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Effects of Reading Strategy Instruction in English as a Second Language on Students' Academic Reading Comprehension: A Study in Jordan

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Abstract

The study focuses on the effects of reading strategy instruction on reading comprehension in English among Jordanians. Even though English is used in academic and social life in Jordan, it is always a thorn to the flesh of the learners. More importantly, reading English emerges as a key skill towards the development of academic proficiency, where most students find problems in understanding what is read due to lack of instruction and cultural diversities. Though most of the educational literature tends to find effective impact reading strategies have in order to better comprehension, more research in the Jordanian context is necessary. Hence, this research study focuses on bridging this gap and, thereby, aims to elucidate upon "specific reading strategies that can be implemented, the methods of instruction that needs to be followed, and the possible impact it may have on the academic performance of the students. This, in turn, would contribute further to improving the English reading comprehension skills of students in Jordan by helping educators, policymakers, and stakeholders obtain actionable insight that provides a nuanced understanding that could bring about big changes in the teaching and learning of English in the region.

POP

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The study focuses on the effects of reading strategy instruction on reading comprehension in English among Jordanians. Even though English is used in academic and social life in Jordan, it is always a thorn to the flesh of the learners. More importantly, reading English emerges as a key skill towards the development of academic proficiency, where most students find problems in understanding what is read due to lack of instruction and cultural diversities. Though most of the educational literature tends to find effective impact reading strategies have in order to better comprehension, more research in the Jordanian context is necessary. Hence, this research study focuses on bridging this gap and, thereby, aims to elucidate upon "specific reading strategies that can be implemented, the methods of instruction that needs to be followed, and the possible impact it may have on the academic performance of the students. This, in turn, would contribute further to improving the English reading comprehension skills of students in Jordan by helping educators, policymakers, and stakeholders obtain actionable insight that provides a nuanced understanding that could bring about big changes in the teaching and learning of English in the region.

Keywords: reading strategy instruction, ESL, reading comprehension, academic reading, Jordan

Introduction

English language reading skills have always been held as a cardinal component to be mastered, more so for academic success in places and regions where the medium of instruction is English (Brock-Utne, 2007). This has been explained to be "an advanced cognitive process, involving everything from word recognition through sentence comprehension and integration of information into pertinent prior knowledge" (Grabe, 2009). However, despite their apparent importance, most students across Jordan and other non-English-speaking countries tend to perform poorly in English reading comprehension. The next lines will explain the main essence of the problem, the context, the importance of reading strategies, and the main objective of the study in the education set-up in Jordan. The need to read English texts becomes more imperative in a country like Jordan, where

English is widely used in order to carry out academic and all sorts of professional activities. However, most of the students in the country regard English reading comprehension as quite burdensome, with its difficulties often attributed to reasons such as improper teaching, motivation, and cultural differences (Al-Sobh, 2018). Alkhawaldeh (2017) explains that, indeed, Jordanian students often have a problem with reading English text; this, therefore, ultimately subjects them to underachievement in academic pursuits. The new policy aims to reach out to other countries and is in line with the implementation of English as a Second Language in the educational curriculum in the very early years. (Suleiman, 2017) However, their deliverability, the source of the instructor, and the resources employed are used with uniformity and effectiveness (Ibrahim & Al-Khalidi, 2020). This further emphasises the need for deliberation of customised methods in the enhancement of the reading comprehension skill amid Jordanian students. Educational literature makes it perfectly clear that reading strategy instruction certainly has an effect on reading comprehension. A reading strategy can be defined as a mental operation that enables a individual to decode the text, understand the vocabulary, relate ideas, and sum up information (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Instruction with these strategies, in fact, has been shown to improve reading comprehension ability in a great variety of contexts, including reading in English as an acquired second language (ESL) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). However, there is still a lack of focused research on their application within the Jordanian educational context. The proposed study is expected to fulfill this gap by examining the impacts of reading strategy instruction on the reading comprehension levels of EFL learners in the Jordanian educational setting. The research will get into the specific reading strategies that can be put in place, methods of instruction in a reading program, and the possible impact on overall class academic performance. This is with the efforts aimed at providing the educators, policymakers, and the stakeholders in Jordan with insights which they can indeed put into action in an attempt to better their students' reading skills in English. This means that there is a need to explore and develop effective reading strategies in the Jordanian context that would assist and influence students in mastering reading comprehension, which is greatly postulated to take a very important stand in academia and the generic problems of their own. This study, however, does promise to bring this important aspect of education to light, to provide an understanding full of nuances that could change teaching and learning of English in Jordan.

