

**Factors Influencing Understanding English Breaking News by Iraqi  
University EFL Learners**

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**الكلمات المفتاحية: الاخبار العاجلة، استراتيجيات الاستيعاب، عناوين الاخبار، المبني  
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**Keywords: breaking news, comprehension strategies, news  
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**الملخص**

تتطلب عناوين الأخبار الإنجليزية اهتماماً كبيراً لفهمها لأنها تتميز بأسلوب خاص في صياغتها. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد العوامل التي تعيق فهم الأخبار العاجلة باللغة الإنجليزية، وهي نوع من عناوين الأخبار، من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات العراقية وتحقيقاً لهذه الغاية، كان المشاركون ٣٥ طالباً في السنة الرابعة في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الانبار للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٩-٢٠٢٠ وعلى صيغة استبيان أرسل إلى المشاركين عبر الإنترنت، طلب منهم تحديد العوامل التي تؤثر على فهمهم للأخبار العاجلة وتم جمع عشرة عناوين إخبارية عاجلة من موقع يورونيوز وتم تحليل البيانات نوعياً باستعمال تصنيف (2009) Donoghue للعوامل المسببة في صعوبة فهم الاخبار العاجلة وأظهرت النتائج أن المتعلمين يعززون صعوبة فهم عناوين الأخبار العاجلة إلى ستة عوامل رئيسية: الغرض، وكونك قارئاً نشطاً، ونوع النص المستخدم، وجودة المعرفة، والاهتمام والممارسة المستقلة ويحتل متغير الاتفاق أعلى نسبة مئوية بينما حصل متغير عدم التأكد على الترتيب الثاني ومتغير عدم الخلاف على أقل نسبة.

### Abstract

English news headlines require considerable attention to understand as they are characterized by a special style in their formulation. The study aims to identify the factors that hinder comprehending English breaking news, a type of news headline, by Iraqi university EFL learners. To this end, the participants were 35 fourth-year learners whose major is English at the College of Education for Humanities, the University of Anbar for the academic year 2019-2020. In the form of a questionnaire sent to participants online, the participants were required to decide upon the factors influencing their understanding of breaking news. Ten breaking news headlines were collected purposively from the Euronews website. The data were qualitatively analyzed based on Donoghue's (2009) classification of the factors that cause difficulties in comprehending news headlines. The findings showed that learners ascribe the difficulty of comprehending breaking news headlines to six main factors: purpose, being an active reader, the kind of text being used, quality of literacy instruction, interest and independent practice. The agreement variable occupies the highest percentage while the uncertain variable scored second place and the disagreement variable has the lowest percentage.

## 1. Introduction

One of the difficulties encountered by Iraqi University learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) is the understanding of English breaking news since news headlines stand by themselves as an independent style of language. Various linguists, like (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1985; McCarthy & O'Dell 2001; Němečková 2011; and Swan 2016), indicate that headlines act as a special language which is different from the ordinary language in terms of the rules of writing headlines. Due to the restriction of space, headline writers are compelled to adopt a special style to formulate headlines. Formulating headlines in a special style may cause EFL learners difficulty comprehending them attributed to various factors. This special style is known as block language characterized by 'abbreviated structures' (Crystal, 2003). Moreover, Swan (2016) mentions that "English news headlines can be very difficult to understand. One reason for this is that headlines are often written in a special style, which is very different from ordinary English" (p.292).

Readers sometimes exert much time to comprehend a text or headline. Comprehension, according to Brassell and Rasinski (2008), is the essential goal of reading as it occurs through "constructing meaning from text" (Parris & Headley, 2015, p.11). Readers, in this regard, resort to many factors in order to construct the meaning of headlines. Paris and Stahl (2005) define comprehension as "a complex skill that depends on a variety of factors, contexts and reading goals" (p.83). Also, Findahl and Hoijer (1982, as cited in Leny and Kintsch, 1982, p.270) asserted that news comprehension depends on many factors. This is in line with Donoghue (2009) who proposed six factors that influence text reading comprehension. Because the subject of the headlines is broad no one can cover all its aspects; therefore, it has been dealt with by many researchers from different perspectives

(Rosalina, 2014; Al-Falahy, 2017; Mohammed, N. (2019); Mohammed, A. (2019); Khudhayer, 2019; Hamza and Kadhim, 2019; and Naeem and Hussein, 2021). Mental Theory was employed by Rosalina (2014) to investigate the readers' difficulties found in the headlines of the Jakarta Post newspaper. She found that students were unable to understand 80% of the headlines because of the existence of irregular structures, special vocabularies, short sentences, and journalism terms. Al-Falahy (2017) and Mohammed, A. (2019) traced the difficulties that M.A. students and novice translators encountered when translating English news headlines into Arabic.

