



## Research Article

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# Causes of Primary Stage Students' Weakness in English Reading Skills

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## Abstract

*The present study aims to determine the reasons behind the primary stage students' weakness in the English reading skills in Tafila Directorate of Education (Jordan). The study follows descriptive analytical method. The subject of the study consisted of the total number of the students in the first three grades in Tafila Directorate of Education (1253 male and female students). As for the sample, it was randomly selected to represent the subject of the study with a total number of (60 male and female students, 40 females and 20 males). The instrument was actually reading texts chosen from the English Students' Books. The texts were chosen to meet the objective of the present study. After a careful follow-up of the researcher to the performance of the students in reading these texts and answering the questions based on them, he reached to some indicators which help him to draw conclusions. Based on the results of the study, the researcher reached to some recommendations.*

**Keywords:** primary stage students, weakness, reading skill

## 1. Introduction

Reading is a basic language communication skill that a student needs to acquire and develop. It is a receptive skill that students use to collect information, process it and integrate it into their cognitive structure. It includes complicated mental processes, requiring and converting symbols into meanings in the brain and links them together according to specific rules, depending on previous experiences and concluding new ideas and meanings (Taha and Kinnawi, 2004). The association of reading with mental processes encouraged educators to consider it a mental process rather than a mechanical skill. Habeeb (2000) considers that reading is a mental process, where thinking dominates in most of its aspects. Reading is not only a mechanical skill limited to decode symbols; it is actually a contemplative mental process, a readers exercises mental processes which includes all types of thinking.

Reading is considered to be one of the four most important language skills. It actually has two sides: one automated which means the recognition of letters shapes and sounds, and the ability to form words, phrases and sentences from these words. The other is mental recognition side which leads to an understanding of the material being read. However, it is difficult to separate between the automated and perceptual sides. If this happens, the language may lose its semantics and significance. Reading may become parroting if the reader does not understand and absorb what he is hearing. It cannot be classified as reading, if one is not able to translate what he can see into audible sounds for letters, words and sentences. Here the perceptual and mechanical sides are met, so there is a type of correct reading

in the strict sense. This could be applied on both silent and aloud reading, since aloud reading requires acoustic and perceptual sides together, while the silent reading requires the ability to translate the reading into connotations that have meanings (Ashour, 2007). The reader interacts with the readable material to come up with new and varied ideas not included in the reading passage. Therefore, many students, especially those in the primary stage, suffered from a problem of poor ability to read or to spell the letters, lack of maturity in terms of physical, mental or emotional aspects. Students may suffer from other troubles, like visual problems such as short or far sightedness, or hearing problems as weak hearing. This hinders the process of hearing a particular word, thus affecting the reading process as a whole. There are also educational troubles such as: students' inability to construct a correct sentence. Earlier wrong reading method; fosters stress method on the student to improve reading. In addition, students' inability to analyze words and sentences, may lead to failure to understand the meaning correctly. There are also psychological factors related to the student himself e.g. the lack of interest in reading or learning and the lack of concentration and paying attention to the teacher while he/she teaches (Alwahideen, 2015).

The manifestation of weak reading lies in the low ability to form sentences that have meanings, surface understanding of linguistic structure, and lack of analysis and criticism. Students are also unable to judge a particular paragraph, poor ability to derive meaning from the reading text, weakness to understand meaning of words from the context and their failure to distinguish between the writer's opinion and what he exposes of ideas and issues. They are unable to write summaries or comments on the reading material, and they are even failing to employ what they read in real life situations (Abdul khaliq, 2000). Some students reveal that reading instruction in the Jordanian schools suffers a lot from the manifestations of reading weaknesses and poor recognition of words, wrong pronunciation of some words and letters. Primary students are sometimes, unable to do substitutions, deletions, repetitions, so they fail to understand meaning of words and sentences. They are also weak in many of silent and aloud reading skills (Abu Tuaima, 2010).

