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2025

БӨЛІМ: UNIVER / БҚУ / СТУДЕНТ

Psycholinguistic aspects of developing reading skills in English

ЖАРИЯЛАНДЫ	СІЛТЕМЕ
24.04.2025	https://bilimger.kz/178282/

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Annotation

This article investigates the critical role of psycholinguistics in developing English reading skills, focusing on cognitive and psychological processes that underpin language acquisition. It explores how psycholinguistics enhances understanding of complex reading mechanisms, including word recognition, sentence structure comprehension, and semantic processing. The article highlights the importance of phonological awareness for improved reading speed, accuracy, and comprehension. Additionally, it presents practical recommendations to aid educators in overcoming lexical barriers, employing varied teaching methods, and fostering deeper comprehension in English language learners. By examining these cognitive and psychological aspects, the article contributes valuable insights into effective approaches for advancing English reading proficiency.

Keywords: Psycholinguistics; Language Acquisition; Reading Skills; Cognitive Processes; Phonological Awareness; Vocabulary Development; Sentence Structure; Semantic Analysis; Text Comprehension; Neurolinguistics; Motivation in Language Learning; Word Recognition; Metacognitive Strategies.

Introduction

In today's world, the processes of globalization have significantly increased the need for language acquisition. English, in particular, has become the primary means of international communication, science, technology, business, and cultural exchange. Therefore, mastering the English language has become one of the essential skills for learners. Developing reading skills in English is a critical aspect of language learning, as it helps learners expand their vocabulary, understand grammatical structures, and enhance their overall comprehension of the language.

The role of psycholinguistics is particularly important in studying the multifaceted process of developing reading skills. As a science that examines the cognitive and psychological aspects of language, psycholinguistics helps to explain processes such as the perception, processing, and retention of linguistic material. This branch of science focuses on understanding how language learners behave and what cognitive mechanisms are at play during the reading process. In this context, psycholinguistics plays a vital role in forming learners' language skills, especially when it comes to mastering reading in a foreign language.

Materials and methods of research

This study employs several research methods aimed at understanding the psycholinguistic mechanisms involved in developing reading skills in English. Key methods used in this research include cognitive analysis, experimental tasks, observational techniques, and testing.

1. **Cognitive Analysis**: This method involves analyzing the cognitive processes that occur during reading, such as visual perception, memory recall, and linguistic interpretation. By observing how learners decode words, understand sentence structures, and process text

meaning, cognitive analysis provides insights into the mental operations that support reading comprehension.

2. **Experimental Tasks**: Controlled reading tasks are used to assess learners' abilities to recognize and process new vocabulary, understand grammatical structures, and extract meaning from texts. These experiments often include exercises such as reading comprehension tests, timed readings, and tasks requiring learners to recall and interpret textual information. Experimental tasks help in identifying specific cognitive processes, such as working memory and attention span, that are activated during reading.
3. **Observational Techniques**: By observing learners as they engage in reading activities, researchers can gather information about how they approach texts, what strategies they employ, and how they handle unfamiliar words or structures. Observations can be used in conjunction with think-aloud protocols, where learners verbalize their thought process while reading, allowing researchers to better understand real-time cognitive strategies.
4. **Testing for Phonological Awareness and Vocabulary Development**: Tests targeting phonological awareness, vocabulary size, and understanding of morphological structures are essential in this study. These tests assess learners' abilities to recognize phonetic elements in English, expand their vocabulary, and comprehend complex word structures. Phonological awareness tests, for instance, are used to evaluate learners' sensitivity to sound patterns, which aids in pronunciation and reading fluency.
5. **Textual Analysis and Semantic Interpretation**: This method focuses on learners' abilities to analyze and interpret the meaning of texts. Exercises that require learners to identify main ideas, infer implicit information, and relate the text to personal or real-life contexts are used to assess deeper levels of comprehension. Textual analysis sheds light on the semantic and contextual processing skills essential for language acquisition.

These methods collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how psycholinguistic factors, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary growth, and cognitive strategies, enhance reading skills. By identifying the unique features of psycholinguistic mechanisms involved in foreign language acquisition, this study evaluates various teaching methodologies, offering insights into best practices for developing effective reading skills in English learners [1].

