



Reimagining Post-Pandemic Reading Recovery in ESL Higher Education: Predictors and Pedagogical Pathways

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered all aspects of higher education, changing access methods, altering the way students processed, and engaged with academic texts. Post-pandemic research has focused on the learning gap created in math and school-level literacy. The long-term effects of reading comprehension for tertiary English as a second language (ESL) education have received little focus. This gap is detrimental in long-term effects, as reading comprehension is essential for success in higher education and for the generation of knowledge that will drive critical thought and learning. Many students arrived on campuses with the effects of the pandemic evident in their lack of endurance, motivation, and confidence.

This paper offers a critical synthesis of post-pandemic reading recovery scholarship across a variety of disciplines, including applied linguistics, literacy studies, educational psychology, digital pedagogy, and higher education studies. This review presents reading recovery as a complex, multidimensional system. The paper argues that reading recovery cannot be simply restated as increased exposure to reading combined with remedial language training, and that there needs to be combined structural and pedagogical shifts to accomplish reading recovery. In response, the authors provide a strategic reading recovery framework (SRRF) that encompasses the use of blended reading ecologies, digitally participatory reading, collaborative reading communities, blended reading ecologies, and artificial intelligence. Based on the review and the presented framework, it is clear that reading recovery should not be understood as a return to inequitable pandemic reading recovery measures. Instead, it advocates for a novel approach to integrated pedagogy, sustaining futures of digital pedagogy, and prioritizing educational equity. The authors outlined a reading recovery framework for ESL higher education, which provides a set of research and policy recommendations for flexible and resilient reading recovery approaches.

Keywords: ESL higher education; reading recovery; post-pandemic learning; academic literacy; reading comprehension; digital pedagogy; metacognition

INTRODUCTION

Higher education learners must possess reading comprehension skills to engage in academic work at any level. This includes everything from reading textbooks to deciphering multimodal materials. Students from partially English-medium schools face even greater difficulty in learning English as a second language. Reading is more than just a task that's completed; it's the path from which students access knowledge and develop their own reasoning on a disciplinary basis. 'Critical reasoning' is the ability to take a step back from the knowledge presented and objectively analyse it to develop a new understanding or explain why it's false. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted educational growth in countless ways. Students faced new challenges to reading, and many were forced to abandon reading as a whole and instead consume information that was devoid of any cognitive effort. Many students have come to rely on reading not the whole text, and instead use a subset of



materials that may include slides, document snippets, and messages. The term “reading recovery” has historically been used to describe early literacy interventions for children, but it has come to represent a need for the greater majority of people to be able to read and understand fully. This is particularly important in ESL contexts, where learners face the most challenges in developing their ability to read and their confidence at an academic level.

Much of the discussion focused on the loss of schooling due to the pandemic and the loss of mathematics skills on the part of students. Less concern has been directed to the recovery of tertiary-level reading loss, especially for students who come from multiple language backgrounds in the developing world. There are unique challenges faced in the world of English as a Second Language (ESL) in higher education. For many students, there is the challenge of having to speak English, but lacking the academic language; the challenge of having to use different languages in different contexts; and the challenge of having very limited access to printed materials in many languages, to guidance or mentorship of any type, or to the technologies of the digital world. For these reasons, this article addresses the following questions: What contributes to the successful reading recovery of students in ESL higher education in the aftermath of the pandemic? What strategies can Educational Institutions implement to assist? In answering these questions, the author draws on the world of Applied Linguistics, Literacy Studies, Educational Psychology, and higher education Policy. Reading recovery is, by nature, an intervention of many components. The author suggests a holistic approach, incorporating the mechanics of language, including but not limited to the realm of literacy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is widely understood that reading is a means of decoding a message and that reading comprehension involves more than just decoding a message. While some of the early scholarly works focused on decoding reading comprehension and reading models, some of the recent works have focused on the understanding of reading and reading comprehension as a cognitively intricate, socially and pedagogically structured process. In higher education specifically, there is a documented nexus between reading competence and success in one's academic endeavour, engagement in the discipline, and ability to synthesize and deploy critical thinking in the execution of research. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the reading pathway by causing the cessation of sustained reading practices, the global disruption of reading pathways, overreliance on the use of digital spaces, and increased reading disparities. While the aftermath of the pandemic has been sobering, the resultant decline in reading has not received as much scholarship as its impact on other disciplines. In post-COVID research, reading recovery has been framed as vocabulary capital, cognitive and reading strategies, motivation, digital literacy, and reading in a multiliteracy and multiliterate framework.