A large number of teachers do not have a full knowledge of reading skills; they are unable to build a good reading program or even to construct tests that could be used to measure reading skills. According to teacher's view, reading is not more than enabling students to perceive images of words, distinguish their different forms and know their syllables and letters to draw them or write them down. They actually focus on other skills that make reading concept as something mechanical. Teachers lack the appropriate tools to detect students' individual differences such as: measures of intelligence and tests of reading skills (Mahmoud, 2012). The real situation of teaching reading in the Arab schools in general and in the Jordanian schools in particular is limited to recognizing and pronouncing words without any interest in teaching the skill smoothly through providing the students with exercises to communicate directly with the meaning. Many teachers practice teaching reading skill by a way like: stand up, read, and then sit down. Most of the time, reading is done aloud which does not serve its purpose or care about its development (Al-Roqi, 2015). Mikulecky (2008) developing a plan for reading procedures that tackles reading not only a translation of symbols, but also a state of thought. Teachers should talk and explain the reading passage till the students reach sensation of the reading material. Student should expand his reading habits till he reaches pleasure, and discusses his reading with someone who can be taken as a model for reading. Students should break the habit of reading word by word to be replaced by fast reading. Each student should learn to read at a pace that suits the reading goal. Top-down method of reading should be employed to link what you read with what you have of previous experiences. Using top-down method of reading helps much to reach fluency and to improve your reading abilities. Applying top-down method increases the student's ability to recognize meaning of useful words, guessing meaning of unfamiliar word through a context, and finally adopting strategic reading comprehension.

### 1.1 Study Problem

A language is the most fundamental tool for communication and understanding between students and

their environment. The ability to read and understand is an important element of student success in the primary stage. A student, who cannot read, is also unable to perform what is required of him to achieve effectively. English language is so important in the Jordanian primary schools, especially the reading skill. Reading is actually an important means for the school to achieve its functions. A language is really the basis on which we depend to upgrade and educate our children. All activities, either inside or outside the school, depend on reading and understanding the language. However, from my own experience as a supervisor of English language for almost ten years, I noticed that the students in general are weak at reading, especially primary stage students, so I here attempt to investigate the causes of students' failure in English reading comprehension skills.

### 1.2 Study Objective

The purpose of the present study is to try to identify the main causes of students' weakness in English reading skills, especially among the first three grades in Tafila Directorate of Education.

### 1.3 Study Question

The study attempts to answer the following question:

What are the main causes of primary stage students' weakness in the English reading skills?

### 1.4 Importance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it attempts to shed light on the causes of the weakness of the students in the first three grades in the English reading skills. The results of the present study are expected to benefit the following groups:

- It may help EFL teachers to raise the level of the students in the English reading skills by making an active access that works to establish students properly in these skills.
- It may help EFL teachers to deal with students of impaired reading skills.
- It may benefit those who are working in the educational process in the country to review the curricula to establish appropriate reading skills for the primary stage students.
- It may open new horizons for readers to conduct similar studies with other classes in different environments.

### 1.5 Study Limitations

The results of the study are limited by:

- Objective limits: The weakness of primary stage students in the English reading skills.
- Spatial limits: The study was conducted in Tafila Governorate.
- Human limits: The study was restricted to primary stage students in Tafila Directorate of Education.
- Time limit: The study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019.

### 1.6 Study Terminology

- Reading: a complex mental process that includes interpretation of the symbols received by the reader. It also can be defined procedurally as an interactive process between a reader and a reading text (Iraiq, 2008).
- Reading weakness: It is defined as a student's inability to achieve the goals set for him in the reading skills, and his failure to reach the required level (Yousif, 2006).

- Primary stage students: They are students who study English in the Jordanian schools for three consecutive years, and their ages are ranged between 6-9 years.

## 2. Literature Review

Now I will review some of the previous views and studies which I think related to the present study and it may support the results of this research paper.

### 2.1 *Reasons of Poor Reading*

The problem of poor reading is one of the troublesome problems facing children and their parents. It negatively affects their lives and their ways to express themselves, because reading is one of the main ways to obtain information and knowledge. To deal with the problem of poor reading for the children, we must first try to identify its causes. First: students are unable to understand English vocabulary while reading them. Second: while reading a text a child meets unfamiliar words that break the stream of consciousness for him. Third: while reading, children sometimes get bored, as the text does not match the reality surrounding them. Fourth: poor verbal language leads to poor reading. Some children suffer from memory impairment, that they don't remember what they are reading for a long time, and thus don't recognize the word when they see it at later times. There are also the visual perception problems, some tumors in the brain that make reading difficult and concentration of no value (tigertuesday.com)

