

Students' Attitudes towards the Incorporation of Reading as a Mandatory Module in the First-Year Bachelor of English Language Programme

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Abstract

Reading is a fundamental skill for academic success, particularly in the context of English language learning. This study aims to gauge the attitudes of first-year students in the Department of English at the University of El Oued, Algeria, towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module. It adopted a descriptive survey design within a quantitative approach. A structured attitudinal questionnaire was administered to a sample of 183 students to collect quantitative data, which were analysed descriptively. The results revealed that first-year students developed positive attitudes towards the newly incorporated module as it helped them enhance other vital skills, including critical thinking skills, reading comprehension skills, and writing abilities. The study recommends conducting experimental studies to determine and measure the amount of reading impact on specific language skills.

Keywords:

Attitudes, incorporation, mandatory module, reading.

1. Introduction

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Developing strong reading skills is fundamental for success in English Language learning. Students need to be able to comprehend complex texts, analyse arguments, and critically evaluate information. The incorporation of reading in EFL programmes has always been a common practice due to the many merits associated with it. For many researchers, reading is the building block for language proficiency. According to Schmitt (2007), reading is necessary for vocabulary acquisition as it exposes students to a vast vocabulary in context. Repeated encounters with new words solidify their meaning and usage. Therefore, extensive reading is particularly effective for vocabulary growth. Additionally, reading has been found to reinforce learners' grammatical skills. In this regard, Foncha (2014) maintains that reading naturally exposes students to proper grammar structures. They subconsciously absorb sentence patterns and word order, strengthening their grammatical foundation. Moreover, reading enhances comprehension. As learners navigate complex texts, their comprehension skills improve. They learn to decode meaning beyond the literal level, fostering critical thinking and inferential skills (Day et al., 1998). Another advantage of integrating reading in EFL programmes is stated by Asiri (2023), who asserts that the ability of English language students to be successful in their academic as well as professional lives is dependent on the motivations that drive them to use the language for various purposes, especially reading. This means that success in reading boosts motivation for academic success.

Traditionally, English Language programmes in higher education institutions worldwide integrate "reading" as a mandatory subject to enhance learners' reading proficiency. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the Algerian universities for decades. Although the official curriculum taught to students at different undergraduate levels in the Algerian higher education institutions was meant to foster students' reading skills through various writing and literature courses,

this was not enough as it did not incorporate “reading” as a module to be taught independently.

This issue was addressed after the ministry's recent review of the contents of Bachelor's degree programmes designed for the field of foreign languages, where reading became an independent and mandatory module taught in the first and second years of the first cycle–undergraduate studies–with the name *Reading and Text Study*. These new programmes went into effect at the beginning of the academic season 2023-2024.

However, the integration of a new mandatory educational subject to be taught may constitute some challenges, as students may hold varying attitudes and perceptions towards the inclusion of such a requirement within their academic curriculum.

This study aims to gauge first-year students' attitudes towards the incorporation of the module of reading to understand their perceptions and identify potential areas for improvement. A secondary aim of the study is to explore the difficulties encountered by students in this new module.

The main research question this study seeks to answer is:

What are first-year English students' attitudes towards the incorporation of reading in undergraduate EFL programmes?

The subsidiary question of the study is:

What are the difficulties students encounter in reading?

Based on the main research question, it has been hypothesised that first-year students of English at the University of El Oued would have positive attitudes towards the incorporation of reading in undergraduate EFL programmes

The significance of this study lies in the necessity of understanding student's attitudes for programme development. The results of the study may also allow for more careful revision of the syllabus of the module of reading and the adoption of more effective instructional practices and implementation policies.

2. Literature Review

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Reading is more than a basic skill for foreign language learning; it is also an essential skill for success in many other domains of life, including professional life. The existing literature has extensively documented the numerous benefits that reading can provide for students who are learning English as a second or foreign language.

2.1. Benefits of Reading for Success in EFL Learning

One of the primary benefits of reading for EFL learners is its ability to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills (Wasik et al., 2016). As students engage with complex texts, they are required to analyse, interpret, and evaluate the information presented, thereby enhancing their ability to think critically and problem-solve (Nation, 1997). Reading for critical thinking skills helps students distinguish important and unimportant information, infer the main idea, and implied meanings, draw implications, and arrive at logical conclusions (Al Roomy, 2022).

Studies also found that reading can improve learners' language proficiency (Febrianti 2023; Linyang, 2021). Through regular exposure to a variety of texts, students can enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and overall comprehension of the English language. As students read, they encounter new words and phrases, which they can then incorporate into their own written and spoken communication. Krishnan et al., (2009) contend that reading can help students develop a better understanding of sentence structure, idioms, and other linguistic nuances which can improve their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Furthermore, reading has been shown to positively impact students' academic performance across a range of subjects (Oriogu et al., 2017). Numerous studies have demonstrated that students who engage in regular reading tend to perform better on standardised tests, have higher grade point averages, and exhibit stronger critical thinking and analytical skills. This is because reading not only enhances language proficiency but also expands students' knowledge, broadens

their perspectives, and develops their ability to understand and interpret complex information.

