An Empirical Study on Enhancing English Reading Skills among Female Middle School Students in Government Schools in Saudi Arabia and its Direct Impact on Academic Achievement

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Abstract

This study aimed to address the issue of low English reading proficiency among female middle school students in government schools in Saudi Arabia. The study targeted a sample of year-seven students; forty-two students were under direct observation in classroom and participated in interviews, questionnaire, and assessment forms. The primary focus of this study was to employ reading comprehension assessments as the major influencing factor.

The main research question was how reading comprehension assessments was used to enhance the English reading proficiency of year 7 female students. This study primarily examined reading comprehension assessments, gathered existing literature on the topic, and formulated a hypothesis to help resolve the problem. The result of this study shows clear indication that reading comprehension assessments had a positive impact on students' attitude toward the English language subject. Students' reading proficiency improved, and their confidence in reading in front of their peers increased. Incorporating various activities contributed to achieving lesson objectives, deepened comprehension, and enhanced reading comprehension skills. Integrating modern technology into education stimulated students' motivation to learn.

Keywords: an empirical study, English reading skills, middle school, government schools, academic achievement

1. Introduction

Language is one of the most distinctive characteristics of humans, taking various forms, including spoken, written, and read. It is a tool that humans use to express their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Without language, humans would not be able to communicate with each other or express their opinions (Abdul Bari, 2002). Each country and community has its own language, chosen to be their primary means of communication and expression. Notably, English has emerged as a significant global force in the modern era. Since the early 21st century, it has assumed the role of a lingua franca, particularly in international contexts. This role is evident in its widespread use in international scientific conferences, seminars, and academic discussions, where it facilitates communication across a diverse array of native languages (Al-Houshani & Al-Nassyan, 2020).

Language, in general, relies on four basic interrelated skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.   Some literature shows that receptive skills (listening and reading) are developed before productive skills (speaking and writing). This view aligns with previous studies, such as those by Bozorgian (2012), Liu and Costanzo (2013), and Pae and O'Brien (2018). These studies revealed that receptive skills like listening and reading could be significant contributing factors for successfully acquiring productive skills such as speaking and writing. This phenomenon occurs as learners, through receptive skills, can recall knowledge or cognitive input, which then aids in the language production process. This also resonates with Krashen's (1982) claim that the ability in productive language skills naturally increases as receptive language skills are fostered. Therefore, these abilities are often referred to as the lSRW skills (Abdullah, 2014; Abu Jamous & Youssef, 2014).

Reading, whether silent or aloud, is an act that humans use to understand, express, and influence others (Al-Asaf, 2016). Reading is a cognitive process that involves decoding symbols to reach the stage of understanding and comprehension. It serves as a means of receiving information but requires an understanding of symbols and meanings, as well as the ability to interpret emotions through creative or innovative reading (Khawja, 2015).

Reading comprehension is defined as "the process of extracting meaning from written texts by relying on the coherence between several related sources of information" (Mastropieri et al., 2012, p.147). Abu Meshref (2016) describes reading comprehension as a complex cognitive activity involving interaction among the reader, the text, and its context. This process is strategic, allowing the reader to derive meaning from written material. It is a complex process that requires coordination among various interrelated sources of information. Reading comprehension skills have levels, including literal understanding, deductive understanding, critical understanding, taste appreciation, and creative understanding (Al-Sabai and Manasirah, 2017).

According to Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012), reading comprehension is a complex process which needs a special skill such as decoding the words and identifying the meanings of the words. Al- Asaf, (2017) and Al- Harithi, (2013) claimed that comprehension is a process in which readers make meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text. According to Klingner (2007), reading comprehension is the process of building meaning and the capacity to interpret and analysis words and phrase to understand the main point of the text. In addition, Van den Broek and Espin (2012, p.315) suggest that "Reading comprehension is a complex interacting among automatic and strategic cognitive processes that enable the reader to create a mental representation of the text".

According to Lin et al. (2021), the multifaceted nature of reading comprehension encompasses various levels of understanding, ranging from the basic extraction of explicit information to more complex processes like inferential thinking and deductive reasoning. A deeper exploration into these different layers is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of how individuals process and interpret written text. This discussion will delve into the definitions and distinctions between several key concepts in the realm of reading comprehension: Literal Comprehension Scale, Inferential Comprehension Scale, Literal Comprehension Assessment, and Deductive Comprehension Assessment. Each of these plays a pivotal role in assessing and understanding the depth and breadth of a reader's comprehension skills. By examining these aspects, we gain insights into the cognitive processes involved in reading and understanding texts, which are fundamental to both educational practices and the broader field of cognitive psychology.

