



EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Secondary School Students' Reading Comprehension Difficulties at Bisha Province

Fayez Saad Fayez Al-Thuwayb

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts, Al-Baha University, Al-Baha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ftuwayeb1982@outlook.sa

Abstract: This study aimed to find out the main difficulties experienced by the EFL students at Bisha secondary schools with reference to prediction, reading comprehension, understanding and skimming abilities, to find out the EFL teachers perspectives on reading comprehension difficulties, to find out the perspectives of the experienced teachers on reading and investigate comprehension difficulties of EFL students at Bisha secondary school, and to bring forward recommendation to the teachers and the students on the various ways to tackle reading comprehension difficulties. To achieve these purposes, the researcher adopted the descriptive method by preparing a questionnaire, and this tool administered to (74) teachers working in secondary schools in Bisha, in addition to using the comparative descriptive method to compare the study sample responses means according to (academic level – years of experience) variables. Then the researcher used suitable series of statistical processes to get the study results which were as the follows: 1) There are difficulties in comprehension and summarizing a text, 2) Lexical Difficulties (Vocabulary), 3) Difficulties in Predicting the meaning of a text, 4) Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text. Finally, in light of the study results and discussion the researcher presented some recommendations such as paying attention to overcoming difficulties in comprehension and summarizing, paying attention to lexical difficulties and overcoming difficulties in predicting the meaning of a text, and Paying attention to difficulties in skimming and scanning a text. The researcher suggested that it is better to conduct a similar study on girl's EFL teachers from different areas of KSA.

To cite this article

[Al-Thuwayb, F. S. F. (2018). EFL Teachers' Perspectives on Secondary School Students' Reading Comprehension Difficulties at Bisha Province. *The Journal of Middle East and North Africa Sciences*, 4(3), 11-17]. (P-ISSN 2412- 9763) - (e-ISSN 2412-8937). www.jomenas.org, 3

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, Perspectives, Reading Comprehension.

1. Introduction:

Reading comprehension is a skill that goes a long way in helping people understand what they are reading be it in a formal setting or informal setting. However, with reference to the formal setting, in this case, high school, the ability to read and comprehend what one is exposed to in the class setting, determines their grade. Even in the technical fields, students ability to read and understand affects the way that they deal with the problems presented to them. In subjects such as mathematics and other technical sciences, the ability of the students determines if they understand the concepts behind the mathematical formulas and the theories presented to them (Du Boulay, 1999). As such, their ability to understand the concepts trickles down to their ability to apply the knowledge learned in class during the lessons to the solutions that they seek in their exams and other aspects such as the practice tests.

Other than the technical subjects, the English language has become one of the most crucial subjects in the schools. This is due to the fact that it is used virtually in all areas of life and most of the countries have turned it into an official language, as per the global trends. Much of these trends can be attributed to the fact that America is the

superpower and it has an influence on the language. This is not alien to the world and the evolution of language, as it has been the case with other superpowers. Much of the medieval times saw the rise of the Greek language among other languages relative to the superpowers that were recognized at that time (Simard, et al., 2014).

High school students much like other levels, where language is not their first language, have some difficulties reading, comprehending, predicting meaning, lexical abilities, skimming and scanning through texts. Reading through texts can take a different form, from skimming, scanning and deeply engaging with the texts. All these forms depend on the task at hand and the objectives of the reader. This paper takes to task a sample of English first language teachers and the second language experienced teachers at Bisha Secondary School to explore the reading comprehension difficulties among the students. Most of the students at Bisha secondary school have been found to have difficulties reading through the English language texts due to their difficulties in vocabulary and comprehension (Du Boulay, 1999). They also illustrate the difficulty of summarizing what they read written in the

English language as well as scanning through the texts while looking for themes and other information.

The researcher presented the opinion on the basis of his personal experience of teaching English at secondary schools in Bisha Province. Through the observation of the researcher, he noted that most of the students in the reading lessons cannot read the prescribed text independently. Usually, they fall below the threshold level of understanding because they cannot handle the complex sentences and the difficult vocabulary.