Another key benefit of reading is its ability to foster cultural understanding and awareness (Idulog et al., 2023). As students read texts written by authors from diverse backgrounds, they gain a deeper appreciation for different cultural perspectives, traditions, and ways of life. This cultural exposure not only enriches students' personal growth but also improves their ability to communicate and interact effectively with individuals from different cultural contexts (Masoud & Rahayu, 2018). Within this vein, Reutzel & Cooter (2003) suggest that reading broadens students' background knowledge across various disciplines. They believe that exposure to diverse topics in English allows students to build general and subject-specific knowledge, a crucial foundation for academic success. This background knowledge facilitates comprehension and learning in all subjects, not just English language courses.

Strong correlations have been found between reading and the improvement of other language skills. Research findings have shown that it is unrealistic for language learners to improve their listening comprehension through classroom listening practice alone (David & Maurer, 2022). The texts covered during the listening activities are used for independent reading, demonstrating that reading can effectively be used for the improvement of listening skills, and thus reducing the common claim that students do not benefit from reading for listening skills improvement. Şad et al. (2020) assert that with the expanded use of technology, including the use of the Internet resources and CD-ROMs, readers of English have increased access to more listening resources that are successfully used to improve listening skills.

As for speaking, many research studies proved that reading has a significant role in the improvement of speaking skills. Reading increases vocabulary, knowledge, and comprehension and all previously mentioned items, which make learners subconsciously absorb proper sentence structures, verb tenses, and grammatical

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agreements (Kucuk, 2024). This improves their ability to use grammar correctly when speaking and enables them to cope with speaking problems. According to Supraba (2020), reading aloud has been shown to enhance speaking fluency and accuracy. The act of pronouncing words, maintaining rhythm, and practising intonation improve spoken language production. Furthermore, reading comprehension involves understanding context, identifying main ideas, and making connections. These skills directly contribute to better listening comprehension and, consequently, more effective speaking (Akbar, 2014).

Reading also has a strong impact on writing. For instance, Krashen (1993) ascertains that learners do not develop a writing style by writing, but through reading. He adds that writing competence can be enhanced through extensive reading for interest and/or pleasure. According to Wilber (2023), reading is a rich source for expanding vocabulary, absorbing grammar rules, understanding structures of different types of writing, exploring various writing styles, and inspiring creativity.

Finally, reading can have a profound impact on students' motivation and engagement in the learning process (Mahdikhani & Rezaei, 2015; Khan et al., 2017). When students find reading materials that are interesting, relevant, and engaging, they are more likely to be motivated to continue reading and to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained to other academic pursuits.

2.2. Research on Students' Attitudes towards Reading

Alexander & Fuller (1976, as cited in Ahmad and Yamat, 2021) define attitude towards reading as a systematic feeling that a learner constructs towards reading, which leads him/her to like or dislike the act of reading as a cognitive process. This feeling is constructed based on the previous experiences of the learner with reading as an activity in class or outside of it. Worth (2002) states that learners' attitudes toward reading influence how involved they are in reading, which directly

affects their achievement because students who read more frequently get far better outcomes.

Attitudes, points of view, language, and learning skills all play a role in the literacy development processes and reading for learning. Furthermore, the experiences and resources available to learners also influence their reading style (Rupley et al., 2006). According to Gumartifa and Adawiyah (2022), there has always been a relationship between reading as a process and reading attitude. Students with a positive reading attitude are more likely to express better views in reading comprehension activities. This means that attitudes towards a specific language skill have a great influence on learners' success in that skill. This leads to the conclusion that studying the factors that affect students' attitudes towards reading are of paramount importance.

In this regard, Laurice (2004) stresses the following four major factors that can positively or negatively influence reading: self-concept, teacher and classroom environment, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement. Self-concept refers to the image an individual maintains about himself/herself. This image strongly influences how a learner enjoys reading. Learners with a positive self-concept as readers are expected to become better readers than those with a negative self-concept because they are more willing to read and are more interested in reading either for leisure or entertainment. This positive attitude towards reading is promoted by success in doing various reading-related tasks assigned by teachers or even parents.

Teachers and classroom environments also play a big role in shaping students' attitudes towards reading. Laurice (2004) believes that students perceive a positive reading environment if teachers manage to create a positive classroom atmosphere that is conducive to engagement and learning. This is possible through the instructional strategies that teachers adopt when they teach reading. Such strategies may include providing a wide range of reading materials from various genres to enrich background knowledge and adopting positive

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reinforcement as a tool to encourage desired behaviours that relate to good reading practice.

Additionally, Laurice claims that socioeconomic status may be an influencing factor on how students perceive reading. Students who grew up in a lower socioeconomic status generally developed negative attitudes towards reading. Conversely, students coming from higher socioeconomic status generally demonstrated a big interest in reading.

The fourth factor affecting students' attitudes towards reading is parental involvement. To Laurice, the information and values that children absorb from their parents on the importance of reading greatly affect how their attitudes form and develop because parents are models for their children. Parents should not only provide various reading materials at home, such as books, journals, magazines, and dictionaries, but also engage in an active and continuous reading process with their children and discuss what they read to create an atmosphere that encourages effective reading and contributes to building a positive attitude towards reading.

2.3. Reading Challenges Faced by EFL Students

As the global demand for English language proficiency continues to rise, the ability to effectively read and comprehend English texts has become a critical skill for students whose first language is not English. EFL students, in particular, often face significant challenges in developing their reading proficiency. This is due to a unique set of obstacles that EFL learners often face when learning reading. These obstacles can hinder their progress in developing robust reading comprehension abilities. Below is a statement of some of these challenges.