Budi & Zuhro (2023) indicate that literal comprehension involves the ability to grasp the primary, explicit meaning of a text. This skill enables readers to efficiently locate key information through techniques such as identifying essential words, quickly reviewing the text (skimming), and methodically searching for specific details (scanning). On the other hand, inferential comprehension is essential for integrating various ideas within a text to create a cohesive and meaningful understanding (Clinton et al., 2020).

Nurhana (2014) pointed out that reading skills are associated with the ability to recognize letters and spelling patterns, retain language fragments in memory, recognize the essence of words, and interpret word order and categories. Reading is a fundamental skill in language learning as it reflects a set of linguistic and cognitive activities for a range of written symbols and visual forms, aiming to decode, translate symbols, and understand the written content by recognizing and comprehending words (Zuhair, 2017).

Reading is an important skill for several reasons; it helps people learn from human knowledge, culture and experience. According to Sadiku (2015) reading is fun-way to knowledge hunt; it is true indeed- reading brings wisdom. In addition, reading is an enjoyable activity such as reading novels, stories or pomes (Maharsi et al., 2019). Reading also stimulates brain cell development and mental health. Al Sulami and Dakhiel (2021) indicate that researchers from the Mayo Clinic in the US studied the daily habits of 200 people from 70 to 89 years with mild memory disorders, during different life stages. They found that middle-aged readers who devoted time to reading and other creative pursuits, such as handicrafts, faced 40% less risk of experiencing further memory impairment or Alzheimer's. In short, reading is the best way to enable humans to grasp a new experience and replace an old view. Reading is the bath to increase your knowledge, get more information, and improve mental health.

Alshamali (2016) conducted a study to investigate the effect of using the Preview, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite, and Review PQ4R strategy in developing reading comprehension skills and reflective thinking among the 5th grade students in south Hebron directorate. PQ4R approach begins with 'Preview', where the reader skims the text for an initial understanding. In 'Question', questions are formulated about the text's potential content. 'Read' involves the thorough reading of the text, aimed at answering these questions. 'Reflect' allows the reader to ponder over the text's deeper meanings and implications. In 'Recite', the reader summarizes or articulates the main points, enhancing retention. Finally, 'Review' involves revisiting the entire content and process to consolidate understanding. This structured method is designed to improve reading comprehension and reflective thinking.

Shoaib, et al. (2016) conducted a study to investigate the effect of PQ4R strategy on slow learners' level of attention in English subject at secondary level in Pakistan. The sample consisted of 20 slow learners who were selected from 9th grade students. An observation sheet was used to observe the sampled students' level of attention during the experiment. Descriptive statics and chi-square test were used for data analysis and data were also shown in graphical form. The result showed that PQ4R strategy proved to be effective in increasing "slow learners" attention.

Keshta (2016) investigated the impact of using the jigsaw strategy on improving reading comprehension and communication skills among 11th grade students in Rafah. She adopted a quasi-experimental approach and employed a sample of 76 EFL female learners studying at Al – Quds secondary school in Rafah. Three tools were used: a questionnaire, an achievement test, and an observation card. The study showed that there were significant differences in learning English reading comprehension and communication skills in favor of the experimental group; thanks to using the Jigsaw strategy.

The Al-Anzi study (2019) aimed to identify the impact of using concept mapping strategies in developing creative reading skills in the English language among year 10 high school students. Achieving the study's objective, a quasi-experimental approach was applied to a purposive sample of year 10 high school students in Tabuk city. Two classes were randomly selected, with one serving as the experimental group, which studied a selected unit using concept mapping strategies, while the other represented the control group and was taught through conventional methods. A list of creative reading skills was constructed and a test in creative reading related to the selected unit was developed. Additionally, a teacher's guide for teaching the selected unit using concept mapping strategies was prepared and validated for accuracy and reliability using appropriate statistical and methodological procedures. The study's results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level between the mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups in the post-test of creative reading skills in the dimensions of fluency, flexibility, originality, and total score in favor of the experimental group. Furthermore, there was a significant effect on fluency and flexibility reading skills, while the effect on the originality reading skill was moderate.

Since the middle school stage, typically encompassing grades 6 to 8 in many educational systems, is a pivotal phase for building and acquiring the English language, it becomes crucial to address the issue of low reading achievement in English among students in these grades. The importance of this focus stems from its direct impact on academic performance. Consequently, there is an urgent need to emphasize the learning and practicing of English reading, a fundamental language skill that must be mastered. This research aims to provide clarification and propose solutions through a strategic plan that could help alleviate this problem, at least partially.

