Effect of the Problem-Based Learning Model on Students' Comprehension of the English Reading Text. *English Review: Journal of English Education*.
Retrieved from https://journal.uniku.ac.id/index.php/ERJEE/article/view/6259

Sidik, H., & Masek, A. (2021). The Effects of Problem-based Learning on Students' Reading Comprehension for Mastering the Content and Vocabulary Acquisition. *Asian Journal of Science and Education (AJSEE)*. Retrieved from https://vm36.upi.edu/index.php/AJSEE/article/view/33382

Study.com. (n.d.). Pretest-Posttest Design: Concept & Examples. https://study.com/learn/lesson/pretest-posttest-design-concept-examples.html

Yahya M, Chin F.Y, Idris A.B, Azizol S. (2000). Forage intake by grazing cattle under oil palm plantation in Malaysia [Internet]. Available from: www.fao.org/ag/agp/AGPC/doc/Bulletin/oilpalm.html