Boonkongsaen and Intaraprasert (2014) ascertain that the lack of vocabulary knowledge and familiarity with idiomatic expressions is one common challenge for EFL students in reading. This can make it difficult to understand the intended meaning of the text, slowing down the reading process and hindering overall comprehension. Additionally,

Carlisle (2000) and Qian (2002) found in their studies that vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in understanding complex reading materials such as textbooks, particularly those containing technical expressions. In addition to vocabulary deficiency, some studies propose that grammar Knowledge has a prominent role in reading comprehension (Koda, 2005). The level of grammar knowledge has also been found to affect EFL learners' text comprehension. Therefore, adequate knowledge of grammar is more than necessary for learners to grasp meaning and understand texts. Similarly, Bernhardt (2000) emphasised that EFL learners' reading ability relatively depends on their grammatical knowledge.

One key challenge is the limited ability to recognise and interpret different text structures and rhetorical devices. Fatkurochman (2019) asserts that complex sentence structures can make it challenging for students to identify the main ideas, supporting details, and the overall organisation of a text. Based on some studies, some readers could understand simple words or expressions, but face difficulty in understanding longer sentences (Laing & Kamhi, 2002; Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009). This indicates that text structure plays a decisive role in hindering comprehension.

Another challenge for EFL students is the language barrier posed by the specialised, content-based texts they encounter at the tertiary level (Samah & Jusoff, 2008). Students, who may have had limited exposure to English in their primary and secondary education, are suddenly confronted with academic texts that are derived from reference books or lecture notes and can be highly complex in their vocabulary and sentence structure. The unfamiliar terminology and dense, information-rich passages can prove extremely daunting, hindering students' ability to fully grasp the content.

Additionally, Singh (2014) believes that EFL students may lack the requisite background knowledge and contextual understanding to effectively engage with these content-based texts. The reading material often assumes a level of familiarity with the subject matter that many

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EFL learners simply do not possess, further compounding their reading comprehension challenges. In this situation, if the learners' background knowledge is inadequate and deficient, their readings will contradict the information within the writing (Zhang & Shanshan, 2011). In a similar vein, Lerner (2000) admits that learners with good background knowledge tend to read more and improve their proficiency compared to those with poor background.

Furthermore, EFL students may struggle with developing effective reading strategies. Although reading strategies are essential for exploring the reading text and constructing meaning, learners often have limited knowledge about these strategies. They may not know how to effectively skim or scan a text, use context clues to infer meaning or employ strategies such as predicting and summarising (Wendaferew & Damte, 2023). In the same vein, Grabe and Stoller (2002) maintain that good reading strategies enable learners to decode letters and words, concentrate on the details over the main points, and identify text structure. Therefore, they strongly recommend instructing and training students on the appropriate use of these strategies.

It is also important to consider the lack of motivation and access to supportive materials that students may face. Without appropriate motivation and access to materials that cater to their level and interests, students may feel less inclined to engage in reading activities and may not see the relevance or value of improving their reading skills (Wahyuningsih, 2018).

One of the key difficulties confronted by students in reading is reading anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling related to fear, and it influences learning, in general, and reading comprehension, in particular. For instance, Vazalwar's (2011) study proposed that high levels of anxiety could influence reading comprehension negatively. This implies that moderate levels of anxiety can be beneficial to EFL learners as they encourage engagement and trigger enthusiasm. The study confirmed that students' reading comprehension was negatively associated with

anxiety. This result was supported by Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012) whose research also established a strong negative connection between reading comprehension and anxiety.

In conclusion, the existing literature strongly supports the notion that reading is a critical component of success for students in learning English as a second or foreign language and that their attitudes towards reading greatly affect the way they view reading as a cognitive process and how they develop interest and enthusiasm for it.

3. Methodology

This section provides a thorough description of the methodology employed in this study. It explains the research design, highlights the research approach, and discusses the research setting and study sample. It also describes the research instrument used to collect the data and clarifies the procedures for conducting the study and analysing data.

3.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, employing a quantitative approach to collect numeric data on first-year students' attitudes towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module in their official programme. The descriptive survey design is a specific type of *descriptive research* that uses surveys to describe the characteristics, attitudes, opinions, and practices (behaviours) of an entire population or a sample (Creswell, 2012). Surveys are procedures in quantitative research that employ questionnaires and interviews (both structured or semi-structured) to collect numeric data that can be statistically analysed "to describe trends about responses to questions and to test research questions or hypotheses" (Creswell, 2012, p. 376). According to the same author, survey design involves two basic types: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Cross-sectional survey design is used to collect data at one point in time and it is the most popular type in educational research. The longitudinal survey design is used to collect data over time. This study utilised the first type. Based on the description provided beforehand, it was perceived that the descriptive survey design would be most suited to the nature of the current

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research. Hence, it would enable the researcher to answer the research question and provide reliable data.

3.2. Setting and Participants

The researcher conducted the study in the Department of English at the University of El Oued during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, in the third second of April. After the researcher received administrative *consent* to conduct the study, he coordinated with the first-year teacher of the Study Skills module who permitted him to use his ordinary sessions to meet the students and conduct the study. The researcher was not teaching the subjects any module at the time of the study.

The research sample included $n=183$ first-year students, belonging to Groups 3, 5, 7, and 8. These groups were randomly selected out of the eight groups enrolled in the first year in the Department of English. The total population from which this sample was drawn was $N=372$ students. Table 1 below summarises the participants' personal information.

