

THE EFFECT OF PRE-READING ACTIVITIES ON READING COMPREHENSION OF A1 LEARNERS

Yakubova Nodira Azizbek qizi

3rd year student,

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

The Second English Faculty

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract

Exploring how pre-reading activities shape the reading comprehension of A1-level Grade 4 learners, this study found consistent gains in students' understanding once strategies like pre-teaching key vocabulary and discussing topic-related images were introduced. Beyond comprehension itself, these activities appeared to hold learners' attention more steadily across the lesson – a quieter benefit, but one the data kept surfacing. We propose rethinking what a reading lesson actually begins with. This action research examines how pre-reading activities influence the reading comprehension and classroom engagement of A1-level Grade 4 learners — 16 primary school students studying English as a foreign language — with the central question being whether structured preparation before the text makes a measurable difference in how well students understand it.

To answer that, a mixed-methods design was used, drawing on pre- and post-tests, a student questionnaire, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. Students first completed a reading task with no preparatory support, establishing a baseline. Two lessons followed, each built around specific strategies — vocabulary introduction, prediction tasks, and visual materials — after which a post-test measured whatever had shifted.

The shift was visible. Comprehension scores improved noticeably, and the questionnaire revealed that most learners gravitated toward visual support and vocabulary preparation as their preferred forms of pre-reading help. Observations confirmed what the numbers suggested: students were more alert, more willing to participate, and less visibly stuck. Teachers, for their part, noted that the strategies seemed to lower the threshold of difficulty — learners arrived at the text already holding something useful, and that changed how they moved through it.

Taken together, the findings point toward pre-reading activities as a reliable support structure for beginner readers — one that prepares them for the language ahead, sustains their motivation, and strengthens comprehension in ways that show up in both test scores and classroom behavior. Structured pre-reading, the results suggest, deserves a regular place in EFL reading lessons rather than an occasional one.

Keywords: *pre-reading activities, reading comprehension, A1 learners, young learners, vocabulary, EFL.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading sits at the center of English language learning, yet for learners at the A1 level, a text can feel less like an invitation and more like a wall — vocabulary gaps and thin background knowledge combine to make even short passages difficult to process, let alone engage with meaningfully. The motivation to keep trying tends to erode quickly when understanding stays just out of reach.

Pre-reading activities work on that problem before it fully forms. By introducing unfamiliar words, connecting the upcoming topic to what learners already know, and giving the lesson a warmer entry point, these strategies shift the conditions under which a student first meets a text — and that shift, small as it sounds, tends to change what happens next. A learner who recognizes a word, or who has already guessed at the topic, reads with a different quality of attention than one who is encountering everything cold.

This study sets out to examine how pre-reading activities affect the reading comprehension of A1-level Grade 4 learners, and to trace how those same strategies shape students' participation and interest across the lesson.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension draws on at least two things at once — language knowledge and the background understanding that gives language somewhere to land — and when either is thin, the text becomes harder to hold together.

Alyousef (2005) identified limited vocabulary and insufficient prior knowledge as the primary sources of difficulty for learners at early proficiency levels, a finding that has held up across subsequent research. Pre-reading activities address both pressure points simultaneously: by surfacing key words before the text arrives and anchoring the topic to something learners already carry, they prepare the ground rather than leaving students to find their footing mid-reading.

Research into how children learn adds another layer to this picture. Suganda observed that young learners lose focus faster than older students, which means the method of delivery carries as much weight as the content itself — pictures, read-alouds, and materials rooted in familiar contexts tend to hold attention in ways that abstract instruction simply does not. Engagement and understanding, at this age, are less separate outcomes than two expressions of the same condition.

Alemi and Ebadi (2010) arrived at a similar conclusion from a different angle, finding that pre-reading strategies — prediction tasks, discussion, and visual support in particular — produced significant gains in comprehension. What their study made visible was the mechanism: learners who had already formed an expectation about a text, even a rough one, moved through it with more direction and less confusion. Among the strategies tested, visuals and prediction tasks showed the strongest effect on students' ability to follow and retain what they read.