Current study aims to find out the main difficulties experienced by the EFL students at Bisha secondary school with reference to prediction, reading comprehension, understanding and skimming abilities, investigate the EFL teachers perspectives with reference to the reading comprehension difficulties and find out the perspectives of the experienced teachers on reading and investigate comprehension difficulties of the students at Bisha secondary school.

2. The Methodology of the Study:

2.1. Study Method:

In the present study the researcher used the descriptive method as follows:

The survey descriptive method is used to identify the perspectives of English teachers as a foreign language about reading comprehension difficulties facing secondary education students in Bisha.

The comparative descriptive method is used to compare the study sample responses means according to (academic level – years of experience) variables.

2.2. Study Community:

The current study community included all teachers of secondary education in Bisha according to Statistics for the second semester (1434 / 1435 H).

Table 1: *Education office's statistics for secondary education teacher's number in Bisha.*

Educational Stage	Teachers		%	
	School Number	Teacher Number	Schools %	Teachers %
Secondary Education	66	98	%100	%100
Participants	66	74	%100	%75.5

Table 1 shows that the study community consists of (66) secondary schools and (98) teachers. The percentage of secondary schools' was 100% while teachers' was 75.5%.

2.3. Study Sample:

In order to ensure representing the study community fully, the researcher selected a class random sample of (75.5% approximately of the study community), (74) teachers.

The basic sample includes (51) teachers which about 68.92% and the pilot sample includes (23) teachers who are not from the basic sample.

Table 2: *Description of the basic study sample according to years of experience and academic level variables*

Years of Experience	Number	%	Academic Level	Number	%
Less than 10 years	30	58.82	Bachelor	41	80.39
From 10 to less than 15 years	11	21.57	Master	8	15.69
15 years and above	10	19.61	PhD	2	3.92
Total	51	100.00	Total	51	100.00

Table (2) shows that the basic sample according to years of experience variable includes 30 teachers less than 10 years of experience about 58.82%, 11 teachers from 10 to less than 15 years of experience about 21.57%, 10 teachers more than 15 years of experience about 19.61%.

In addition, table (2) shows that the basic sample according to academic level variable includes 41 teachers holding the bachelor degree about 80.39%, 8 teachers holding the master degree about 15.69%, 2 teachers holding the Ph.D. degree about 3.92%.

2.4. Study Instruments:

The present study used a questionnaire as a data collection tool in an attempt to answer the previously mentioned questions of the study. The questionnaire objectives were determined to identify the perspectives of EFL teachers about reading comprehension difficulties facing EFL secondary students in Bisha. In addition, the researcher interviewed a group of experts in this field to benefit from their experience. Before starting to apply the tool to the study sample, the tool's validity and reliability were verified as follows:

2.5. Reliability & Validity:

After finishing the questionnaire, it was presented first to the supervisor who gave instructions to successfully administer the questionnaire. After that, the questionnaire was in its initial form, it was handed in to jury members from foreign languages department at Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Al-Baha University in the academic year 1434/1435 H and from other universities. A letter was addressed to them stating the study problem, aims, and questions. The jury members were (9 members) in order to verify items convenience, clarity, relationship to the dimension they belong to, wording accuracy, and questionnaire grading and appropriateness. According to jury members' opinions on the questionnaire's appropriateness for the study aims and their suggestions, some items were amended linguistically. The questionnaire includes 31 items distributed in 4 dimensions.



The questionnaire validity was assured through the application of a pilot study of (23) teachers. Validity was calculated using content validity method through Pearson's Correlation Coefficient which determines the correlation relation among the questionnaire items (31 items). Total score of the test is shown in the table (3). It calculates the correlation relationship among each of the items of the questionnaire dimensions and the total score related to each dimension separately Table (5). It calculates the reciprocal relationship among the questionnaire items and the questionnaire total score. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient which measures the relationship between two variables was adopted. (total score of the test dimensions and the total score of the test as a whole).