Table 1.

Background Information of Questionnaire Participants

Characteristics		Number	Percentage
Gender	Female	118	64.48%
	Male	65	35.52%
Age	17–21	137	74.86%
	22–26	23	12.56%
	27–31	9	04.92%
	32–36	6	03.27%
	37 +	8	04.37%
Repetitive	Yes	25	13.66%
	No	158	86.34%

All participants have been at university for one year, except for twenty-five repetitive students who have been there for two consecutive years. They were assumed to have the same background knowledge since they received similar instruction in all modules from the same teachers throughout the whole academic year (2023-2024). As the study sample was randomly selected, it was assumed that it would represent the broader population; hence, it would fit the purpose of the study.

3.3. Instrumentation

The researcher used an attitudinal questionnaire (see Appendix A) to collect quantitative data from the subjects about their attitudes towards incorporating the mandatory module of *Reading Text Study* in their official study programme. The questionnaire adopted the Likert Scale format. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the Likert Scale has two major characteristics: it is a very useful means for determining attitudes, perceptions, and opinions and it combines the flexibility of response with the ability to determine quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire included three sections. The first section was devoted to participants' demographic information. While the second section aimed at gauging students' attitudes towards reading, the third section intended to collect information about the probable challenges students would meet in reading. Sections II and III included eight 5-point Likert scale statements each based on the literature review. The response options for these statements were: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Respondents were asked to tick once for each item in the space that best represented their opinions.

Two strategies were employed to pilot the questionnaire: expert revision and conduction on a similar sample. The questionnaire schedule was critiqued by three expert university teachers. All experts expressed their primary satisfaction with it and suggested minor modifications, which were taken into consideration in its second version. Secondly, the questionnaire was piloted with ten students from

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Group 1 a week before the conduction of the study. After explanation, the pilot sample understood all statements and could respond to them very easily.

3.4. Procedures and Data Analysis

In class, the researcher started by explaining the aims of the study to the students and instructing them on how to respond to the questionnaire. He also ensured them the confidentiality of the information provided and, hence, got their informed consent. Next, the questionnaire was administered face-to-face and the participants were asked to follow the researcher while reading the statements and tick the degrees of agreement or disagreement, which would reflect their actual attitudes. After the participants responded to all statements, the researcher collected the questionnaires.

As for data analysis, descriptive statistics was used as a tool to analyse the questionnaire-based quantitative data. This involved calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standards of deviation for all statements in the questionnaire. This type of analysis allows for a thorough description of trends in responses to questions and an accurate comparison between them. Collected data were summarised visually and through frequency tables.

4. Results

This study is set to investigate the attitudes of first-year English students towards reading as a mandatory module, in addition to the reading difficulties. Students' responses to the attitudinal questionnaire are analysed below based on the statements involved in sections two and three respectively.

4.1. Analysis of Data on Students' Attitudes

The second section of the questionnaire examines first-year students' attitudes towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module in the official programme. Students' responses to the eight statements in this section are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Students' Attitudes

S.	SA (5)		A (4)		N (3)		D (2)		SD (1)		Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Trend
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
1	78	42.62	89	48.63	2	1.09	8	4.37	6	3.28	4.23	1.21	2	SA
2	83	45.35	71	38.80	8	4.37	12	6.55	9	4.92	4.13	0.96	3	A
3	51	27.86	64	34.97	15	8.20	33	18.03	20	10.93	3.51	1.19	8	A
4	64	34.97	60	32.79	19	10.38	17	9.29	23	12.57	3.68	1.07	7	A
5	62	33.88	63	34.43	21	11.48	18	9.84	19	10.38	3.72	1.43	6	A
6	75	40.98	79	43.17	12	6.56	11	6.01	6	3.27	4.13	1.13	4	A
7	68	37.16	87	47.54	6	3.28	9	4.92	13	7.10	4.03	0.87	5	A
8	91	49.73	76	41.53	2	1.09	8	4.37	6	3.28	4.30	1.15	1	SA
Weighed Mean											3.96			
Standard Deviation											1.12			

The survey results revealed a range of students' attitudes towards the mandatory reading module incorporation. Statement 8 (Reading broadens my appreciation for different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles) got the highest average with a mean of 4.30 and a standard deviation of 1.15. The percentages of agreement were 49.73% for strongly agree and 41.53% for agree. The second highest average was assigned to Statement 1 (The mandatory reading module helps me develop critical thinking skills for better text analysis). This statement got a mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 1.21, with 42.62% and 48.63% as percentages of agreement for strongly agree and agree respectively. Statement 2 (The variety of texts we are exposed to

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enhance my vocabulary, grammar, and overall text comprehension) got the third highest average with a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.96. The degrees of strongly agree and agree were 45.35% and 38.80% respectively. The next Statement was S.6 (Reading increases my motivation and engagement in the learning process), which got a mean of 4.13, a standard deviation of 1.13, and a percentage of 33.88 for strongly agree and 34.43 for agree. This is followed by Statement 7, which had a mean of 4.03 and a standard deviation of 0.87. The level of agreement reached 37.16% for strongly agree and 47.54% for agree. The sixth highest average was for Statement 5 (Reading is a vital factor in developing other language skills). It received a mean of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 1.43 with percentages of 33.88% for strongly agree and 34.43% for agree. The seventh statement in terms of the low average was S. 4 (I benefit from this module in improving my reading styles and strategies), with a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of 1.07. The agreement rates were 34.97% for strongly agree and 32.79% for agree. The statement with the lowest average was S.3 (Reading broadens my appreciation for different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles). It got a mean of 2.786 and a standard deviation of 1.3497. It also marked a rate of 27.86% for strongly agree and a rate of 34.97% for agree.