Marinaccio's contribution to this conversation was structural. Reading lessons, the argument goes, work best when they follow a deliberate sequence — pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading — with each stage preparing the ground for the next. The pre-reading phase carries particular weight in this model, since it is where purpose gets established and where learners shift from passive recipients into active participants before the text has even begun.

Across these studies, a consistent picture forms: pre-reading activities help beginner learners build vocabulary, draw on prior knowledge, sustain motivation, and approach texts with greater confidence — each of these effects reinforcing the others in ways that make the whole more than the sum of its parts.

CHALLENGES AND RESEARCH GAPS

The evidence in favor of pre-reading activities is fairly consistent, yet the practical question of 'how' to use them — how often, for how long, in what combination — remains largely unanswered in the literature. Without clear guidance on this, teachers tend to fall

back on intuition and personal habit rather than any structured framework, which means implementation varies widely even within the same school.

Classroom conditions complicate matters further. Limited lesson time and large class sizes create real pressure on teachers who want to incorporate preparatory activities but also need to move through a fixed syllabus – and in that tension, pre-reading work is often the first thing trimmed. The constraint is practical, but its effect on learning is not trivial.

The research base itself carries a gap worth naming. Most existing studies are situated in general EFL or ESP contexts, with far fewer investigations focused specifically on A1-level young learners in primary school settings. What works for older or more proficient learners does not transfer automatically to early-stage classrooms, and the literature has been slow to account for that difference.

A final limitation runs through much of the existing work: pre-reading activities tend to be treated as a single, undifferentiated category. Which specific techniques produce the strongest results, and under what conditions, remains an open question – one that classroom-based research, attentive to real teaching environments, is better positioned to answer than large-scale studies conducted at a distance from the lesson itself.

METHODOLOGY

An action research design framed this study, chosen for its capacity to examine a specific classroom problem from within the teaching context rather than from outside it. The central focus was the effect of pre-reading activities on the reading comprehension, engagement, and overall understanding of A1-level Grade 4 learners during regular English lessons in a primary school setting.

PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Sixteen Grade 4 learners at the A1 proficiency level formed the student group, all observed within their natural classroom environment during scheduled English lessons. The setting was a typical primary school EFL classroom — no conditions were artificially altered, and the intervention was embedded into the existing lesson structure rather than added alongside it.

Two English teachers also participated, contributing through semi-structured interviews. Their perspectives offered a practitioner's view of how reading instruction unfolds in this context and what role, if any, pre-reading strategies already played in their regular practice.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

To ensure the findings rested on more than a single source, multiple data collection instruments were used in combination. A pre-test established each learner's reading comprehension level before the intervention began, providing a baseline against which later performance could be measured. Following the implementation of pre-reading activities across two lessons, a post-test of comparable format and difficulty was administered to capture whatever change had taken place.

Alongside the tests, a structured questionnaire gathered data on how learners felt about reading and where they consistently ran into trouble – attitudes and difficulties being two things that test scores alone tend to obscure. Classroom observations across two reading lessons then brought a different kind of evidence into the picture: what students actually did during the lesson, how readily they participated, and how they

responded to pre-reading activities when those activities were unfolding in real time rather than being recalled afterward.

Teacher perspectives were collected through semi-structured interviews with two English teachers, adding a qualitative layer that neither test results nor observation notes could fully capture – specifically, how practitioners read the situation from the front of the room and what they believed was actually driving the changes they observed.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Data from the 16 participants moved through two parallel tracks of analysis. Quantitative material – drawn from the pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire – was examined through frequency and percentage analysis, which allowed patterns in performance and learner responses to surface without being buried in raw numbers.

Pre-test and post-test results were set against each other directly to trace the effect of the intervention on reading comprehension. Questionnaire responses opened a separate line of inquiry into students' attitudes toward reading and the difficulties they encountered most often. Classroom observations and teacher interviews were handled differently – read thematically, with attention to recurring patterns around engagement, comprehension challenges, and how well the implemented strategies appeared to be working in practice.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Analysis of Questionnaire

To get closer to how learners actually experienced reading – and how pre-reading activities shaped that experience – a questionnaire was administered to the Grade 4 A1 group. The aim was to map students' difficulties, preferences, and reactions to different reading strategies, with the results presented through a series of figures below.

