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**Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Comprehension Difficulties  
among EFL Learners**

The Case of Fourth Year Middle School Learners, Jijel

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Didactics of English

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**Abstract**

The reading comprehension is regarded as one of the fundamental language skill that an EFL learner must perform. In fact, it is not an easy skill since most of learners face many reading problems. This study aimed at finding out the difficulties that teachers suffer with their learners during the reading process. It, also, aimed at searching for effective strategies to help teachers to enhance the learners' reading comprehension level. The present research work is built upon two hypotheses. First, it hypothesis that the appropriate and correct use of reading strategies by 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school teachers would help to prevent the reading comprehension difficulties. Second, the reading strategies and techniques the teachers mainly used may enhance EFL learners level. To this end, the data were collected by one research instrument that is an online questionnaire. It has been answered by 23 teachers. The results obtained from this study show that, actually, learners encounter major problems in the process of reading. On the basis of these results, pedagogical implications were suggested.

**List of Abbreviations and Symbols**

?: Percentage

4<sup>th</sup> : Fourth Year Middle School Learners

C.B.A: Classroom based assessment

DE: Diagnostic evaluation

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

etc: An so forth

i.e.: That is to say

n. d: No date

P: Page

Q: Question

Vs: Versus

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## 1. Background of the Study

Reading is one of the four language skills taught for English language acquisition besides listening, speaking, and writing. It is one of the most important skills for everyone, especially for students. According to Brenda Thompson (1979), "Reading is the first and most important skill children learn at school. If they do not learn to read well, the rest of their education will be impaired. (p. 9)

Generally speaking, reading is the elicitation of meaning from a text. It is a complex process in which it involves the dynamic interaction between the readers and the text. Smith (2006), reports research which indicates that reading in a second language. e.g. English as second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) is a resource of considerable difficulty. Success is not assessed by the number of words read, but by the depth acquired through the interaction between the reader and the text. According to Hammerberg (2004) the building of meaning comprises of more than the reader only decoding words and saying them loudly in his/her head. Rather, it is an interactive process including the active building of meaning during reading. Even when the learner reads words correctly, she/he should be able to go beyond the text's literal meaning in order to comprehend the author's intent and think critically about deeper layers of meaning. (Khinger, Vaugh & Boordman, 2007)

In accordance with Mourtaga, (2004) learning to read English for native speakers of Arabic is linked with various challenges and difficulties involving poor vocabulary, grammar and syntax which need to be explored in order to be taught for them and these problems overcome.

For instance, if a student does not comprehend the differences between simple, compound and complex sentences, this may lead to misinterpretation of the meaning intended by the author. Books on reading proficiency indicates that EFL learners commonly face variety of comprehension difficulties. These include: reading proficiency (Salmani 2003), prior knowledge of the subject matter (Carrell, 1984), and reading techniques (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Reading comprehension is the process of building meaning from the text. The goal of all reading instructions is eventually aimed at helping a reader to understand a given text. The process of reading comprehension includes at least two people: the

reader and the writer. " The process of comprehending involves decoding the writer's words and then using background knowledge to construct an approximate understanding of the writer's message" (Chen, 2003, p.161). In short, the main purpose of reading is to understand the text being read, if comprehension is not achieved then the reading activity is aimless.

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

Reading comprehension is crucial for the reading process as it helps student to comprehend, criticize and interact with the text. It also improve their critical thinking and self-monitoring during while reading. Thereby, it helps them to get involved in the reading process actively and effectively. However, reading comprehension can be accomplished merely when students are able to use appropriate and adequate reading strategies and knowing how and when to use them.

Accordingly, most of 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners have the ability to read, but unfortunately, they always failed in the accomplishment of comprehension in reading. As a result, they spend a lot of time and effort without achieving the meaning of the intended text, owing to the fact that they are unable to use certain effective reading strategies or lack of comprehending these strategies that help them to access comprehension. The motive behind selecting the 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners was the fact that students in this year sit for an academic exam (BEM) and according to an investigation of the scores obtained in the preceding years, it is noticed that learners got the least scores in the first part of the exam (comprehension) compared to the remaining parts. The researchers had concluded, according to the formers' statements, that 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners face some difficulties in comprehending the written materials.

### **2. Aims of the Study**

This study aims at:

- To find out the difficulties that teachers suffer with their learners during the reading process.
- Searching for effective techniques to help teachers to enhance the learners' reading comprehension level.

### **3. Research Questions**

The current study focuses mainly on the following stated question:

- What kind of difficulties 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners suffer?
- What strategies can be adopted by teachers to help 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners to minimize and overcome their reading problems?
- What might be the suggestions to enhance 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners their reading comprehension level?

#### **4. Research Methodology**

In order to answer the above questions; a quantitative research tool have been chosen that is one questionnaire have been administered to 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school teachers; to reveal the learners reading difficulties and available means for helping them apply appropriate reading strategies.

#### **5. Structure of the Study**

The current study consists of three main chapters: the first two chapters are devoted to the theoretical background of the research topic. The first chapter is concerned with teaching reading comprehension; it is divided into two parts. The first part concerned with the nature of reading, including an overview on the concept of reading, some definitions on reading and reading comprehension, as well as it involves its types, its models, and essentials of reading. Whereas, the second part presents various reading strategies and sub-skills that are used in the reading comprehension process, the process of reading comprehension, reading and text selection; also it identifies the teachers' role in reading classes as well as the importance of reading comprehension.

The second chapter is about assessment of reading comprehension. It deals with a brief description of assessment as a broad term; also it involves the common types of assessment. It includes the criteria of assessing reading comprehension as well as the formal and informal methods of assessing readers' comprehension. In addition to that, it presents the traditional assessment and the alternative one which is introspective and retrospective measures. Besides, it deals with difficulties and factors that affect reading comprehension.

While the last chapter is practical in nature deals with the field work and data analysis and the discussion of teachers' questionnaire. Finally, the third chapter gives some worthy pedagogical recommendations on the light of the findings of the research.



## **Section One: Reading Skill in General**

### **Introduction**

Reading is one of the four basic skills in language teaching and learning. It enables learners to acquire knowledge and understand different subjects. As well as it is very important not only as a language skill but also as a language input for other skills to develop. For these reasons, it is very important for EFL learners to have not the ability to read written materials, but also the ability to understand what they have read. Furthermore, EFL learners are in need to be aware of reading strategies to help them increase their reading comprehension. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will be devoted to the nature of reading including : notion of reading, definitions of "reading" and "reading comprehension" from different point of views. Besides, it tackles teaching reading comprehension EFL classes. In addition to that, it deals with "the reading models and types of reading as well as essentials of reading, reading techniques. Whereas the second section concerns with reading comprehension difficulties and the factors behind those difficulties.

### **1.1. Notion of Reading**

Formulating an acceptable definition for reading to all researchers and psychologists has been problematic. This due to the different perspectives about the notion of reading. In traditional view reading was considered as a passive process in which the readers simply decode the information without the use of their own knowledge, background knowledge to interact with the text.(Clark & Sibbestein, 1977). However, after the emergence of the psycholinguistic model of reading (Goodman, 1976), research on reading process clarified that reading is in fact an active process, in which the reader grasps the meaning from the written words . Goodman (1976) (as cited in Nouri & Affak 2017) stated that, "Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game" (p. 6) , that is to say the reader take an active stance with the text to construct meaning.

Furthermore, other scholars stated that reading is not only a cognitive and psycholinguistic activity, but also this cognitive activity has social dimensions and it can be described as a social process(Labov, 1972; Bloom 1985; Gee 2001). Harmer

(1998) supported the notion that reading is not a passive skill; but it is especially an active process. To do it swimmingly, the reader ought to comprehend what the words mean, understand pictures, understand arguments and train yourself on reading texts; but if the readers do not do these things and are not engaged with the reading text they will quickly forget it. At the same time, reading is an activity to acquire information.

Nunan (1991) defines the reading is the process of getting, comprehending and catching the content of the reading. Reading is a process to comprehend a written text which means extracting the needed information from it as efficiently as possible to construct meaning.

According to Kennedy (1981) reading is the capacity of an individual to recognize the written (visual) form, link the form with a meaning acquired in the past and on the basis of past experience, comprehend, and interpret its meaning . Reading texts also useful for English writing. At various times we can encourage students to focus on vocabulary, grammar or punctuation . It is reading material to prove the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. Hence students will have a good writing style. According to Anderson et al (1985) reading is a process of getting meaning and recognizing the written words. This process requires the unity of a lot of related sources of information.