### 2.2 *Individual Differences*

Not all students are of the same degree of ability to read; there is the distinct, the average, and the poor. However, the weak reading has several features such as: inability to spell, reading some letters incorrectly, or slow reading. Reading weakness also can be classified into several main characteristics, among them: Physical factors: as deficiency in some areas of physical development. Psychological, emotional or even mental troubles, these also have several cumulative, genetic or psychological causes such as: abuse at home and the presence of several troubles in the family. It could be related also to visual impairment of the student that leading to visualize some words or letters wrongly, which consequently leads to change meanings as a result of that. Poor reading leads to wrong words being heard, and this affects reading accordingly. Educational factors: these could be related to the errors in the syntax, or analysis of sentences, as a result of poor basic education originally, or exaggerated pressure on the student to advance in reading to obtain higher grades and excellent advancement. Poor reading comprehension may lead to failure to take into account individual differences when teaching students, all these are major causes of poor reading. Teacher's focus on intelligent or average students and his negligence of poor students may lead to tragic results in education. With regard to psychological factors such as: the lack of reading values for the student, the large number of distractions, and the shyness of student's participation are all remarkable causes of poor reading (ed.com).

### 2.3 *How to Deal with Poor Reading*

There are several ways to face students' poor reading: one of them is to follow the health situation of the students and explore them to treatment, with the need to rearrange them, so that the vision impaired ones could be placed at the front seats. Teachers should take into account individual differences when teaching, and involve a large number of students in the class discussion. Positive correction of students' errors is of great importance, by giving them opportunities to correct themselves through spelling. Graduation in teaching, gives students the chance to distinguish between syllables of

small and capital letters. Students should be encouraged to learn by following a variety of learning methods. Group work method of teaching should be used, through integrating different levels of students in these groups. The use of mental and material reinforcement has its greater influence on poor students' motivation towards study. Students should be accustomed to read by distributing attractive stories that could be accompanied with drawings and beautiful pictures in their classes. Educational counseling in schools should take its part to follow up cases of poor reading students. Allocating additional classes that focus on vulnerable students, by working to develop their skills in various fields, and enhancing what they already have. Encouraging parents to follow their children positively when teaching them, adopting psychological and moral development and avoiding psychological or physical punishment and replacing it with motivation and reinforcement (readinghorizons.com)

#### 2.4 Importance of Language as Means of Communication

The language is the primary means of understanding between people all around the world. It is considered a means of expression to exchange views, thoughts and experiences with others to reach understanding. A person can express himself and transmit his thoughts, opinions and experiences to others using a language. The language is actually the core means of communication and interaction between the members of the society. By using a language, an individual grows socially (Madkhour, 2007). As a result of this increasing importance of the language, people focus much on learning it. A language includes four main skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, each of them is crucially needed in life (Hagger, 2003).

#### 2.5 English as an International Language

The number of English speakers worldwide has been risen for several years, with the current number approaching 2 billion, according to some estimates. The fact that many people now use English as a first or second language indicates that English will likely remain a world-wide for many years to come. English language gives students access to information and research, since many of the most important academic journals are published in English. Students and academics need English language for reading and writing skills. Moreover, for a research study or other publications to get enough attention, it must be published in English. The ability to speak English facilitates travel, it's always easy to find English speakers as well as information printed in English, especially in hotels and areas frequented by tourists. The tremendous spread of this language has led to it is being considered the first global language in many public matters, so the importance of learning English could be summarized in the following points (Arabic Encyclopedia, 1999):

- Many individuals strive to learn English greatly, and this has contributed to the allocation of international curricula for the English language.
- English provides a set of means of communication between different people, which contributes to identification of customs, heritage, and global folk traditions.
- The educational and professional future has become dependent on a person's proficiency in English language.
- English will give you access to some of the best universities in the world.
- English is the language of some of the most famous writers in the world.
- English language is widely used within websites on the internet, as its learning contributes to helping individuals learn about the nature of these websites and the content published on its various pages.

Finally, I could say that learning another language in the early years of life is very beneficial. It helps students to read and write better, and then leads to the development of study skills and gaining high grades in different school subjects. Learning a new language especially English, increases self-

confidence, and helps to develop the ability of communication and mutual understanding among people. However, English is based on simple letters, which are easy to learn when compared with other languages. It gives you a sense of satisfaction when you are making progress, which makes it more enjoyable.

## 2.6 Related Studies

Al-Mousawi, and Abbas (2009) aimed at identifying the reasons of low levels of second grade students in reading and writing skills from their teachers' point of view. The sample of the study consisted of (174) male and female teachers. The study adopted descriptive analytical method. A questionnaire consisted of 83 items was distributed on ten different fields. The results revealed that the low level of students in reading and writing skills could be attributed to the students' weak foundation, the lack of interest of parents in developing their children' reading and writing skills, the scarcity of school libraries, the lack of material and moral incentives and the frequent absence of the majority of teachers during teaching process.