Question 1: Do you like reading?



Figure 1 shows that reading holds genuine appeal for most of the group — 10 out of 16 students responded positively, while 6 did not. That remaining third, though a minority, is large enough to signal that positive attitudes toward reading cannot be assumed, and that strategies capable of making lessons feel more accessible and worthwhile remain worth pursuing.

Question 2: Do you understand most of the words in reading texts?

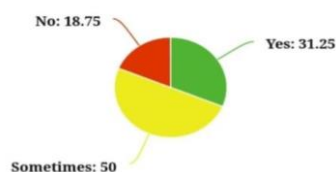
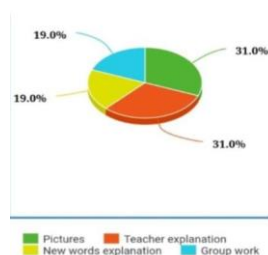


Figure 2 tells a more complicated story. Only a small number of students reported understanding most of the vocabulary in reading texts, while the majority said they understood words only sometimes – and a noticeable share reported consistent difficulty. Vocabulary, the data suggest, functions less as one obstacle among many and

more as the primary threshold between a learner who can engage with a text and one who cannot.

Question 3: What helps you understand a reading text better?



According to Figure 3, pictures and teacher explanations each accounted for 31% of student responses when asked what supports their understanding most. Vocabulary explanation and group work were mentioned less frequently. Visual input and direct teacher guidance, taken together, appear to carry the most weight in how these learners make sense of a text – a finding that aligns closely with what the classroom observations later confirmed.

Question 4: When you read a text, what is difficult for you?

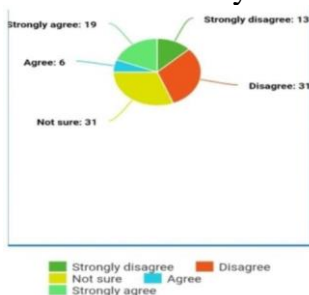


Figure 4 points to long sentences as the single most reported difficulty, followed closely by unfamiliar vocabulary. A smaller proportion of students identified understanding the main idea as their primary challenge, and only a few reported no difficulties at all. Sentence length and vocabulary, then, are where comprehension most often breaks down for this group – two pressure points that pre-reading activities are reasonably well positioned to address.

Question 5: Reading in English is easy for me.

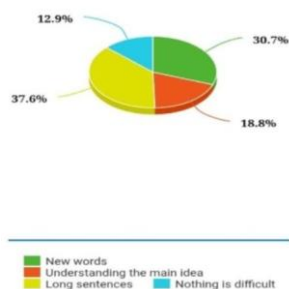
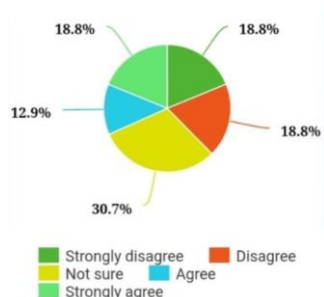


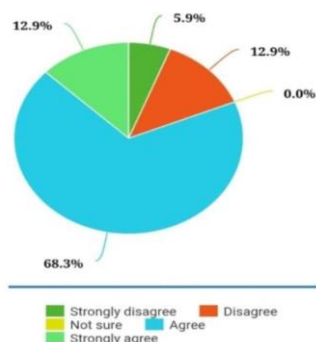
Figure 5 rounds out the picture with a finding that is hard to overlook: the largest shares of responses fell in the “difficult” and “uncertain” categories, each at 31%, while only a small proportion of students described reading in English as straightforward. Confidence around reading, for most of this group, remains fragile – which makes the affective dimension of pre-reading support at least as important as its cognitive one.

Question 6: Pictures help me understand the text.