Finally, three researchers attempted to examine the ability of EFL learners to use block language correctly. Khudhayer (2019) observed that learners encountered difficulties in using block language when they were asked to paraphrase the sentences of the test. Similarly, Hamza and Kadhim (2019) revealed that EFL learners encountered difficulties in mastering block language at two levels, production and recognition. Mohammed, N. (2019) evaluated the quality of the Kurdish translation of English breaking news. She adopted House's (2007) model in the analysis of data. She found that the socio-cultural and linguistic structure were the main reasons that caused the disagreements between the Kurdish translations and the original breaking news. More recently, Naeem and Hussein (2021) identified the difficulties encountered by Iraqi University EFL learners in comprehending English breaking news. They investigated the difficulties that the fourth-year students encountered in reading the headlines of the Euronews website. They found that (54%) of the total number of students classified the headlines as difficult to understand, whereas (46%) regarded them as easy. The findings of previous studies show a general consensus that news headlines are difficult to

comprehend. Although much work has been done to date, more studies need to be conducted to ascertain the factors influencing or hindering comprehension of English breaking news.

The purpose of the current study was to determine the factors influencing comprehension of English breaking news. This topic was identified as being of importance to both headline writers and teachers. It is significant for headline writers to provide them with the necessary background to formulate headlines in a way that would be easily understood by readers; on the other hand, it is important for teachers to provide them with wide background knowledge about the factors that would hinder language comprehension in general and reading comprehension in particular, hence the way they teach reading comprehension. To this end, the current study attempts to answer the following question: what are the factors influencing comprehension of English breaking news by Iraqi EFL learners at the university level?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Features of News Headlines

A headline is the first captivating message that appears on the website and engages the eyes of the readers when browsing the news. Shams (2002) revealed that readers can get daily news summaries within a few seconds when having a quick skim at the headlines. Because they are designed as much as possible to be short, readers can skim them in public places (Tiono, 2003). Halliday (1985), described headlines as little texts, which convey the essence of news through few words. The main function of headlines is to give a summary of the most important information the report shows (He, 1991).

News headlines are characterized by various features, mostly syntactic. These features are considered by headline writers in formulating headlines. These features show that some headlines especially English news headlines are problematic for readers since they break the normal rules of grammar. The unusual way or the special style of forming the headlines is the main reason behind making them confusing, ambiguous and difficult to understand. Therefore, readers should not ignore headlines' characteristics since their ignorance, according to Hui-xia's (2002) view: "poses an obstacle to their understanding the headline and promptly grasping the main idea of the news" (p.1). Below is a list of headline features as suggested by Quirk et al. (1985), (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2001) and Swan (2016):

- a. **The present tense is always used in headlines instead of the present perfect tense as well as progressive tense.**

Swan (2016) contends that the present simple can be used to refer to the events that occurred in the past as well as the present as in the following example:

“Obama makes surprise visit to Iraq” (Financial Times, April 2009)

**b. Headlines usually use to-infinitive to point to the future.**

The form of the below example headline indicates futurity due to the use of the infinitive which indicates the intention of the president to visit the flood areas.

“President to visit flood areas” (McCarthy & O’Dell, 2001, 200)

**c. Asyndeton is commonly used to condense the headline.**

Headline writers make use of the phenomenon of Asyndeton, which is defined by Bussmann (1998), as the “omission of conjunctions between words, phrases or clauses” (p.102), so as to achieve brevity in the headline as in the following headline:

“One dead, two injured in northern Germany knife attack” (Euronews, 2018)

**d. Transitive verbs can be used intransitively in the headlines.**

Headline writers always try to convey information through the use of simple sentences consisting of at least one subject and one verb as in the case of active sentences which necessitate intransitive verbs. Thus, a simple sentence wherein a transitive verb functions as an intransitive verb, results from the combination of two constituents organized within one clause only (Quirk et al. 1985), as the headline below:

**e. Headlines consist of strings of nouns.**

When the headlines contain more than one noun, it can be classified as nominal headlines as in the subsequent headlines introduced by Swan (2016):

“Luxury Hotel Death” (Swan, 2016, 292)

**f. Ellipsis of both ‘verb to be’ and ‘articles’ is ordinary in headlines.**

Dropping of articles whether definite or indefinite is a ubiquitous characteristic employed by headline writers through formulating

headlines. For example, the articles enclosed between brackets in the following headlines can be dropped without affecting meaning.