Habayeb (2010) conducted a study aimed at identifying the difficulties of reading and writing skills of the first grade students in Gaza Strip from their teachers' point of view. The study adopted the descriptive and analytical method, and applied to a stratified random sample of (123) male and female teachers, 44 males and 79 females. A questionnaire consisted of 33 items was used and it was statistically analyzes. The results showed that the most important difficulties in reading and writing were based on the failure of the students in the skills of reading and writing. The researcher recommended the teachers to focus on the use of teaching aids and to concentrate more on the reading and writing skills.

Gay (2011) stressed that the students at any school stage may face problems in the issue of reading skills. He attributed these problems to the students themselves in particular or the surrounding environment in general.

Al-Koori (2012) reported that the fourth and fifth grade students are both suffer from difficulties when reading aloud, with rates ranging between 75% - 90% in the capital Sanaa (Yemen). This could be attributed to several reasons: some are related to the teacher and his method of teaching, some are related to the learner and his ability to learn, and some are connected to the school environment. Besides, classes are crowded; some have 90 students per class, and most of the time parents are not cooperative with schools' administration.

Talukder (2013) conducted a study to examine the reasons for poor reading skills of students in Bangladesh. He notified that students can not acquire the skill of reading as required. Students have done very little reading of anything except comprehension passages in their English course books. They may never read a whole book in their life. So, they can not acquire reading skills. In addition, students are only involved in intensive reading practices, either in bottom-up or top-down approaches or combination of both. Students are never encouraged to practice extensive reading.

Iqbal et al. (2015) stressed the fact that students are weak at using English vocabulary. They are unable to guess meanings from the context, or even weak at word recognition.

Essa (2017) conducted a study aimed at identifying the impact of using branched thinking strategies on the development of reading comprehension skills for fourth grade students in Arabic language. The study adopted experimental method. The instrument of the study was built to examine reading comprehension skills, and teacher's guide for developing reading comprehension skills through using branching thinking strategies. The sample of the study was 71 female students (fourth graders) distributed into two groups 37 experimental and 34 control group. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the two groups experimental and control. The significance was in favor of the experimental group.

Wagner (2018) conducted a study to examine the comprehension problems of children who have specific reading comprehensions defects. Results indicated that children with reading comprehension defects had defects in oral language, but these defects were not severe as their defects in reading

comprehension. When comparing reading comprehension with oral language skills, we find that the oral language weakness of children with reading comprehension defects represents developmental delay rather than developmental deviance.

When reviewing the above mentioned studies, it was found that students in general suffer a lot from various troubles when practicing reading skills, especially those in the primary stage. Most of the studies mentioned above were unanimously agreed that students suffer from the following: poor comprehension, slow reading, wrong pronunciation of English words, lack of incentives, lack of reading either intensive or extensive, unwillingness of students to read English texts, lack of family follow-up to their children and cooperative with school administration, poor performance of teachers, in addition to many other influencing things. However, the findings of the present study is highly consistent with most of the above studies and views, especially the studies of (Aqeel, 2006), (Almousawi and Abbas, 2009), (Habayeb, 2010), (Gay, 2011) and (Koori, 2013).

### 3. Methodology

The researcher followed the descriptive analytical method in this research, which depends on the direct observation of the students' performance during the implementation of the required tasks. The reading passages were carefully chosen from the students' English language syllabuses (Two passages for each grade) to serve the goals of the study in terms of identifying the difficulties facing the students of the first three grades in Tafila Directorate of Education when reading English texts. The researcher focused on the extent to which the students comprehend and pronounce English vocabulary, and then answer the given questions either orally or written. The questions include: Yes-No questions, matching, completion, and multiple choice questions. Through close monitoring of students, researcher found that they suffer from several problems while reading English texts. These problems could be attributed to the students' inability to absorb English texts, wrong pronunciation of vocabulary items, slow reading, wrong translation into the mother tongue, and students' unwillingness to read. All of these problems are actually related to the student himself, the teacher of the subject, the family and then the environment surrounding the student.

#### 3.1 Study Instrument

The study instrument composed of carefully selected texts from the English language textbooks of the first three grades students. Students were asked to read those texts thoroughly aloud and then answer the given questions.

#### 3.2 Subject and Sample of the Study

The subject of the study included all the students of the first three grades in Tafila Directorate of Education, with a total number of (1223) students. The sample which was chosen randomly consisted of 67 male and female students distributed as follows: 27 males and 40 females. The sample was actually chosen from three basic schools, two from the city centre and one from the rural areas.