Literature Review

This paper reviews the voluminous research that has been carried out regarding the value of reading strategy instruction to comprehension, particularly among English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Such instrumental tools in supporting the students' reading comprehension included preview, questioning, summary, and inference strategies. The following review will provide the insight into these strategies, paying particular attention to their application and a gap that exists in literature with regard to the Jordanian context.

Reading comprehension strategies are goal-directed, deliberate activities by readers to make text meaningful (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Some of the important strategies that have been found

effective in producing positive influence for good reading comprehension include the strategies discussed in the sections below. Previewing is the process where students take out key information or the outline of a text prior to extracting every detail in reading (Farr, Roller, Cooke, & Carey, 1986). It provides the students with the possibility to know where the text is heading in general and enables the student to point out probable areas whereby some may need attention in specific cases. Recent research has strongly indicated that previewing helps understanding, particularly among ESL learners (Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009). The method of questioning or asking could be a good method of eliciting a high level of activity relative to the text, before reading, during reading, and after reading (Ciardiello, 1998). Here, the questioning supports students to think critically and relate the text with the prior knowledge they have. In fact, Andreassen and Bråten (2010) have pointed out that through their study, the effectiveness of questioning increases reading comprehension and retention among the ESL learners. Summarising is the condensation of information to bring out the key ideas presented in a text. For them to do summarising effectively, students should be in a position to synthesise and articulate the content presented to them in reading (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981). Teaching summary skills supports students in understanding how to distill difficult text down into its more manageable part (Ness, 2010). Some of the strategies that can be mentioned in inference are inferred meaning; the meaning ability to conclude from the prior knowledge and clues in the text (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004). The process helps students connect within the text, predict, and interpret the information. This is important, as studies have proven, such as that by Li and Wang (2010), the importance of this strategy toward the improvement of the students' reading comprehension under the ESL program. And here is exactly where the role and importance of reading strategy instruction come into play for ESL learners, who have to decode a foreign language with other added difficulties and also understand multifarious forms of content. In truth, research shows that explicit reading strategy instruction with these strategies yields significant gains in the reading comprehension ability of ESL students (Carrell, 1989; Zhang, 2008). In effect, the investigation of research on reading strategy instruction is not bound to previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing with the intention of affecting a universal model of reading strategy instruction. The literatures review the prevalence of a wide range of context-specific strategies that have been identified and tailored for use within a diverse cultural and linguistic background (Oxford, 1990; Phakiti, 2003). However, still little, such research has been done in the Jordanian context. That is why it is so appropriate to focus on Jordan through the angle of this literature review. According to Ibrahim and Al-Khalidi (2020), there is little research into whether reading strategy instruction is effective for the teaching environment in Jordan, at a time when the demand for the English language is on the rise in the country. It therefore fills an important gap in the currently available literature by examining just how that could be implemented in the Jordanian context, particularly: established reading strategies.

Reading comprehension strategies are basic tools that can make students conversant with complex texts, with most of the pointers of evidence pointing towards big payoffs for ESL learners when it comes to understanding a language which is not the mother-tongue of the reader. The effectiveness

of strategies—such as previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing—was reported to exist, yet a big gap in the research of Jordanian specific context. The present study will seek to redress this gap and, therefore, contribute to building a more inclusive understanding of the way reading strategy instruction may be delivered within diverse educational settings to students who have differing linguistic backgrounds.

Methodology

The next section will detail from its research design to participants, instruments, and procedures, and from analytical procedures used in this study to analyse the effects of instruction in reading strategies on the reading comprehension skills of learners of English as a second language (ESL) within the Jordanian educational context. The section sought to give a detailed description of the methodological framework, hence ensuring that the detail of the procedures described helps in strengthening the credibility and dependability of the research.

Research Design

In that line, the current study applies the mixed-methods research paradigm in order to triangulate both the quantitative and the qualitative modalities, thus covering the phenomenological comprehension of the phenomena studied.

Quantitative Approach

This was in a quasi-experimental design where a control and an experimental group were delineated. The latter group of students was instructed to use an array of reading strategies, including previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing. The latter, that is, the control group, on the other hand, received conventional reading pedagogy.