“<The>US transfers control of another province to Iraqis” (Euronews, 2008)

**g. Duality class of the part of speech (i.e., the same word in the headline can function as both a noun and a verb).**

Hudson (2000) explained that a noun can function as a verb and a verb can function as a noun as in the three subsequent headlines presented by Swan (2016): “Us Cuts Aid to *Third World*” (p.292), wherein the word *Cut* is a verb and *Aid* is a noun, whereas *Cut* and *Aid* can function as a noun and a verb respectively in the subsequent headline:

“Cuts Aid Rebels” (Swan, 2016, 292)

But the same words function as a noun in the following headline:

“Aid Cuts Protest” (Swan, 2016, 292)

**g. Passive headlines are constructed with no auxiliary verbs, only the past participle is employed.**

Headline writers make use of passive structure in formulating the headlines especially when the active subject is not known as well as to void of uncertain information. To clarify, one can notice the dropping of the auxiliary verb in the following headline:

“At least two people<were>killed in a helicopter crash in Courchevel, France” (Euronews,2021)

**h. Longer connecting expressions are often replaced by ‘as’ and ‘in’.**

It is clear that headline writers, in the subsequent headlines, make use of *as* and *in* to achieve brevity.

“Hospital Boss Axed *as* Patients Die” (Swan, 2016, 292)

“Football Manager *in* Car Crash” (Swan, 2016, 292)



**i. Punctuation is effective in the headlines.**

Saxena (2006) indicated that “a colon is often used in place of the attributive verb.” (p.189). In the subsequent headline, the writer uses it to save space when there is no place to say: “Turkey: Violent clashes follow election row” (Euronews,2011)

**2.2 Difficulties of Understanding Headlines**

Surveying past studies on the difficulties of understanding headlines, it is observed that there are many difficulties that may be encountered by EFL or ordinary people. Among these difficulties are neologisms, passive voice, vocabulary, ambiguity and ellipsis as addressed below.

**a. Neologisms:**

This term is well defined by (Akhmanova 1966, as cited in Levchenko, 2010, p.11): “Neologism is a word or phrase created for defining a new (unknown before) object or expressing a new notion” (p.11).

“Will English remain an official EU language after Brexit?” (Euronews, 2021) The difficulty of understanding such a headline relates to the presence of Brexit, which is a newly coined word denoting the departure of Britain from the European Union.

**b. Passive Voice:**

Leech (2006) defines passive voice as “a type of verb construction in which a form of *be* is followed by the-ed form (past participle) of the main verb” (p.80). It is a grammatical construction which headline writers make use of in order to put the most significant information at the beginning of the headline to attract the readers’ interest so as to read the whole story as in the following headline:

“Germans kidnapped in Yemen” (Euronews,2008)

**c. Vocabulary:**

It is clear that understanding a headline requires knowing the majority of the headline words. Thus, readers understand what is stated in the headline when comprehending most of the words employed in the headline. By employing unused vocabulary (e.g., shorter and more dramatic) to fulfil the requirements of the headlines, writers of headlines unintentionally hinder readers' comprehension. In the following headline, Blaze is used instead of Big Fire to denote any fire. "Six die in hotel blaze" (Swan, 2016, 292).

**d. Ambiguity:**

Ambiguity refers to the state in which a word or a statement can be understood in more than one way as Kempson (1977), defines it as "the state of having two possible interpretations from an expression" (p.82). In the subsequent headline, "Teacher strikes idle kids" (p.53)

Ambiguity occurs due to the existence of the word strikes which functions either as a noun meaning a "refusal to work" or a verb meaning "to hit". (Dooley, 2006)

**e. Ellipsis:**

Ellipsis is viewed by Palmer (2003) as the "omission of one or more words in a sentence" (p.13). Praskova (2009) clarified that omission is one of the main features of newspaper headlines and writers of headlines depend very heavily on it so as to abbreviate the headlines and make them more condensed. It is clear that the ellipsis of an element in the news headlines may occur initially and medially.