#### 3.3 Test Method

Six comprehension pieces were carefully selected from the students' textbooks for the three grades. Students were asked to read those texts aloud thoroughly, so that the researcher could monitor and follow the students with regard to reading speed, English words utterances and understanding. Students then asked to finish a worksheet which includes different types of questions e. g. Yes-No question, matching between words and their meanings in both languages Arabic and English, completion and multiple choice questions. By implementing the tasks in the worksheet, the researcher was able to identify the troubles which face the primary stage students when reading English texts.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

It becomes clear that the low level of primary stage students in English reading skill is a result of the accumulation of many causes and factors that can be summarized in the following points: role of student, role of teacher, role of family, role of Ministry of Education and role of society or surrounding environment. Now, I will explain these items in details as follows:

- Low level of intensive or motivation: It is that the student has no firm desire to learn English language on his own, and this feeling arises with the student and is inherent with him inside and outside the walls of the school. Even though, the availability of all means that encourage a student to self-learning and considered to be the main factor that influences a person's life.
- Role of the family: The family is one of the most important elements that contribute effectively in the education process and raise the level of students. The family role is not limited to providing the children with food, clothing and care only, but it goes beyond that. Unfortunately, we find that the role of the family is extremely negative. This negative role of the family may be due to the parents' ignorance of how to deal with their children and then to create an appropriate atmosphere for them to learn. The negativity of the family is reflected in the failure to monitor their children and know their quarterly results, or not to follow up their home works. The family can provide all means to help their children develop the language inside home by bringing books, newspapers, photos, magazines and programs that help in language learning.
- Role of school and testing system: It is represented in the absence of the punishment principle for the careless student. This leads not to respect the school systems and laws by the students, especially in secondary schools. The ministry of Education obliges teachers not to punish careless students physically, consequently, many students neglect their duties, and their respect to their teachers decreased. Some students seemed indifferent to their future, especially; they do not appreciate English language or even the teachers who teach it.
- Psychological factors: It is the feeling that English is a difficult language to understand and requires hard work. So, students come to school with this misconception. Here comes the role of interactive teacher, who can work hard to help students overcome all difficulties they may face.

#### 5. Conclusion

Reading is the mirror of thoughts. No one denies, whether a scientist or ignorant, the role that reading plays in the progress of a nation and places it in the ranks of advanced nations. So, it is reading that helps us to know all about old and new of knowledge. Through reading, people can obtain both culture and knowledge. Reading motivates students to survey books searching for range of information. It also helps students to increase their linguistic wealth, and train them to say words properly. Unfortunately, many EFL teachers in the Jordanian schools complain their students' weakness in the English reading skill, either aloud or silent forms. This weakness is always repeated with the majority of students, especially, those in the first three grades. The weakness is represented in the students' failure to achieve the intended goals of the reading, and their inability to understand or explain the readable material. The students, especially primary graders, suffer from slow reading, wrong pronunciation of words and lack of control over word forms.

#### 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the researcher recommends the following:

- Increasing reading and oral exercises in each class.
- Encouraging students to read their favorite subjects in English.



- Reading sentences containing new words harmoniously.
- Students should be accustomed to repeat pronunciation of new words and write them down more than one time in a special notebook.
- Teachers shouldn't rely on synthesis method to teach reading skill, but they have to try other methods as well.
- Assigning specialized teachers for teaching reading material, especially those who have educational experience in the field of teaching and learning, and who are professionally qualified.
- Establishing libraries in each school, and directing students to the books that suit their level and interest by allocating a period for that, and encouraging them to practice free reading.
- Teaching English language in general and reading in particular, using the latest teaching methods.
- Classifying weak readers and developing effective treatment plan for them.
- Using individual learning strategy to overcome each student's problem.
- Administering continuous assessment for students to evaluate their progress in reading skills.
- Following the students' health and psychological conditions all the time.
- Establishing special educational committees to prepare reading material for all students.
- Choosing reading topics that attract the students' interests, inclinations and tendencies.
- Providing a lot of reading activities and exercises in the students' textbooks.
- Reinforcing English language syllabuses with different types of reading that include group communication, narration, story telling ... etc.
- Teachers should illustrate to students how to infer meaning from the context.
- Word-meaning should be taught in English to English; this will develop the students' wealth of vocabulary.
- Conducting more other useful studies that may contribute greatly to addressing troubles that face students while practicing English reading skills.

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