1.1 Study Problem

Through teaching English for more than ten years at the middle school level, it has been observed that reading in the English language poses a burden on female students, resulting in a decline in their English language proficiency.   This study specifically focuses on female students because it is conducted in schools exclusively for girls, where gender-specific challenges in language learning have been noted. As a result, male students were not included in the research. The central issue of the study is the low level of English reading proficiency among middle school female students in these government schools, and how this affects their academic achievement. By concentrating on this group, the study aims to understand and address the unique challenges they face, which may differ from those encountered by male students. This issue directly affects their academic achievement, as reading in the English language is the foundation of language learning. Upon closely monitoring and examining the students' academic and educational performance, the following issues were revealed: a lack of motivation among female students for reading in English, a lack of confidence in correct pronunciation of English vocabulary during oral reading.

in the classroom, and limited practice of English reading. Consequently, the research problem can be formulated as follows: the low level of English language reading proficiency among middle school female students in government schools and its direct impact on academic achievement.

1.2 Study Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to address the issue of low English language reading proficiency among middle school female students in government schools; particularly year 7, using English language reading comprehension assessments. This leads to the following specific objectives:

(1) To determine the impact of using the literal comprehension assessment on improving the reading proficiency of year 7 female students.

(2) To identify how to encourage year 7 female students to practice deductive comprehension assessments when reading in English.

(3) To explore strategies for addressing the low level of English language reading proficiency among year 7 female students.

1.3 Research Questions

The research attempts to answer the main question of how reading comprehension assessments were used to enhance the English reading proficiency of year 7 female students.

This main question gives rise to the following sub-questions:

(1) What is the impact of using the literal comprehension assessment on improving the reading proficiency of year 7 female students?

(2) How can deductive comprehension assessments be encouraged during English language reading among year 7 female students?

(3) How can the low level of English language reading proficiency among year 7 female students be addressed?

1.4 Study Hypothesis

The use of English language reading comprehension assessments increases students' motivation to read continuously and enhances their reading practice by stimulating them to read, following up, and correcting their mistakes.

1.5 Study Significance

The significance of the research lies in:

(1) addressing the issue of low English language reading proficiency among female students;

(2) providing procedural steps that can partially solve the problem; and

(3) developing the researcher's professional performance and improving educational practice.

2. Methodology

This study is an individual procedural study conducted by the practitioner herself to gain a better understanding of the learning process and to bring about the desired change in order to address the problem they aim to solve. The fieldwork for the study was carried out according to the methodological procedures and tools commonly used in field research.

In this study, the methodology involved a detailed process. Initially, forty-two Year 7 female students in an intermediate school, all at an intermediate level in English, were selected based on specific criteria. The data collection included administering reading comprehension and reflective thinking tests, with clear instructions and set durations for each. A particular teaching method or intervention was implemented over a specified period, using defined materials and strategies. The data analysis involved meticulous processing using SPSS, with careful coding and application of statistical tests such as test-retest reliability, Pearson correlation, and ANCOVA. Additionally, follow-up procedures were conducted to assess the long-term impacts of the intervention, involving further tests or interviews with the students. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough understanding and assessment of the research problem.

The research design is descriptive and exploratory, focusing on a sample of year 7 female students in a government school. Forty-two students participated in this study, all of whom are at an intermediate level in their English language proficiency. This inclusion of their English proficiency level provides a clearer context for the study's scope and the participants' capabilities.

In the study, three key research tools were utilized. Direct observation by the researcher assessed the female students' English language reading proficiency, pinpointing areas of low performance. Additionally, both individual and group interviews were conducted with the study sample, aiming to identify specific weaknesses in their English reading skills. Furthermore, a questionnaire was developed to determine the underlying reasons for the observed low proficiency levels in English reading among these students, and to gain insights into the challenges they face, with the goal of addressing these issues effectively.

In the study, the intervention spanned approximately four months within an academic semester. Bi-weekly direct observations and mid-semester interviews were conducted, with both being recorded and transcribed through audio recordings and note-taking. The questionnaire, consisting of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, was paper-based and distributed in classrooms towards the end of the semester. The assessment form was meticulously designed, drawing upon educational research and methodologies, particularly referencing works like those of Shoaib et al. (2016), Keshta (2016), and Al-Anzi (2019) on strategies impacting language acquisition and reading comprehension, such as the PQ4R strategy, jigsaw, and concept mapping.

An assessment form was designed, incorporating comprehension assessments including literal comprehension, deductive comprehension, critical comprehension, and creative comprehension. These assessments were distributed to the female students to be applied with each new reading material to improve their English language reading proficiency. The researcher used two instruments for data collection: a reading comprehension test and reflective thinking test. In addition, two statistical analyses were used to analyze the collected data: The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed for data analysis. The specific statistical tests used in the analysis included test-retest reliability, Pearson correlation, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The study's findings revealed that the implementation of the PQ4R strategy significantly enhanced both reading comprehension and reflective thinking skills in the experimental group of 5th graders, compared to a control group. This indicates that students who were taught using the PQ4R method showed a more pronounced improvement in these areas than those who did not receive this intervention.