Table 3.

Evaluation Criteria for the Likert Scale Items

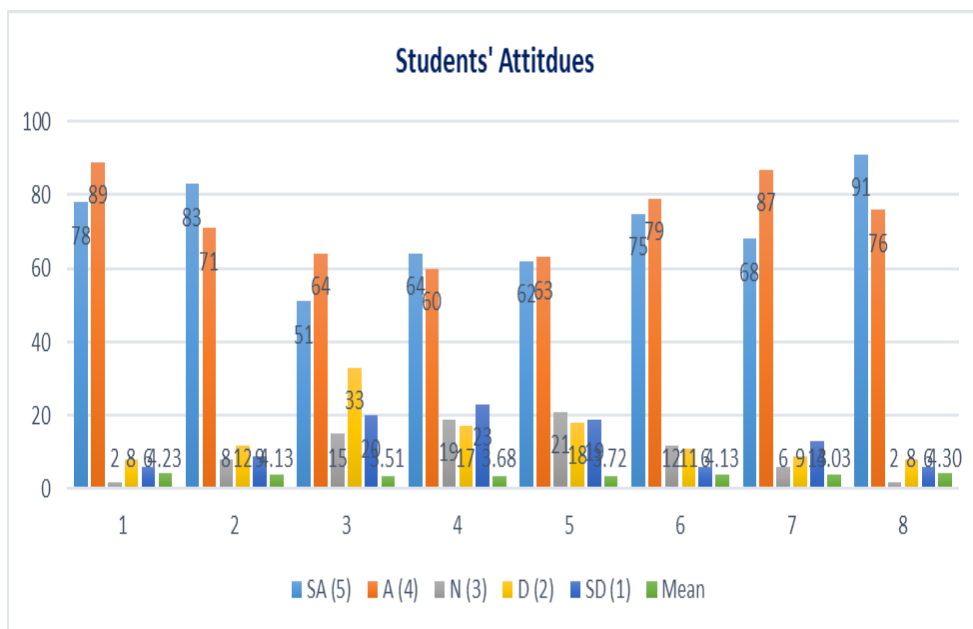
Mean Interval	Response Type	Level of Influence
1.00–1.79	Strongly Disagree	Very Low
1.80–2.59	Disagree	Low
2.60–3.39	Neutral	Moderate

3.40–4.19	Agree	High
4.20–5.00	Strongly agree	Very High

The weighted mean of Section 2 was 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.12. According to Table 3 above, which explains the trends of response and levels of influence applied to Likert scale mean scores, this mean indicates that the general trend of participants' responses in this section on *Students' Attitudes* is "Agree" and the level of influence is "High" as it lies within the interval of [3.40-4.19]. The responses analysed above are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Bar Graph of Students' Attitudes.



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4.2. Analysis of Data on Reading Challenges

The third section of the questionnaire reports on the difficulties encountered by students in the reading module. The summary of students' responses is stated in Table 4.

Table 4.
Descriptive Statistics for Reading Difficulties

S.	SA (5)		A (4)		N (3)		D (2)		SD (1)		Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Trend
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
9	96	52.46	81	44.26	0	0	4	2.19	2	1.09	4.45	1.28	1	SA
10	93	50.82	77	42.08	2	1.09	8	4.37	3	1.64	4.36	1.57	2	SA
11	88	48.09	85	46.45	1	0.55	5	2.73	4	2.19	4.36	1.91	3	SA
12	82	44.81	85	46.45	3	1.64	6	3.28	7	3.83	4.25	1.15	4	SA
13	7	3.83	12	6.56	2	1.09	79	43.17	83	45.36	1.80	1.58	8	SD
14	65	35.52	71	38.80	19	10.38	15	8.20	13	7.10	3.87	0.77	5	A
15	53	28.96	56	30.60	41	22.40	23	12.57	10	5.46	3.65	1.13	6	A
16	14	7.65	11	6.01	9	4.918	78	42.62	71	38.80	2.01	1.84	7	D
Weighed Mean											3.59			
Standard Deviation												1.40		

Students' responses to the statements of section 3 yielded the following results. The statement with the highest mean was S9 (The vocabulary used in some texts hinders my comprehension) with a mean of 4.54 and a standard deviation of 1.28. the degrees of agreement were 52.46% for strongly agree and 44.26 for agree. This is followed by