In accordance with Kustaryo (1988) (as cited in Larasati, D. 2019) " reading is the instantaneous recognition of various written symbols with existing knowledge, and comprehension of the information and ideas communicated" (p. 7). Hence, it can be defined as the combination of printed or written symbol with background knowledge to comprehend the text.

Manzo and Manzo (1993) view reading as the act of concurrently reading the lines, reading between lines, and reading beyond the lines. " Reading the lines " is the technique of decoding words to reconstruct the author's essential messages. " Reading between the lines " is the technique of making inferences in order to rebuild the author's implied messages. This depends upon the comprehending of logic facts integrally as well as the comprehending of figurative language. " Reading beyond the lines " is the process of judging connotation of the author's message, and effectively

implementing it to other areas of knowledge and experience. Reading is a technical process because it necessitates reading letter by letter and word by word. It is automatic information processing, in which each word is decoded and comprehended while the process of building understanding is through combining their individual meaning. Because it encompasses the correlation of the use of language, reading is a linguistic process (Davenport, 2002, p. 5).

In summary, reading can be defined as an interactive skill in which the reader constructs meaning through the dynamic interacting with the text. This interactive process includes the reader's existing knowledge or background knowledge, the reading strategies, the text and the context of the reading text.

## **1.2. Definition of Reading**

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are considered as the four fundamental skills for foreign a language acquisition. The reading skill is an essential one for a language acquisition because it has positive effects on vocabulary knowledge, spelling as well as learner's writing. Reading is viewed as an interactive process between the reader and the writer in which the former has to comprehend the message of the reading situation and then to decode it. Moreover, it is a dynamic process in which information from the text and background knowledge of the reader interact to enable him to construct meaning before, during and after reading. In this regard, Goodman (1973) states that " the learner interacts with a message encoded by the writer. He concentrates his total prior experience and concepts he has attained, as well as the language competence he has achieved ".(p. 162)

Reading is not a passive task, but rather an active one. In fact, reading requires both the learners mental empirical inputs of who is predicted to understand the written passage. Reading is comprised of two parts: the written form, and the meaning of the message. In this respect, Ur (1996) defines reading as follows:

"Reading means reading and understanding. A foreign language learner who says, I read the words but I do not know what the mean is not, therefore, reading in this sense. He or she is merely decoding translating written symbols into corresponding sounds." (p. 138)

### **1.3. Definition of Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is important for everyone who wants to expand their knowledge. Sometimes some learners face difficulties to comprehend the reading situation, so they get nothing from the text. So the teachers have to be more connoted about the problem. Kennedy (1981) states that reading comprehension is a thinking process in which readers become aware of ideas, comprehend it in terms of their previous/ background knowledge, determines the author's intended meaning to be transmitted, and interpret it in relation to their own needs and objectives. To put it in another way, comprehension is the process of deriving and extracting meaning from the reading situation. Comprehension is an active process in which the reader actively engages with the text to build meaning with the use of her/his prior knowledge.

According to Combridge Dictionary, Comprehension is the ability to understand and completely can be familiar with a situation, facts, etc. Meanwhile, comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and linked grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them comprehend written text. Reading Comprehension plays an important role in any language and literary program. It considered " the essence of reading " (Durkin, 1993).

### **1.4. Types of Reading**

It is surely that, reading does not take place in just one form or one manner. Evidently, reading aims to help the reader to comprehend the meaning of written or printed texts. Researchers have categorized reading to consist of some specific types of reading naming: extensive reading, intensive reading, silent reading, reading out loud. According Patel (2008) there are four types of reading:

#### **1.4.1. Intensive Reading**

Patel (2008) claimed that intensive reading is to read for detailed information; It  
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refers to detailed focus on the reading texts which usually take place in classrooms under the teacher's guidance. Whilst the aim is to comprehend material in

depth. In this reading the learner focuses on using dictionary to analyze and translate while reading texts i.e. the learner read the text to get knowledge or analysis. The goal of this reading is to read shorter text. This reading is done to get specific information. This reading assists learner to develop active vocabulary as well as linguistic items ,moreover; the teacher plays corer role in intensive reading. This reading aims at active use of language.

#### **1.4.2. Extensive reading**

According to Patel (2008) extensive reading is another device refers to the reading that learners often do away, far out the classroom, without the aid of the teacher. Extensive readers read for the sake of pleasure with emphasis on comprehending the overall meaning. In this reading, the learner chooses her/his own books; then the teacher has to guide learners to select books depending on their levels of comprehension to avoid bogging down in reading which is too complicated. The purpose of extensive reading will be to train the student to read directly, fluently and smoothly in the target language for enjoyment, without the aid of the teacher. Additionally, this reading aims to enriches reader's background knowledge and expand their vocabulary. This reading helps learner to develop the active vocabulary as well as the learners play major role because they have to ask for measures. Also through extensive reading the good reading habit can be developed. The aim of this reading is to enrich learner's knowledge and for pleasure.

#### **1.4.3. Aloud reading**

In Patel's view (2008) Reading Aloud is a type of reading which play an important role in teaching of English. It must be given at primary level because it is the base of words pronunciation. Teachers can make reading aloud interesting like the material which the teacher present should be according to background knowledge of the students. Also, the teacher should concentrate on the stress of learners and during the process of reading, he should be very careful about the committed mistake and correct it in friendly and productive way. Moreover, the teacher should pay attention for all readers whether weak or excellent readers. Reading aloud have advantages such as to develop the skill of reading very well by speaking or expressing ideas, to

develop the pronunciation the pronunciation very well, makes reading very enjoyable and pleasurable.

#### **1.4.4. Silent Reading**

For Patel (2008) silent reading is an essential skill in teaching English. This type of reading is done to acquire a lot of information. Here, the student read silently without voicing the word. Making this reading interesting requires an interesting and effective subject matter. The teacher should motivate student, he should not read the text first, he should let students to read the text. The advantages of this type are rehearsing the student's concentration toward subject matter and learns naturally, saves time because this activity is done at a time. It is beneficial for developing the skill of reading fast (ibid).

### **1.5. Reading Models**

Reading comprehension is necessary in every grade level and in every subject. Some researchers have described it by generating three reading models: the bottom-up reading model, the top-down reading model and the interactive model.

#### **1.5.1. Bottom-up Model**

The bottom-up model focuses on the written or printed text, which is also called data driven. This model underlines the ability to interpret or put into second what is seen in the text in which the readers derive meaning in a linear way. Moreover, the bottom-up model propounds that learning to read processes from learners learning the portions of language (letters) to comprehending the whole text (meaning). In this respect, Nunan (1991) says:

"These letters or graphemes are matched with the phonemes of the language. These phonemes, the minimal units of meaning in the sound system of language are blended together to form words. The derivation of meaning is thus the end of process in which language is translated from one represent action to another." (p. 64).

This model of reading concentrates on decoding the language, i.e. the learner is assumed to decode the words without comprehending the full text. According to (Hudson, 1998), The bottom-up process is separate from context and poor readers depend significantly on context strategy in order to make text interpretations. Indeed, this model entails that the text should be analyzed and discussed in detailed manner and the learner will perceptively process the text by decoding words, sentences, and paragraphs. Evidently, this model requires readers to process the text at grammatical and structural levels and leads them to construct comprehensive semantic analyses of the text in order to construct meaning.

### **1.5.2. Top-down Model**

This reading model is focused on the reader's previous knowledge in the reading process in which meaning takes primacy over structure. Therefore, it tends to ignore that grammar is important for the use of higher levels. In this context, Clarke et al (1977) maintain that the reader brings information, attitudes, and experiences from the text, where this knowledge is accompanied by the ability to make linguistic predictions.

In the same vein, it is a process in which students make expectations and inferences about text data and utilize their previous knowledge to build text comprehension. It is described by Nuttal (2005) : " an analysis with an eagle's view of text ". Top-down process suggests that the tackling of a text begins in the mind of the readers, or a supposition about the meaning of a text. From this perspective, readers determine letters and words in order to emphasize their previous suppositions about the meaning of the text. In the same line, Goodman (1976) mentioned that the goal of reading is building meaning in response to text; It requires interactive use of grapho- phonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to build meaning ".

### **1.5.3. Interactive Model:**

Interactive model is a reading model that attempt to combine between the bottom-up and top-down model. It is introduced to cover the deficiencies of the two models. It is agreed that the interactive model is the complete one in the process of reading

comprehension because it involves the interaction of both the bottom-up and top-down processes. In this respect, Richards (1990) sees reading as: " an integration of top-down processes that utilize background knowledge and schema, as well as bottom- up processes that primarily text or data driven." (p. 77).