Table (3) findings refer that correlation coefficients values varied from (0.531) to (0.828), all correlation coefficients values are positive and high at statistical significance level (0.01) reflecting content validity among each item score and the score of the demission it belongs to and the questionnaire total score.

The tool reliability was verified through Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability value was (0.964) which is the high score at (0.01) significance stating the high reliability of the questionnaire.

2.6. Construction of EFL Reading Difficulties Questionnaire:

The current study has one data collection instrument which is a modified version of EFL reading comprehension questionnaire originally prepared by Nezami (2012). It uses Likert's scoring system ranging from strongly agree (5 scores) to strongly disagree (1 score). It has four

dimensions that start with "Lexical Difficulties" which are elicited by eight statements (1-8). Then, "Difficulties of skimming and scanning a text" that are investigated by seven statements (9-15). " Difficulties in predicting the meaning of the text" by eight statements (16-23). Finally, "Difficulties of comprehending and Summarizing a text" traced by eight statements (24-31).

The score (5) for shall e given to "Strongly Agree" response, (4) for "Agree", (3) for "Neutral", (2) for "Disagree", and (1) for "Strongly Disagree" The highest score of the questionnaire shall be $31 * 5 = 115$, the lowest score: $31 * 1 = 31$, and the mean score: $31 * 3 = 93$. According to Likert Scale, the following criterion was used to judge the teachers' perspectives.

2.7. Statistical Methods:

Statistical methods used in the current study were repetitions and percentages to describe the study sample with regard to personal information, mean scores and standard deviation to calculate the value given by the study sample for each item or group of items (the aspect). variance test to compare the study sample individuals' responses according to academic level and years of experience variables. the validity of the questionnaire using content validity, the reliability of the questionnaire using Alpha Cronbach and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to measure reliability through reapplication method.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients between item's score and dimension's score.

S	Dimension	Correlation to the dimension it belongs to	Correlation to The questionnaire total score	S	Dimension	Correlation to the dimension it belongs to	Correlation to the questionnaire total score
1	Lexical Difficulties (Vocabulary)	0.695 **	0.654 **	17	Difficulties in Predicting the meaning of a text	0.534 **	0.752 **
2		0.622 **	0.661 **	18		0.559 **	0.542 **
3		0.644 **	0.560 **	19		0.539 **	0.539 **
4		0.695 **	0.566 **	20		0.568 **	0.541 **
5		0.694 **	0.537 **	21		0.541 **	0.759 **
6		0.784 **	0.657 **	22		0.759 **	0.615 **
7		0.627 **	0.615 **	23		0.619 **	0.534 **
8		0.716 **	0.613 **	24		0.564 **	0.646 **
9	Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text	0.623 **	0.646 **	25	D-Difficulties in comprehending and summarizing a text	0.679 **	0.596 **
10		0.828 **	0.536 **	26		0.621 **	0.535 **
11		0.675 **	0.599 **	27		0.604 **	0.604 **
12		0.528 **	0.615 **	28		0.657 **	0.537 **
13		0.590 **	0.665 **	29		0.638 **	0.531 **
14		0.535 **	0.700 **	30		0.828 **	0.541 **
15		0.629 **	0.596 **	31		0.825 **	0.596 **
16		0.568 **	0.791 **				

N = 23

** Significant at 0.01



3. Results:

Findings presented in Table (4) show reading comprehension difficulties facing secondary education students in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers as follows:

1. Difficulties in comprehension and summarizing came in the first order in mean (29.41), and standard deviation (6.223).
2. Lexical Difficulties (Vocabulary) came in the second order in mean (28.67), and standard deviation (5.317).
3. Difficulties in predicting the meaning of a text came in the third order in mean (26.20), and standard deviation (5.389).
4. Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text came in the fourth order in mean (25.24), and standard deviation (5.823).