It can be seen in Figure 6 that students have mixed opinions about the usefulness of pictures in understanding a text. The largest group is uncertain, while some students find pictures helpful and others do not. This suggests that pictures alone may not be sufficient to support reading comprehension for all learners.

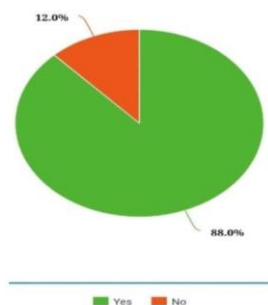
Question 7: Learning new words before reading helps me understand better.



As highlighted in Figure 7 that most students believe learning new words before reading is helpful. A clear majority agree, while only a small proportion disagree. This suggests that pre-teaching vocabulary is an effective strategy for improving reading comprehension.

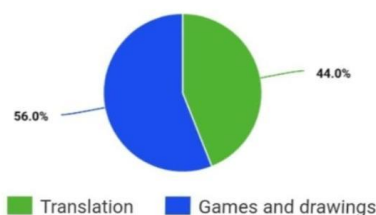
Question 8: I like when the teacher translates new words into my own language.

The results in Figure 8 shows that the vast majority of students prefer when the



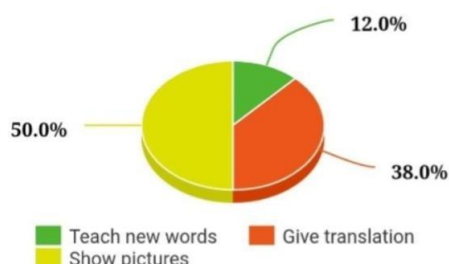
teacher translates new words into their native language, while only a small proportion do not. This suggests that the use of L1 can effectively support vocabulary learning and comprehension.

Question 9: Which way helps you remember new words?



According to Figure 9 more students prefer games and drawings to remember new words, while a slightly smaller group chooses translation. This suggests that interactive and visual activities may be more effective for vocabulary retention than traditional translation methods.

Question 10: Question 10 What can the teacher do to help you understand reading better?



Finally, Figure 10 indicates that the most commonly preferred strategy for understanding new vocabulary is the use of pictures (50%), followed by translation (38%). Only a small proportion of students (13%) prefer learning new words without additional support. This indicates that visual support and translation play a more significant role in facilitating vocabulary comprehension than direct memorization, suggesting that learners benefit more from meaning-focused and visually supported input than from traditional rote learning approaches.

Analysis of Classroom Observations

To support the data from the questionnaire and interviews, two reading lessons were also observed to see how pre-reading strategies were used with Grade 4 (A1) learners. The main focus was on students' engagement, participation, and their understanding during the reading tasks.

The observation results showed some common patterns. First, visual support was used most often. Teachers started the lesson with pictures, which helped students connect with the topic and understand it more easily, especially for those who had limited vocabulary.

Second, both lessons showed more student participation. In the first lesson, group activities helped students interact more with each other. In the second lesson, prediction tasks made students more curious and involved in the lesson. Because of these activities, the classroom environment became more active and student-centered.

Finally, pre-reading activities worked as a kind of support for learners. By linking new information with words students already knew, teachers helped them face less difficulties. As a result, students could understand the texts better and answer the questions with more confidence.

Table 1: Summary of Observed Pre-Reading Interventions

<i>Observation area</i>	<i>Observation 1 (Topic: Thanksgiving)</i>	<i>Observation 2 (Topic: Be clean around food)</i>
Introductory scaffolding	Visual discussions used to activate prior knowledge of cultural holidays.	Picture elicitation and leading questions (e.g., "Do you like fruit?") used to capture interest.
Vocabulary integration	Pre-teaching of specific historical terms (e.g., Pilgrims, Indians).	Review and linkage of previous food-related vocabulary to the new text.
Interactive techniques	Implementation of jigsaw reading and group discussions.	Utilization of prediction activities and role-play.
Learner engagement	Students were described as "motivated and actively involved" through movement and collaboration.	High levels of motivation; students were actively engaged throughout the session.
Comprehension checks	Use of short videos and interactive Q&A to reinforce learned concepts.	Summary through retelling the story and vocabulary revision.