Grabe's foundational studies support the idea that reading a second language requires integrating lower-level and higher-level reading processes. Lower-level reading processes include word recognition and syntactic parsing, while higher-level processes include making inferences, understanding the text, and constructing meaning (Grabe). This theory is still relevant, since it helps explain why a lot of students can read and pronounce words correctly or understand single definitions of words, but fail to understand the arguments of academic texts. Also explaining this theory, Anderson notes that good readers and poor readers differ in their linguistic and metacognitive competence, including skills in self-assessing their own understanding of the text, reading parts of the text again, predicting how the text will progress, and altering their reading speed based on how difficult the text is (Anderson 460). Nation insists that in order to effectively read and understand a text, a learner needs to have a broad and deep understanding of vocabulary, where knowledge of vocabulary involves knowing a word's meaning, where it can be used in language, and how it can be used in different parts of a text. Reading and understanding the text involves knowing the definitions of words (Nation).

Lexical competence creates a type of academic capital in a university context because gaining access to knowledge in a discipline is reliant on the possession of specialized language and abstract forms of language. Students with a smaller vocabulary suffer cumulative disadvantages such as slower reading, decreased stamina, poor inferencing skills, and diminishing confidence. These challenges are further exacerbated by the pandemic, during which many students were relying on simplified lecture notes, slides, and short digital excerpts. This tendency interfered with their reading of authentic long-form literature. Therefore, newer



literature suggests that when thinking about reading recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic, priority must be given to vocabulary frameworks in which there is repetition, learning that is contextual, awareness of morphology, and reading that is discipline-bound, escorted by explicit vocabulary instruction.

Critical studies in learner psychology continue to build the case that reading is an emotional and motivational practice and not simply a technical skill. The motivational and emotional dimensions of self-regulated learning offer insight into the psychological processes that contribute to effective and persistent goal attainment in an academic context and outcome achievement. Self-efficacy and persistence, together with motivational dimensions and goal orientation, combine to influence the realization of academic achievement. Self-efficacy is evident in students who think of themselves as capable readers, and they typically persist in the reading of demanding texts. Those students of low self-efficacy, on the other hand, stay away from reading and resort to reading low-level materials. The implications of this reading-related phenomenon are especially relevant during the current period, which follows the COVID-19 pandemic, and will continue to be important as learners return to the academic context following a period of reading isolation, where they have been forced to read and receive sporadic feedback, as well as cope with self-induced difficulties. Most learners return to academic institutions with low self-efficacy in reading academically demanding materials. Educational psychology suggests that repeated reading-related failure, in the absence of support, generally culminates in the learner becoming anxious and withdrawing. Reading recovery, in the context that follows the COVID-19 pandemic, needs to be as focused on low-skill reading recovery interventions as building the learners' reading self-efficacy concerning the supportive feedback, and low-risk mechanisms that reinforce learners' reading recovery and reading-related progress.

One of the most notable areas of recent research is the 'digital' mediation of literacy. The pandemic brought about even more of the emergence and necessity of reading and processing variable text through phones, tablets, PDFs, online learning portals, and hyperlinked text and resources. These digital environments have a lot to offer research and learning, giving students the benefits of text that is easily searched, lightly marked, read, and annotated. However, there is a price to pay, of course, which is reading text that is extremely fragmentary, depleted of its value, and reading that will cause ample strain on the operators of the resources. These digital learning environments make concentrating and processing information simultaneously impossible. The most important thing about 'digital' reading and processing is not the reading that actually takes place, but the various environments that are employed pedagogically. Contemporarily, reading and literacy are best facilitated through equal and combined value reading that uses printed text and digital resources. Most significantly, these environments are the most beneficial to students in the field of post-pandemic higher ed.

Reading decline is also closely tied to structural inequality. Students from rural, multilingual, first-generation, or economically disadvantaged backgrounds often faced further disruption during the pandemic due to device scarcity, unstable internet, domestic commitments, and insufficient space to study. UNESCO has found vital educational recovery across the world, and the most vulnerable students have the slowest recovery. From a sociocultural stance, consistent with Vygotsky, learning is a byproduct of the tools, relationships, and structures on which one's learning is based, not because one tries hard. So, low levels of reading ability should not be perceived as a personal failure. Universities with no learning support, reading-friendly curricula, libraries with reading-supporting technologies, or technologies with reading supports, repeat the same low outcomes, no matter the potential of the students. This shifts the reading recovery debate from a learning problem to a learning solution. Reading recovery, especially, is an obligation of the institutions.