In order to identify the causes of reading comprehension difficulties facing secondary education students in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers in each aspect of the study aspects, the researcher used the following equation to judge the sample teacher's perspectives with regard to difficulty level:

Range: the highest score- the lowest score = 5-1= 4

Class Length: Response Range/Response Classes = 4/5= 0.8

Table 4: *Ordering reading comprehension difficulties facing EFL secondary students in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers*

S	Dimension	N	M	SD	Ordering causes of reading comprehension difficulties
1	Lexical Difficulties (Vocabulary)	51	28.67	5.317	2
2	Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text	51	25.24	5.823	4
3	Difficulties in Predicting the meaning of a text	51	26.20	5.389	3
4	Difficulties in comprehension and summarizing a text	51	29.41	6.223	1

Findings presented in Table (5) show that causes difficulties in reading comprehension and summarizing a text as stated by the study sample were high in general. These causes were represented in writing the summary in correct grammar in the first order with high degree in mean (4.02), writing the summary in correct grammar in the second order with high degree in mean (3.90), writing the summary in correct grammar in the third order with high degree in mean (3.82), writing the summary in correct grammar in the fourth order with high degree in mean

(3.75), writing the summary in correct grammar in the fifth order with high degree in mean (3.71), and writing the summary in correct grammar in the sixth order with medium degree in mean (3.49).

The researcher interprets these findings that having difficulty in understanding and summarizing a text as stated by the study sample's individuals' perspectives were among the reading comprehension difficulties facing EFL secondary students in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers.

Furthermore, these findings are in line with Nezami, (2012) in which he found that in text comprehension and summarizing difficulties are a high percentage of EFL teachers perspectives on reading comprehension difficulties.

Table 5: *Study sample individual perspectives on difficulties in reading comprehension and summarizing a text*

	Difficulties in comprehension and summarizing a text	M	SD	Order	Response
24	Understanding the reading comprehension text.	3.71	1.137	5	High
25	Expressing in their own words.	3.75	1.309	4	High
26	Summarizing a two-page article in a class.	3.90	1.153	2	High
27	Writing antonyms and synonyms.	3.45	1.254	7	High
28	Developing new vocabulary words.	3.27	1.234	8	Medium
29	Reading silently for comprehension purposes.	3.49	1.065	6	High
30	Expressing the summary in written language.	3.82	1.144	3	High
31	Writing the summary grammatically correct.	4.02	1.208	1	High

Findings presented in Table (6) show that causes of difficulties in predicting text meaning as stated by the sample's individual responses came in high degree and were represented in guessing the meaning of difficult words using context cues which came in the first order with high degree in mean (3.86) and learning and retention of vocabulary came in the second order with high degree in mean (3.86), getting meaning from group-discussion came with high degree came in the third order in mean (3.84), pronunciation of new vocabulary in aloud reading came in the fourth order in mean (3.78), Improving their vocabulary by further reading came in the fifth order in mean (3.71), finding out difficult words by self-study came in the sixth



order in mean (3.51), Using paper dictionary and using electronic dictionary came in the seventh and eighth orders in mean (3.12) and (2.99) respectively.

The researcher interprets these findings that having difficulty in vocabulary as stated by the study sample's individuals' perspectives were among the reading comprehension difficulties facing students of secondary education in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers.

Furthermore, these findings are in line Blinkhorn, (2009) in which he found that vocab difficulties are a high percentage of EFL teachers perspectives on reading comprehension difficulties.

Table (6): Study sample individual perspectives on lexical difficulties (vocabulary)

Lexical Difficulties (Vocabulary)	M	SD	Order	Response
1 Learning and retention of vocabulary.	3.86	1.184	2	High
2 Finding out difficult words by self-study.	3.51	1.255	6	High
3 Guessing the meaning of difficult words using context cues.	3.86	0.939	1	High
4 Pronunciation of new vocabulary in aloud reading.	3.78	1.137	4	High
5 Using paper dictionary.	3.12	1.321	7	Medium
6 Using electronic dictionary.	2.98	1.157	8	Medium
7 Getting meaning from group-discussion.	3.84	1.120	3	High
8 Improving their vocabulary by further reading.	3.71	1.361	5	High