3. Results and Discussion

Approximately half of the sample i.e. 22 students (52.8%) finds reading in English moderately difficult, while about a quarter of the sample i.e. 11 students (25%) finds it difficult. Only 13.9% i.e. 6 students of the sample find it very easy (Figure 1). This suggests that reading in English is challenging for the participants.
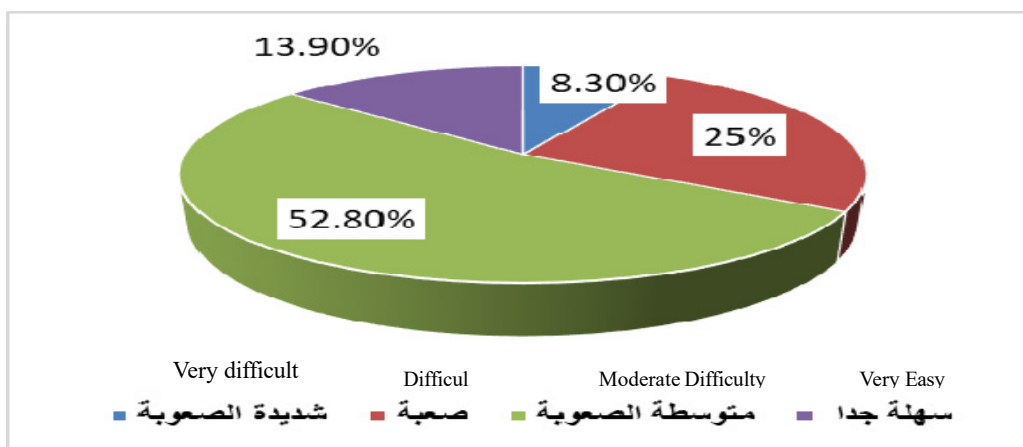

Figure 1. Response of the study sample to the first question: is reading in English considered challenging?
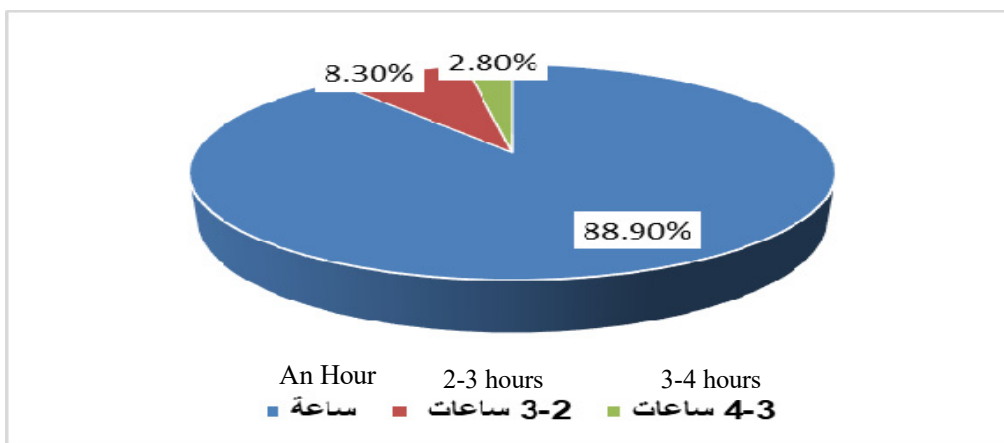

Figure 2. Response of the study sample to the second question:

How much time do you spend reading in English every day?

Figure 2 shows the majority of the sample i.e. thirty-eight students (88.9%) spends only one hour per day reading in English. Only three students (8.3%) spend 2-3 hours daily, and one student (2.8%) spends 3-4 hours.

As illustrated in Table 1, most participants strongly agree on the necessity of understanding a text before being able to read it. In addition, they are aware of the importance of knowing the correct pronunciation of words to be able to read them. Finally, they consider learning English as an important matter.