Most disciplines emphasize format and presentation as sorts of non-disposable knowledge (knowledge that can't be removed or known about). Each discipline has its conventions for presenting evidence, and its rhetorical structure as well (academic, literary, etc.). Because of this, students need different content area support (Shanahan and Shanahan). Higher education needs discipline-based reading support at least as much as it needs support for reading across the language framework, especially at the tertiary level. Reading recovery in the post-COVID-19 era needs to address this issue as it illustrates the impact of pandemic-related changes. Shanahan argues that learning to read like a particular type of specialist is also a part of the learning of that discipline (Shanahan). Though the focus of language-based teaching is reading recovery, this type of



reading support is also valuable and needs to be implemented across the entire educational spectrum (both vertical and horizontal). Creating a schoolwide reading culture, i.e., a zone beyond the language classrooms and touching on all disciplines of schooling, is what needs to be a reading recovery kids-focused in the post-COVID-19 era.

Day and Bamford centre their research on reading improvement in the educational context of good-language learning provided to the students (Day and Bamford). Set and supported reading (i.e., reading done in specific and organized intervals) on the ungoverned and relaxed type of reading support established in the language classrooms affords students the controlled and organized intervals of reading in a relaxed and ungoverned context beyond the governed reading stipulated for examination. Kress claims that modern reading has transformed due to technology. Nowadays, interpreting a text means you need to look at text, images, sound, and digital interfaces. It is not enough that you read print alone (Kress). Because reading is an essential skill in modern post-pandemic higher education, students need to analyze messages contained in charts, infographics, videos, hyperlinks, and documents that allow user engagement as well as prose. Many reading recovery models focus on reading print and ignore other forms of reading. Resilience theory helps us understand post-pandemic reading recovery. According to Masten, resilience is one's ability to adjust and remain positive in a negative, cruel, and oppressive environment (Masten). Relating resilience and reading in the context of the pandemic helps us understand why certain students have a better chance of reading recovery than others. Resilience to reading loss is attributed to the help, guidance, individual motivation, and the materials that a person has and adapts to. There is a lot of research that focuses on second language reading, the acquisition of vocabulary, the motivation to learn, digital pedagogy techniques, literacy in different areas, learner autonomy, and resilience. Sadly, very few studies combine more than one of the topics and look at the recovery of an ESL reader in higher education after the COVID pandemic. Most studies assume that second language learner students in postgraduate programs (Advanced/Academic) have the ability to read and comprehend at an Advanced level. This assumption has proven to be false, especially as a result of the COVID pandemic. There is a serious need for models that help to view the reading skill as a supported, taught, and common responsibility of each member of the institution. This study proposes a multidimensional reading recovery model, and that model includes the following components: motivation, digital literacy, institutional support, metacognitive skills, and lexical and disciplinary (subject-specific) skills. Instead of calling for a reversion to pre-pandemic standards, it promotes a transformative literacy agenda that focuses on building stronger, fairer, and more resilient academic reading cultures.

Understanding Reading Comprehension in ESL Higher Education

Reading is a skill that requires a higher level of thinking than just decoding letters into words. It requires critical thinking by connecting ideas. Prior knowledge is also essential when determining how much something should impact the evaluation of your evidence. Learning English requires even more juggling as the reader is required to translate lexicons of words, analyze the structure of a sentence, cross-translate, and switch multiple languages. Grabe's research suggests that fluent reading, along with higher-order cognitive skills, is necessary to read in a second language.

Reading in a second language slowly is the inability or lack of motivation to read, rather than a cognitive load. University-level reading for students is dense and highly targeted to a specific academic discipline. For engineers, it is a technical manual or a business report on how to analyze the market, or a humanities essay involving multiple social theories. Higher-level reading requires the reader to understand the discipline literacy. As a multilingual reader, academic reading involves negotiating multiple identities as higher education encompasses a high level of critical thinking. Being able to analyze and synthesize into a formal discipline is in one language. Translanguaging is a high level of skill that is helpful when one has to shift from one function of a language to another, though institutions usually stigmatize. Reading models should use multiple languages in different registers as positive elements.