Findings presented in Table (7) show that causes of difficulties in predicting text meaning as stated by the sample individuals responses came in high degree and were represented in: understanding the text/phrases full meaning came in the first order with high degree in mean (3.86) and reading stories and poems came in the second order with high degree in mean (3.49). In addition, Causes of difficulties in predicting text meaning as stated by the sample's individuals' perspectives came in medium degree and were represented in predicting and giving the correct answers came in the third order in mean (3.33), participating in group prediction came in the fourth order in mean (3.27), reading argumentative material topics came in the fifth order in mean (3.24), having of previous knowledge related to the topic came in the sixth order in mean (3.20), predicting meaning using heading titles and

predicting meaning using pictures came in the seventh and eighth orders respectively in mean (2.90).

The researcher interprets these findings that having difficulty in predicting text meaning as stated by the study sample's individuals' perspectives was among the reading comprehension difficulties facing students of the secondary school in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers.

Table 7: Study sample individual perspectives difficulties in predicting the meaning of a text

Difficulties in Predicting the meaning of a text	M	SD	Order	Response
16 Understanding meaning of complete text/phrases.	3.86	1.184	1	High
17 Predicting meaning using pictures.	2.90	1.315	8	Medium
18 Predicting meaning using heading titles.	2.90	0.985	7	Medium
19 Reading argumentative material topics.	3.24	1.124	5	Medium
20 Reading stories and poems.	3.49	1.155	2	High
21 Having some previous knowledge related to the topic.	3.20	1.149	6	Medium
22 Participating in group prediction.	3.27	1.078	4	Medium
23 Predicting and giving the correct answers.	3.33	1.089	3	Medium

Findings presented in Table (8) show that y the sample individuals responses about difficulty in skimming and scanning a text came with high degree and were represented in: "using skimming and scanning strategies" came in the first order in mean (3.84), getting general idea of the text by skimming came in the second order in mean (3.67), completing skimming tasks within the allotted time came in the third order in mean (3.63), discussing their answers in pairs or groups for skimming and scanning in class came in the fourth order in mean (3.61), preparing reading lessons at home came in the fifth order in mean (3.57), completing scanning tasks within the allotted time came in the sixth order in mean (3.47), Recognizing the particular area of text for scanning came in the seventh order in mean (3.45).

The researcher interprets these findings that having difficulty in skimming and scanning a text according to the study sample's individual's responses were among the reading comprehension difficulties facing students of secondary education in Bisha from perspectives of EFL teachers.

In regard to the previous findings, researcher thinks that these findings are due to teachers themselves or their



strategies of learning during the course, for instance, paying little attention to student's weakness in reading, giving inadequate concern in making coherence between reading skills and other language skills, giving little opportunity for the student to practice reading. All these things will affect the students reading comprehension skills especially their abilities of skimming and scanning a text. All these findings agree with the findings of (Al-Jamal et al., 2012) which indicated that assisting students with background knowledge is an essential feature of reading comprehension. Also, Nezami, (2012) study revealed that the reading difficulties felt in different areas such as the use of vocabulary, scanning, skimming, prediction and summarizing in the process of comprehension of English language.

Table 8: *Study sample individual perspectives on difficulties in skimming and scanning a Text*

Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text	M	SD	Order	Response
9 Using skimming and scanning strategies.	3.84	1.206	1	High
10 Preparing reading lessons at home.	3.57	1.345	5	High
11 Discussing their answers in pairs or groups for skimming and scanning in class.	3.61	1.168	4	High
12 Getting a general idea of the text by skimming.	3.67	1.108	2	High
13 Recognizing the particular area of text for scanning.	3.45	1.222	7	High
14 Completing skimming tasks within the allotted time.	3.63	1.076	3	High
15 Completing scanning tasks within the allotted time.	3.47	1.120	6	High

4. Discussion:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the main reading comprehension difficulties experienced by the EFL secondary school students at Bisha according to their EFL teachers perspectives with reference to prediction, understanding and skimming abilities. Also to bring forward a recommendation to the teachers and the students on the various ways to tackle reading comprehension difficulties. The researcher To achieve these purposes, the researcher adopted the descriptive method by preparing a questionnaire, and this tool administered to (74) teachers working in secondary schools

at Bisha, in addition to using the comparative descriptive method to compare the study sample responses means according to (academic level – years of experience) variables. Then the researcher used suitable series of statistical processes to get the study results which were as the follows: 1) There are difficulties in comprehension and summarizing a text, 2) Lexical difficulties (vocabulary), 3) Difficulties in predicting the meaning of a text, 4) Difficulties in skimming and scanning a text.