The interactive model includes the interaction of bottom-up and top-down process instantaneously throughout the reading process. Therefore, it depends on both graphic and textual information, which shows that there is a combination of both surface structure systems (bottom-up model of reading) with deep structure systems (top-down aspects of reading) to construct meaning. In the same vein, Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) consider the processes included in this interactive process occur at the same time:

" The data that are needed to instantiate, or fill out, the schemata become available through bottom-up processing; top-down processing facilitates their assimilation if they are anticipated by or consistent with the listeners/readers conceptual expectations. Bottom-up processing ensures that listeners/readers will be sensitive to information that is novel or that does not fit their ongoing hypotheses about the content or structure of the text; top-down processing helps the listeners/readers to resolve ambiguities or to select between alternative possible interpretations of the incoming data ". (p. 557).

## **1.6. Essentials of Reading**

Reading encompasses a variety of components and involves certain interpretation skills. Apparently, to achieve appropriate reading comprehension students need to decipher terms, combine sentences, use prior knowledge and join it to the new information.

### **1.6.1. Phonological awareness**

Phonological awareness basically refers to the ability to read aloud, detect phonemes and manipulate the sound chunks of words (Puf paff, 2009). In fact, phonemes are known to be the smallest unites that are connected to produce meaning and make up the spoken language. These phonemes are joined together to form syllabus and words, for



example, the word "task" has four phonemes while the word "shone" has three phonemes.

Phonemic awareness is viewed as a pre-reading skill and is commonly taught to emergent readers. It is the ability to discriminate between sounds. It is a needful requirement to phonics because learners cannot use letter sounds to decipher unknown words if they are not able to tell one sound from another. It is certainly an acoustic skill whereby learners hear and articulate sounds, consequently students depend only on their ears, not their eyes. (Duffy, 2009).

Additionally, the phonological awareness means the capacity to identify and comprehend the phonemes or the sounds that form words. It can also be viewed as the ability to read loudly, hear, and manipulate the individual sounds within words. Such as the word "cat" has three phonemes, and the word "bike" has also three phonemes. Thereby, the phonemic awareness is about sound of speech not letters (Timothy, 2006).

Skillful readers integrate skills and strategies when they read. Commonly, good readers use context in combination with initial consonant sounds to decipher known words in text. When students encounter an unknown word, they guess about the sound at the beginning of the unknown word and its meaning that is made in that context. It is extremely useful because it can be used rapidly, and greatly leads to an accurate word identification. (Duffy, 2009). In the early phases, teaching of phonological awareness is a principal component of teaching reading. Indeed, this teaching has important effects on the development of word identification skills, the spelling skills, and of the reading performance.

### **1.6.2. Vocabulary knowledge**

One of the essential components of language proficiency that has a strong impact on reading comprehension is vocabulary knowledge in the language being read. (Coady, 1997). Other investigation proposes that vocabulary is acquired through extensive and regular reading. (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Constantino, 1995; Joe, 1998). Certain studies shown that rehearsing students on rapid and accurate vocabulary identification could enhance their reading comprehension (Burt et al., 2003). The skill of word reading

involves processing written words, their meanings, and their pronunciation and skillful reading is an outcome of interactive processing of these three elements (Adams, 1990).

Number of studies have demonstrated that lexical knowledge and comprehension are correlated for skillful reader's. Knowledge of spelling, decipherment, and phonology help them conceivably deduce meaning from the text.(Prefetti, 1985).

### **1.6.3. Background Knowledge**

Scholars agree that adequate background knowledge is a principal factor for reading (Adams & Collins, 1979). Certainly, effective reading requires students to be able to link the reading situation to their own experience. Research has demonstrated that background knowledge plays crucial roles in comprehending the reading material. In fact, most of this knowledge and the way it is implemented to content area topics affect profoundly student's comprehension (Texas Education Agency Handbook, 2002). Thus, learners should be trained to use their previous knowledge to comprehend texts. This previous knowledge may involve many areas such as cultural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, and subject matter knowledge. Teachers should figure out what learners know about the topic and should motivate them to link their knowledge to the new information in order to make them better comprehend the text.

Additionally, using background knowledge includes schema activating. Indeed, comprehension entails students to reveal what is in the text and figuring out ideas through reading between lines.(Burt et al., 2003). In fact, comprehension can be achieved when learners incorporate text information with their existing knowledge in order to build correct understanding.

### **1.6.4. Syntactic Knowledge**

The syntactic process refers to learner's ability to recognize the grammatical relationships between words and sentences. It includes using word order such as "Subject followed by verb" and morphological signs such as "Tenses and conjunctions" in order to understand the meaning of phrases, words and sentences (Burt et al., 2003).

The syntactic instruction in the reading task points out student's awareness about the syntactic forms that are included in the text. For instance, teachers can teach texts that involves specific words and forms in order to draw attention to the parts of speech in context. Then, they identify and discuss these forms so that to indicate their grammatical roles in the text (Burt et al., 2003).

### **1.6.5. Fluency**

Fluency is the capacity to read words accurately, correctly, automatically, smoothly, expressively, and quickly consciously with attention to mechanics of reading. Indeed, fluent readers are those who are able to read, perceive, recognize, and understand words and sentences instantaneously. Marice (2008) mentioned " A key reason that fluency is a critical component of reading programs is that fluency is associated to with reading outcomes, including comprehension." Certainly, fluency is considered as a requisite component of reading (p. 4).

Fluency, either in oral or silent reading is " reading like you talk". Students have one best way to develop their fluency which is making them do repeat readings of every texts. Thereby, they learn to utter words rapidly and in a ways that reflect the meaning. Whilst, comprehension is a main factor, fluency too requires rapid, accurate recognition of words, sentences and paragraphs in a text (Duffy, 2009).

Furthermore, the reading fluency can be viewed as the ability to read passages correctly, speedily, readily, and with appropriate expression (Rasinski, 2003). Actually, fluent readers are presumed to read correctly, speedily with the combination of spoken and written features of language like grammar and pronunciation. In this regard, some scholars view that fluency can be enhanced by exercising reading and providing assessment-based instruction.

As well as, fluency is not just speed-reading, whether oral or silent, it is more concerned with the appropriate phrasing and intonation. That is to say, the text is read swimmingly without any difficulties and with meaning. When student read with intonation and phrasing, they can comprehend the author's intention and the messages that the text conveys. In this respect, fluency is not merely a matter of recognizing

words at sight; it is also a matter of understanding the reading situation accurately and correctly (Duffy, 2009).

According to Marice (2008) fluency includes the following skills:

**Accuracy:** It refers to the ability to accurately generate phonological recognition of each word with the use of decoding strategies. This accuracy includes decoding skills such as: the alphabetical awareness, the ability to integrate sounds, and the ability to use indications to identify the meaning of words in different contexts.

**Automaticity:** In Marice'S view (2008) It refers to the ability to speedily recognize words with little cognitive effort. This automaticity can be achieved when word decoding becomes quick and easy with full text comprehension. It can be developed with presenting learners to different complex tasks in reading.

**Prosody:** according to Marice (2008) It refers to the ability to read with suitable phrasing and expressions. It seen as an indicator of reader's ability to build the meaning of the text. It could be said that fluency with comprehension is a primary goal of reading.

#### **1.6.6. Comprehension**

Comprehension is a complex cognitive process which includes several interactions between the reader and the text to build meaning (National Reading Panel, 2000). It involves making logical linking between the sentences, the ideas, and the paragraphs of the text so that to elicit the proper meaning of this text. Furthermore, comprehension encompasses meta-cognition, or self regulated thinking, which is viewed as an internal interactivity between the reader and the text which emphasis on the reader's thinking and what the reader knows during the reading (David et al., 2008).

Comprehension happens when readers construct mental representation of a particular text. The process of comprehension that relates this representation happens at various levels across language units. These levels are: word level, sentence level, and text level. Through these levels, the process of word identification, referential

mapping, and a variety of inference processes interact with the reader's knowledge to construct a final meaning of the text (Charles et al., 2004).