The Post-Pandemic Reading Crisis in Higher Education



The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe disruptions in higher education that led to reduced student engagement and comprehension. When students returned to school from remote learning, they had diminished concentration, decreased reading ability, and a small vocabulary. Before, students were required to read and engage with their textbooks. But once schools returned to in-person learning, students had a lengthy reliance on PowerPoint presentations, recorded class lectures, and digital, daily in-class assignments. ESL students learned the negative impact of not reading authentic English texts. Reading stamina decreased as students became acclimated to reading short assignments instead of reading longer, more complex assignments. With the increased use of digital distractions, students developed skimming instead of reading and comprehension. Students regressed in vocabulary due to the lack of required reading in class and the lack of engagement in class. Due to the in-class interactive reading and discourse of a reading passage, learners were not able to engage with discipline-specific, complex, and abstract academic vocabulary. With the pandemic, students lost motivation and confidence. Remote learning caused students to read less and more of a chore than a privilege, and a privilege-based inequality in reading and engagement, where some students could read and study with the appropriate support, and some students could not, because they lacked resources to the Internet and necessary reading devices. Reading in higher education is at a breaking point, and losing stamina is a big contributor, with vocabulary skills declining, barriers to reading, and inequities in reading. Higher education learning institutions need to be at the forefront to regain lost literacy and confidence.

Predictors of Post-pandemic Reading Recovery

Reading recovery of student's post-pandemic extends beyond a single factor of language. Learning levels, willingness to learn, technology environment, and institutional circumstances are also important. Recovery is understood by the factors from five domains: linguistic, cognitive, affective, technological, and institutional. Regarding linguistic domains, reading recovery relies on students' lexical breadth and grammatical knowledge, reading integration, and fluency. Text comprehension improves with a robust lexical form and enriched grammatical structure, and is made deeper by the integration of reading comprehension with a fluency level that ensures sustained focus on the task. Recovery is also shaped by cognitive factors. Ability to think strategically, and integrate, as well as prior knowledge, determines students' comprehension and evaluation thresholds of the reading material. Recovery of reading also relies on self-efficacy and anxiety as affective determinants. Recovery of motivation is a necessary condition for firm and sustained persistence level of students, notably those who perceive a high regard for the task. Access to technology is made possible by digital skills and the quality of technical reading platforms, recovery, and measurement-restricted functionality that provides safe interactivity and mouldable technological. Recovery also depends on the quality of instruction. Reading recovery is made easy by the instructors' structure, order, and integration of the reading material.

Pedagogical Pathways for Reading Recovery

Reading recovery post-pandemic in the field of ESL higher education goes much further than getting students to read more. Due to COVID-19 related disruptions, learners returned to universities with weaker reading stamina, smaller vocabularies, difficulties concentrating, and reduced levels of self-confidence with reading. These problems require reading to be reinstated as a fundamental academic discipline for learners, and the fixing of reading requires engaged, strategic, and pedagogically sound interventions. The first of these pathways involves the reading strategy. Teachers explain to students how experts in reading preview the headings of text, construct a rudimentary understanding of text, jot down the main ideas, create questions, synthesize ideas, and read critically to create a coherent argument. Without falling into the trap of using passive reading, students often demonstrate incredible difficulty internalizing these reading processes, and the more these processes are modeled and practiced, the more learners are able to read proficiently and autonomously.

The second pathway is the implementation of the guided reading framework, whereby students are required to read thought-provoking and level-appropriate materials. These materials may include newspaper articles, essays, short stories, and even texts related to students' fields of study. Guided reading encourages students to read for pleasure and see reading as something positive and meaningful, rather than a chore that is being done for the sake of an examination. The use of reading logs and even participating in group discussions is a great



way for students to find and share different perspectives on what they have read. From these interactions and discussions, students come to understand different ways in which the same text can be interpreted. Creating a vocabulary ecosystem is a highly effective way of developing students' vocabulary. Rather than learning vocabulary in a utilitarian way, students should be exposed to new vocabulary in a variety of contexts, including reading, lectures, and discussions, to reinforce their vocabulary development in an organic way. Incorporating etymology into vocabulary study, word families, and the usage of specialized vocabulary for each field of study, is an extremely valuable strategy within the context of higher education. These strategies allow students to develop a vocabulary that enables them to read academic texts with greater ease.

Collaborative reading creates opportunities for peer discussions, jigsaw reading, group interpretations, and shared annotations. It allows students to negotiate meanings together. Such interaction improves the social dimension of learning. It improves the motivation and the accountability of the students, the reading comprehension, etc. In multicultural classes, collaboration also helps students readjust their structured thinking, now in English. The reading ecology allows and integrates digital and physical media. Digital media help with note-keeping, task and text flexibility, and text alternatives. To help maintain a balance in reading modes, students should also be capable and prepared to choose the mode that best fits their task. Furthermore, reading ecology also brings the opportunity of ethical AI integration. AI now helps with easier anchor glossaries and helps to design and structure questions and reading tasks. It may also give texts a reading and comprehension glow. It may also give the texts a small summary reading, improving the comprehension, etc. However, it should never be a replacement for an anchor and thinking. Controlling AI glossaries and glow tasks also helps to maintain attention, inferences, and better reading and task glow. As a result, reading ecology should never be a task in self-control and/or healthy monitoring. The reading ecology also restructures the learning zone. The reading ecology helps prepare students for independent, confident, and future-ready integrated reading.