Table 1. Research sample responses to the survey questions

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have difficulty when reading English texts.	16.7%	19.0%	38.1%	7.1%	4.8%
I struggle with pronouncing many English words.	11.9%	23.8%	38.1%	9.5%	2.4%
I feel embarrassed when speaking or reading in English in front of others.	16.7%	21.4%	23.8%	11.9%	11.9%
I believe I need to understand a text completely before I can read it.	38.1%	33.3%	7.1%	4.8%	2.4%
I think I can't read any word in English if I can't pronounce it correctly.	28.6%	28.6%	19.0%	7.1%	2.4%
I feel that learning English is entirely unimportant.	2.4%	16.7%	21.4%	45.2%	2.4%
I don't see a reason to speak English outside the classroom.	7.1%	11.9%	23.8%	23.8%	19.0%

These findings indicate that there is a perception of the difficulty of reading in English among the participants. They emphasize the importance of understanding texts and correct word pronunciation in the reading process, and participants generally consider learning English as important.

4. Proposed Solutions for the Plan

In this study, conducted in an intermediate school, we explore strategic solutions to enhance English reading proficiency among Year 7 female students. The school faces challenges in fostering English language reading skills, impacting students' overall academic performance. The proposed solutions aim to address these challenges through a combination of direct engagement, innovative teaching methods, and technology integration. Each solution is tailored to the unique needs of the students at this school, with a focus on improving comprehension, confidence in reading, and promoting a sustainable interest in the English language. This comprehensive plan is designed to transform the learning experience and elevate the students' proficiency in English reading.

(1) Sit with the students, guide them, understand the reasons for their weaknesses, and motivate them by encouraging their love for the English language both inside and outside the classroom.

(2) Design a comprehension measurement form and distribute it to the students with every new text studied to record their levels of reading comprehension: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical comprehension, creative comprehension for continuous application.

(3) Use the "literal comprehension" scale from the comprehension measurements when reading a new piece in the lesson by segmenting the text, placing questions on the paragraphs, and extracting the main ideas from them. This scale is an integral part of a reading comprehension assessment form utilized in the study in an intermediate school. This scale is specifically designed to evaluate the most fundamental level of understanding of a text. It encompasses several key components essential for basic comprehension. Firstly, students are tasked with identifying the main idea of the text, which involves understanding the central theme or primary message conveyed by the author. Secondly, the scale requires students to determine the literal meanings of words as they are used in the text. This aspect focuses on the explicit, direct meanings of words, avoiding any interpretations or inferences that go beyond what is stated. Lastly, an important part of this scale is organizing the sequence of events. Here, students arrange the events or ideas presented in the text in their correct chronological or logical sequence. This structured approach is crucial in ensuring that students grasp the basic contents of the text, laying a solid foundation for more advanced levels of comprehension, such as inferential or critical understanding.

(4) Utilize the "inferential comprehension" scale from the comprehension measurements by identifying unfamiliar words and assigning students to write down new words in a special notebook for practice, reviewing them with them in the upcoming sessions. This scale represents a crucial component of the reading

comprehension assessment form used in the educational study. This scale delves into a deeper and more interpretative level of understanding text, beyond just the surface-level meanings. It primarily involves two key aspects: firstly, students are tasked with inferring the author's purpose for writing the text. This requires them to think critically about the underlying themes, messages, or intentions that are not explicitly stated but are implied within the narrative or exposition. Such an exercise encourages students to consider the broader context, hidden motives, or subtle cues that an author might have embedded in the text. Secondly, the scale requires students to identify nouns that are referred to by pronouns within the text. This aspect of inferential comprehension is crucial for understanding relationships and references that are not directly spelled out but are essential for grasping the full dynamics of the text. For instance, in a narrative, students may be asked to deduce why certain plot developments occur or to connect pronouns to their respective nouns, thus enriching their comprehension with a more nuanced understanding of the text's structure and content. This approach cultivates students' ability to interpret and engage with texts at a more sophisticated level, fostering critical thinking and deeper reading skills.

(5) Change the English reading style and methods by pronouncing words correctly and reading sentences that contain new words with a harmonious reading.

(6) Encourage students to read in English by providing a mobile library, selecting suitable books for students and encouraging them to read and borrow them.

(7) Activate the effective use of technology by enhancing reading through the Teams program, which uses artificial intelligence to motivate students by inserting a text on the platform. When the student reads this text aloud, it monitors the score and corrects errors while training.

(8) Activate the effective use of technology by incorporating a digital library into the platform to facilitate browsing and access.

(9) Top of Form

5. Designing the Action Plan and Testing the Hypothesis

In this section, the researcher focused on systematically improving English reading skills among Year 7 female students in an intermediate school. The action plan incorporated a blend of direct student engagement, comprehension assessments, and innovative teaching methods. The implementation involved interactive reading sessions, using comprehension scales like literal and inferential comprehension, and integrating technology to engage students actively. The effectiveness of these strategies was tested through pre-and post-intervention assessments, allowing for data-driven analysis of the improvements in reading comprehension. The results indicated a positive impact, leading to adjustments in the approach for enhanced effectiveness. The plan emphasized sustainability and adaptability, ensuring long-term benefits in students' reading proficiency.