In accordance with Duffy (2009) Comprehension is proactive, because a reader must be actively thinking and constantly monitoring the meaning as well as tentative, because predictions made in one moment may change in the next moment. And personal, in that meaning remains in the readers interpretation, which is controlled by his or her previous knowledge. Additionally, Trans-active, because the reader's background interacts with the writer's intention. Also Thoughtful, because readers must always analyze the clues, ideas. Moreover; comprehension is imagistic because in narrative text readers use the writer's descriptive language to shape pictures in their mind of what is happening. In addition, inferential because the reader can merely guess the writers' meaning was operation from one set of experiences and the reader from another. Besides, comprehension is reflective in that good readers appraise what

they have read and identify its meaning and how it can be used after finishing reading. In sum, it can be said that comprehension is the primary objective of reading as well as, it is an act that involve interaction between the new information and the reader's background knowledge in order to extract meaning from the text.

## **1.7. Reading Sub-skill**

Sub-skills are those techniques students do to help them comprehend what they read. In reading process, there exist two major sub-skills namely: skimming, scanning.

### **1.7.1. Skimming**

Skimming is a valuable speed-reading technique, which allows the learner to overlay a large amount of material speedily. It is the technique of speedily observing a part of the text to get only the main ideas and a general overview of the content. This means that this type of reading includes getting the general meaning/overall sense of a given paragraph."Skimming is a high speed reading that than can save time and help to get through lots of material quickly" (Mikulecky, Beatrice and Jeffries, 2004. P. 38). This technique is certainly to be applied when the task is just to get an overview

of the passage. Within this technique, learners read speedily to pick up the key points, and jump over the details. It is helpful in getting an overview of a passage before reading it in detail or refreshing understanding of a passage after reading it.

In the same vein, Brown (1994) indicates that skimming is basically running your eyes over the entire text to get the main idea about it. Skimming gives readers the advantage of being able to expect the purpose of the passage, the major topic or the message, and probably some of the developing and supporting ideas. This gives them a "head start" when they start on more focused reading. For example, when a person wants to buy a book, he/she principally reads the title of the book, back cover of the book and possibly a few passages of the book. It gives the reader an overview about the book.

### **1.7.2. Scanning**

Scanning is normally reading rapidly for getting some specific basic terms and phrases without dealing with the whole text. It is a skill that requires glimpsing or reading through moving our eyes rapidly for the sake of searching words or phrases; readers do not read all the text word by word they look for the information they want to find. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004) considered that scanning is a very high-speed reading that the reader uses to search for a specific piece of information.

Along the same lines, in Brown's (1994) view scanning is valuable, and rapidly searching for some specific piece of information in a text. The purpose of scanning is to elicit certain specific information without reading the entire text. For academic English, scanning is certainly crucial. In occupational or general English, scanning is used to get particular information about the text. For example: when a person wants to know about sports news from a newspaper, he normally sees the particular page where the sports news are available. That is to say we can scan for particular information.

## **1.8. Reading Comprehension Techniques**

Reading comprehension strategies are regarded as tactics used by readers to make decisions about meaning before, during, and after reading process. Research has

shown some of these strategies: using background knowledge, self questioning, making inferences, predicting, visualizing, and summarizing (Texas Education Agency Handbook, 2002). Throughout the following students can determine their reading purposes, determine the important ideas in the text, monitor their reading, correct their understanding, and enhance their comprehension rates.

### **1.8.1. Prediction**

Prediction helps readers activate their prior knowledge about the topic and integrate what they know with new information in the text. Prediction is based on the type of text being read and on clues in the text such as: pictures, illustrations, subtitles. Readers can arrive to predictions from the prior knowledge about another text form, or content. Predicting is fundamental to comprehension because students foresee meaning by predicting what is going to happen in the topic and by reviewing their predictions when they read. Readers of all ages make predictions. Like all comprehension strategies, predicting is based on the thoughtful use of prior knowledge. Students form predictions based on purpose for reading, topic clues, and the type of the text being read. According to Duffy (2009), when teaching the predicting strategy, teachers have to understand that getting meaning is the purpose of reading as well as the reader must actively build meaning. Also it is a model in which how the readers actively build meaning. Moreover; predicting is not a vague guess but a thoughtful based on clues. Furthermore; predicting is like all comprehension strategies; it is a matter of "reading between lines".

There are two types of prediction: while reading and post reading. The questions that are relevant to while reading prediction are varied from the post reading prediction questions. For instance, when learners read the first paragraph of a text and then asked about the whole text and what might happen after. On the other side, post reading prediction questions requires learners looking for answers according to what they comprehend from the text (Nuttal, 2005).

### **1.8.2. Inferring**

Inferring is the ability to read between lines or to pick up the meaning that a writer implies but does not state it evidently. Almost all comprehension strategies include inferring in the sense that comprehension requires readers to notice text clues, to access prior knowledge associated with those clues, and then predict what the meaning is; thus, in this sense, inferring is something readers make as part of all comprehension strategies (Duffy, 2009). In other terms inferring allows the reader to go beyond the literal meanings and make assumptions about what is implicitly stated in the text. It can include predictions, conclusions and interpretations that are neither confirmed nor refused.

It is useful to teach inferring as a separate strategy, especially in narrative text where students often are anticipated to infer the features of characters or to infer attitudes. Character traits are rarely mentioned explicitly but instead are implied by stating what a person does or says. In the same vein, mood is rarely described directly but instead is implied by describing the physical environment or the behavior of characters, therefore; it is up to students to deduce the mood. When teaching inferring, teachers and students have to comprehend that authors write text based on their experience background and we build meanings based on what the writer's words make us think about. As well as they have to comprehend that inferring is approximately the same process as predicting.

Obviously, constructing meaning requires the correlation of background knowledge, retention of text information, and making the inference itself. In this regard, learners should learn from the very young age that reading is a matter of inferring meaning based on background knowledge about text information.

### **1.8.3. Monitoring**

Research indicates that how comprehension achievements are relevant to low monitoring skills. Challenges in implementing monitoring strategies drive to a failure to restore information either in the text or in the memory. Wherefore, students should develop some reading skills to monitor their text comprehension. In fact, monitoring helps them to verify their understanding and to make the essential reforms during the



reading process. Actually, they should become able to identify their comprehension breakdowns and detect any discrepancies in their understanding (Charles et al., 2004).

Monitoring can be viewed as a process of talking to oneself about if the meaning being found is the predicted meaning or not. This means, whether the original whether the original prediction is valid or not. Monitoring and questioning are approximately the same because questioning is also a process of talking to oneself about whether the meaning is pointless or meaningful. That is, the reader should always ask the following question: "Does this make sense? Is this what I had predicted? What was going to happen?", hence; the reader start self-talk about what new prediction requires to be made. Then, he/she tries to modify his understanding according to the new information found in the text.

#### **1.8.4. Imaging**

Like the rest comprehension strategies, imaging requires students to use background knowledge and to predict information. In this case, the background knowledge the student uses is relied on the experience with words and descriptive language. Readers utilize what that descriptive language makes them think to create images. That is, they predict what image the writer aims to transmit (Duffy, 2009). Because descriptive language appears with more frequency in narrative than in expository text, imagery supposed to be taught in conjunctions with stories rather than with textbooks or other informational texts. Imagery is particularly important to reading narrative text because it is mostly the image that makes stories dynamic, existing, dramatic and alive. Students see what the characters see, hear what the characters hear, and feel what the characters feel. It is these emotional responses that often stimulate students and cause them to think that reading is pleasurable. Therefore, if teachers can develop imaging, they increase a great opportunity to motivate students to make recreational reading a permanent part of their lives. To understand imagery, teachers and students should know that comprehension requires proactive effort. Additionally, that writers want readers to see, hear and feel some things, particularly in the narrative text they write. As well as they should know that writers use descriptive language so we can use our senses of sight, hearing, smelling,

feeling, and tasting to construct an image of what the author wants us to see, hear, feel or taste (Duffy, 2009).

For sure, good students react to descriptive and narrative text by creating pictures or images in their minds. Imagining can also be called "visualizing" as it can be naturally done. However, some students may encounter difficulties in creating images of what they read because they do not understand how to use descriptive language to generate pictures in their minds about what is happening.

### **1.8.5. Previewing**

Previews are organizers that give information about a piece of text. They aim to activate the prior knowledge and to provide specific purposes for the reading (Holschuh & Aultman, 2009).

Indeed, the strategy of previewing ideas and thinking about them make learners go deeply in their understanding and help them learn from their reading. In this regard, Fisher et al (2009) viewed: "As readers, we are always activating our knowledge base and comparing it with what we are reading. In other words, we compare what we already know with what we are reading". In order to teach and practice previewing skill, teachers need modeling the questions that good readers should ask themselves like: What is the type of this text? Why am I trying to read it? And what information it contains?