5. Conclusion:

Learning a second language can be hard especially where much of the student's life has been marked with the first language. There are difficulties that accompany learning second languages and most students tend to develop challenges when reading or trying to comprehend texts that are written in the second language (Virtue & Motyka Joss, 2012). Most of the students at the secondary school level are faced with the challenge of comprehending certain texts as they read them or listening to the teachers. Much of the challenges, crop up from the fact that the students do not have the right skills and vocabularies in their second language. This means that every time that they read a text that contains vocabularies that they have not seen before, they get stuck.

As such the students experience difficulties during their reading, prediction of the texts meaning, skimming and scanning through texts (Ediger, 2010). It is crucial that a student masters the skills in reading their second language otherwise they will have a hard time comprehending the content. At the same time, they cannot be in a position to summarize texts because they do not have the ability to understand the content (Brown, 2013). Skimming is one of the most crucial skills that students and teachers alike use when searching for information of a specific type (Mahapatra et al., 2010). If the student does not have the right reading comprehension skills subject to their vocabulary and prediction abilities, they will have a hard time trying to skim through scores of books and web pages to get the information that they need. As such the reading comprehension skills are very crucial in English as a second language.

6. Recommendations:

Based on the results found in the current study, the followings are some recommendations and suggestions that may provide suitable solutions for reading comprehension difficulties facing by EFL secondary schools students at Bisha. The researcher would recommend to pay attention to overpowering difficulties in comprehension and summarizing, pay attention to overcoming lexical difficulties (vocabulary), pay attention to overpowering difficulties in predicting the meaning of a text and promote the role of parents to help their children to read at home constantly.

**Corresponding Author:**

Fayez Saad Fayez Al-Thuwayb, MSc.
Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts, Al-Baha University, Al-Baha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
E-mail: fhwayeb1982@outlook.sa

References:

1. Al-Jamal, D., Al-Hawamleh, M., & Al-Jamal, G. (2013). An assessment of reading comprehension practice in Jordan. *Jordan Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(3), 335-344.
2. Blinkhorn, D. L. (2009). *Reading comprehension difficulties among students with disabilities and students at-risk*. The University of Phoenix.
3. Brown, S. (2013). A blended approach to reading and writing graphic stories. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(3), 208-219.
4. Du Boulay, D. (1999). Argument in reading: what does it involve and how can students become better critical readers? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 4(2), 147-162.
5. Ediger, M. (2010). Struggling readers in high school. *Reading Improvement*, 47(2), 105-111.
6. Mahapatra, S., Das, J. P., Stack-Cutler, H., & Parrila, R. (2010). Remediating reading comprehension difficulties: A cognitive processing approach. *Reading Psychology*, 31(5), 428-453.
7. Nezami, S. R. A. (2012). A Critical Study of Comprehension Strategies and General Problems in Reading Skill Faced by Arab EFL Learners with Special Reference to Najran University in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Education*, 2(3).
8. Simard, D., Foucambert, D., & Labelle, M. (2014). Examining the contribution of metasyntactic ability to reading comprehension among native and non-native speakers of French. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 18(6), 586-604.
9. Virtue, S., & Motyka Joss, L. (2012). Hemispheric processing of inferences during text comprehension: The role of consistency and task difficulty. *Laterality: Asymmetries of Body, Brain and Cognition*, 17(5), 549-564.

Received February 04, 2018; revised February 09, 2018; accepted February 12, 2018; published online March 01, 2018