This section presents the real difficulties faced by Year 7 female students in their English reading classes. The table is not merely a proposal, but rather an evaluation of the actual challenges encountered during the implementation of the reading improvement plan. It details both the strategies applied to address these difficulties and the outcomes observed, providing a clear and practical overview of the interventions and their effectiveness in the educational setting.

Table 2. Implementation of the Plan and Testing Hypotheses

The Proposed Assumptions for the Plan	Tools Required	Difficulties	Solution	Time
Using reading comprehension measures to be applied when studying each new text.	Designing a form that gathers all the reading comprehension measures (literal, inferential, critical, creative).	Initially, the limited time during the class was burdensome for the teacher, but later on, the students adapted to this approach, resulting in improved performance And increased engagement.	This difficulty can be overcome by implementing effective time management strategies, optimizing lesson plans, and incorporating technology-enhanced learning. Teachers can prioritize key learning objectives, utilize online resources for self-study, and adopt a flipped classroom approach. Encouraging peer learning, conducting regular assessments, and maintaining flexibility in teaching methods can also contribute to addressing this challenge. Through these measures, both teachers and students can adapt positively to the learning approach, leading to improved performance and increased engagement in the classroom.	Two complete academic semesters.
Using the inferential comprehension measure in reading comprehension assessments by identifying unfamiliar words and assigning students to write the new words in a special notebook for practice, reviewing them with them in the upcoming lessons.	Designing and executing a dedicated notebook for each student.	Absence of students.	This difficulty can be overcome by implementing a comprehensive attendance monitoring system, enhancing lesson engagement and relevance, establishing open communication with students and their families, and providing makeup assignments for missed classes. Additionally, offering flexible learning options, promoting peer support, implementing attendance incentives, and involving parents in the process can collectively address the challenge of student absence. These measures aim to foster regular attendance and provide necessary support to ensure students' academic success.	Two complete academic semesters.
Changing the English reading style and methods by pronouncing it correctly and reading sentences containing new words with a harmonious reading style.	Encouraging students to engage in synchronized reading.	No issues.		Two complete academic semesters.
Motivating the students to read in English by providing a mobile library and selecting suitable books for the students, encouraging them to read and borrow them.	Preparing a digital library accessible at any time and a mobile library in school for leisure time.	Lack of interest from some students in reading these books.	This difficulty can be overcome by implementing strategies that foster a love for reading among students. To address the lack of interest from some students in reading books, educators can introduce a variety of engaging and culturally relevant reading materials. Additionally, personalized reading choices, book clubs, and discussions can be encouraged to make reading a more interactive and enjoyable experience. Teachers can also integrate multimedia	The implementation of the plan began at the start of the academic year and has been ongoing for two complete academic semesters.

			elements, such as audiobooks or digital resources, to cater to diverse learning preferences. Moreover, celebrating reading achievements and providing positive reinforcement can motivate students to take a more active interest in reading, ultimately cultivating a lifelong love for books.	
Activating the effective use of technology by incorporating text into the Teams program, which utilizes artificial intelligence technology to monitor grades and correct errors.	Inserting new text every week via the platform into the TEAMS program.	No issues.		The implementation of the plan began at the start of the academic year and has been ongoing for two complete academic semesters.
Encouraging students to read in English outside the classroom. | Providing students with a list of recommended books and online resources. | Lack of interest or motivation.	Providing students with a list of recommended books and online resources.	Lack of interest or motivation.	To solve the issue of lack of interest or motivation in an English reading classroom, it is effective to use engaging and relevant texts, employ interactive teaching methods like group discussions, provide positive feedback and achievable goals, involve students in choosing reading materials, and create a supportive classroom environment. This approach aims to increase engagement and sustain students' interest in learning.	Throughout the academic year.
Providing students with a supportive and engaging learning environment.	Creating a comfortable and welcoming classroom atmosphere. | Limited resources and time constraints.	Limited resources and time constraints.	To overcome limited resources and time constraints in an English reading classroom, educators can utilize free online resources and digital libraries to expand the range of available reading materials. Collaborative learning strategies, such as peer-to-peer teaching and group discussions, can maximize learning within limited time frames. Efficient lesson planning focused on key learning objectives and incorporating brief, focused activities can also help make the most of the available time. By creatively using available technology and emphasizing collaborative and efficient teaching methods, teachers can effectively address these challenges.	Throughout the academic year.
Encouraging students to practice deductive comprehension assessments when reading in English.	Providing students with examples and practice exercises.	Difficulty in understanding the concept.	To overcome difficulties in understanding concepts in an English reading classroom, teachers can employ diverse instructional strategies. Simplifying complex ideas into smaller, more manageable parts helps in gradual comprehension. Using visual aids, such as charts and diagrams, can aid in	Throughout the academic year.