Analysis of Interview

The qualitative data from interviews with two English teachers showed that both of them agree on the importance of pre-reading support for A1 learners. From their answers, several main ideas could be seen.

- Reducing language difficulties

Both teachers showed lack of vocabulary as the main problem that A1 students face. Interviewee 1 mentioned that students sometimes focus more on pronunciation than meaning, meanwhile Interviewee 2 explained that unknown words can quickly make students lose motivation. To overcome this problem, both teachers highlighted pre-teaching vocabulary by using flashcards, real objects, and simple explanations. This method helps students feel less confused and understand the text more easily.

- Using visuals and prediction

Another useful method that was mentioned is the use of pictures and prediction tasks. Teachers often used images before reading to help students think about the topic. Interviewee 1 said this helps activate students' background knowledge. For A1 learners, this is very useful, because sometimes they understand the idea but cannot express it in English. In this case, pictures can support their understanding before they learn the exact words.

- Emotional impact on students

Reading is not only about understanding the text, but also about students' feelings. Both teachers noticed that students became more confident and more active when pre-reading activities were used. Interviewee 2 mentioned that students feel more comfortable when they already know some key words. Many learners feel

nervous at the beginning of reading, especially if they are not ready, so these activities help them feel more relaxed and prepared.

- Connection with reading tasks

However, teachers also mentioned that pre-reading activities should be connected to the main reading tasks. If these activities are clearly related to while-reading and post-reading stages, students understand better why they are reading. Having a clear purpose helps learners focus more and makes reading easier for them.

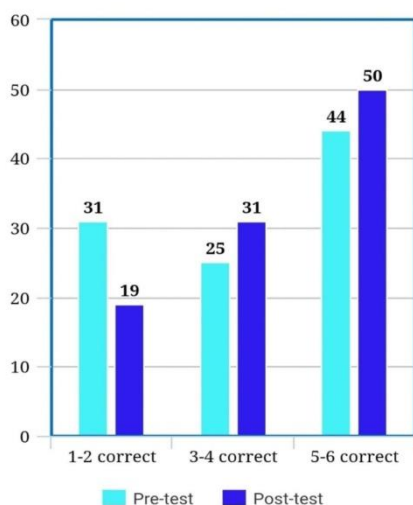
Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Results

I observed an intervention with 16 Grade 4 learners at A1 level. The students were tested before and after several reading lessons where pre-reading activities were used, such as vocabulary pre-teaching, prediction tasks, and visual support.

The pre-test was given without any preparation to see students' starting level. The post-test had a similar format and difficulty, and it was used to measure any changes after the lessons. Both tests included a short text with multiple-choice questions, true/false tasks, and one open-ended question.

The results showed a gradual improvement, not a very big change but still clear. The number of students with low scores (1–2 correct answers) decreased from 31% to 19%. At the same time, the number of students with higher scores (5–6 correct answers) increased from 44% to 50%. The middle group also improved a little, which shows that the progress was seen in most students, not only in a few strong ones.

Bar chart 1: Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results



Overall, the Bar chart 1 illustrates that students performed better after the implementation of pre-reading activities. The decrease in low scores and the increase in higher scores suggest that the intervention had a positive effect on learners' reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

What the data, the interviews, and the classroom observations kept returning to was the same underlying mechanism – a learner who arrives at a text already holding some of its vocabulary, already having guessed at its topic, already curious about whether their prediction was right, reads differently than one dropped in cold.

This action research set out to test whether structured pre-reading activities would improve reading comprehension among A1 level Grade 4 students, and the post-test results suggest they did. Vocabulary preparation, prediction work, and visual support

each contributed something distinct, yet all three pointed toward the same outcome: reduced difficulty, stronger engagement, and measurable gains in comprehension. For teachers working with beginner readers, the implication is less a recommendation than an observation – the lesson, in a real sense, begins before the text.

In conclusion, pre-reading activities play an important role in supporting reading comprehension among beginner learners. It is therefore recommended that teachers incorporate structured pre-reading strategies into their lessons to enhance students' understanding and develop their reading skills.

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