

**Iraqi EFL Intermediate School Students' Reading Comprehension****Huda Hadi Salim****MA Candidate, English language Department, College of Education-Ibn Rushed for Human Sciences, University of Baghdad/Baghdad, Iraq****[hoda.hadi1207o@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:hoda.hadi1207o@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)****Asst. Prof. Dhea Mizhir Krebt, Ph.D.****Professor, English Language Department, College of Education-Ibn Rushed –for Human Sciences, University of Baghdad/Baghdad, Iraq****[dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)****Abstract:**

Reading comprehension is an interactive process in which readers construct a meaningful representation of a text using effective reading strategies. reading comprehension is the process of creating meaning from text. The purpose is to get an understanding of the text rather than to acquire meaning from individual words or sentences. The outcome of reading comprehension is the mental representation of a text meaning that is combined with the readers' previous knowledge. Reading comprehension requires readers to interpret the mental image from the given text through the interaction between both conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge.

This study aims at finding out Iraqi EFL Intermediate school students' reading comprehension level. A sample of (375) students (boys and girls) has been chosen randomly for the academic year 2022/2023. Reading comprehension tests were adopted from British Council/ learn English to measure the learners' performance in reading comprehension. The results of the statistical manipulation show that Iraqi EFL intermediate students have a medium level of reading comprehension.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension RC, reading comprehension test, Iraqi EFL Intermediate School Student.

**I. Introduction**

Wolley (2011) states that RC is a process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. In understanding text information students develop mental images, or representations of meaning of the text ideas during the reading process. Thus, RC is important skill that enables students to find some information for knowledge and it can share the information for everyone when they need it. Difficulties that faced by students in RC divided into external and internal. Internal factor includes intellectual, and psychological. While external factors include family and school environments. (Abbas&Al-bakri,2018)

Reading comprehension is defined as “the process of construction of meaning through the dynamic interaction between the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by written language, and the context of the reading situation” (Anthony, Pearson & Raphael, 1993,

p. 284). Dutcher (2019) defines RC as the dynamic interplay between the reader's previous knowledge, the information inferred by the written language, and the reading situation context.

Veeravagu, et al. (2010) state that the term RC refers to thinking process by which a reader selects facts, information, or ideas from printed materials; determines the meanings the author intended to transmit; decide how they relate to previous knowledge; and judge their appropriateness and worth for meeting the learner's own objectives.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Reading as a Receptive Skill**

Reading is a receptive skill, meaning that it helps readers to take in and comprehend information. The complicated way of reading, on the other hand, need the capacity to speak in order to articulate the words that individuals learn. In this view, reading is a useful technique since it helps others to access and share information (Alvermann et al.,2011). Schmitt (2010) argues that the primary goal for reading is raising learners' awareness of a material's core concepts and understanding how a book organize for good comprehension. As a result, focusing on text structure and realizing the ordering of content information through graphic representation is an important resource for comprehension education.

Reading is an important receptive skill in language acquisition and instruction. It is crucial for a variety of reasons. To begin with, it is frequently encountered by students in their everyday lives. Second, because the students studying English for academic purposes, they will undoubtedly be required to read a great number of lengthy articles or books in their departments. They can't learn anything if they don't grasp the books, and they can't pass the examinations if they don't understand them. Because most EFL learners live in an environment where English is not spoken, reading is their major source of language input (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009).

### **2.2 Types of Reading**

Harmer (2007) states that extensive reading and intensive reading are not contrasting types of reading rather they are complementary and both are important and necessary in the teaching and learning RC.

#### **2.2. 1 Intensive Reading**

Intensive reading refers to the reading of short text. It entails the reading made at classroom level under the guidance of the teacher, the main aim of intensive reading is to arrive at a profane and detail understanding of the text, not only of what it means but also of the meaning is produced. It tends to develop the strategies of the learners(Harmer,2007). Patel and Jain (2008) explain that intensive reading will provide a basis for explaining difficulties of Structure and for extending knowledge of vocabulary and idioms.