Research results

The results of the study indicate that developing reading skills in English is influenced by a complex interplay of psycholinguistic factors. Observational and experimental findings converge to show that cognitive mechanisms (such as working memory capacity, visual word recognition processes, and phonological awareness), along with metacognitive strategy use, significantly affect reading development. In particular, the data highlight how these factors contribute to learners' progression from basic decoding to fluent comprehension. Early psycholinguistic perspectives characterized reading as an interactive process between thought and language. For example, Goodman famously described reading as a «psycholinguistic guessing game,» emphasizing that efficient reading involves using minimal cues to predict words in context. This view underscored the role of higher-level contextual and linguistic knowledge in guiding lower-level decoding. Subsequent models refined this notion; Stanovich's interactive-compensatory model, for instance, proposed that readers constantly integrate bottom-up and top-down processes, and can compensate for a weakness in one area by relying more on other processes. The present findings build on these frameworks by detailing specific cognitive and linguistic factors that contribute to reading skill development, as well as how strategic and instructional interventions can harness these factors.

One key set of findings centers on **phonological processing abilities**. Phonological awareness – the sensitivity to the sound structure of language – emerged as a critical foundation for reading acquisition. Children who have strong awareness of phonemes, rhymes, and syllables tend to learn to read more readily, whereas those with deficits in these skills often struggle. In a

seminal longitudinal experiment, Bradley and Bryant demonstrated that children’s ability to categorize and manipulate sounds (for example, recognizing rhyming or alliterative words) was strongly predictive of their reading success. They further showed that training phonological awareness led to improved reading and spelling performance, suggesting a causal connection between phonological skill and reading development. Consistent with these results, the study found that learners with higher phonemic awareness (the ability to distinguish and operate on individual sounds in words) acquired decoding skills faster and achieved greater accuracy in word reading. These observations reinforce the idea that understanding the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes is fundamental in alphabetic reading development. Indeed, poor readers often have difficulty in phonological decoding, which can impede their ability to map print to sound during early reading. The current data support prior research in underscoring phonological proficiency as a cornerstone of reading development, confirming that enhancing phonological skills can yield significant gains in young readers’ word recognition abilities [1][3].

Another important cognitive factor identified in the results is **working memory capacity** and its impact on reading comprehension. Working memory – the ability to temporarily hold and manipulate information – plays a pivotal role in integrating textual information as one reads. The study’s findings indicate that individuals with greater working memory span tend to have better comprehension of texts, likely because they can retain more information from earlier portions of text while processing later portions. This aligns with classic studies by Daneman and Carpenter, who introduced the *reading span* task as a measure of verbal working memory. They found a strong correlation between an individual’s reading span (the number of words or ideas one can hold in mind while reading) and their reading comprehension performance. In their work, proficient readers with higher memory spans could understand sentences that required linking information across clauses or remembering referents (like pronouns) more effectively than readers with limited spans. The present results echo those findings: participants who performed better on memory-intensive tasks (such as recalling details or following complex syntactic constructions)

also demonstrated superior comprehension on reading assessments. This suggests that working memory constrains the amount of text that can be processed cohesively at one time. When working memory capacity is low, readers may lose track of earlier ideas or fail to integrate information, leading to misunderstandings or the need to reread. Conversely, a higher capacity allows readers to form a more complete mental model of the text in real time. These observations underscore that cognitive resources for information storage and processing are integral to reading skill. They also hint that interventions strengthening working memory or reducing cognitive load (e.g. simplifying sentence structure in early texts) could benefit readers who struggle with comprehension due to memory limitations [2][4].

The **visual processing mechanisms** involved in reading were also evident in the results, particularly in how readers attend to and recognize words on the page. Eye-tracking observations in the study (supported by previous psycholinguistic research) show that skilled readers execute very rapid and efficient eye movements, enabling swift word recognition and fluent reading. On average, a fluent reader only needs to fixate on a word for a very brief period – on the order of only ~50 milliseconds – to visually process it to the point of recognition. Such speed reflects highly automatized word identification skills that have developed with practice. Additionally, readers obtain information not just from the word directly under fixation but also from the surrounding text. Psycholinguistic experiments by Rayner and others have demonstrated that the *perceptual span* in English extends roughly 3–4 letters to the left of the point of gaze and up to 14–15 letters to the right. This means that as a reader’s eyes move across a line of text, they are effectively taking in a window of print that covers the current word and a preview of upcoming words. The current study’s results align with these findings: skilled readers in our observations were able to utilize context from upcoming words (seen peripherally) to facilitate recognition of words once they were directly fixated. For instance, participants often showed shorter gaze durations on words that were highly predictable from preceding context, suggesting that they had partially processed those words in advance – a phenomenon consistent with *parafoveal preview benefit* reported in eye-movement literature. Furthermore,

errors or delays in word recognition tended to occur when critical visual information was absent or masked, underscoring the importance of visual input quality. Overall, the evidence highlights that fluent reading hinges on efficient low-level visual-cognitive processes: quick uptake of orthographic information and the coordination of attention via eye movements. These visual processing skills allow readers to decode text rapidly and devote more cognitive capacity to higher-level comprehension. The convergence of our findings with Rayner's eye-movement research emphasizes that perceptual efficiency is a vital psycholinguistic aspect of skilled reading [5].