### **1.8.6. Summarizing**

Summarizing is the creation of a recapped retelling of a text. Whilst it may encompass the general idea or theme. The focus is on explaining in brief form the text's main points. It is the process of determining key ideas of the text and recognizing them in abbreviated statements that truly entails core meaning of the text. As a matter of fact, a research indicates that instruction and practice in summarizing not merely enhance student's ability to summarize a text, but also their whole comprehension of the written content (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Moreover, summarizing is viewed as a process of putting together the important ideas that contain the core information in the text. This skill requires learners to authenticate their understanding. In fact, students need to distinguish the important ideas from the unimportant ones. As well students need to identify central ideas, pick the topic sentences, make generations, delete unimportant and redundant data, and present appropriate understanding (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, most of learners face difficulties in summarizing texts as they are required to check throughout the text and determine the important and the unimportant ideas in order to use the important one in order to construct a new concise text that symbolize the original one. The right way to teach students how to summarize is to teach them to arrange their summarizes around text structure. Well-written text are always well arranged and have an interior structure. If learners are taught to determine the structure of a text, they can use it when summarizing.

### **1.9. The Process of Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension activity in classroom is commonly viewed as the most important of language teaching and learning. Reading is the pillar for success in other language skill. Thus, teacher should be proficient in stimulating learners by selecting material, and choosing suitable method.

Comprehension skills are strategies readers use to restore information and build meaning from expository text. They are the thinking processes, divided into steps that are used to comprehend. These must be taught evidently. Jhonson (2008) states the three types of comprehension skills namely: Pre-reading, During reading, and post reading. These comprehension skills can be readily learned and flexibly implemented to a variety of reading situations.

#### **a. Pre-Reading Comprehension Skills**

In Jhonson's view (2008) pre-reading comprehension skills are used initially to preview the structure of the text or to link new information to background knowledge of readers

#### **b. During Reading Comprehension skills**

Jhonson (2008) claimed that during reading comprehension skills are used to monitor comprehension, to evaluate ideas gathered from each paragraph, and to begin to arrange within the structure of the text while students are reading

### c. Post-Reading Comprehension Skills

For Jhonson (2008) post reading comprehension skills are used to rebuild important ideas, arrange those ideas, and evaluate those ideas after reading a chapter or article.

## **1.10. Teaching Reading in EFL Classes**

### **1.10.1. Teacher's Role in Reading Class**

Teachers play a vital role in teaching reading as they are greatly appreciated participants in the reading process. Indeed, the international Reading Association (2000) stated that the teacher's knowledge that makes a distinction in learning outcomes. The teacher role in the reading process is to establish experiences and environment that increase students abilities to engage with text. This entails that teachers use explicit instruction, which involves modeling, scaffolding, facilitating, and participating (Au & Raphael, 1998).

Influential teachers have a great impact in teaching students to become successful readers, active readers and strategic readers. Both reading researchers and professional organizations have determined the characteristics of influential reading teachers (International Reading Association, 2000; Ruddell, 1995, 2004).

In Ruddell's view (1995, 2004) influential reading teachers believe that all children can learn. In addition, they differentiate instruction and know that motivation and many types of text are important elements of teaching and learning. Also they have profound knowledge of different aspects of literacy, involving reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As well as they use the information gathered from formative assessment of individual learner's strengths and needs. Moreover, they keep an eye on learners learning and adjust teaching as needed to ensure the success of all learners.

### **1.10.2. Reading and Text Selection**

Reading materials play a vital role in a successful reading comprehension process. Selecting proper text is essential both for learners and teachers. These materials must be appropriate and relies mainly on the learner's cognitive level. As a matter of fact, learners themselves should select materials that match their interest, i.e. it is better to allow learners to select the types of texts that they prefer to read and any topic that interests them...etc. selecting carefully texts creates a kind of motivation and participation in the classroom, and it is useful for both the teacher and the learner. Text selection takes into consideration several factors that can lead to the successful use of the text of authentic materials where the reader can interact whenever he/she read the text. According to Shahidullah (1995-96) (as cited in stated in Babaiba, 2014, p.12) "Students present linguistic level, and the level of their content and cultural schemata have to be taken into consideration in selecting texts for them". This is an essential point to make the reading process amusing and enjoyable. Thereby, the learners will become more interested and will organize specific time for reading. Therefore, this will enhance their reading skill.

### **1.11. The Importance of Reading Comprehension:**

reading comprehension skills are necessary for students in order to be successful in both academic and personal life. In student's academic lives, reading comprehension is the base for understanding all the academic content. In fact, students need reading comprehension to successfully achieve the educational expectations at school and in the classroom. For instance, students are expected to comprehend what they are reading from several sources in order to research topics in different academic areas. In addition, being able to comprehend what they read enables students to quickly find relevant information, exclude non-relevant one to the current topic, and determine the important information to focus on. Academic success also entails students to be able to comprehend, analyze, and apply information they collected through reading. Besides, students need reading comprehension skill to perform academic assignments effectively. Thereby, without having reading comprehension skills, students cannot achieve all of that work (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013; Wong, 2011).

Reading comprehension also is required for individuals in order to be successful in their personal lives (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007). For example, to be successful, individuals, need to comprehend the main text that appears in utility bills, housing contracts, career applications, and newsletters (Hoeh, 2015). Moreover, individuals need reading comprehension skills in order to be able to obtain a job and successfully engage in daily work (Hoeh, 2015; Mahdavi, & Tensfeldt, 2013).

Reading comprehension is significantly requisite when thinking about the negative consequences of not being able to read in critical situations. For example, not being able to read and understand, dosage directions on a bottle of medicine or a warning on a container of dangerous chemicals that threatens individual's safety and lives (Marshall, n.d.) another probable negative consequence of not being able to read is being socially exclusive (Bryner, 2008; Hoeh, 2015).

On the other hand, individuals who can perceive what they are reading, can safely live their lives, and continue to earn socially and intellectually (Hoeh et al., 2015; Marshall, n. d.).

## **Section Two: Reading Comprehension Difficulties**

### **2.14. Reading comprehension difficulties**

Before coming to assess learners' reading comprehension and give them feedback to their performance, assessors must determine what are the difficulties and obstacles that prevent students to understand the written text very well. Thus; scholars and researchers of reading comprehension state that EFL learners face some struggles when they answer the questions which are related the comprehension part. Actually; the major problem that most of the English foreign learners suffer from is vocabulary. The students cannot understand the written words, expressions, phrases....that's why they are unable to understand the reading comprehension questions.

Moreover, the learners may find some difficulties during the exam, they may confuse between Words which are similar to each other such as homophones and homonyms, are words that have the same spelling whereas meaning is different. So, they are similar in terms of sound no more. For instance, learners may find out the

following words (be, bee) they are pronounced the same way, they differ only in the letter (e). In this case, the learner cannot differentiate easily between them. Especially if it is a tricky question like the following:

Find in the text the following?

- 1- The name of an insect.
- 2- An auxiliary.

It is very difficult for a student especially those with low level to distinguish between the verb and the name of the insect.

Second, other difficulties that the learners find are words that contain more than one meaning. e.g.: the word right means correct or the direction; the opposite of left. More importantly; even if the student knows the meaning of words but it is not enough for them to understand the exact meaning? So, it's not a matter of just knowing the meaning but also he must be on the look out of the foreign language culture. The learner may face a problem in understanding the proverbs and idioms even if he knows the literary meaning. E.g. the proverb "Over my dead body" means no (disagree), it expresses refusing and rejecting something.

For this reason a lot of researchers see vocabulary as the most serious problem that the learner often face.

As Kame' enui Bauman (2012) declared "Intelligent, hard working students struggled to understand literary and social studies texts as a result of the high percentage of unfamiliar English words that these texts contained " (p. 280). In this regard, most of EFL learners confirm that vocabulary is the main reason behind their comprehension difficulties i.e. learners with strong vocabulary rarely face the problem of comprehension because they have already learn the words and expressions mentioned either in the text or through the question itself.

According to Gilakjani & Sabouri ( 2016) text complexity is considered as a problem that prevents a lot of foreign learners to understand what the text is about or get the general idea of this text. Forth year middle students find difficulties in

answering comprehension questions especially if the written text contains different ideas or the author's style is indirect (the students cannot understand the intended meaning easily)

Another problem that EFL learners often face is the ability to understand complex sentences in reading comprehension or what is known as "sentence structure" as Cain (2010) declared that " Speakers are more likely to chain clauses together with " and ", Whereas writers use more elaborate or complex devices to link clauses"(p. 12).