| Exploring strategies for addressing the low level of English language reading proficiency among year 7 female students. | Conducting research and consulting with experts in the field. | Limited resources and time constraints. | visualizing and reinforcing concepts. Encouraging interactive discussions and questions allows students to clarify doubts and deepen their understanding. Incorporating real-life examples and relatable contexts can make abstract concepts more tangible and easier to grasp. Additionally, providing additional resources or supplementary materials can offer different perspectives and explanations, aiding in a more comprehensive understanding of challenging concepts.

To tackle limited resources and time constraints in an English reading classroom, educators can leverage free online resources and e-books for diverse reading materials. Implementing group activities and discussions maximizes learning within limited time. Efficient lesson planning that focuses on core concepts, along with short, targeted exercises, ensures effective use of time. This approach helps in optimizing both resources and time for enhanced learning experiences. | Throughout the academic year. |

6. Implementation of the Plan and Recording the Results

In implementing the study's plan, the central hypothesis focused on using reading comprehension scales in English to enhance students' reading practice and motivation. To achieve this, a specialized form covering literal, inferential, critical, and creative comprehension was designed and used in each lesson involving a new text.

This form is given to the students with every lesson that includes a new text. In the study, the specialized assessment form designed to gauge various levels of reading comprehension was used in a total of 15 lessons. Each of these lessons introduced a new text, allowing for the consistent application of the form and ensuring that students had multiple opportunities to practice and improve their reading comprehension skills over the course of the semester. This structured approach provided a robust framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the reading strategies being studied. After the students read the text from the book, we start discussing these levels in the following way refer to the figure below:

(1) In literal comprehension, students identify the main idea of the text, determine the literal meaning of words in the text, and organize the sequence of events.

(2) In inferential comprehension, students infer the author's purpose in writing this text. They also identify the nouns referred to by pronouns.

(3) In critical comprehension, students can distinguish between the main and secondary ideas, between fact and opinion, and between reality and imagination.

(4) Finally, in creative comprehension, the student can suggest a new title for the text or a different ending, and she also asks three questions about the text.

The mechanism involves distributing a worksheet (the form) to all the students, which includes these four levels of reading comprehension as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Sample form of reading comprehension levels (Source: Researcher's Construction)

7. The Objectives

The objectives of the study aim to address specific aspects of English language reading proficiency among middle school female students. They focus on engaging students in the reading process through questioning and critical thinking, enhancing reading comprehension by information collection and organization, and facilitating practical application of reading skills. These objectives are designed to not only improve students' ability to understand and use English in various contexts, but also ensure effective implementation of reading comprehension abilities in real-world scenarios. The study aligns these objectives with teaching methods and assessments to effectively address the low level of English reading proficiency observed among the students. These objectives are as follows:

(1) Engaging students in stimulating the reading process by asking questions and critical thinking.

(2) Enhancing reading comprehension skills among students by collecting information from the text and organizing it.

(3) Facilitating the practical application and reinforcement of reading skills in students, so that they can easily understand and use these skills with new texts both inside and outside the classroom. This objective focuses on ensuring that students not only learn but also effectively implement their reading comprehension abilities in various real-world scenarios.

8. Objectives

The study objectives primarily focus on two key areas. First, it aims to help students acquire a larger number of new words and vocabulary, along with practicing them. The second objective is to enable students to master pronunciation, articulation of letters, and correct spelling, as these are crucial in conveying the correct meaning. While Table 2 in the study outlines these two steps, it is noted that the other steps have not been detailed. This omission is due to the specific focus of the study on these foundational elements of language learning, which are essential for building further language skills. Future work could expand on these initial steps to include a broader

range of language learning aspects.

