

The Reasons That Affect Secondary Stage Students' Reading Comprehension Skill of English Language in Southern Region of Jordan from the Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is considered as one of the most important skill of a language the study aims at investigating the reasons that affect the students' reading comprehension skill of secondary stage in English Language in southern region of Jordan. The sample consisted of (64) teachers, (27) males and (37) females which forms (36%) from the total number of the population. The results indicated that the highest effect on students' weakness in reading comprehension skill refers to the students' domain with a mean of (4.096), and standard deviation of (0.40). The teachers' domain came secondly with a mean of (3.604) and standard deviation of (0.82). The textbooks domain came thirdly with a mean of (3.551) and standard deviation of (0.64). The results indicated that there are no statistically significant differences on the level of ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) attributed to the variables of gender, qualification, and the experience of the teachers or the interaction between the variables on the weakness of students in reading comprehension skill.

Key words: language, skill, weakness, textbook .secondary stage

Introduction and background

A language as most of linguists defined; is a means of communication between individuals. In a native language (L1). It is easy for individuals to communicate when using the mother tongue language but nowadays it becomes necessary for most people to learn at least a foreign or second language (L2) because of the ease of communication in the world.

The importance of the study emerged from the fact that English language is an international language used in the United Nations, European Union, in addition that many countries in the world adopt it as a foreign or second language to be able to communicate with the outside world .Learning (L2) is not an easy task. Mitchell & Myles (2004) indicated that " second language learners also go through fairly rigid stages when acquiring certain constructions in L2 which are unlike both their first language, as other languages is reading comprehension" . This skill is defined by Ruddell (2002) as " process of constructing meaning from a written text as a result of thinking with the guidance of existing text."

Reading skill is an important and difficult task. Therefore, linguists centered on this skill from the early stages. This concern could be noticed in methods of teaching English in Grammar Translation Approach .Researchers in general concentrated on the tow important and complex skills of reading comprehension, fluency and accuracy.

" Reading is very sophisticated structure and includes many skills that require simultaneous condition to successfully complete many reading task" Logan (1997). Fluency in reading as Rasinski, Samuels, Hiebert, Petscher & Feller (2011) identified; "is a key component in effective reading instruction, and instruction toward reading fluency has been revealed to lead to improvements in children's reading achievement ". Fluency skill development depends on other sub-skills, such as; vocabulary knowledge, word recognition, stress, pauses, motivation, eye movementetc.

Pikulski & Chard (2005) described fluency as" a bridge from word recognition accuracy to text comprehension." This indicates that reading fluently refers to the fact that, word recognition accuracy leads to fluency which ultimately leads to comprehension.

"Oral reading fluency is distinctly separated into two components that are critical for a student to possess prior to being able to read fluently. The two necessary components are speed and accuracy" Schatsneider & Torgesen (2004).

Hasbrouck (1998) mentioned five activities from being a successful reader:

Rely primarily on the letters in the word rather than context or pictures to* identify, familiar and unfamiliar words, Process virtually every letter, *

Use letter sound correspondences to identify word, *

Have a reliable strategy for decoding words, and *

Read words for a sufficient number of times for words to become automatic. *

He concentrated on word recognition, decoding words, practice, pronunciation and letter processing. Whereas Snow, Catheren, et al (2005) defined the proficient reader as " who reads with accuracy and speed, easily comprehending and responding to the material; within the same article or chapter, he or she slows down, makes mistakes, abandons a sentence mid-clause, paragraphs, or pages to try to understand what just went over his or her head".

Some researchers indicated how the process of comprehension could be successful. Prado & Plourde (2005) stated that comprehension is a process that involves thinking, teaching, past experience and knowledge. They also added that comprehension is "the interaction among word identification, prior knowledge, comprehension strategies, and engagement." What Prado & Plourde stated, is similar to what Jitendra & Gabriel (2010) suggested pertaining cognitive abilities and experience. They concluded that poor reading comprehension may also be related to a lack of prior experiences or a lower socio-economic environment, and the cognitive abilities for students with learning disabilities may make reading comprehension a difficult task.

In addition to the mentioned difficulties which weaken fluency and accuracy in reading comprehension is the strategy or method that a teacher uses in teaching reading. Ridge & Skinner (2010) indicated that an acronym that has been founded to be successful with secondary students is the TELLs strategy, which stands for title, examine, look, and setting. A second acronym is art of reading program which stands for ask, read, and tell Mocalum, et al (2010).