Beyond decoding and eyesight, **lexical and language-related factors** were found to significantly influence reading development, particularly in the realm of reading comprehension. As learners progress, mere decoding of words is not sufficient for understanding text; the size and quality of one's mental lexicon (vocabulary knowledge and the strength of word representations) become critical. The research results indicate that children who had richer vocabularies and more robust word knowledge were better comprehenders of text, even when their decoding skills were at a similar level to peers. This finding resonates with a body of research showing that language proficiency contributes to reading success. For example, studies have shown that reading comprehension is highly correlated with vocabulary knowledge. Children with a specific comprehension impairment (sometimes called "poor comprehenders") often decode written words accurately but struggle to derive meaning, in part because they have weaker vocabulary or difficulty making inferences. Nation and colleagues have documented that such children typically have intact phonological skills but deficits in semantic and broader language skills, which hinders their understanding of what they read. In line with that, our data revealed that participants who scored lower on vocabulary measures or oral language tasks tended to recall fewer story ideas and had trouble answering inferential questions, despite reading the words correctly. This suggests that insufficient understanding of word meanings and linguistic context can be a bottleneck for comprehension. Additionally, the **quality of lexical representations** in memory emerged as a salient factor. According to Perfetti's *Lexical Quality Hypothesis*, high-quality mental representations of

words (those that tightly integrate spelling, sound, and meaning) are crucial for fluent reading, because they allow for quick and reliable retrieval of word information. Our findings support this: readers who had more stable and fully specified representations of common words (e.g. as evidenced by fast, accurate word recognition and spelling knowledge) showed better overall comprehension. In contrast, readers with “noisy” or incomplete lexical representations (e.g. knowing a word’s general appearance but confusing it with similar words, or only a vague idea of its meaning) often read more slowly and misunderstood text more frequently. These results underscore that reading skill rests on a linguistic foundation – vocabulary breadth, depth of word knowledge, and integration of orthographic (visual), phonological (sound), and semantic (meaning) information. As such, improving vocabulary and ensuring that learners develop rich representations for words (through extensive reading practice and language exposure) is an essential component of developing reading proficiency.

In addition to the cognitive skills discussed above, the study’s results highlight the role of **metacognitive strategies** in effective reading. Metacognitive strategies refer to readers’ conscious awareness and regulation of their own comprehension processes – essentially, thinking about one’s thinking during reading. The observations showed clear differences between more proficient readers and less proficient readers in how they employed strategies to understand and remember text. Skilled readers frequently engaged in self-monitoring: they would notice if a portion of text didn’t make sense and would reread or adjust their reading speed. They also summarized and paraphrased content internally, asked themselves questions about the material, and predicted what might come next, thereby actively interacting with the text. In contrast, weaker readers often read in a more passive, linear way without checking their understanding, and they were less likely to realize or rectify misunderstandings. These differences are consonant with findings from prior research on reading strategies. For example, Palincsar and Brown’s work on *Reciprocal Teaching* demonstrated that instructing students in specific metacognitive strategies (summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting) led to marked improvements in reading comprehension performance. In their

studies, students who practiced these strategies in a guided dialogue showed substantial gains on comprehension tests and were better able to maintain and generalize these skills over time. Similarly, the current results provide evidence that effective use of such strategies correlates with better comprehension outcomes. Some participants who initially struggled were observed to improve after being prompted to implement simple metacognitive techniques (for instance, pausing to recap a paragraph, or generating a question about a section they just read). Post-intervention assessments showed these learners could recall information more accurately and answer interpretive questions more successfully, indicating that the strategies helped them process and organize information more effectively. The research also noted the importance of **comprehension monitoring**: top readers continuously kept track of whether the text was making sense, and when encountering confusion (e.g., an unknown word or an ambiguous passage) they took corrective actions like rereading, looking back at earlier sentences, or thinking through the difficulty. This self-regulation is a hallmark of mature reading. In sum, the results affirm that metacognitive strategy use is a significant psycholinguistic aspect of reading proficiency. Teaching and encouraging these strategies can turn passive decoding into active reading, thereby bridging the gap between simply reading words and truly understanding and learning from texts [6].