"<The>US <is>not winning Iraq war, according to Defence nominee Gates" (Euronews, 2006)

"<They are>proud to carry the flag of Kosovo" (Praskova, 2009, 37)

## 2.3 Comprehension Strategies

Understanding or comprehending a text requires not only extracting the explicitly required data but also drawing inferences based on what has been implied between the lines. One can examine comprehension indirectly since it is impossible to notice what is occurring in the human head when comprehending something. In this sense, Barrett (1968), as cited in Brassell & Rasinski, (2008), stated that there are three-level taxonomy for comprehension: **Literal Comprehension**, accessing information explicitly, **Inferential Comprehension**, understanding implicitly, and **Evaluative Comprehension**, creating personal opinions in terms of communicated information

In this sense, good readers use certain strategies to understand texts. They believe that such strategies might enhance comprehension. Diehl and Nettles (2010) explained that good readers “re-create the text in their minds by linking personal experiences, including ideas from works they have read previously, to the author’s ideas” (p.11). Below is a list of six comprehension strategies with suitable descriptions based on different researchers:

### a. Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge is “the knowledge the learner already has before they meet new information” (<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/prior-knowledge>). It helps readers to comprehend something as well as construct meaning through reading. Readers resort to it so as to make a prediction when there is some confusion about the ideas used in the text. According to the National Research Council (2001, as cited in Keller, Amoo-Adare, Johnson and Stevenson, 2005), “learners actively construct their understanding by trying to connect new information with their prior knowledge” (p.27). When someone reads something, they bring what they already know about the subject to the

text. For example, when reading about fish, they talk about what they already know about it. They use the prior knowledge to make sense of new information they read.

#### **b. Questioning**

Siddiqui (2009) explains that questioning “involves the identification of information, themes, and ideas that are central and important enough to warrant further consideration” (p.218). When students direct certain questions to themselves through reading, they can discover their understanding of the text. According to Bhatia (2011), questions are “framed on central ideas” (p.69), and this strategy cannot be applied when the text contains confusing information as well as “unclear parts.” (p.69). For Diehl and Nettles (2010), this strategy “engages readers in active comprehension of the text, in all stages of the process” (p.11).

#### **c. Monitoring**

Comprehension monitoring, according to Hulme and Snowling (2013), denotes the “ability to detect when comprehension of a text has broken down” (p.116). McNamara (2007) reveals that “comprehension monitoring is often assessed by requiring readers to detect inconsistencies in text, such as scrambled sentences, contradictory sentences, or statements that conflict with readily available general knowledge” (p.49).

#### **d. Clarification**

Damon (2006) reveals that students practice clarification when the ideas of the text cause confusion to them. Therefore, they make use of such a strategy by rereading the texts to identify the significant information which is not understood. According to Taylor and Mackenney (2008), such information is employed within “new vocabulary” (p.156), as well as “unfamiliar concepts” (p.156).

**e. Summarizing**

Saddiqui (2008) defined summarizing as “the process of identifying the important information, theme, and ideas within a text and integrating these into a clear and concise statement that communicates the essential meaning of the text” (p.219). It is applied after reading a part of the text. By adopting such a strategy, students are provided with a chance to pick the most significant information and write it again using their own words in the form of a sentence or paragraph. In addition, this strategy according to Morris and Mather (2008), enables students to “use their own words and write only what is needed to present the main idea(s)” (p.204).

**f. Predicting**

Taylor and MacKenney (2008) stated that “this strategy requires readers to hypothesize on what the author might discuss next” (p.156). In this case, it is not possible for them to make a prediction unless they relate to their prior knowledge concerning the topic presented to them. Therefore, predicting in Siddiqui’s (2009) view: “involves combining the reader’s prior knowledge, new knowledge from the text” (p.219). For instance, the readers usually predict the order of the events in the text. Taylor and MacKenney (2008) also add that the strategy mentioned above “facilitates the use of the text structure as students learn that headings, subheadings, and questions embedded in the text are useful means of anticipating what might occur next” (p.156).

### 3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology of the study. It includes research design, description of the questionnaire and participants, criteria and procedures for data collection and description of data analysis.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The main objective of the current study is to identify the factors that hinder comprehending English breaking news by Iraqi University EFL learners. It is qualitative in nature in using a quantifying qualitative procedure to describe the qualitative data. A closed-ended items questionnaire was used with a purposeful sampling of ten English news headlines to collect quantitative data. The data will be analyzed using the manual descriptive statistics. The questionnaire is based on having participants identify factors that hinder comprehending English breaking news. These factors were suggested by Donoghue (2009). They are six in number: purpose, being an active reader, the kind of text being used, quality of literacy instruction, interest, and independent practice; and participants are required to decide upon the factor(s) they think to hinder comprehending English breaking news. The data were collected online due to the COVID-19 situation, the questionnaire was distributed online to 35 university EFL learners in the academic year 2020/2021.