#### **2.2.2 Extensive Reading**

Hedge (2003) declares that extensive reading differs based on learners' motivation and School resources. A highly motivate and well-train teacher can certainly select appropriate materials and activities for their own learners. It helps learners to gain their independency through reading either in class or at home.

According to Alderson (2000) extensive reading activities can be beneficial in aiding learners to become self-directed individuals who search for meaning provide that they are based on student-selects texts that learners interest in what they read. The process of choose reading texts according to content, level of difficulty, and length. Lontas (2002) mentioned the benefits of extensive reading as follows: Students can make their language proficiency, advance in their reading skill, become more independent in their learning, learn cultural knowledge, and expand confidence and incentive to continue their own learning.

### **2.3 Reading Comprehension Models**

There are three major RC models that play a significant role in managing and facilitating the comprehension process, as well as assisting readers to better understand a written passage and overcome their reading comprehension difficulties while engaging in the reading process. These models include the bottom-up model, the top-down model, and the interactive model. The three models differ from one another based on their concentration of the technique that readers apply in order to obtain meaning from a written passage. (Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdullah, 2013).

#### **2.3.1 Bottom-Up Model**

The notion behind the bottom-up model is that readers should gradually start the reading process by decoding every letter, vocabulary word, and eventually sentence in order to construct meaning from a written passage. In other words, this model looks at the entire reading process as letter and vocabulary-based. Thus, in order to successfully gain meaning from a text, readers are required to understand and recognize each letter and vocabulary word while reading. Since this model emphasizes the importance of understanding every single word for comprehension, quick word understanding is an essential requirement for the bottom-up approach (Ahmadi et al., 2013). This RC model supposes that readers who follow the bottom-up reading process rapidly become expert readers whose proficiency plays a significant role in improving their ability to decode (Pressley, 2000).

#### **2.3.2 Top-Down Model**

In contrast to the bottom-up model, the top-down RC model engages readers' prior knowledge, experience, and expectation about a particular topic in order to obtain meaning from a written passage. Thus, as describes by Eskey (2005) the top-down model considers RC as a process that begins "from the brain to text" (p. 564). In the top-down model, readers require to start the process of RC with building particular expectations about the text. These expectations build based on a reader's previous knowledge about a particular topic.

After building some expectations, the reader moves to another task in which they draw on their world knowledge in order to decode vocabulary within the text to either prove or modify their pre-established expectations. Therefore, the top-down RC model looks at the text itself as meaningless, with the reader gaining meaning by integrating the text into their prior knowledge (Hudson, 2007).

### **2.3.3 Interactive Model**

Since the interactive model emerged to address weakness and limitations that were found in both the bottom-up and the top-down RC models, it tends to integrate features of each. Today, the interactive model is the most widely conclusive model for explaining the process of RC and confirms the importance of the interaction between a reader and the text (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012).

Mainly, the interactive model adapts the notion that neither the bottom-up nor the top-down model can be used in isolation to explain the entire reading comprehension process. Therefore, it called for the creation of an interaction between these two models (Ismail, & Abdullah, 2013).

## **2.4 Factors Affecting Students' Reading Comprehension**

### **2.4.1 Lack of Motivation**

Archer (2012) states that teaching a FL is challenging task due to the variety of constraints that EFL teachers face daily. For instance, they have to look for ways to motivate their students to learn it in meaningful and attractive ways and they have to explore appropriate methods to teach it. These are demanding tasks for EFL teachers whose main goal is to achieve effective learning for their students. Due to this fact, EFL teachers need to be selective and analytical to choose suitable methodology which helps them to implement in their actual classroom. Students can be taught how to make these decisions, (R. K. Elaf, 2022).

### **2.4.2 Students' Learning Background**

Anderson (1999) argues that students' learning background, including their L1 reading skills and knowledge level affect their RC. According to Nuttall (2005) some students do not read efficiently even in their L1. This hinders the development of efficient reading in the FL, for there is a strong transfer of reading habit from one language to another. (Sundus A.J. 2022).

### **2.4.3 Inadequate Vocabulary**

Readers with inadequate vocabulary read slowly and with poor understanding. In connection to this, students who lack adequate vocabulary have difficulty of getting

meaning from what they read, so they read less because they find reading difficult Growth of attention on learning in classrooms becomes the vogue now as it proves its striking effect on students" progress in learning foreign languages (Alsaadi & Shahad Hatim, 2016).