A Conceptual Model of Reading Recovery

Reading recovery after COVID-19 in ESL higher education cannot be assessed based on the simplistic return to pre-COVID-19 reading levels. Instead, reading recovery is a complex phenomenon that involves learner attributes, reading fluency, scaffolded systemic support, and the ability to borrow specific reading strategies from a text. ESL learners do not return to their reading levels just because of a prolonged gap or through window-based reading classrooms. A recovery of learners' reading levels occurs due to a combination of factors and supports. This challenges the focus-on-learner deficit models and emphasizes the personal ability of the reader, the systemic/administrative nature of the entities, and the constructs of the pedagogy of the reading recovery.

The proposed conceptual framework may be represented as: Reading Recovery = $f(\text{Linguistic Competence} + \text{Motivation} + \text{Metacognition} + \text{Digital Conditions} + \text{Institutional Support})$. Recovery is best viewed as a complexity, and not a system per se, due to the interconnected nature of the components and factors that support return to previous levels and maintain reading progress post COVID-19. Each recovery/post-COVID-19 reading level reflects a major domain that, if neglected, constrains the other domains' progress. Meanwhile, the reading recovery framework promotes the value of comprehensive support system interventions. Linguistic recovery is the most essential level, consisting of knowledge of language, grammar, and discourse, as well as reading fluency. Higher levels of abstraction are reading fluency, vocabulary, and grammar. Recovery is a cognitively demanding activity because most of the cognitive resources are spent on double decoding words and their internal syntax and comprising an internal coherent grammar and discourse. This is a uniquely pronounced challenge in higher education where the beliefs involve a reliance on old and discipline-based academic text reading fluency. Students with above-average linguistic skills are generally able to recover faster, because they are able to interact with the text more deeply and participate in discussions more easily. Reading motivation refers to the desire to keep reading. Learners who understand the purpose of reading and view it as important, doable, and worthy, will attempt to do it despite the challenges. Reading motivation is especially critical in the post pandemic period, where students the world over have become disengaged. Highly motivated learners are able to utilize reading as an avenue to cope with reading gap and closure. This



practice, however, cannot overcome the structural barriers of a poor reading framework. Reading motivation should therefore be used in conjunction with proper reading materials, able to read to understand and utilize reading framework to cope with reading gaps and closure.

A high level of understanding is achieved when learners can comprehend and evaluate the reading. When metacognition is properly utilized, it is able to facilitate the best outcomes of reading. Students with comparable language in reading ability can perform and achieve totally different results based on the strategies utilized. One student can read a tough reading in a passive and overwhelmed manner, and the other can read and understand the text by actively checking whether they understand it. Such instances are the exceptions to reading gaps and closures and highlight the importance of reading to understand, recover, and cope. To read in the post pandemic world, reading in the digital era is a new infrastructure of digital reading. Reliable devices, stable internet, digital literacy, and ability to manage focus and attention span are necessary tools and skills. Reading recovery is a digital country in post-pandemic worlds. When paired with digital resources like e-books and note-taking applications, positive digital environments have the potential to enhance accessibility and incorporation of various e-primers and e-dictionaries. However, technology alone cannot ensure that students will make effective use of these resources to improve their digital and academic skills. For instance, many students may have the best digital devices to improve learning and performance while remaining stuck in fragmented reading. This is often due to their reading habits that are influenced by their devices and the prevailing culture of social interaction, multi-tasking, and reading prompts. Motivated students devise innovative strategies to overcome the digital reading challenges and may still want to read substantial texts that cannot be read comfortably on small and cramped mobile screens. Digital conditions are positive factors that encourage reading but not solving the lack of reading.

The institutional support is a clear manifestation of the greater system within which the recovery of reading skills is done. It includes the guidance of the teachers, libraries, curriculum, and design, the provision of reading skills and support, the assessment and the academic support. Capable students can lose their confidence to read skills in a system that does not reward their skills or overloaded students with poorly constructed tasks. For instance, the ability of the teachers can be severely restricted by a system that focuses more on rote recall than critical thinking, students are encouraged to read skills but are not provided with quiet places to read or to get free books. The biggest strength of the model is its ability to stress interdependence. Relying on a single line of evidence is never a guarantee of success. Motivational techniques cannot close the gaps in various skills, access to digital resources does not necessarily enhance reading, and quality teaching cannot improve learning impacted by a poorly designed curriculum.