Complex sentences are sentences in which they contain two or more clauses, they are not considered as simple ones. Learners often prefer dealing with simple sentences rather than the complex ones even if both they contain one single idea.

### **2.15. Factors that affect reading comprehension**

Alderson (2000) (as cited in English Language Learning in the Asian Context, Robertson, p. 2005, p. 235) classifies factors that affecting reading comprehension into two categories as follow (Broadly speaking, factors affecting reading comprehension can be classified into two general categories: (1) reader variables, and (2) text variables. The first category of variables which includes factors such as readers background knowledge, readers skills and abilities, and readers motivation and attitude, are internal to readers. The second category of variables which includes factors such as text content, text type and genre, text organization, text typographical features, and text readability are internal to texts rather than the readers".

There are challenges related to learners themselves such as their capacities and capabilities to realize and understand the written text, these capacities differ from one learner to another. On the other hand, there are some challenges related to text as, text length, type, order, organization etc.

Fulcher (1997) stated some factors that impact EFL learners' reading comprehension are first, motivation(some learners are not keen to read or write in



English, so it effects their scores), second, students' background knowledge, third, learners' previous reading experience.

**Conclusion:**

This theoretical chapter try out to give a notion about reading skill, shedding light on its different types and models, depending on various scholar's views. It also strives to focus on techniques and skills that readers use in reading process. In addition, it identify reading comprehension difficulties and its factors. Then, It deals with some essentials of reading. It deals with teaching reading in EFL classes. Finally, it signify the importance of reading comprehension.

**Chapter three:**

**Research Methodology and Data Analysis**

Introduction

3.1. Research Design

3.2. Aims of the Questionnaire

3.3. Description of the Questionnaire

3.4. Administration of the Questionnaire

3.5. Results and Interpretation

3.6. Discussion of the Results

3.7. Pedagogical Implications

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Conclusion

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Data Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Reading is one of the most important skill for teaching foreign languages. EFL teachers view that most of 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school student always face difficulties in comprehending different reading materials. This chapter aims to reveal such difficulties and provide some pedagogical implications to avoid them.

**3.1. Research Design:** a quantitative research instrument has been used which is an online questionnaire.

### **3.2. Aims of the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is mainly constructed for the sake to reveal the reading comprehension difficulties that learners encounter during the reading process. As well as to reveal the reading techniques that teachers follow in classroom.

### **3.3. Description of the Questionnaire**

To reveal 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners' reading difficulties during reading texts, a five page questionnaire was administered to 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school teachers. The questionnaire begins with a small introduction that presents the aim of the study. It is wholly made up of 25 questions which falls into 3 types: close-ended, open-ended, and open questions. Close-ended questions are asked in which teachers tick the appropriate answer. Through open question, teachers are asked to provide free responses. However; teachers are asked to provide justification for their choices through open-ended questions. The questions are logically ordered, classified under the sections, each one focusing on a particular aspect. The first section is concerned with general information about teachers. It is made up of 4 questions. The second section entitled 'teaching reading comprehension' comprises 13question. Though the second section, entitled 'assessing reading comprehension' consist of 12 questions.

### **3.4. Administration of the Questionnaire**

The teacher's questionnaire was given to 23 teachers of 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school ,between the period of October 2<sup>nd</sup> and October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The sample was randomly selected without any pressure to participate. At the end, the 23 questionnaires were returned, representing a rate of 100%.

### 3.5. Results and Interpretations

Concerning the questionnaire, different answers that are provided by participants reveal precious pieces of information about reading comprehension difficulties that 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners encounter whilst the reading process. Accordingly, what will follow is a meticulous analysis of the findings where the data will be presented in statistical forms.

**Q1.** How would you describe the reading level of (forth year) middle school learner?

- A. Most are above the average
- B. Most are average
- C. Most are below the average
- D. Reading level various greatly

Table 3.1

Learners' reading level

Options	Frequency	Percentage
<b>A</b>	1	4,3%
<b>B</b>	12	52,2%
<b>C</b>	8	34,8%
<b>D</b>	2	8,7%
<b>Total</b>	23	100%

This question is designed in the aim of discovering fourth year middle school learners' reading level. More than a half teachers have adjusted that learners' level in reading is average (52,2%), while (34,8%) which is represented eight English teachers

said that most of fourth year learners are below the average, (87%) represented the number of teachers who are asserted the learners' reading level various greatly, and (4,3%) represented only one teacher who has declared that most of learners are above the average.

The stated results show that reading level differs from one learner to another and the teachers have to determine each one's level, it is their responsibility to know learners' strengths and weaknesses too.

**Q2.** Do you think that reading is an important skill for language teaching? If yes why?

As for the informants' answers to this question, reading skills is considered as an essential receptive skill in which the learners should acquire and master as well. All the teachers who have answered this questionnaire stressed the importance of reading skill. Two respondents did not share any clarification for this question, unlike others provided arguments for the importance of reading skill. Their clarification are quoted as follow:

" Reading offers students a wider range of vocabulary and grammar, it essentially supports and feeds the brain with the correct language structures. ... As learning is facilitated by visual cues, reading helps the brain to remember these language structures as the learner will connect an image to the word it represents."

" In order to accomplish success one needs to have good reading and comprehension skills. Without these skills children will struggle to grow academically as reading is the foundation to all reading subjects."

" Active reading is a crucial skill that teachers should develop among their learners because it helps promote learners' writing and reading."

" Reading is a salient skill for language teaching since it goes hand in hand with the other skills. Without reading, writing could not be mastered."

" It helps them develop speaking habits and boost their confidence even if they mispronounce."

" Good reader is a good writer. "

" Reading gives you an opportunity to learn new things and explore new ideas."

**Q3.** Do you use various techniques and strategies in the class?

This question was set to know whether teachers teach reading techniques in the class or not. We got the same response. They all teach various techniques. Some teachers answer with just yes; and others provide clarifications as the following:

" of course I use technique of cooperative learning encourage students of mixed abilities to work together by promoting small group or whole class activities."

" I do as variety prevents boredom and kindles learners' motivation."

" Relying on one strategy does not help."

" I vary from time to time."

" Extensive and intensive reading are helpful."

**Q4.** Which reading technique do you often ask learner to use when giving them a text?**1. Scanning**

Table 3.2

Teacher's use of reading techniques (scanning)

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Always	11	47.8%
Sometimes	10	43.5%
Often	2	8,7%

**1. Skimming**

Table 3.3

Teacher's use of reading techniques (skimming)

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>percentage</b>
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Always	14	60,9%
Sometimes	6	26,1%
Often	3	13%

When asked about reading techniques (scanning and skimming), teachers' answers were evenly matched, (47,8%) always use scanning techniques when giving their learners a text to read, (43,5%) of them use scanning just sometimes in the class, and (8,7%) of teachers often use scanning as an important reading technique. On the other hand, the majority of participants prefer using skimming all the time (60,9%), (26,1%) of them use skimming, while only (13%) of teachers who often ask learners to use.

The aim behind asking this question is to know what reading technique the teachers are interested.

**Q5.** To what extent forming reading habit is important for English middle school learners?

All participants confirmed the importance of reading habits for English middle school learners, each one in his own way. Some of them insist on the importance of building reading strong vocabulary especially for those who are below the average, in addition to that four skills are interrelated to each other since a good reader is a good writer as well as one of the participants pointed out that " reading is a key to understand and then to speak." Other participants addressed the importance not just educationally but also build the learners' personality too, as a teacher have answered " reading build the personality of our learners to think creatively.

The results show that forming reading habit is of a great importance , essential, and necessary for EFL learners.

**Q.6** How do you rate the importance of the following items according to their role in reading comprehension?

Table 3.4

Importance of Vocabulary, Grammar, Reading Aloud and Translation in reading comprehension

Item	Frequency	percentage	total
Vocabulary			
Highly important	22	95,5%	
Somewhat important	1	4,34%	
Not important	0	0%	
Grammar			
	8	34,78%	
Highly important	15	65,21%	
Somewhat important	0	0%	
Not important			
Reading Aloud the Text			
	8	34,38%	
Highly important	9	39,13%	
Somewhat important	6	26,08%	
Not important			
Translating the text into Arabic			
	1	4,34%	
Highly important	9	39,13%	
Somewhat important	13	56,52%	
Not important			

As we can notice from the above table, teachers' rates of every item differs according to its importance. Almost all teachers select vocabulary as the most important item in reading comprehension by the percentage of (95,5%); because as much as learners have more vocabulary knowledge as much as they enhance their comprehension. And no one said that vocabulary is not important.