Anderson (1999) also reports that readers with inadequate vocabulary read slowly without enjoyment. This, in turn, degrades understanding. In the contrary, students with well-developed vocabularies read more and improve their reading skills and at the same time they learn more words. Good vocabulary knowledge will ascertain reading development which will lead to increased reading comprehension (Duke, 2003).

#### **2.4.4 Lack of Background Knowledge**

Lack of appropriate background knowledge is a factor that limits text understanding. Regarding to this, Nuttall (2005) elaborates the reader and the writer should share about the world and the way it works. Brown and Yule (1983) provide a comprehensive account of how this background knowledge can guide and influence the comprehension process. Efficient reader, therefore, calls for an appropriate utilization of the background knowledge readers have about the world. Knowledge of the world and how it works is important in order to understand a given text Language proficiency is obligatory in translation practice (Krebt, 2022).

#### **2.4.5 Lack of Awareness with Reading Strategies**

Paran (2003) states that if a reader is aware of what is needed to perform effectively, then it is possible to take steps to meet the demands of a reading situation more effectively. If the reader is not aware of his or her own limitations as a reader or of the complexity of a task at hand, then the reader can hardly be expected to take preventive actions to participate or recover from problems. This is why EFL students need different reading strategies to cope up with the challenging RC activities.

According to Duke (20003), Reading strategies are all the different methods one uses to increase comprehension, whereas skills are the small steps and ways into understanding. Strategies are more complex than different, individual skills, or techniques. Thus a strategic reader is according to Yang, Dai, and Gao (2012) someone who possesses various tools to be able to solve any problem that might arise while reading. In addition, reader has a good meta-cognitive competence, ascertaining that they supervise their reading and are conscious of which strategies they ought to use when, and if, comprehension fails. The most important presumption is that the student and the teacher would take care of the structure spontaneously (Krebt, 2017).

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Population and Sampling**

The population in this study is Iraqi EFL intermediate school students consists of (15000) students during the academic year 2022/2023. five intermediate schools are

randomly selected from the directorate of education in Al-Qadisiyah governorate to extract the sample from. The total number of the sample is 375 students.

### 3.2 Instrument

To assess students' level of RC, the researcher adopted a test. The topics of the test are selected according to subjects from the prescribed text book which is entitled "English for Iraq" by Olivia Johnston and Mark Farrell (2018), the test includes two reading passages; the first passage is followed by a multiple-choice question, it includes five items. The second passage is followed by a true/false question and a matching question, it includes ten items.

### 3.3 Reliability

A sample of (40) students are randomly selected from the 2<sup>nd</sup> intermediate school (Um-kulthum intermediate school for girl) from the Educational Directorate of Al-Qadisiyah to conducting the pilot administration of the two tests. The pilot study is conducted on 4 December 2022, this procedure is used to find out:

1. The clarity of items and instructions in the tests.
2. The amount of time participants set aside to complete answering the tests.

As a results, no ambiguity is found in the test items. The time required for the students to answer the two test is between (40-45) minutes.

## IV. Results

The aim of this study is "Finding out the level of RC for Iraqi EFL intermediate Schools", to achieve this aim RC test has been applied on the sample consists of (375) students (boys and girls). The results showed that means score for this sample is (14.955) score and standard deviation is (3. 283) score. For the purpose of finding out the significant differences between mean score and hypothetical mean which is (15) score. T-test has been used for one sample and it showed that there are no significant statistical differences at the level (0.05), because T-value is (0.267) and this score is lower than calculated T-value which is (1.96) at freedom degree (374), this can indicate that Iraqi intermediate students at a medium level as shown in table and figure (4-2).