Previous studies:

There are many studies conducted in this area but each one concentrated on definite problem/s. Lee (2011) applied Bakhtinian theories. He argued that while speed, accuracy, and vocabulary knowledge are important in L2 reading. Also, the individual differences among the readers are more vital in the comprehension of a text. He accepts the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and other Russian scholars of the 1920s that there can be no right or wrong interpretation of a text and that the dialogic process between the reader and supposed author is fundamental to the reader understands of the text. The author compared the active construction of meanings of two participants who read the same article from a Chinese newspaper, and found that worldview and personal histories are essential elements of reading comprehension. Since he views reading as an inherently social behavior, the author argued that teaching L2 reading should involve dialogic pedagogy which values the individual construction of text meaning.

Lesaux, et al (2011) conducted a study on 87 native Spanish – speakers from three schools in a southwestern U.S .urban school district as participants to investigate the effects of Spanish and English oral language and word reading skills on English reading comprehension. The participants are followed from the 4th to the 5th grade. Findings revealed that the students' oral language skills had a significant effect on L2 reading comprehension, while their word reading skills were not significantly related to L2 reading comprehension.

Mohd (2010) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between anxiety and English as a second language (ESL) reading comprehension among 218 first –year low proficiency of ESL learners from a Malaysian university. Results revealed that student's anxiety significantly influenced their reading performance. Cho (2010) used in his study interviews with instructors and a focus group of fourth-grade students to explore the motivation and engagement of English Language learners in a reading intervention program. The qualitative data was drawn specifically from the instructors and students perceptions regarding the program. Based on their anecdotal evidence, and with references to previous quantitative studies, the authors concluded that challenging reading materials of high interest make a more positive impact on student's motivation to read .also of importance in engaging students to read were the teacher's preparation, attitude, and expectations of student performance.

Finally, the authors argued that their results imply that the connection between oral reading skills and comprehension skills is weaker than had previously been accepted. Ercetin, g. (2010) conducted a study on second language learners of English at a

Turkish university as participants, the investigation examined the effects of topic interest and prior knowledge on the reading of hypermedia texts. The author explored the effects of the independent variables on both written recall and use of annotations while reading. findings revealed that performance was facilitated when topic interest was high, but the interaction effects of prior knowledge and topic interest was no significant. The researcher also conducted follow-up interviews, and the qualitative data revealed that topic interest was more important for comprehension than prior knowledge. Overall the study is the first to examine these factors in an L2 hypermedia environment. the author concluded that readers may compensate for lack of prior knowledge by using annotations which may also increase interest in the topic. Finally, the author offered an extensive review of research on L2 reading in hypermedia text environments and connect present findings.

Netten (2011) selected randomly 729 L1 learners and 93 L2 learners in elementary school in the Netherlands as its participants, the present investigation was used to construct a multi-factor model that predicts the development of reading literacy. Finding revealed differences between groups with regard to reading literacy skills, language, mathematics, and reasoning skills. Structural equation modeling was utilized in order to demonstrate that reading literacy development in both L1 and L2 learners may be explained from the following variables: decoding, language, mathematics and reasoning skills, as well as motivation and self-confidence. One major difference between the groups was that home reading resources appear to influence reading literacy of L1 learners but not L2 learners. Palmer, et al (2010) in their case study, they investigated the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve second language and reading proficiency of a 7 year old Chinese-speaking English language learner, who has completed second grade at a diverse metropolitan elementary school in the U.S. An 8week instructional plan was created, during which time the participant and the tutor met twice a week, in an attempt to build proficiency and reading in English. The study found that at the end of the 8 week intervention, the participant showed significant growth in English language proficiency and reading fluency, and he is developing in oral vocabulary in English. The authors report that factors beyond the tutoring sessions may have also contributed to the success.

Schmitt, et al (2011) with 661 L2 learners from 8 different countries as its participants, the study examined the percentage of vocabulary needed for L2 learners to understand academic texts. Two different reading texts were chosen based on topic familiarity. The first was about climate change, a familiar topic, and the second concerned circuit training with laboratory mice, and unfamiliar topic. The vocabulary tests consisted of a check list (yes/no) format, and reading comprehension was assessed with multiple choice items. Finding echoed previous research with a 98% estimate of vocabulary knowledge for readers of academic texts.

Aim of the study:

The study aims at investigating the reasons that affect the students' reading comprehension skill of secondary stage in English Language in southern region of Jordan from the teachers' perspectives.

Problem of the study:

The problem of the study emerged from the fact that there are reasons affecting the students' reading comprehension skills in English Language in the secondary stage in southern region of Jordan. This could be noticed through answering the following questions:

- 1- Are there reasons affecting the students' reading comprehension skill in English Language in secondary stage in southern region of Jordan?
- 2- Are there any statistically significant differences attributed to the variables of gender, qualification, the experience, and the interaction between the variables?