Concerning grammar, the majority of them (65,21%) said it is somewhat important. While (34,78%) said it is very important, because grammar provide students with the structure they need in order to organize their ideas and to understand the text easily. As it is mentioned throughout teachers' questionnaire no one of teachers said that grammar is not important.

Concerning text reading a text (34,38%) considered it as highly important. While the majority of teachers (39,13%) said reading aloud is somewhat important, it is important for students who prefer to read aloud in order to understand better. Whereas; (26,08%) of them claimed that it is not important.

For translating into Arabic, most of teachers (56,52%) said that is not important. Translation into Arabic confuse students and mislead them to unsuitable meaning of a given text or sentence.(39,13%) of them answered somewhat important. While, just (4,34%) of teachers said that translating into Arabic is highly important.

As we can deduce from the results above, the most important items in reading comprehension according to teachers are vocabulary and grammar.

**Q.7** What do usually do with a student who is slow in reading?(you can choose more than one option).

Table 3.5

Reactions' towards slow students

	<b>Number of answers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Wait and give him the time to improve his performance	11	47, 82%
Spend more time working on reading individually with that student	1	4,34%
Assign home works to help the student	13	56,5%
Motivate him to use reading strategies to enhance his comprehension	17	73,91%
Others please specify		
Choose texts that suit her/his level	1	4,34%
Give them a simple text and long time	1	4,34%

The aim of this question is to know how teachers act with slow student i.e. students who face difficulties, and how they help him to get up to speed. The majority of the teachers (73,91) declared that they do so through motivating him to use reading strategies to enhance his comprehension. (56,5%) of them said they help him through assigning homework to catch up. (47,82%) of them said they give him time to enhance his performance. Whereas; (4,3%) them choose to spend more time working on reading individually with that student. Concerning 'others' (4,3%) of teachers provided other suggestions like:

- Choose texts that suit her/his level
- Give them a simple text and long time

As we can deduce from the above results, teachers use different techniques to help students improve their reading ability; and these techniques vary from one teacher to another depending on the level of students.

**Q.8** In your opinion, are reading techniques important in improving students' reading comprehension?

Table 3.6

Reading Strategies Importance

	Number of answers	Percentage
Yes	23	100%
No	0	0%
Total	23	100%

All of teachers (100%) agree that reading strategies are important in enhancing their students' reading comprehension. And no one of them disagree for its importance.

**Q.9** If yes, please mention why?

Teachers' suggestions about the importance of reading strategies can be stated as follow:

- Reading strategies help learners to elicit meaning from the text and even go beyond its literal meaning to derive deep meaning.
- Reading strategies help learners and facilitate their reading comprehension tasks.
- Reading strategies help learners to read with a purpose in their mind.
- Learners who use reading strategies, they for sure will develop their comprehension skill.
- The aim of reading strategies is to help learners to be able to construct meaning.

It seems from the above teachers' answers that they are aware of the importance of reading strategies in enhancing and developing students' reading comprehension.

**Q.10** Can you give a brief definition of "reading techniques"?

Teachers' definitions of reading techniques can be stated as follow:

- Preview the text by skimming and scanning to get a sense of the overall meaning.
- Reading techniques is a comprehensive term used to describe the explicit behaviors that may help readers to interpret the meaning of any text.
- Reading techniques are strategies used to understand the sense of a given text and give a brief summary about it.
- Reading technique is a plan or explicit actions that improve the learners' decoding and reading comprehension
- Reading technique are techniques the teachers use to develop their student deficiencies and best fit their needs.

**Q.11** As a middle school teacher of English, how can you evaluate learner's reading comprehension according to their answers about the comprehension part questions?

Table 3.7

Learners' reading comprehension level

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Average	18	78,3%
Good	5	21,17%
Bad	0	0%
Total	23	100%

The majority of teachers (78,3%) declared that fourth year middle school learners' reading comprehension level according to their responses to the comprehension part questions is in the average. While others (21,17%) mentioned that their level is good; and no one of them said that learners have a bad level in reading comprehension.

It seems from the above table that most of learners are average in reading comprehension.

**Q.12** Do learners experience difficulties in comprehending texts or any written material?

Table 3.8

Learners' Difficulties in Reading texts

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	22	95,7%
No	1	4,3%
Total	23	100%

Answering to this question, the above table shows that the majority of teachers (95,7%) answered with 'yes', and ensured that their students do experience difficulties. Each learner has his own difficulties this is why teachers should be aware of the factors behind these problems to help learners to minimize and overcome such difficulties. whereas; (4,3%) of teachers answered with 'no', and confirmed that their learners do not face reading difficulties.

From the above results, we can deduce that the majority of learners encounter difficulties.

**Q.13** What kind of difficulties do learners generally encounter in reading comprehension during their examination?

The aim of asking this question is to find out the major difficulties that EFL learners often meet during their examination. Teachers' answers show that most learners have problems in comprehending texts. They try to know the meaning of every single word in it; but they often fail to do this. Furthermore, they experience difficulties with understanding the questions such as true/false questions, synonyms and antonyms questions, w/h questions.

As we can deduce from the above results that generally learners encounter difficulties in understanding both questions and the reading material.

**Q.14** In your opinion, what are some causes of reading difficulties among 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners?

Table 3.9

Causes of Reading Comprehension Difficulties

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of motivation	12	52,2%
Lack of the reading fluency	7	30,4%
Lack of vocabulary and comprehension	20	80%
Others		
Lack of engagement	1	4,3%
Difficult vocabulary	1	4,3%

When asked about the main causes of reading difficulties among 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners (80%) of teachers agreed that the major reason is lack of vocabulary and comprehension. While (52,2%) answered that lack of motivation is a factor that cause reading difficulties. (30,4%) of teachers mentioned that middle

school learners have the problem of lack of reading fluency. Only (4,3%) add the lack of engagement as one of those causes. The same (4,3%) of teachers declared difficult vocabulary as a cause of reading difficulties.

From the results above we can conclude that tests and acts to explore learners' vocabulary is not sufficient; teachers have to motivate learners and train them on reading to minimize reading difficulties.

**Q.15** How do you guide your learners to overcome their reading comprehension difficulties? (you can choose more than one option)

Table 3.10

Teachers' Techniques for guiding learners' to overcome Reading Difficulties

<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Ask them to read the text aloud	9	39,1%
Try to figure out the cause of the problem	10	43,5%
Try to explain the general idea of the text	19	82,6%
Try to explain every single sentence		17,4%
Others		4,3%

(82,6%) of teachers said that they try to explain the general idea of the text. While (43,5%) of them try to find out the cause of the problem. (39,1%) of teachers mentioned that they ask them to read the text aloud. Whereas (17,4%) said they try to explain every single sentence.

Accordingly, (4,3%) of them added other suggestions that are mentioned as follow:

- Help learners with pictures, visuals.
- Ask them to read the text at home.
- Allow them to use dictionary.
- Teach them reading strategies and how to apply them to a given text.

- Ask them to read the text silently and slowly.

**Q.16** What are your suggestions for enhancing reading skills and overcoming or minimizing reading comprehension difficulties?

This question aims at gathering teachers' suggestions for enhancing reading skill and overcoming or minimizing reading comprehension difficulties. Different views and suggestions were given:

- Make learners love reading , using a funny short story in the classrooms, using flashcards, rewarding learners.
- Reading a lot and practice the language outside classroom.
- Teachers and learners should devote much time for reading.
- Parents should encourage their children to be more interested in the language and learners should make efforts.
- Motivation and good preparation for the reading phase may well help learners to improve their reading comprehension level.
- Pushing learners to be independent on themselves in developing their reading skill.
- Following student-centered method helps both teacher and learner to overcome any problem.

### **Discussion of Results**

After analyzing the teachers' questionnaire, some conclusions are depicted on what concerns reading comprehension.

There is an agreement regarding the kind of reading difficulties that 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners have problems in comprehending texts. Furthermore, they experience difficulties with understanding the questions such as true/false questions, synonyms, and antonyms questions, w/h questions etc. Generally, learners encounter difficulties in understanding both questions and the reading materials..