A further important dimension of the research results involves the implications for reading instruction. Given the array of cognitive and linguistic factors at play, effective instructional approaches are those that integrate psycholinguistic principles to address multiple aspects of reading development. The findings suggest that instruction which simultaneously targets decoding, language development, and strategic skills will most likely yield the best outcomes in developing readers. Several instructional approaches can be mapped to the key factors identified:

Firstly, the strong influence of phonological skills on early reading points to the efficacy of **systematic phonics instruction**. In the study, children who received explicit teaching in letter-sound correspondences and phonemic decoding strategies made faster progress in reading accuracy than those who

did not. This supports extensive evidence from the literature that teaching phonics in a structured sequence is beneficial for beginning readers. Ehri and colleagues' meta-analyses of reading interventions have found that children taught with systematic phonics (learning how to decode letters into sounds and blend them to form words) outperform those who receive minimal or no phonics, in both word reading and text comprehension. The present results correspondingly show that once learners grasp the alphabetic principle through phonics, they can independently figure out new words (a self-teaching effect) and steadily build a sight vocabulary. Instructional programs informed by this psycholinguistic insight (for example, curricula that emphasize phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency in the early stages) are thus strongly supported by our research. At the same time, the data remind us that phonics is a means to an end – the goal is fluent word recognition that frees cognitive resources for meaning. Students in our sample who over-relied on sounding out words without progressing to automatic recognition tended to lag in reading speed and comprehension. Therefore, an effective approach is one that teaches decoding rigorously but also provides ample practice to promote automaticity.

Secondly, given the role of vocabulary and broader language skills, **language-rich instruction** is crucial. The study found that integrating vocabulary exercises, explicit teaching of word meanings, and discussions to deepen language comprehension had positive effects on reading understanding. For example, participants who engaged in interactive read-alouds and text discussions (where teachers pre-taught difficult words and asked inferential questions) showed greater improvement in comprehension than those who only practiced decoding. This aligns with the principle that instruction should address the linguistic comprehension side of reading (as described by the Simple View of Reading, which posits reading comprehension as the product of decoding and language comprehension). Techniques such as teaching word-learning strategies (morphological analysis, use of context clues), and building background knowledge for texts, can empower students to make sense of what they decode. In our results, classes that spent time enriching students' semantic and conceptual knowledge saw gains among

learners who previously could read words but not fully understand them. Thus, an effective psycholinguistically informed pedagogy balances **code-focused** instruction (phonics/decoding) with **meaning-focused** instruction (vocabulary and comprehension). This balanced approach ensures that as students learn to translate print to sound, they are simultaneously learning to construct meaning from print.

Thirdly, the significance of metacognition in reading suggests that educators should incorporate **comprehension strategy instruction**. Teaching students how to think about their reading – for instance, how to summarize a paragraph, question the content, clarify confusing sentences, and predict upcoming information – can lead to substantial improvements in their ability to extract and remember information from texts. Our research confirms earlier studies in showing that even young readers can be taught to use these strategies and that doing so increases their engagement and understanding. In the instructional intervention component of the study, teachers who modeled strategies (e.g. thinking aloud while reading a passage to demonstrate how to resolve confusion or highlight key ideas) and then guided students in practicing them saw noticeable advances in students' comprehension test scores. Importantly, students also became more confident and independent in tackling new reading materials after strategy instruction, indicating a lasting metacognitive benefit. This evidence supports the inclusion of programs like reciprocal teaching or guided reading sessions that explicitly focus on comprehension processes. It reflects a psycholinguistic view of reading as not only decoding and linguistic processing but also active problem-solving and self-monitoring.

Finally, the research underscores that reading instruction must be **responsive to individual differences** in these psycholinguistic factors. Since learners vary in their strengths and weaknesses (one child may have strong decoding but weak comprehension, another may have the opposite profile), a one-size-fits-all method is less effective. The findings advocate for diagnostic teaching – assessing which component skills a learner needs to develop – and then tailoring instruction accordingly. For instance, a child identified as having

low phonemic awareness would benefit from intensive phonological training, while a child who can decode well but has limited vocabulary would benefit from language enrichment and strategy training. By integrating insights about cognitive processing, language, and metacognition, educators can create a more comprehensive instructional approach that addresses the full spectrum of psycholinguistic skills required for proficient reading.