However, small targeted improvements in various areas can lead to greater overall improvements. This is a positive model and the outcome of reading. Outcomes are based on the relationships between variables in their respective contexts. The model also understands the evolving nature of recovery. Improvement in reading is dynamic, not constant. Students can quickly progress in a given semester with support; though, they can also quickly regress if the support is removed and the reading demands are increased. Earning confidence (along with gain in reading practice) will eventually strengthen vocabulary and reading practice. Fluency and vocabulary can also assist in the decrease of reading-related anxiety when the learners are collaboratively assisted. So, the model's variables are evolving factors that can impact each other. Overall, this conceptual model sees reading recovery as a long-term, systemic process and not a short-term remedial process. It argues that in order to achieve meaningful recovery post the pandemic, universities must take integrated approaches to simultaneously strengthen language competence, motivation, metacognitive awareness, digital and institutional readiness, and support.

Implications of the Model

The conceptual framework carries several practical implications

- assessment should be multi-layered, with inclusion in the diagnosis of languages as well as motivation, strategy, and access.



- focus on strategies. Interventions that include vocabulary instruction should not exclude confidence-building.
- policies should be focused on equity. Both digital and institutional inequities affect reading outcomes.
- teaching should be flexible.
- policies should emphasize improvement. Reading should develop across disciplines and semesters.

The conceptual model suggests that reading recovery in the post-pandemic period should be approached as a systemic process influenced by learner and institutional factors. By integrating linguistics, motivation, metacognition, digital and structural frameworks, the trying to interpret the reading decline, recovery should not be viewed as a return to the previous frameworks, and post-pandemic should be construed as the strategic shaping of the stronger and more comprehensive and resilient literacy ecosystems.

Implications for Teachers

In this post-crisis context, educators are critical for developing reading strategies as they directly influence student engagement with texts, classroom norms, and educational literacy. After COVID-19, many ESL learners who entered higher education have experienced reading deficits coupled with brevity of attention, loss of vocabulary, and poor sense of self-esteem. Despite changes at the institutional level, classroom innovations and targeted approaches can have an immediate positive impact on response to students. Many important considerations factor into this context, but first, low-stakes reading tests are an invaluable opportunity for students and educators alike to assess what students can do and what their strengths are. Educators are then encouraged to use a variety of comprehension tests, vocabulary assessments, and poster surveys to facilitate discussions in order to assess students' reading for meaning, use of active reading strategies, and general confidence. Longer assessments of reading and reading strategies should be broken into smaller reading segments and given as reading homework. Segmented reading provides children and students the ability to engage in cognitive reading while participating in the process of reading. Adopting a pre-reading activity that nurtures students' prior knowledge helps eliminate a lot of the comprehension problems students encounter.

Active reading strategies, annotation, and the making of notes as forms of active reading should all be encouraged, and exemplary reading and strategies should be focused upon. Most students probably read passively and have no idea what they should do to read like an expert. To increase understanding of reading processes and teach students how to retain what they read and think critically while reading, reading an academic passage, and underlining, writing notes in the margins, identifying transitions, and summarizing the passage should be done. In addition, maintaining a reading journal, writing discussion posts, and creating portables of their reading to keep track of their progress shows how students have grown and shows their worth, the effort and consistency of their work, and the strategies that they possess, regardless of the final score and the outcome. This is useful for students who are gaining their confidence back from the disrupted learning they have experienced. It is also important to not only tell students that reading and understanding a difficult text is a struggle, but that they should expect the struggle. Academic reading is not like reading for pleasure. It often involves much re-reading and critical analysis. This type of reading is what students should be expected to do. This is what teachers should be doing to encourage students to not just read for the sake of reading. They should be building student confidence and incorporating a range of different reading strategies, assessments, and scaffolding for the students to work from as they go. Because students read posts that work reflectively on their own reactions to the text and reading strategies, snapping back to academic literacy after the period of forced literacy over the last few years should not be thought of as a quick shock to the system, and reading should be a well-organized teaching strategy and an answer to the reading gap.