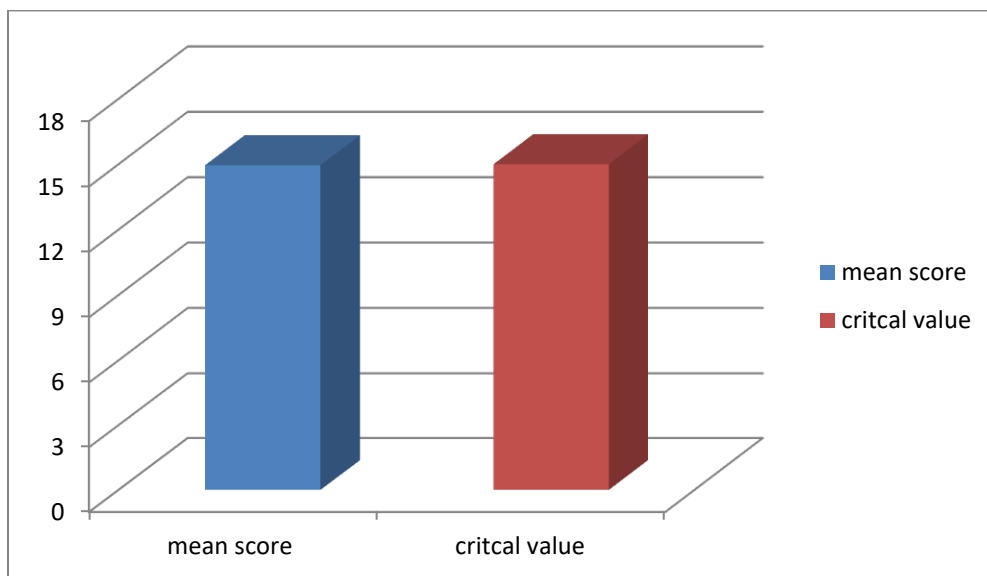
Table (4-2)

Mean Score, Standard Deviation, T-value for RC test

Variable	N	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Theoretical Mean	T-value		Significance ( $\alpha$ )
					Calculated	Critical	
RC	٣٧٥	14,955	3,283	15	٠,267	١,٩٦	Significant

Figure (4-2)

Mean Score and Hypothetical Score for RC Test



## V. Discussion of Results

The finding of current study indicate also that Iraqi EFL intermediate school students have a medium level of RC, EFL learners may face a number of difficulties in RC, such as dealing with unknown vocabularies and rote memorization, boring content and lacking interest and motivation, anxiety, lacking the ability to infer the meaning of the text and shortage of practice time outside the classroom. Difficulties in RC due to weak cognitive abilities, RC activities are covered with various actions with a focus on word meaning and sentence structure.

## VI. Conclusions

In accordance with preceding survey and discussion related to the finding, aim, and question of this research, the conclusion has been drawn that Iraqi EFL intermediate school students have medium level of reading comprehension.

## References

- Abbas S., & Shaymaa Abdulbaqi Al-bakri, S. A. (2018). The Effect of Pair Writing Technique on Iraqi EFL University Students' Writing Performance and Anxiety. *Arab World English Journal*, 9 (2). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no2.2>
- Ahmadi, E. a. (2013). The Importance of Metacognitive Reading Strategy Awareness in Reading Comprehension (Vol 10). *English Language Teaching/ Canadian Center of Science and Education*.
- Al Saadi, Shatha & H. Shahad, (2016). Investigating Iraqi EFL College Students' Multiple Intelligences, *Journal of the College of Education for Women University of Baghdad*, Volume, 27. Issue, 1.
- Alderson, J.C. (2000). *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511732935>
- Alvermann, D.E., Rezak, A.T., Mallozzi, C.A., Boatright, M.D., & Jackson, D.F. (2011). Reflective practice in an online literacy course: Lessons learned from attempts to fuse reading and science instruction. *Teachers College Record*, 113(1), 27-56.
- Anderson, N. (1999). *Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Anthony, H. M., Pearson, P. D., & Raphael, T. E. (1993). Reading comprehension: A selected review. In L. M. Cleary & M. D. Linn (Eds.), *Linguistics for teachers*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, pp. 282-307.
- Archer, M. A. (2012). *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139108058>
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dhea Mizhir Krebt, (2022). Cognition Construction of First Language of Translator Education in Iraq: A Correlation Study. *Alustath Journal for Human & Social Sciences*. Volume (61), Issue (1), 2022, 639-650.
- Duke, N. (2003). Comprehension instruction for informational text. Presentation at the annual meeting of the Michigan Reading Association, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Dutcher, Peggy (2019) "Authentic Reading Assessment," *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation*: Vol. 2, Article 6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7275/http-7723>



Eskey, D. E. (2005). Reading in a Second Language. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 563-580). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow: Longman.