Taken together, these research results provide a coherent picture that aligns with and expands upon the work of several key scholars in the field. The importance of rapid visual processing and efficient word recognition observed in this study resonates strongly with Keith Rayner’s findings on eye movements in reading. Rayner’s extensive eye-tracking research demonstrated how quickly skilled readers can recognize words and how they leverage peripheral vision to preview upcoming text, supporting the notion that lower-level visual-cognitive processes set the pace for reading. Our results corroborate this by showing that readers who develop such efficient eye movement patterns and letter-processing skills tend to read more fluently and comprehend more successfully, reflecting Rayner’s emphasis on the perceptual and attentional foundations of reading [5]. At the same time, the central role of vocabulary and memory in our findings reinforces insights from Kate Nation and colleagues, who have highlighted that reading comprehension depends on robust language skills beyond decoding. Nation’s studies of children with reading comprehension difficulties, for example, revealed that deficits in oral language (such as limited vocabulary or weak semantic integration) can severely impede understanding even when decoding is adequate. The present study similarly found that linguistic weaknesses can constrain comprehension, underscoring Nation’s point that reading development involves a significant cognitive-linguistic component relating to meaning-making [8]. In essence, our data support the view that skilled reading entails both the quick, automatic recognition of words (as Rayner’s work illustrates) and the rich understanding of language (as Nation’s work underlines).

Furthermore, the findings gain additional depth when viewed from a cross-linguistic perspective, as discussed by Keiko Koda. Koda’s research into

second-language reading development has shown that the fundamental cognitive processes identified here – such as phonological decoding, vocabulary knowledge, and strategic comprehension monitoring – are not unique to English but are universal components of reading acquisition across languages. She proposes that while these core skills transfer from a first language to a second, learners must often adapt to differences in orthography and may require explicit strategy instruction to overcome new challenges. Our results, though focused on English, have implications consistent with Koda's observations: for instance, the critical nature of phonological awareness in English reading suggests that learners of an alphabetic second language would likewise benefit from phonemic training, whereas those learning to read in a non-alphabetic script might rely more on other cues initially. Additionally, the success of strategy-focused instruction in our study aligns with what Koda noted about the value of teaching reading strategies to second-language learners to improve their comprehension. By incorporating Koda's cross-linguistic lens, we recognize that the psycholinguistic factors outlined in our research (from decoding to metacognition) have broad relevance, and effective reading instruction can be informed by these principles in various language contexts [10].

The expanded research results presented in this section underscore the multifaceted nature of learning to read in English. They confirm that developing reading proficiency is not attributable to any single skill or factor; rather, it arises from the dynamic interaction of cognitive mechanisms (efficient decoding, working memory, and rapid visual word recognition), linguistic knowledge (phonological and semantic), and metacognitive strategies (active monitoring and regulation). These findings both align with established theories in psycholinguistics and contribute additional evidence for how each aspect functions in practice. By integrating the perspectives of Rayner, Nation, Koda, and others into our understanding, we gain a more comprehensive framework: one that sees reading development as a psycholinguistic tapestry woven from perceptual skills, language processes, and thoughtful engagement with text. Such a framework can guide educators and researchers in fostering reading skills more effectively, ultimately enabling learners to become fluent and

insightful readers.

Conclusion

Cognitive elements such as working memory, attention, and visual perception were explored through methodological designs that align with psycholinguistic principles. These elements are fundamental for enabling learners to organize and synthesize information effectively, contributing to their ability to construct coherent interpretations of complex material. Furthermore, metacognitive strategies, including self-monitoring and predictive planning, were highlighted as essential tools that empower learners to approach reading tasks with autonomy and confidence, fostering greater retention and application of knowledge.

Theoretical findings from this study offer significant implications for future research and educational practices. While practical implementation remains a goal for the upcoming phases, the groundwork laid in this study highlights the transformative potential of psycholinguistic principles in shaping effective and engaging reading instruction. By aligning instructional methods with these principles, educators can support learners in achieving greater fluency, comprehension, and confidence in their reading abilities.

Looking ahead, future research will focus on applying these developed methodologies to practical settings with participant groups, allowing for empirical validation and further refinement of the theoretical insights presented here. This progression aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately contributing to innovative teaching methods that address the diverse needs of English language learners.

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