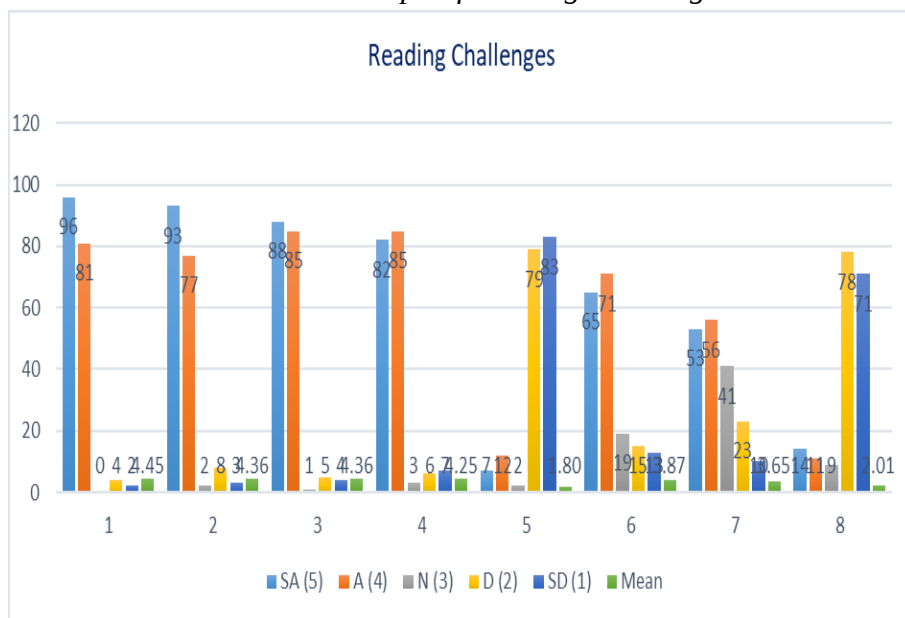
statement 10 (The complex sentence structures in academic reading materials make it hard for me to understand the meaning) with a mean of 4.36, a standard deviation of 1.57, a rate of 50.82% for strongly agree, and a rate of 42.08% for agree. Statement 11 (Some academic texts contain very complex information) ranked third. It had a mean of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 1.91 with agreement rates of 48.09% and 46.45% for strongly agree and agree respectively. The fourth statement in terms of average was S. 12 (My background knowledge on some topics covered in the readings is limited, hindering comprehension), with a mean of 4.25 and a standard deviation of 1.15. The agreement rates were 44.81% for strongly agree and 46.45% for agree. The next Statement was S.14 (I have limited knowledge about reading strategies), which got a mean of 3.87, a standard deviation of 0.77 and a percentage of 35.52% for strongly agree and 38.80% for agree. This is followed by statement 15 (Reading anxiety influences reading comprehension negatively) with a mean of 3.65, a standard deviation of 1.13, 50.82% for strongly agree, and 42.08% for agree. Statement 16 (The current teaching methods used in reading effectively engage me with the texts) marked low scores. It had a mean of 2.01, a standard deviation of 1.84, and agreement rates of 7.65 for agree and 6.01 for disagree. Conversely, the disagreement rates were very high: 42.62% of the subjects disagreed with the statement and 38.80% strongly disagreed. The statement with the lowest average was S.13 (Students contribute to the selection of texts studied in class). It got a mean of 1.80 and a standard deviation of 1.58. This statement also marked the lowest rates of agreement with 3.83 for strongly agree and a rate of 6.56 for agree. Meanwhile, it marked the highest rates of disagreement with 43.17 for disagree and 45.36 for strongly disagree.

Section 3 marked a weighted mean of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 1.40. Despite the trends of disagreement in statements 13 (Strongly Disagree) and 16 (Disagree), the general trend of participants' responses in this section on Reading Difficulties is "Agree" with a

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“High” level of influence as it lies within the interval of [3.40-4.19]. Figure 2 displays the graphic representation of the section.

Figure 2.
Bar Graph of Reading Challenges



5. Discussion

The focus of this section is to interpret the quantitative data collected in the study in light of the existing literature. The main research question aims to gauge the attitudes of first-year students towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module in the official instructional programme. The subsidiary research question

seeks to explore the difficulties associated with the integration of reading as a new, mandatory module.

The findings of the study revealed that the subjects had predominantly a positive attitude towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module. This is reflected in the weighted mean and standard deviation of the second section ($M=3.96$, $SD=1.12$), and in the high rates of agreement marked in the majority of the statements. These values indicate that the study participants agree on the importance of integrating reading in the first-year programme as the general trend is “Agree” with a “High” influence, according to the criteria of Likert scale items evaluation (see Table 2. Above).

Coming to the individual statements (1–8), all students’ responses ranged between “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”. In S.1 for instance, 42.62% of the respondents strongly agreed and 48.63% of them agreed that reading helped them enhance necessary critical thinking skills for better text analysis. This supports the findings from Day et al., (1998) that navigating complex texts enabled learners to decode meaning beyond the literal level, allowing them to develop critical thinking skills. Wasik et al. (2016) and Nation (1997) also maintained that students could enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills by analysing, interpreting, and evaluating the information contained in the reading materials.

The rates of agreement were also high in S.2 as 45.35 % and 38.80% of the participants respectively strongly agreed and agreed that they could enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and overall text comprehension. This finding is in line with Schmitt’s (2007) view that extensive reading is particularly effective for vocabulary growth; Foncha’s (2014) claim that students’ regular exposure to proper grammar structures strengthens their grammatical foundation; and (Febrianti’s (2023) and Linyang’s (2021) opinions that readers can enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and overall comprehension if they are regularly exposed to a variety of texts.