Significance of the study:

Reading comprehension is considered as one of the most important skill of a language. The study could shed a light on the reasons of student' weakness in reading comprehension skill in English Language which ultimately could be useful for teachers, students, or for the decision makers in the ministry of education in the department of curricula to improve or modify curricula or to find appropriate solutions for the reasons.

Limits of the study

The study is limited to the teachers of English Language of the secondary stage in southern region of Jordan.

Population:

The population of the study consisted of the teachers of English Language of secondary stage in southern region of Jordan with a total of (177) teachers, (85) males and (92) females.

Sample:

The sample consisted of (64) teachers, (27) males and (37) females which forms (36%) from the total number of the population.

Instrument:

The researcher developed an instrument included two parts:

The first part included information about the study individuals relating to gender, qualification, and experience .

The second part included (30) items for investigating the reasons that affect the students' reading comprehension skills in English Language in secondary stage in southern region of Jordan. The items were distributed into three domains as follows:

- students' domain (14) items.
- teachers' domain (9) items.
- textbooks domain (7) items.

The items of the instrument were graded according to Likert Quintet scale.

Methodology:

Validity: The validity of the study was checked by experienced referees in education. Some modifications were processed according to the referees ' views .The (30) items were considered. The validity was (82%) which is fit for the study.

Reliability: For investigating the reliability of the study, Test-re-Test and internal consistency were used. The instrument was distributed to (20) male teachers and (25) female teachers out of the sample to response to the items. After two weeks the instrument was distributed to the same teachers to response to the items again. The results were as table (1) shows:

The values of reliability

domain	Test-re-Test	Internal consistency
Students	0.83	0.83
Teachers	0.82	0.81
textbooks	0.81	0.79
The tool as a whole	0.86	0.84

Statistical methods

For answering question number (1), means and slandered deviations were used, and for answering question number (2),MANOVA was used.

Standard of judgment:

The following standard was adopted for the reasons that affect secondary stage students' reading comprehension skill of English language in southern region of Jordan based on the following means:

- 1-Mean which comes between (1-2.33) is low.
- 2- Mean which comes between (2.34-3.66) is medium.
- 3- Mean which comes between (3.67-and above) is high.

Results and Discussion:

Results of question one: "Are there reasons affecting the students' reading comprehension skills in English Language in secondary stage in southern region of Jordan?"

The results indicated that the highest effect on student's weakness in reading comprehension skill refers to the students' domain with a mean of (4.096), and standard deviation of (0.40). The means of the items of students' domain came between (4.29) for item (2) which runs (Students' weakness in eye-movement during reading), and the lowest mean was (3.64) for item (1) which runs (Students' lack of interest in English Language). The results could be noticed in table (2)

Table (2) Means and Standard Variation of Students Domain Items

No.	item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Students' lack of interest in English Language	64	4.2656	.82119
2	Students' weakness in eye-movement during reading	64	3.6406	.89739
3	Students' weakness in words pronunciation	64	4.2656	.67241
4	Lack of Students' understanding the rules of correct reading	64	4.2969	.81025
5	Lack of Students' understanding the reading objectives	64	3.9531	1.07541
6	Students' disability in guessing the meaning of new vocabulary items	64	4.1562	.76051
7	Students' weakness in spelling words	64	4.0313	.81589
8	A student feels confused when he reads	64	3.9531	.95002
9	Students' disability in connecting meanings	64	4.2500	.59094
10	Students concentrate on memorizing than comprehending	64	4.1719	.91815
11	Students' weakness in recognizing the key words in a text	64	4.1250	.82616
12	Students' lack of interest in silent reading	64	4.1875	.61399
13	Lack of Students' understanding the importance of reading	64	4.1406	.81391
14	Lack of Students' use in technology-based reading	64	3.9062	.95483
	average	64	4.0960	.39231

The teachers' domain came secondly with a mean of (3.604) and standard deviation of (0.82).

The means of the items of this domain came between (3.875) for item (7) which runs (Lack of teachers' encouragement for students to develop their fluency and speed in reading), and the lowest mean was (3.359) for item (2) which runs (Lack of teachers' concentration on reading skills in early stages). The results could be noticed in table (3)

Table (3) Means and standard deviations of teachers' domain items

No.	item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Lack of teachers' concentration on reading skills in early stages	64	3.6094	1.26763
2	Lack of teachers' understanding the methods of teaching English	64	3.3594	1.17334
3	Lack of teachers' encouragement for students in self-reading	64	3.4062	1.26890
4	Teachers less encouragement for students to summarize what they read	64	3.7812	1.13346
5	Teachers' concentration on structures than other skills	64	3.8125	1.08196
6	Teachers neglect the role- playing technique in reading	64	3.6719	1.11348
7	Lack of teachers' encouragement for students to develop their fluency and speed in reading	64	3.8750	.89974
8	Teachers' weakness in class communication skills	64	3.3906	1.19013
9	Reading context poorness for the standards of a good context in the textbook	64	3.5312	1.11225
	Average	64	3.6042	.82221