#### 3.2 Questionnaire

The researchers designed a closed-ended items questionnaire as a research instrument with a purposeful sampling of ten English news headlines to collect data. It was designed in accordance with the objective of the study. It is used to obtain data rapidly as stated by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) that “one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour” (p.6). According to (Sim & Wright,

2000), a good questionnaire “takes time and skill to construct, and its content and structure should be consistent with research questions of the study” (p.74). It was designed to identify the factors influencing students’ understanding of breaking news.

As educational institutions (public and private) were forced to use online and distance learning, after the COVID-19 outbreak, the questionnaire was sent online via students’ Google Meet on 28/2/2020. A link was sent to participants via email to answer the questionnaire. It focused on the six factors proposed by Donoghue (2009); they are purpose, active reader, the kind of text used, quality of literacy instruction, interest and independent practice. Before conducting the questionnaire, participants were asked to read the aforementioned factors with their explanations and rate the six items on a three-point Likert scale: agree, uncertain, and disagree.

The questionnaire concerns the factors that influence understanding (10) of breaking news headlines collected by the researchers from the Euronews online website (Appendix B). These headlines are about economic, political, medical, technological and social issues. To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was rated by two experts who specialised in applied linguistics at the University of Anbar. They approved the questionnaire with some modifications. There were some stylistic modifications related to the statements of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was amended, and, then, sent to the Department of English to attain accreditation (Appendix A).

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants were 35 fourth-year learners who studied English as a foreign language at the College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar for the academic year 2020/2021. Fourth-year learners are supposed to experience advanced English, hence successfully comprehending English breaking news.

### 3.4 Criteria for Data Collection

Data gathering was conducted through a closed-ended items questionnaire constructed in accordance with the objective of the study. The data include (10) English breaking news headlines downloaded from Euronews Broadcasting, a well-known online news website, from 2014 to 2020. Such a website has been selected purposefully for three reasons: first, it has an archive which allows the researchers not only to download headlines but also their articles. Second, it is regarded as an international news website in the world, that has been believed to broadcast news without bias. Third, none of the previous studies has investigated the factors that affect comprehension of breaking news headlines by Iraqi EFL learners news in this website yet. After browsing the website well, the researchers need to select the news headlines. The data have been gathered from (35) participants using a questionnaire.

### 3.5 Procedures for Data Collection

Data collection procedures passed through four stages. First, the researchers were requested to browse the website as well as read the headlines accurately. Then, the criteria for choosing the headlines were followed to be applied to select the required number of headlines. Second, the researchers applied the questionnaire, which included closed-ended items. Third, the researchers communicated with the participants via Google Meet to describe the questionnaire. Fourth, the questionnaire link was sent online to students. Finally, the programmer received answers, collected them, and sent them to the researchers via an Excel sheet.



### 3.6 Data Analysis

The data utilized to accomplish the objective of the present study have been gathered by means of the questionnaire, the tool of the study. The answers of the (35) participants to the questionnaire have been later collected and analyzed qualitatively using a quantifying qualitative procedure. The participants were required to read six factors and tick one of the following (disagree/ uncertain /agree) on the six proposed factors. Accordingly, the participants' answers need to be collected and tabulated as in the tables below.

The factors were based on Donoghue (2009). The first factor is 'purpose' which aids readers to apprehend the texts. Al-Sinbesy (2009) explains that "most readers have a goal for reading"; therefore, they determine their purpose so as to obtain the information necessary for the texts. The second one is 'being an active reader'. An active reader can create meaning from the text due to the use of his prior knowledge and vocabulary. The third one is 'the kind of text being used'. For example, a text can be easy or difficult according to the words being used, whether familiar or unfamiliar to the readers. The fourth factor is the 'quality of literacy instruction'. In fact, literacy instructors not only provide readers with vocabulary but also train them to become good comprehends. The fifth factor is 'interest' which has an influence on comprehension due to the persistence of the readers to grasp the subject in which they are interested. When children, for example, are interested in animals, they will be involved with that topic and read to look for information to gratify their curiosity. The last factor is 'independent practice' which reveals that reading books other than the textbook enables students to share their experience with their classmates and enriches their ability to understand the text.