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In comparison to S.1 and S.2, students' level of agreement lowered in S.3. 27% of the subjects strongly agreed that the assigned readings were relevant to their interests and background knowledge, and 34.97% agreed with it. This shows that the reading texts students used to deal with did not always correspond to their actual linguistic competence and comprehension. This finding coincides with S.13 (Students contribute to the selection of texts studied in class), where the participants almost reported that they did not contribute to the selection of texts studied in class. 43.17% of them strongly disagreed with the statement and 45.36% strongly disagreed with it. This finding contradicts Mahdikhani and Rezaei (2015) and Khan et al. (2017), who found that When students read interesting, relevant, and engaging materials, their motivation to continue reading is increased, gaining more knowledge and necessary skills for academic success.

The study subjects reported positive attitudes towards S.4 (I benefit from this module in improving my reading styles and strategies). 34.97% strongly agreed and 32.79% agreed that reading boosted their reading styles and strategies, confirming the findings of Wusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014, as cited in Oriogu et al., 201) that reading is an essential tool for knowledge transfer and the habit of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies.

Regarding S.5 (Reading is a vital factor in developing other language skills), the subjects responded positively to the statement with percentages of 33.88% and 34.43% for strongly agree and agree respectively. This shows that reading enabled them to improve other language skills. This finding is confirmed by many studies claiming that reading can effectively be used for the improvement of listening skills (David and Maurer, 2022); that loud reading enhances speaking fluency and accuracy (Supraba, 2020); and that technological reading material gives access to further listening resources. Also, the above-stated finding is supported by other studies about the impact of reading

on speaking like Kucuk (2024), who claims that reading enables learners to cope with speaking problems thanks to the structures they learn through reading, and Supraba (2020), who maintains that loud reading enhances speaking fluency and accuracy. Additionally, reading improves writing based on many findings such as Wilber (2023), who believes that reading helps EFL learners gain familiarity with various structures, types of writing, and writing styles.

As for S.6 (Reading increases my motivation and engagement in the learning process), the participants admitted that reading increased their motivation to learn (40.98% strongly agree and 43.17% agree). In this regard, Mahdikhani and Rezaei (2015) and Khan et al. (2017) stated that reading could have a profound impact on students' motivation and engagement in the learning process.

In S7. (Reading positively affects my academic performance in other subjects), students' responses were very positive, in that, 37.16% strongly agreed and 47.54% agreed with the statement. This claim is aligned with Oriogu et al. (2017), who assert that reading positively influences students' academic performance across a range of subjects. Asiri (2023) also says that students' success in academic life relies a lot on their use of language, including reading.

The last statement in the second section of the questionnaire is S.8 (Reading broadens my appreciation for different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles). Again, the study sample agreed with the statement at a rate of 49.73% for strongly agree and 41.53% for agree. Although the subjects reported in S.3 that the assigned readings were not very relevant to their interests, they confirmed in S.8 that they benefited from the reading materials in broadening their cultural background. This is advocated by the studies conducted by Idulog et al. (2023) and Masoud and Rahayu (2018) which found that reading could foster students' cultural understanding and awareness, which in turn, enriched students' personal growth and improved their ability to communicate and interact effectively with individuals from different cultural contexts

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Concerning the statements of the third section, the study sample reported major challenges they usually met during learning reading. This included the inability to comprehend some texts due to difficult vocabulary S. 9 (The vocabulary used in some texts hinders my comprehension). The response tendency of this statement is “Strongly Agree” as 52.46% of the subjects strongly agreed and 44.26% of them agreed with it. This finding is supported by the suggestions of Boonkongsaen and Intaraprasert (2014) that vocabulary knowledge and familiarity with idiomatic expressions constitute the major challenges for EFL learners and Qian (2002) that vocabulary knowledge facilitates the process of understanding complex texts. To this issue, can be added grammar knowledge (Koda, 2005; Bernhardt, 2000). Both researchers pointed out that limited grammar knowledge impedes text comprehension and assimilation of meaning.

In S.10, (The complex sentence structures in academic reading materials make it hard for me to understand the meaning). The subjects revealed that complex text structure interrupted their comprehension and construction of meaning. 50.82 % strongly agreed with the statement and 42.08% agreed. This advocates the finding that complex sentence structures can make it challenging for students to identify the main ideas, supporting details, and overall text organisation (Fatkurochman, 2019).

The study sample stated that they encountered difficulties dealing with complex information in some texts. In S.11 (Some academic texts contain very complex information), their agreement rates were high; (strongly agree 48.09% and agree 46.45%). This finding aligns with Samah and Jusoff (2008) that academic texts derived from reference books or lecture notes can be challenging for EFL learners as they include highly complex vocabulary and sentence structure, unfamiliar terminology, and information-rich passages. Unfortunately, this hinders deep comprehension and the ability to answer questions.

The rates of agreement were also high in S.12 as 44.81 % and 46.45% of the participants respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their text comprehension was inhibited by their limited background knowledge on some topics covered in the readings (S. 12). Many research studies yielded similar findings. For instance, Singh (2014) found that the lack of appropriate background knowledge could affect students' positive engagement with content-based texts, reducing comprehension of reading materials. Lerner (2000) also concluded in his study that learners with good background knowledge could read more, and hence, could improve their proficiency compared to those with poor background.

Regarding students' contribution to the selection of reading materials (S.13), the agreement rates were very low this time. Conversely, the subjects strongly disagreed with the statement at a rate of 45.36% and disagreed with it at 43.17%. This finding, which indicates that the texts suggested for reading were the mere choice of the teacher, contradicts the recommendations stated by Lee and Yeo (2014) which insisted on involving EFL learners in selecting the reading texts for more motivation and engagement. To them, the reading texts should reflect students' interests and needs.