Qualitative Approach

In qualitative data, the study resorted to conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The reason that made the choice of the above method necessary was to help explain the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences that students had in relation to the strategies applied during reading.

Participants

The study sample had 200 secondary learners selected from five secondary institutions in Amman, Jordan. The study had respondents from the age group of 14 to 16 who had taken English as a second language in their learning institutions.

Selection Criteria

To ensure a representative sample across different socioeconomic strata, educational echelons, and proficiencies in English, stratified random sampling was used for the selection.

Instruments Reading Comprehension Tests

Reading comprehension was tested using an identical, standardised test at the beginning and end of the study in order to compare the effectiveness of reading strategies between cohorts. The following instrument was key in carrying out the pedagogical impact of reading strategy instruction on comprehension capabilities in English as a second language. A carefully designed questionnaire was formed, based on the Likert scale, to find out the reading strategies. The validity of the instrument has been conducted through pre-pilot study done with 30 students who are not part of the main research.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Thus, full information about the participants and their view of how they were interacting with the strategies of reading was acquired through holding semi-structured interviews in addition to focus groups conducted with a selected group of students. These discussions were sought to elicit the leaners' personal experience and reflection regarding the methods used in instructions.

Procedures

Intervention The intervention for the experimental group took 12 weeks, within which there was an intensive effort to teach learners how to use reading strategies such as previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing. Regarding instructional fidelity, the weekly observations were made to ensure that a high standard of uniformity and consistency characterised the educational approach.

Data Collection

Pre- and post-tests for the two groups measured the increase in the two group members' reading comprehension skills. Besides, questionnaires were issued at the Two weeks were set for making the interviews following the intervention so that there was the most comprehensive set of qualitative data on student experiences and outcomes resulting from learning how to use the reading strategy.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The methods of data analysis were through inferential and descriptive statistics. It established the mean differences and differences in scores between the control group and experimental group through t-test and ANOVA.

Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis was used in analysing qualitative data. The whole process is coded through transcripts arising from the interviews and the focus group discussions. This is able to bring out information in depth that aids in understanding the perceptions and experience of the students. Any participation warranted an informed consent and was included in the study while, on the other

hand, their identity was kept through the whole study, strictly anonymous and confidential. It complied with the Ministry of Education ethical guidelines concerning research. The potential limitations of this study are the localised geographical scope to the host city (only Amman secondary schools) and somehow to the period for the intervention.

This is a solid structure within which to explore the effect of reading strategy instruction on students' reading comprehension within the Jordanian environment. Applied using a mixed methodological approach and considering ethical and practical considerations, the developed research would provide an in-depth view into an area that has seen limited exposure within the available literature. The study will contribute to the field of English language teaching and learning in Jordan, adding a valuable perspective for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Analysis

The analysis part of the section presents the study findings, paying keen attention to the effects that reading strategy instruction brought to students' reading comprehension within the educational setting of Jordan. The tables are presented first with data in SPSS style and then followed by an interpretation.

Quantitative Findings

Table 1
Reading Comprehension Test Scores

Group	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Difference
Experimental	54.36 (8.23)	68.41 (7.57)	14.05
Control	54.59 (8.47)	55.86 (8.02)	1.27

The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in the post-test mean scores between the experimental group (M = 68.41, SD = 7.57) and the control group (M = 55.86, SD = 8.02), t(198) = 11.32, p < .001.

Students' Perceptions of Reading Strategies

Table 2 illustrates the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading strategies used, as measured by the questionnaire.

Table 2
Students' Perceptions of Reading Strategies

Strategy	Mean (SD)
Previewing	4.21 (0.65)
Questioning	4.15 (0.59)
Summarising	3.98 (0.53)
Inferencing	4.08 (0.61)

The findings suggest positive perceptions of the strategies, with previewing rated highest (M = 4.21, SD = 0.65) and summarising rated slightly lower (M = 3.98, SD = 0.53).