Institutional and Policy Implications



Recovery of reading skills in ESL higher education after the pandemic has implications beyond the classroom. More reading difficulties influence teaching by structural inequities (e.g., curricular and syllabus frameworks insufficient in support of teachers' pedagogical process). Higher education institutions must abandon student-deficit models and shift their understanding of reading recovery to be an institutional concern. For recovery of reading skills to be effective, directed, coordinated initiatives/policies and frameworks are required. One principal concern of these frameworks is the provision of Reading Recovery Centers or academic literacy support units. This provision will be able to cater for one-to-one reading and understanding workshops, reading and vocabulary development workshops, reading strategies clinics, and reading support/discussion groups focused on different academic disciplines. Many students require guidance in reading and understanding, and also in gaining the skills to read and understand primary and secondary texts, research writings, and even theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Reframing these units as developmental, supportive, and empowering resources for each learner, rather than the stigmatizing resources for students with learning difficulties, encourages and motivates learners to access the resources without the fear of stigma.\

A second concern should be interdisciplinary reading support workshops focusing primarily on reading development. Reading support is predominantly in the languages. Reading demands for engineering students, for example, are different, and students from commerce read and write in more advanced disciplines and units than their peers. Therefore, reading and teaching support units across the disciplines should establish workshops, modelling clinics, and reading support discussion groups to provide reading support across different academic disciplines to assist students in developing the skills. Library renewal is a primary concern. Libraries should no longer be where books are stored and collected. They should help foster literacy. Different reading interventions and platforms, first-year collections, reading clubs and workshops, and quiet study areas, help universities boost reading culture. Libraries must also be first and foremost, platforms that provide students with resources in different formats that help with integration and access, be it in print or online. These are important resources for students who lack concentration and reading focus because they are important for reading recovery and building reading for integration and access.

Institutions still have a long way to go in terms of having and implementing inclusive technology policies. COVID has shown how important access to technology is. Those universities that are still on the lower end when it comes to reading intervention strategies to help those students who struggle with reading are also the same universities that have not embraced technology. This has shown that it is important to help intervention programs like workshops, how to teach students, and how to manage distractions while studying, etc. This easily allows students to integrate and is seen to be a positive way for higher education and students to easily help each other through the same goals. This is seen to be a helpful way to aid and integrate students for higher education and universities to help each other support the same goals. Considered as the "bridge theory," programs that aid students in higher education from a lower to higher education focus also aid students in higher education to easily integrate and achieve the same from the university goals and lower to higher education progression. By showing us where we fell short, the post-pandemic phase has the potential to create more robust and more integrated reading cultures in higher education, rather than re-establishing the old ways.

Future Research Agenda

Post-pandemic recovery of reading within ESL higher education is a field of inquiry in its infancy. Recent studies have identified loss of learning, alterability of digital tools, and shifting student behavior due to COVID-19, yet many critical issues related to the development of reading over time remain. Most studies are based on short surveys, small-scale, and somewhat unspecific case studies. Future work needs to bring a theoretical lens and a methodical, policy-oriented approach. Recovery of reading is a process permeated by many factors, such as language, development, and social inequities. The introduction of longitudinal studies that track reading recovery over a period of several academic semesters is a significant gap that is currently within academic literature. Many studies present a short, one-time snapshot of reading recovery and the associated challenges of ESL education, and do not capture the progress or regression of reading recovery over time. Though these studies may capture changes in reading and comprehension, recovery of reading in ESL education is a slow process of improvement. A second and significant new direction is the comparative



research of ESL reading challenges and challenges present within reading recovery initiatives. Many ESL reading recovery initiatives lack robust comparative critiques in the wider body of academic literature on reading recovery within dominant English contexts. Through comparison, we may begin to identify whether reading recovery initiatives lack motivation or are insufficient in their design to meet ESL needs. Assuming that one model addresses the needs of all learners can create challenges, and such research will provide institutions with the means of successfully applying interventions while improving and overcoming the challenges that come from one model fits all learners. Rural-urban gaps in the recovery of reading should also be prioritized in the next research.

Rural areas are usually characterized by an internet that is available in fewer places, libraries that are smaller and offer fewer services, coaching that is available in fewer places, and less English. In contrast, urban learners are likely to be affected by the aforementioned challenges, in addition to the challenges of poor digital skills and coaching. Comparing reading recovery in rural and urban areas can provide research about the effects of geography on reading and academic skills in students, and how reading policies in the country may be targeted and less generic. Also, there is an urgent need to study the various ways that AI may be harnessed to aid reading. AI may provide glosses of vocabulary; generate reading summaries; provide quizzes, coaching, and feedback on reading; and provide help with pronunciation.