Participants of the study admitted that their knowledge about reading strategies was limited (S.14). 35.52% of them strongly agreed with the statement and 38.80% disagreed. This accounts for the difficulties they might have encountered in text comprehension. This claim is aligned with the findings from a study by Grabe and Stoller (2002) that sound knowledge about reading strategies would enhance students' ability to decode letters and words, concentrate on the details over the main points, and identify text structure.

Reading anxiety was suggested by first-year students as one of the main reading challenges they usually met (S.15). The levels of agreement with the statement reached 28.96% for strongly agree and 30.60% for agree. This result is similar to that of a study by Vazalwar (2011) who proclaimed that anxiety could be a debilitating factor in the

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reading process and one that could enormously affect reading comprehension. In the same vein, Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012) asserted that there is a strong negative correlation between reading comprehension and anxiety.

In the last statement of the questionnaire S.16 (The current teaching methods used in reading effectively engage me with the texts), the subjects expressed their dissatisfaction with the instructional methods and strategies adopted by their teacher in teaching reading. The rate of agreement with the statement was very low as it decreased to 7.65% for strongly disagree and 6.01% for agree. This finding shows that the way reading is taught represents another challenge for students. This calls for rethinking the reading instructional practices adopted by teachers for more effective and encouraging outcomes.

Based on the findings discussed above, it can be deduced that the study participants have developed positive attitudes towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module. This is evidenced by the high level of agreement that characterised most of the statements of the attitudinal questionnaire used to collect data and the high level of influence of each of them. Also, the study identified major difficulties associated with reading that should be viewed with consideration while teaching this module. Thus, it is concluded that the study findings have provided an accurate answer to the main research question and that the hypothesis has been confirmed.

6. Conclusion

The current study attempted to gauge the attitudes of first-year students in the Department of English at the University of EL Oued towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module in the first-year programme. Despite the reading challenges encountered by students, the findings indicated that the study sample had a predominantly positive attitude towards reading as a mandatory module and reported that its incorporation allowed them to enhance their reading comprehension skills. Students highly perceived the impact of

integrating reading in the official programme on the EFL learning process and academic success, in general.

Some limitations should be acknowledged in the current study. First, it employed an attitudinal questionnaire as a solo data collection tool with a close-ended prompted response pattern. This type of tool does not allow researchers to obtain deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation as in open-ended questions or interviews, for instance. Moreover, the investigation was limited to first-year students at the University of El Oued, making it hard to generalise the findings to a wider population from other universities.

Despite the above-stated limitations, the current study contributed to the existing literature that teaching reading as an independent module would improve students' reading ability and that understanding their attitudes and perspectives is essential for the successful improvement and implementation of instructional programmes and the development of strategies to maximise student engagement.

To increase the generalisability of the study findings, further studies should be conducted on a wider population from various universities. This would reveal whether or not students from other universities have similar attitudes to the students at the University of El Oued. Furthermore, future studies should consider utilising more instruments for collecting deeper and richer information about this research topic. Reading is a vital component of any English Language programme. Therefore, to further enhance the reading module, future research could examine the effectiveness of different teaching methods and explore student preferences for specific types of reading materials.

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Appendix: A

Questionnaire on First-year Students' Attitudes towards Reading Module

Dear students,

This questionnaire is part of a study entitled: **Students' Attitudes towards the Incorporation of Reading as a Mandatory Module in the First-Year Bachelor of English Language Programme**. It aims to gauge the attitudes of first-year students in the Department of English at the University of El Oued towards the incorporation of reading as a mandatory module. Please, put a tick (✓) in the box that best shows your opinion. This questionnaire will be used only for the sake of this research and the answers you provide will remain confidential. Your cooperation in completing this questionnaire will be highly appreciated.

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Characteristics		Response
Gender	Female	
	Male	
Age	17–21	
	22–26	
	27–31	
	32–36	
	37 +	
Repetitive	Yes	
	No	

SECTION ONE: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

Instruction: Please, tick (√) the appropriate choice.

Key: 1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neutral 4= agree 5= strongly agree

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	The mandatory reading module helps me develop critical thinking skills for better text analysis.					
2	The variety of texts we are exposed to enhance my vocabulary, grammar, and overall text comprehension.					
3	The assigned readings are relevant to my interests and background knowledge.					
4	I benefit from this module to improve my reading styles and strategies.					
5	Reading is a vital factor in developing other language skills.					
6	Reading increases my motivation and engagement in the learning process.					
7	Reading positively affects my academic performance in other subjects.					
8	Reading broadens my appreciation for different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles.					

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SECTION TWO: READING CHALLENGES

Instruction: Please, tick (√) the appropriate choice.

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
9	The vocabulary used in some texts hinders my comprehension.					
10	The complex sentence structures in academic reading materials make it hard for me to understand the meaning.					
11	Some academic texts contain very complex information.					
12	My background knowledge on some topics covered in the readings is limited, hindering comprehension.					
13	Students contribute to the selection of texts studied in class.					
14	I have limited knowledge about reading strategies.					
15	Reading anxiety influences reading comprehension negatively.					
16	The current teaching methods used in reading effectively engage me with the texts.					