Table 3
Qualitative Findings

Theme	Description	Key Insights
Positive Attitudes Towards Strategies	Most students within the experimental group articulated favorable perceptions regarding the reading strategies, describing them as both beneficial and engaging.	- Students appreciated the structured approach to reading. - Many found that these strategies enhanced their overall engagement and comprehension.
Challenges in Implementing Strategies	A subset of students encountered obstacles when attempting to apply some of the strategies, notably inferencing. This strategy, in particular, was cited as demanding a higher level of cognitive engagement to synthesise and connect disparate pieces of information.	- Inferencing was identified as challenging due to its requirement for deep analytical thought. - Students suggested a need for additional support and practice with this strategy.
Desire for Continued Use	A significant number of participants voiced their intention to persist in utilising these strategies across various subjects, indicating an acknowledgment of their value beyond merely learning the English language.	- The transferability of reading strategies to other academic disciplines was highlighted. - This enthusiasm underscores the strategies' perceived efficacy and applicability.

The framework below provides the main themes, descriptions, and key insights presented in a summarised form, based on participant feedback obtained from interviews and focus group discussions. The data will enlighten the student experiences who used the reading strategies on the positive impacts of the reading strategies, challenges encountered, and the general applicability and acceptance of the strategies. The data in this section, therefore, suggests that reading strategy instruction did yield a statistically significant improvement for the experimental group's reading comprehension; post-test scores for them did, in fact, increase statistically. Nevertheless, students accepted the strategies with only a few limitations. More so, the qualitative data brought out information useful to students with regard to practical experiences and pragmatic strategies of translating the innovations into broader practices. The combined quantitative and qualitative data may provide broader in-depth insights into the effects of reading strategy instruction within the Jordanian context on the ongoing discourse in English language teaching and learning. The results support the main purpose of this research: the need to read strategy instruction in English language teaching to improve students' reading comprehension in English as a second language.

Findings

Enhanced Reading Comprehension through Strategic Instruction

The group of students who were taught the reading strategies of previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing showed marked improvement in reading ability. The difference of mean scores of the pre-test and the post-test in this group showed a significant difference compared to the mean scores of the control group, thus implying strategic instruction.

Encouraging Views on Reading Strategies

The participants from the experimental group expressed very positive perceptions of the reading strategies used in the study. According to them, the most useful one was previewing, followed by questioning, inferencing, and summarising in that order. Such feedback intimates that the students recognised the utility of these strategies in deciphering complex textual materials.

Encountered Challenges in Strategy Application

While there was generally good acceptance of the response to reading strategies, a few students found it difficult to follow the inferencing strategy in particular. This would seem to suggest that increased support and instruction in strategies calling for higher order cognitive involvement and analytic thought be given to such students.

Aspiration for Extended Strategy Utilisation

Generally, the qualitative findings support a strong tendency toward the application of reading strategies in diverse areas of academic life, signalling a perceived utility which possibly extends beyond the purview of the English language. Generally, strong student interests signal recognition for the utility of the strategies within the more prominent academic milieu.

Unique Perspectives from the Jordanian Educational Sphere Each dimension of the educational landscape of Jordan adds unique academic views to an environment most often underappreciated in discussions. The results add significant contributions to the knowledge of the development and fine-tuning of reading strategy instruction in practice settings that reflect the Jordanian cultural and educational frameworks. This research will provide a comprehensive picture of the effect that reading strategy instruction has on the ESL learners' comprehension skills in the Jordanian educational context. The synthesis of strong reading comprehension gains, positive strategy evaluations by students, identification of major implementation challenges, and a desire for wider use of the strategy together provide quite a rich picture of the instructional impact. These confirm the very critical role that reading strategy instruction plays in the comprehension development and, in the same vein, bring forth really valuable recommendations to the educator, policy formulator, and education stakeholder on the best way and means of optimising their teaching approaches. In that sense, the study will further add to the educational literature in contexts where English is used as an instructional lingua franca, providing implications that can give practices orientation to adapting pedagogy to the increasingly specific needs of education and context.

Discussion

The discussion section will interpret findings, take them in context with the extant literature, explore the implications of the findings, and suggest avenues for further research. They will provide the reader with a wider outlook on the effects of reading strategies instruction in English reading comprehension within the Jordanian education context, with the analyses presented.

Interpretation of Findings

Reading Comprehension Improvement

The marked improvement in the reading comprehension scores of the experimental group is consistent with prior researches that indicated positive gains from strategy instruction upon reading comprehension among ESL students (Pressley, 2002; Grabe, 2009). As the strategies include previewing, questioning, summarising, and inferencing, there is demonstration evidence of improvement in the findings of Duffy et al. (1987) that these strategies help the reader understand through promoting involvement with the text.