In addition, the use of the (Inferential Comprehension) scale within the reading comprehension measures was more profound. This was achieved by identifying unfamiliar words and assigning students to write down these new words in a specially designed research notebook, which includes the name of each student individually. This approach aims to stimulate their motivation to commit to reviewing these new words in the coming lessons, while also practicing their spelling as illustrated in Figure 4 below.
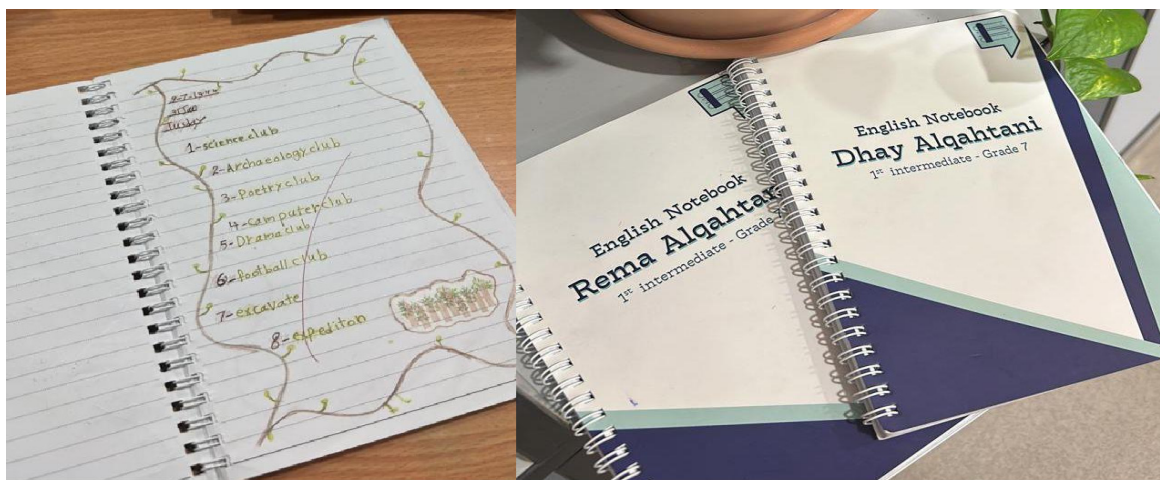

Figure 4. A model of the notebook for each student for the (Inferential Comprehension) scale

9. Discussion of Findings

These findings emphasize the effectiveness of the plan in enhancing students' English reading skills. The plan, not only improved their language proficiency that was measured by using a pre-test and a post-test, but also boosted their confidence and motivation to excel in English reading.

(1) The reading comprehension assessments had a positive impact on students' interest in the English language. This finding aligns with previous research by Sadiku (2015), which emphasizes that reading is a fun way to gain knowledge and wisdom. Reading also stimulates brain cell development and mental health (Dowrick et al., 2012). Therefore, enhancing reading skills can lead to increased knowledge and improved mental health, reinforcing the importance of the study's results.

(2) Students' English reading skills significantly improved. The improvement in students' English reading skills was assessed using a combination of methods. This included reading comprehension tests, both before and after the intervention, to quantitatively measure changes in proficiency. The reading assessments were designed to evaluate various levels of comprehension, such as literal, inferential, critical, and creative comprehension. This finding is consistent with the findings of Al-Shamali (2017). Their study found that the PQ4R strategy led to the development of reading comprehension skills and reflective thinking among students. This parallels the positive impact of the reading assessments in the current study.

(3) Students gained confidence in themselves and became more comfortable reading aloud in front of their peers. This increase in confidence and willingness to read aloud supports the idea that reading contributes to improved mental health, as suggested by Sadiku (2015).

(4) In the study, the inclusion of various activities significantly contributed to the achievement of lesson objectives and the enhancement of reading comprehension skills. These activities encompassed assessments of literal comprehension, such as understanding key ideas and words, inferential comprehension tasks like identifying and noting unfamiliar words, and critical comprehension exercises that distinguished between main ideas, facts, and opinions. Additionally, creative comprehension was encouraged through tasks like suggesting alternate titles or endings for texts and formulating questions about them, paralleling Keshta's (2016) findings on the effectiveness of varied activities in improving reading skills.

(5) Satisfactory results motivated students to exert more effort. This motivation is crucial for learning, as highlighted by Shoaib, et al. (2016), who found that the PQ4R strategy increased the level of attention among slow learners.

(6) Understanding the text, identifying challenging words, and knowing how to use a dictionary helped students develop their language skills and made reading more accessible. This finding aligns with Al-Anzi's (2019) study, which aimed to develop creative reading skills using concept mapping strategies.

10. Recommendations

The finding of this study:

(1) emphasize the importance of teaching the English language to enhance students' speaking and reading fluency;

(2) provide training for teachers on English language reading comprehension assessments;

(3) implement the reading comprehension levels form for students with each new text studied;

(4) encourage students to participate in English language training programs; and

(5) motivate students to track their performance and achievements, highlighting the importance of self-assessment in helping them progress and develop.

11. Conclusion

This empirical study demonstrates that enhancing English reading skills among female middle school students in government schools can significantly influence their academic achievement. The research highlights the critical role of targeted strategies and interventions in bridging the gap and ensuring that students receive the support necessary for their educational success. These findings provide a strong foundation for further research and the development of evidence-based policies and practices to enhance English reading skills and, consequently, academic outcomes in government schools in Saudi Arabia.

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