The suggestions for enhancing reading comprehension skill and overcoming or minimizing them differ from one teacher to another, some of them suggest reading a lot and practice the language outside classroom; also making learners love reading and so on.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented and analyzed the results obtained by the research instrument used in the current study. Taking into consideration the designed aims of the current research work, a teachers' questionnaire was used. We can say that the results revealed from teachers' questionnaire analysis that 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners encounter difficulties during reading as well as teachers are aware about the significant role of reading techniques in enhancing learners' reading comprehension level.



### **Pedagogical Implications**

It is important say that learners can enhance their reading comprehension better if teachers concentrate on teaching them reading strategies, when, where and how to use them in their reading process.

In fact, more time should be spend to develop reading strategies training tasks and instruction, develop specific reading skills and encourage content reading to prepare learners for independent reading, since most learners had a teacher-centered learning background. They should become independent target language readers and have to be given the opportunity to experience and practice different reading techniques and strategies.

Another implication is that, it is important to point out the fact that to read more proficiently; learners must be taught practical problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills. It is important also for learners to be engaged in reading activities as much as possible in order to minimize their reading comprehension difficulties and improve their reading skill. Therefore; it is the teachers' job to guide and help them comprehend what the text implies.

Different instruments in gathering data should be included in such study: using tests and think aloud protocol face to face with learners; in order to know about reading comprehension problems and difficulties and help them know how to overcome them to be efficient readers. Learners should be actively engaged in the reading process because the more they read, the more they will comprehend the material to be read; and then, the more they will enhance their general ability.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study, as any other research, has its limitations which can be summarized as follow:

- The first limitation was the Corona virus and due to the outbreak of the corona that overran the world in 2020; It was impossible to conduct an experimental study as it was intended.
- Corona virus was the main constraint that leads us to rely only on questionnaire as data collection tool which is not really enough and reliable for investigating learners' reading comprehension difficulties.
- Many difficulties were encountered in submitting the teachers' questionnaire. The difficulty stems from the fact that teachers were not all collaborative in the sense that not all of teachers answer the questionnaire.
- The inaccessibility of some sources like, books and articles which are not free of charge. This issue was encountered in writing the two chapters.

### **General Conclusion**

Reading as one of the basic skills, is considered as an essential element for everyday life. As stated in the earlier chapters, the aim of this study was to find out the difficulties that teachers suffer with their learners during the process of reading. Also, it aims at searching for effective strategies to help teachers to enhance learners' comprehension level. As well as to come out with some possible suggestions to help learners overcome their reading problems and become successful readers.

The present research work consisted three chapters. The first two chapters were concerned with the literature review related to the field of investigation of this study. The third chapter, however; was devoted to the practical investigation of the matter: it is divided into two sections. The first section was devoted to explaining the methodology used. The second section meticulously dealt with the analysis and discussion of the obtained result. In this respect, the measure of investigation adopted was a teachers' questionnaire which have allowed finding out reading comprehension difficulties and strategies used by teachers to help learners overcome those difficulties. The main results reveal that 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners have problems in reading comprehension performance.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire for teachers:

#### Dear middle school (fourth year )teachers

This questionnaire is a part of our master dissertation research. We would be very thankful if you participate and answer the questions. This study has an aim at exploring the reading comprehension difficulties that encountered by EFL learners. Your answers will be of a great help to this work. So, please give your response as sincerely and accurately as possible to guarantee the success and validity of this study. Thank you in advance for your collaboration. Please put a tick (√) in the corresponding box, or boxes and make full statements whenever necessary.

#### Section One: General information

1- According to your teaching experience, how would you describe the reading level of (fourth year) middle school?

- a. Most are above the average
- b. Most are average
- c. Most are below average
- d. Reading level various greatly

2- Do you think that reading is an important skill for language teaching? If yes why?

.....  
.....  
.....

3- Do you use various techniques and strategies in the class?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3-which reading technique do you often ask learner to use when giving them a text?

- a. Scanning
  - always    sometimes    often
- b. Skimming
  - always    sometimes    often

4- To what extent forming reading habit is important for English middle school learners?

.....

.....

.....

.....

5- How do you rate the importance of the following items according to their role in reading comprehension?

The item	Highly important	Somewhat important	Not important
Vocabulary			
Grammar			
Reading aloud the text			
Translating the text into Arabic			

.....

.....

.....

6- What do you usually do with a student who is slow in reading? (you can choose more than one option)

Wait and give him the time to improve his performance.

Spend more time working on reading individually with that student.

Assign home works to help the student catches up.

Motivate him to use reading strategies to enhance his comprehension.

- Others, please specify

.....  
.....

7- In your opinion, are reading techniques important in improving student's reading comprehension?

yes

no

8- If yes, please mention why?

.....  
.....

9- Can you give a brief definition of "reading techniques"?

.....  
.....

10- In your reading course, do you ask your students to? (you can choose more than one option)

Answer reading comprehension questions

Answer oral questions

Write something related to what they read

Summarize what they comprehend in their own words

Others, please specify

.....

11- As a middle school teacher of English, how can you evaluate learner's reading comprehension according to their answers about the comprehension part questions?

Good

Bad

Average

12- Do students experience difficulties in comprehending texts or any written material?

Yes

No

13- What kind of difficulties do learners generally encounter in reading comprehension during their examination?

.....  
.....  
.....

14- In your opinion, what are some causes of reading difficulties among 4<sup>th</sup> year middle school learners?

Lack of motivation

Lack of the reading fluency

Lack of vocabulary & comprehension

Others.....  
.....

15- How do you guide your learners to overcome their reading comprehension difficulties? (you can choose more than one option)

Ask them to read the text aloud

Try to figure out the cause of the problem

Try to explain the general idea of the text

Try to explain every single sentence

Others, please specify

.....  
.....  
.....

16- What are your suggestions for enhancing reading skills and overcoming or minimizing reading comprehension difficulties?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Résumé

La compréhension de l'écrit est considérée comme l'une des compétences linguistiques fondamentales qu'un apprenant EFL doit acquérir. En fait, ce n'est pas une compétence facile car la plupart des apprenants font face à de nombreux problèmes de lecture. Cette étude visait à découvrir les difficultés que les enseignants rencontrent chez leurs apprenants durant le processus de lecture. Il visait également à rechercher des stratégies efficaces pour aider les enseignants à améliorer le niveau de la compréhension de l'écrit chez ces apprenants. Le présent travail de recherche repose sur deux hypothèses. La première hypothèse suppose que l'utilisation appropriée et correcte des stratégies de lecture par les enseignants de 4<sup>ème</sup> année moyenne contribuerait à prévenir les difficultés de la compréhension de l'écrit. La deuxième hypothèse présume que les stratégies et les techniques de la lecture que les enseignants ont principalement utilisées peuvent améliorer le niveau des apprenants EFL. À cette fin, les données ont été collectées par un instrument de recherche à travers un questionnaire en ligne, dont les réponses ont été menées par 23 enseignants. Les résultats de cette étude montrent qu'en fait, les enseignants rencontrent beaucoup de difficultés chez les apprenants au cours du processus d'apprentissage de la lecture. En se basant sur ces résultats, des recommandations pédagogiques ont été proposées.

## الملخص

تعتبر مهارة فهم النصوص المقروة إحدى المهارات اللغوية الأساسية التي يجب على متعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية القيام بها. في الواقع إنها ليست مهارة سهلة لأن معظم المتعلمين يواجهون العديد من لمشاكل القراءة. لذلك هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة الصعوبات التي يعاني منها المعلمون من طرف المتعلمين أثناء عملية القراءة. كما أنها تهدف إلى البحث عن استراتيجيات فعالة لمساعدة المعلمين على تعزيز مستوى فهم نصوص القراءة لدى المتعلمين. الدراسة الحالية مبنية على فرضيتين. أولاً، فرضية أن الاستخدام المناسب والصحيح لاستراتيجيات القراءة من قبل معلمي صف السنة رابعة متوسط من شأنه أن يساعد في منع صعوبات فهم نصوص القراءة لدى المتعلمين. ثانياً، قد تعزز استراتيجيات وتقنيات القراءة التي يستخدمها المعلمون بشكل أساسي مستوى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تحقيقاً لهذه الغاية، تم جمع البيانات بواسطة أداة بحث وهي استبيان عبر الانترنت حيث أجاب عليه 23 معلماً. تبين النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من هذه الدراسة ، أنه في واقع الأمر المعلمون يعانون من صعوبات فهم النصوص المقروة لدى المتعلمين أثناء عملية القراءة. وعلى أساس هذه النتائج تم اقتراح نصائح بداعوجية.