The textbooks domain came thirdly with a mean of (3.551) and standard deviation of (0.64). The most effective reason for the weakness of students' weakness in reading comprehension skill in this domain was for item (4) which runs (the book does not take into consideration the different class environment) with a mean of (3.890), and the lowest mean was for item (7) which runs; (Weekly classes for English Language are insufficient) with a mean of (3.062). The results could be noticed in table (4):

Table (4) Means and standard deviations of the textbooks domain items

No.	item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Reading context poorness for the standards of a good context in the textbook	64	3.3906	1.06335
2	Reading contexts in the textbook are inappropriate for the attitude of students	64	3.5625	1.05221
3	Inappropriateness of the textbook context and the students' cognitive background	64	3.7187	1.01526
4	books do not take into consideration the different class environments	64	3.8906	.96143
5	Teachers' book includes definite strategies in teaching reading	64	3.4062	1.04985
6	Lack of teaching aids in the textbook which help students' comprehending the context	64	3.8281	1.00087
7	Weekly classes for English Language are insufficient	64	3.0625	1.31987
	average	64	3.5513	.64937

In general the mean of the three domains together was (3.682) and standard deviation of (0.511) as table (5) shows:

Table (5) Mean and standard deviation average of the three domains

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
total	64	3.682	.5117
Valid N (list wise)	64		

Results of question two:

Are there any statistically significant differences attributed to the variables of gender, qualification, the experience, and the interaction between the variables?

By using (MANOVA) for answering this question, the results indicated that there are no statistically significant differences on the level of ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) attributed to the variables of gender, qualification, and the experience of the teachers or the interaction between the variables on the weakness of students in reading comprehension skill as table (6) shows:

Table (6) (MANOVA) for the effect of gender, experience, and qualification in students' weakness in reading comprehension skill and the interaction between them.

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
qualification	average student	.008	1	.008	.051	.822
	average teacher	.893	1	.893	1.547	.219
	average textbook	.146	1	.146	.326	.571
Exp.	average student	.032	2	.016	.098	.906
	average teacher	2.448	2	1.224	2.120	.130
	average textbook	2.121	2	1.060	2.368	.104
gender	average student	.077	1	.077	.470	.496
	average teacher	.046	1	.046	.079	.780
	average textbook	.042	1	.042	.094	.761
qualification * exp.	average student	.343	2	.171	1.043	.360
	average teacher	1.182	2	.591	1.024	.366
	average textbook	.302	2	.151	.337	.715
qualification * gender	average student	.060	1	.060	.363	.550
	average teacher	1.206	1	1.206	2.090	.154
	average textbook	.382	1	.382	.854	.360
Exp. * gender	average student	.490	2	.245	1.492	.234
	average teacher	7.498	2	3.749	6.496	.003
	average textbook	.509	2	.254	.568	.570
qualification * exp. * gender	average student	.184	2	.092	.560	.575
	average teacher	1.938	2	.969	1.679	.197
	average textbook	.014	2	.007	.015	.985

Discussion of question one:

The results indicated that the students are the main reason for their weakness in reading comprehension. This could be attributed to the fact that there is a weakness starting from the early stages in learning English Language since students consider that learning English Language is too difficult which instills a negative attitude to them. The second variable for the students' weakness in reading comprehension skill is the teacher. The teachers of English Language concentrate on writing skill and grammar in general than reading skill. The cumulative weakness of students in English Language leads to the reduction of teacher's motivation towards instruction in general and the interest in reading skill in particular. The third variable is the text books though they are prepared in a distinguished way, but they need motivated student to learn and a good and ready teacher to teach and use various methods in teaching.

Discussion of question two:

The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences attribute to the variables of gender, teachers' experience, and their scientific qualification in students' weakness in reading comprehension skill. This could be attributed to the fact that those teachers face the same problem relating to instructing English Language in general and reading comprehension in particular regardless their gender, experience, and qualification. The results of the study meet with the results of the conducted studies mentioned in this study especially what is relating to cumulative knowledge, the interest of teachers and students, and the motivation of students towards learning.

Recommendations:

- 1-Such studies should be conducted taking different variables and different stages.
- 2-Teachers of English Language should attend educational courses to know howto deal with the students' negative attitudes towards learning English Language and the psychological issues that students suffer from especially in early stages.

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