Hedgcock, J. S., & Ferris, D. R. (2009). *Teaching readers of English: Students, texts, and contexts*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hudson, T. (2007). *Teaching second language reading*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Krebt, D.M. (2017). The Effectiveness of Role Play Techniques in Teaching Speaking for EFL College Students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 8(5):863. DOI:10.17507/jltr.0805.04. University of Baghdad.

Liontas, J. (2002). Transactional idiom analysis: Theory and practice. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 1(1), 17-52.

Nuttall, C. (2000). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. Oxford: Macmillan

Paran, A. (2003). *Intensive Reading English Teaching Professional*, 28,40-48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patel, M.F. and Jain, P.M. (2008) *English Language Teaching*. Sunrise Publishers and Distributors, Bangalore.

Pressley, M. (2000). What Should Comprehension Instruction Be the Instruction of? In: M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol. III, pp. 545-561). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

R. K., Elaf (2022). "The Effect of Cognitive Strategies on Iraqi EFL College Students' Writing Anxiety". *Journal of the College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad*, vol. 33, no. 4, Dec. 2022, pp. 27-39, doi:10.36231/coedw.v33i4.1633.

Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching Vocabulary: A Vocabulary Research Manual*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sundus A.J. Kamil, (2022). Investigating Strategies Developed by University Students in Learning English Vocabulary. *AL-USTATH JOURNAL FOR HUMAN& SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR HUMAN& SOCIAL SCIENCES* Volume, 61, Issue.4, pages,101—119.

Veeravagu, J. V. J., Muthusamy, C., Marimuthu, R., & Michael, A. S. (2010). Using Bloom's taxonomy to gauge students' reading comprehension performance. *Canadian Social Science*, 6(3), 205- 212.

Yang, W., Dai, W., & Gao, L. (2012). Intensive Reading and Necessity to Integrate Learning Strategies. *English Language and Literature*. 2(1), 55-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v2n1p112>

## الاستيعاب القرائي لدى طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية

هدى هادي سالم

مرشح ماجستير قسم اللغة الانكليزية كلية التربية ابن رشد للعلوم الانسانية جامعة بغداد / بغداد ،العراق

[hoda.hadi1207o@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:hoda.hadi1207o@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

أ.م.د. ضياء مزهر خريط

أستاذ قسم اللغة الانكليزية كلية التربية ابن رشد للعلوم الانسانية جامعة بغداد / بغداد ،العراق

[dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

### الملخص:

الاستيعاب القرائي هو عملية تفاعلية يقوم فيها القراء ببناء فهم هادف للنص باستخدام استراتيجيات قراءة فعالة. فهم المقروء هو عملية تكوين المعنى من النص. والغرض من ذلك هو فهم النص بدلاً من اكتساب المعنى من الكلمات أو الجمل الفردية. نتيجة فهم القراءة هي التمثيل العقلي لمعنى النص الذي يتم دمج مع المعرفة السابقة للقراء. يتطلب الفهم القرائي من القراء تفسير الصورة الذهنية من النص المحدد من خلال التفاعل بين المعرفة المفاهيمية والمعرفة الإجرائية.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة مستوى الاستيعاب القرائي لدى طلبة المرحلة المتوسطة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية. وقد تم اختيار عينة من (٣٧٥) طالب وطالبة (بنين وبنات) بشكل عشوائي للعام الدراسي ٢٠٢٢/٢٠٢٣. يتم جمع البيانات من خلال تبني اختبار الاستيعاب القرائي لقياس اداء الطلبة في الاستيعاب القرائي . وقد أظهرت النتائج أن لدى طلبة المدارس المتوسطة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية مستوى متوسط في الاستيعاب القرائي.