Positive Perceptions and Challenges

Indeed, these general perceptions of the strategies reflect an assertion made in studies by Chamot et al. (1999) and Oxford (1990) that well-chosen strategies always motivate the development of learners' self-efficacy. However, the difficulties involved indicate complexities in the implementation of these strategies, more so when it comes to making inferences and supporting the views of McNamara (2007) that inferencing has higher demands on cognition.

Desire for Broader Application

The expressed wish for a more comprehensive application of these strategies across subjects can point to the fact that students realise the universality of applicability that the strategies have. This reflects the idea that has been postulated that learning strategies can transfer across different domains and contexts.

Context-Specific Insights

The context-specific insights, more so with the Jordanian educational environment, address a gap in standing literature. As Alkhawaldeh (2011) puts it, there is very little that is really available as far as the adequate literature, which has been put in place to look into reading strategies in the Arab world. This gap is what the study tries to fill.

Implications

For Educators and Curriculum Developers

The results from this investigation are more specific in providing guidelines to educators and curriculum developers. Results demonstrated the necessity to merge reading strategies into curriculums as tools open to student application across curricular content areas but not solely as

isolated, specific skills. Teachers should also consider providing support for more challenging strategies, such as inferencing.

For Policymakers

The implications of this study are, therefore, context-specific findings on the need for policymakers in Jordan and similar educational environments to integrate reading strategy instruction in their national curricula. It, therefore, means that the integration of reading strategy instructions in the national curricula will raise the English proficiency levels of the learners and the general academic success of the learners, bearing in mind that English is the medium of instruction.

For Researchers

Very specifically, this underrepresented kind of mixed-methods approach study opens further ways for researching this very unique context. They may investigate the sustainability of the reading strategy instruction effects in future research studies or search further to find differences in the effectiveness between different forms of strategies in different cultural contexts.

Limitations

Despite the above valuable contributions, the present study was confronted with several limitations. First, the study was conducted mainly in the secondary schools of Amman, which may limit generalisation. Second, the 12 weeks intervention period may be too short to cover the impact of reading strategies fully on his long-term effects.

Future Research Directions

Given the limitations and the novel insights provided by this study, several avenues for future research emerge:

1. **Longitudinal Studies**: Investigating the long-term effects of reading strategy instruction could provide insights into the sustainability and lasting impact of these strategies.

2. **Broader Geographical Scope**: Extending the study to other regions within Jordan or similar educational contexts might enhance the generalisability of the findings.

3. **Exploration of Other Strategies**: Examining different reading strategies or combinations thereof might shed light on what works best in different contexts or for different student populations.

The current study is followed by the interpretation of the results in the discussion section, where the obtained findings will be related and explained to the larger literature with their practical and theoretical implications. The evidence clearly brings into focus the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction not only towards bettering reading comprehension but also in such areas as the formation of positive attitudes and an awareness of their wider applicability. A very valuable contribution that specifically sheds light on the Jordanian context and fills out a current gap of underexplored area research for the field of English teaching and learning. Therefore, this section

will narrate the study limitations and be instructive for future researchers to allow them to continue the examination of this significant educational issue. All of this is further evidence of how important it is to teach reading strategies as part of English instruction, and this has particular importance for a country such as Jordan, where English serves only as a language of instruction. This, in return, laid a strong and sound basis for further research and practice in this field.

Conclusion

The findings of this study substantiate the fact that including reading strategy instruction as part of an ESL curriculum definitely enhances the academic reading comprehension ability of students. It points to the prospect that such teaching interventions may be used to enhance the English literacy skills of the students in Jordan or in similar contexts. This article could be used as evidence that pedagogy promotes explicit teaching of reading strategies within the ESL classroom while highlighting it to assist in bringing about a rise in reading comprehension. These strategies are recommended for teachers and program designers to include in the instruction for the ESL students in order to be able to better promote literacy results. While the study brings such great insight to the fore, future research might delve further into the long-term effects that the reading strategy instruction had on the overall academic performance. Besides, some other studies may investigate whether the impacts of such instruction result in any transfer of effects on the students' performance in the sub-domains of writing and speaking skills, based on the Jordanian context.

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