#### 4. Findings, Analysis and Discussion

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of findings. The analysis is based on the factors proposed by Donoghue (2009). The findings of each factor were tabulated based on the participant's responses to these factors that appeared in the questionnaire.

##### Factor (1): Purpose

**Table (1.1)**  
**Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 1**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Agree	29	82.8571
Uncertain	5	14.2857
Disagree	1	2.8571
Total	35	100

As noticed in the above table (1.1), 29 participants, (82.8571%), agreed with factor 1: finding out the purpose of the text helps students to apprehend the text and news headline is no exception. There were (5) participants with a percentage (14.2857%) who were not sure about that, and (1) participant with a percentage (2.8571%) disagreed. This might be due to the fact that determining the purpose of the text, according to Angela Eze (2016), helps students activate their background knowledge about the topic of the material and then achieve comprehension.

**Factor (2): Active reader**

**Table (1.2)**

**Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 2**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agree	29	82.8571
Uncertain	4	11.4285
Disagree	2	5.7142
Total	35	100

As noticed from the participants' answers to factor (2) above in Table No. (1.2), there were (29) participants with a percentage (82.8571%) who agreed with factor 2: student as an active reader has the ability to comprehend text based on background knowledge and vocabulary. This might be done due to the fact that students relate the content of what they read to their background knowledge, with the aid of vocabulary, they have to create meaning from the text. As stated by (Wilkins 1972, as cited in Lessard-Clouston 1994, p.69), "Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". There were (4) participants with a percentage (11.4285%) not sure about that, and (2) participants with a percentage (5.7142%) disagreed.

**Factor (3): The kind of the text used**

**Table (1.3)**

**Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 3**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agree	21	60
Uncertain	11	31.4285
Disagree	3	8.5714
Total	35	100

Table (1.3) discloses that there were (21) participants with a percentage (60%) who agreed with factor 3: a headline text can be easy or difficult according to the words used, familiar or not familiar to the students. The unfamiliarity with the topic might lead to the existence of many unfamiliar words that might hinder headline comprehension. This is in line with Carver's (1994) view: "When more than 2% of the words in a text are unfamiliar to the reader, his or her comprehension is blocked". There were (11) participants with a percentage (31.4285%) who were not sure about that, and (3) participants with a percentage (8.5714%) who disagreed.

#### **Factor (4): Quality of literacy instruction**

**Table (1.4)**

##### **Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 4**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Agree	14	40
Uncertain	18	51.4285
Disagree	3	8.5714
Total	35	100

As can be seen in Table (1.4), there were (14) participants in the study's sample with a percentage (40%) who agreed with factor 4: literacy instructors not only provide readers with vocabulary but also train them to become good comprehends. There were (18) participants with a percentage (51.4285%) who were not sure about that, and (3) participants with a percentage (8.5714%) who disagreed.

**Factor (5): Interest**

**Table (1.5)**

**Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 5**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Agree	24	68.5714
Uncertain	8	22.8571
Disagree	3	8.5714
Total	35	100

As explained in Table (1.5), there were (24) participants in the study's sample with a percentage (68.5714%) agreeing with factor 5: much interest in the subject leads to understanding or influencing the comprehension of the headline text. There were (8) participants with a percentage (22.8571%) who were not sure about that, and (3) participants with a percentage (8.5714%) who disagreed. A possible explanation for this might be that interest has an influence on comprehension due to the determination of the readers to understand the subject in which they are interested. When one, for example, is in a state of being interested in sports news, he becomes involved with that topic and will read to look for information to satisfy his curiosity. Thus, most students seem interested in the news.

**Factor (6): Independent Practice**

**Table (1.6)**

**Frequency of Participants' Answers to Factor 6**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
Agree	26	74.2857
Uncertain	8	22.8571
Disagree	1	2.8571
Total	35	100

From the table above, we can see that (26) participants with a percentage of (74.2857%) agreed with factor 6: reading books other than textbooks enables students to share their experience with their classmates and enrich their ability to understand the text. There were (8) participants with a percentage (22.8571%) who were not sure about that, and (1) participant with a percentage (2.8571%) disagreed. It seems possible that these results were due to the fact that most students read outside sources other than their textbooks, such as the Internet. Analyzing the factors influencing comprehending news headlines the following table (1.7) summarizes all findings mentioned above.