The research on AI use should address whether AI aids the reading process and promotes the use of reading skills, and design research to examine the benefits and take a position on AI uses in reading policy. There is a neglected need to support students in their discipline by incorporating elements of reading appropriate to the varied disciplines. Reading in support of students in the various disciplines and of reading in support of students in the reading policy of the country is extremely important. The emotional aspects of reading recovery are equally significant. A common misunderstanding is that academic reading is purely cognitive. However, there are emotional factors that impact reading engagement. The aftermath of the Pandemic saw many learners in a state of anxiety, burnout, and vulnerability. Future research should aim to explore the role of the above constructs in the engagement with challenging texts. More understanding about these constructs can be gained from qualitative data that uses interviews, learner diaries, and narrative inquiry, apart from quantitative data that uses surveys. The notion of reading recovery should be understood more broadly in that it is a contextual and interdisciplinary endeavor, and not a short-term response to an emerging crisis. The tools of evidence, taken from different aspects of study such as longitudinal and comparative studies, studies of a technological and emotional nature, will be effective in creating just, long-lasting, and efficient literacy policies. Pedagogically and socially grounded reading recovery research will be essential in enhancing academic reading in higher education in the immediate future.

CONCLUSION

Post-COVID higher education has brought up the choice of either ignoring the issue of declining reading awareness among the unenthusiastic population in higher education or taking the time to redesign the methods of teaching how to read, where to read, and to what end reading should be, to both the elementary and the advanced learners. The COVID disruptions, to be viewed as more than the period of loss, give an opportunity to the universities to embrace the changes and create a literacy-first, centric offer for the learners, targeting equality, economy, and sustainability. The Advanced learners of ESL should not only be viewed as the language-related, reading skill-depleted learners for whom the only remedy should be reading. The readers, and more importantly, the employees, should be trained in ESL to fill the gaps in the learners' academic gaps and create a diverse and integral future for them in the workforce. The formation of reading skills should be aimed at helping the learners acquire the tools of self-representation.

Reading recovery should be understood as restoring the democratic opportunities to gain, process, and disseminate knowledge, and therefore reading. This review posits that a range of interdependent elements, rather than a focused intervention, dictates successful reading recovery from the pandemic. While the pandemic did impact recovery, vocabulary, syntax, and reading fluency (as elements of a child's linguistic process) remained foundational. Effectively, the pandemic impact recovery requires metacognitive strategies, background knowledge, and logical inferences concerning reading comprehension. In addition to the cognitive



control the pandemic required to process the information, the elements of motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy remained pillars of the challenge. The impact of the extended schooling via technology impacted reading flexibility, recovery, and the control of the information environment. How universities scaffold literacy development in recovery, post-pandemic, is a significant factor.

Understanding how all these things work together is vital. Enthusiasm cannot fill the void of a serious lack of vocabulary. Superior digital resources do not automatically make everything successful. The most devoted of teaching professionals may not thrive if a course favors remembering facts over critical thinking. The same goes for the potential of a student if a course divests consideration of emotional health or systemic inequality. Reading recovery encompasses a number of various ecological and systemic elements to the degree that it demands the systematic integration of classroom, instructional, and policy responses. The educational pathways that have been described in this paper indicate possible classroom-centered instructional responses. Reading instruction that is based on strategies can make informed comprehension of reading invisible to students. Gradual reading builds is restores reading stamina, reading fluency, and the enjoyment of reading. Vocabulary draws provide vocabulary access through extensive exposure. Reading-based communities address the social elements of learning. The cardboard ecology of reading. Educational uses for artificial intelligence can support learning but not provide a replacement for thinking. The authors of this paper suggested that offering the different ways in which institutions have addressed Reading Recovery is a more comprehensive means of addressing the reading deficiencies of students. These are most needed for students who are first-generation learners, multi-lingual, and to a certain extent, those who the COVID-19 pandemic impacted most adversely.

Importantly, the idea of recovery should not focus on returning to the norms that existed before the pandemic. Several of the systems of pre-pandemic literacy were already imbalanced, with a lack of resources or passive reading models. Any relapse to that would be a wasted chance instead of a forward step. Rather, institutions must aim to create more humane, embodied, and inclusive literacy futures where reading is perceived not as a presumed ability but a life-long developmental action that needs to be coached, time and community-based. Higher education is partly hinged on whether universities can produce graduates who are able to focus on complex tasks as well as to engage in critical interpretation of information, reasoning based on evidence, and able to think and interact thoughtfully with challenging books. Such abilities do not come along with enrolment and need to be fostered. When universities invest in the establishment of strong reading ecologies, in which students learn how to read, are assisted during reading, and are motivated to read, then the upheavals of the pandemic can still act as a catalyst in the establishment of stronger, more resilient, and more intellectually vibrant.

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