**Table (1.7)**  
**Summary of the Participants' Answers to Factors**

Factors	Likert scale						Total
	Agree	%	Uncertain	%	Disagree	%	
1-Purpose							
Number of participants	29	82.8571	5	14.2857	1	2.8572	100
2-Active reader							
Number of participants	29	82.8571	4	11.4285	2	5.7144	100
3-The kind of the text used							
Number of participants	21	60	11	31.4285	3	8.5715	100

Factors	Likert scale						Total
	Agree	%	Uncertain	%	Disagree	%	
4-Quality of literacy instruction							
Number of participants	14	40	18	51.4285	3	8.5715	100
5-Interest							
Number of participants	24	68.5714	8	22.8571	3	8.5715	100
6-Independent practice							
Number of participants	26	74.2857	8	22.8571	1	2.8572	100

#### 4.1 Discussion of Findings

As regards the findings of the objective, comprehension of a headline can be influenced by six factors as proposed by Donoghue (2009). The first factor is the *purpose* (p.175) of reading. Students' comprehension can increase when isolating the required material essential to their understanding. Based on table (1.1), it is apparent that the majority of the students (82.85%) agreed that specifying the purpose helps them comprehend headlines.

The second factor is being *an active reader* (p.175). Gear (2008) indicated that a reader is categorized as an active reader when having the ability to use the subsequent seven strategies to interact with a text. The first of these strategies is to make connections.

According to Diehl and Nettles (2010), an active reader connects the text content with what already s/he has seen or read in other places. Therefore, the reader uses his background knowledge and personal experience to create meaning from the text (Gear, 2008). It is clear that these connections are made by blending the author's words and the reader's background and interest (Diehl & Nettles 2010). The second strategy is to ask questions in which the reader increases his understanding. The reader poses two kinds of questions through the stages of reading. They are literal as well as inferential questions. He asks literal questions like (what government is Suha in?), which answers can be found in the text. Another type is inferential questions such as (How are the cars alike?).

The third strategy that active reader uses is visualisation. It helps readers to understand and remember what they are reading (Johnson-Glenburg, 2000). It requires readers to create mental images during the reading process. Thus, the mental image is created when using the descriptive words employed in the text (Diehl & Nettles 2010). The fourth strategy that the active reader uses is to draw inferences, which requires a reader to read between the lines of the text (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2012). He is aware that a text does not include all the required information which enables him to know the implied message the author conveys. He utilizes the available evidence in the text to hypothesize and predicate. For example, he hypothesizes the events and feelings of characters (Diehl and Nettles 2010). The fifth strategy used by the reader is to determine the importance in which he examines information with great care in order to select significant ideas from the text. The sixth strategy is to analyze and synthesize in which he relies on the text as well as his own thinking to decompose information and draw a conclusion. The final strategy used



by the reader is to monitor comprehension. This strategy reveals the awareness of the reader whether understanding occurs or not. Similar to the first factor, the majority of students (82.85%) revealed their agreement with this factor.

‘Type of the text being used’ (p.175) is the third factor which influences comprehension. A text can be easy or difficult to understand according to the words employed whether they are familiar or unfamiliar to readers. According to (Mårdh, 1980), “familiarity with the subject matter of the headline will increase the reader’s interest and facilitate his comprehension of the headline. To achieve high readability, a headline should be short enough to be read quickly” (p.87). Unfamiliar texts, for Lauer (2002), arise when the events are likely unusual to readers in contrast to familiar texts which talk about ordinary issues. Therefore, familiarity enables readers to understand a text. For example, the following text: “Coronavirus disease named Covid-19”, broadcasted on BBC website on (11, 2, 2020), is somewhat EtU because of the familiarity of the disease among people. In contrast, on a website entitled “Science-News” (2021), the headline: “eROSITA X-Ray Telescope Spots Enormous Supernova Remnant”, is difficult to understand due to the use of unfamiliar words (e.g., scientific terms).

The fourth factor which affects comprehension is the “quality of literacy instruction” (p.175). Instructors train readers to become good comprehenders by scheduling daily reading. They surround readers with books and give them an opportunity to share ideas with each other. Such a procedure enables them to master some strategies and then improves comprehension. The fifth factor is “interest” (p.175). In a website entitled “Merriam-Webster” (6/2021), interest is “a feeling that accompanies or causes special attention to something or someone”. Students who are interested in a specific topic would be

interested in a text on that topic and interest in text would enhance comprehension.

A reader, for example, can comprehend a text if he is interested in the field that the text belongs to. Along the same line, students, who have a high interest in sports, can understand some sports headlines even if they encounter difficult vocabulary. This is in line with Ahuja and Ahuja (1991) who explained that “if the material is interesting for the child, he is able to comprehend easily” (p.50). Interest is necessary for learning. According to Brophy (1999), the learners’ interest can increase with the assistance of their teacher although they are not prone to the topic. Teachers try to create a situational interest aiming at introducing sufficient information in order to make the topic familiar to them. In addition, “independent practice” (p.176) is the final factor which affects comprehension. It is obvious that students who read outside resources are capable of comprehending something better than those who focus on educational material. This might be due to the fact they have good background knowledge.

## 5. Conclusions

This study explored the factors influencing the comprehension of English breaking news by answering the research question: What are the factors influencing comprehension of English breaking news by Iraqi EFL learners at the university level? The study concluded the following points:

- 1-The factors and their frequencies faced by EFL learners in comprehending breaking news headlines were various.
- 2-‘Purpose’ and ‘active reader’ are the most frequent factors; they constitute (82.8571%) of all the six factors mentioned.
- 3-After ‘purpose’ and ‘active reader’ independent practice, interest, the kind of text used and quality of literacy instruction is found to be among the most frequent factors occurring with (74.2857%), (68.5714%), (60 %) and (40%) respectively.
- 4-Breaking news headlines were difficult to comprehend due to the lack of one or more than one factor like interest. Students who are interested in a specific topic would be interested in a text on that topic and interest in text would enhance comprehension. This might be due to the fact that determining the purpose of the text, according to Angela Eze (2016), helps students activate their background knowledge about the topic of the material and then achieve comprehension.
- 8-Another factor is independent practice which also affects comprehension. It is obvious that students who read outside resources are capable of comprehending something better than those who focus on educational material. This might be due to the fact they have good background knowledge.

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## Appendix A

### Causes of difficulties understanding news headlines

	Items	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1. Purpose	finding out the purpose of the text helps students to apprehend the text and news headline is no exception.			
2. Active reader	student as an active reader has the ability to comprehend text based on background knowledge and vocabulary.			
3-The kind of the text used	a text (headline) can be easy or difficult according to the words used, familiar or not familiar to the readers (students).			
4-Quality of literacy instruction	literacy instructors not only provide readers with vocabulary but also train them to become good comprehenders.			
5-Interest	much interest in the subject leads to understanding or influencing the comprehension of the text (headline).			
6-Independent practice	reading books other than the textbook enables students to share their experiences with their classmates and enrich their ability to understand the text			

## Appendix B

### English News Headlines Used in the Questionnaire

1-Affordable Care Act: Biden defends Obamacare as US Supreme Court considers its merits 10/11/2020

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/11/10/affordable-care-act-biden-defends-obamacare-as-us-supreme-court-considers-its-merits>

2-Sacred selfie? Muslim cleric hits out over new Hajj trend at Mecca 3/10/2014

<https://www.euronews.com/2014/10/03/sacred-selfie-clerics-anger-over-new-hajj-trend-at-mecca>

3-New Brexit coin unveiled as Britain prepares to leave EU 27/1/2020

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/01/26/new-brexit-coin-unveiled-as-britain-prepares-to-leave-eu>

4-Merkel and Macron agree on eurozone budget 19/06/2018

<https://www.euronews.com/2018/06/19/watch-live-macron-and-merkel-address-the-press-after-eu-reform-talks>

5-Telemedicine for rural areas 3/2/2016

<https://www.euronews.com/2016/02/03/telemedicine-for-rural-areas>

6-Toxic smog triggers restrictions on cars in India's capital 04/11/2019

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/11/04/india-s-capital-new-delhi-restricts-cars-resident-choke-toxic-n1075921>

7-Supermarket shelves empty as French butter shortage hits 24/10/2017

<https://www.euronews.com/2017/10/24/supermarket-shelves-empty-as-french-butter-shortage-hits>

8-HSBC to move 1,000 staff from London to Paris after Brexit 18/01/2017

<https://www.euronews.com/2017/01/18/hsbc-to-move-1000-staff-from-london-to-paris-after-brexit>

9-One dead, five hospitalized in shooting at a Phoenix motel  
13/1/2019

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/13/one-dead-five-hospitalized-shooting-outside-phoenix-motel-n958206>

10-France orders tobacco industry: stub out cigarette butt pollution  
9/12/2019

<https://www.euronews.com/2018/06/14/france-orders-tobacco-industry-stub-out-cigarette-butt-pollution>