The Effect of Active Learning Strategies on EFL Tenth-Grade Students' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract
This study aimed at investigating the effect of active learning strategies on Jordanian EFL tenth-grade students' reading comprehension. A sample of 50 male students were distributed randomly into an experimental and a control groups of 25 students each. Four active learning strategies (viz., SQ3R, brainstorming scaffolded instruction, and snowball throwing) were used to instruct the experimental group whereas the control group was taught by the teaching strategies in the teacher’s book. The data were collected using a quasi-experimental approach design through a pre-post-test for both control and experimental groups. In terms of data analysis, One-way MANCOVA and One-way ANCOVA were used to answer the research question. The findings revealed significant differences between the two groups' performance in the post-test in favor of the experimental group. Therefore, the researcher recommends using the selected ALSs on different EFL skills and different levels of students.

Keywords: active learning strategies; brainstorming; reading comprehension; scaffolding; snowballing; SQ3R

Introduction
Reading comprehension plays a significant role in language development. It is not only the backbone of language learning but also of comprehending other subjects. A crucial end of teaching reading comprehension is to assist students in growing knowledge and skills if they want to come to be skilled readers. Being confused in getting meaning from a given text is a matter of concern. Active learning strategies can steer students' learning; thereby, meaning is created by the students themselves rather than the teacher. Therefore, making use of effective strategy makes the instruction more engaging.

Students' academic progress is profoundly shaped by their ability to understand the written text (Omaggio, 2001). Specifically, academic success requires students to understand, analyze, and apply the information they gathered through reading (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2013). Therefore, students need reading comprehension skills to accomplish the educational goals and expectations required in classroom settings.

According to Basaraba, Yovanoff, Alonzo, and Tindal (2013), reading comprehension is staged into three comprehension levels: the literal, the inferential, and the evaluative. These levels proceed as follows: (a) the literal stage states facts in the text: data, specifics, dates, traits, and settings, (b) the inferential stage is built on facts in the text: predictions, sequence, and settings, (c) and the evaluative stage is a judgment of text based on: fact or opinion, validity, appropriateness, comparison, and cause and effect.

The notion of active learning can be linked to Confucius (551-479 BC), who stated, “I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand” (Naithani, 2008, p.1). Moreover, Dede (2008) added that active learning causes a change from the classical education process to a new process; based on Constructivism, it became a set of principles for creating meaningful learning engaging instructions.
EFL learners face challenges in comprehending written texts. This seems to derive from highly restricted traditional strategies that hardly enable them to read comprehensibly (Baptist, 2018). Furthermore, several local studies such as (Assaf, Al-Jamal, & Rababeh, 2020; Bataineh & Al-Sakal, 2021) highlighted the importance of improving the quality of the EFL context learning process quality in Jordan; for instance, Jordanian EFL learners are expected to make determined efforts to improve their language production through language reading comprehension skills (Assaf et al., 2020).

Consequently, the current study examined active learning strategies on EFL tenth grade students' reading comprehension using four active learning strategies (henceforth, ALSs), namely, SQ3R, brainstorming scaffolding, and snowball throwing. Furthermore, these ALSs conducted sequentially in the reading lesson per reading stage. In other words, these different ALSs that have been chosen may provide insight into potential uses; they are selected to correspond to various phases in a reading comprehension lesson.

Statement of the Problem
EFL learners in Jordan were reported to find comprehending written texts problematic due to teachers’ use of conventional strategies that hardly enable them to read comprehensibly, (e.g. Al-Jamal, Al-Hawamleh, & Al-Jamal 2013; Bataineh & Al-Sakal, 2021). Furthermore, these studies reported that inappropriate reading comprehension strategies negatively affect the students’ reading comprehension levels. Thus, the researcher has noted the need to pay attention to the use of specific active learning techniques to investigate how active learning strategies affect EFL tenth grade students; however, none of the previous research studies precisely focused on reading comprehension.

Purpose of the Study
This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of ALSs on EFL tenth-grade students' reading comprehension levels (literal, inferential, and evaluative) and their attitudes towards these strategies.

Question of the Study
The study seeks an answer to the question, are there any statistically significant differences (at $\alpha = 0.05$) in the students’ mean scores of the reading comprehension post-test due to the instructional strategies (ALSs vs. conventional)?

Significance of the Study
The significance of the findings may probably draw the attention of EFL curriculum designers, educational policymakers, EFL supervisors, teachers, and students, to raise their awareness of the significance of incorporating four ALSs (SQ3R, brainstorming, scaffolding, and snowball throwing).

Operational Definition of Terms
- **Active learning strategy**: In this study, active learning comprises four strategies, including SQ3R, brainstorming, scaffolding, and snowball throwing, conducted in EFL tenth grade students’ reading comprehension class. It was measured through the students’ scores on the reading pre/post-test of reading comprehension that the researcher will carry out.
  - SQ3R: According to Robinson (1946), SQ3R is the process that makes the students read faster, get the crucial points, and memorize the content in their minds. The abbreviation stands for the steps in the process: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. In this study, the SQ3R strategy was used in EFL tenth-grade students to foster their reading comprehension. It was measured through the students’ scores on the reading pre/post-test.
  - Brainstorming: According to Stein (1975) clarified that the success of brainstorming derives from a long-standing and widespread desire to increase group productivity; they showed that it is quick and easy to understand, and it can significantly enhance group idea generation with enjoyment in the activity itself. In this study, brainstorming is a strategy used to solve EFL tenth-grade students’ problems in reading texts in Action Pack 10. It was measured through the students’ scores on the reading comprehension pre/post-test.
  - Scaffolding: Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) introduced scaffolding originally with adults assisting children in acquiring knowledge or developing informal learning environments. Later, it was adjusted to include a broader range of learners with diverse learning goals in formal education (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, 2006). This study refers to the teacher’s help in assisting learners to complete a task that tackles reading texts to gain an overall comprehension. It was measured through the students’ scores on the reading comprehension pre/post-test.
  - Snowball throwing: Slavin (1991) defined it as a cooperative learning strategy that enhances students’ appreciation for academic learning and changing norms related to achievement and prepares students to learn using collaboration and social skills through active participation of small groups. In this study, this strategy encouraged students to consider their answers to problems and initiate a collaborative process for others, allowing less outspoken students to exchange ideas in pairs in larger groups. It was measured through the students’ scores on the reading pre/post-test.

- **Reading Comprehension**: According to Pressley (1976), it is the process through which the readers can make a mental image of a text to comprehend what they are reading, and the readers who form a mental image as they read are better able to recall what they have read than those who do not image. In this study, reading comprehension refers to students’ scores in the pre-post reading test at three comprehension levels (i.e., literal, inferential, and evaluative).

Limitations of the Study

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The findings are limited to EFL tenth-grade male students at Balila secondary school for boys in Jarash Directorate of Education in Jordan during the first semester of the academic year (2021/2022).

Theoretical Literature

Reading Comprehension

The aim of reading comprehension is to comprehend what a reader is reading. Reading comprehension is one of the crucial factors of success academically and at work, but reading comprehension is not easy to develop or use in life (Connor and Weston, 2016). Hence, it is essential to know reading comprehension and its skills.

According to Basaraba et al. (2013), reading comprehension is staged into three comprehension levels: the literal, the inferential, and the evaluative. These levels proceed as follows: (a) the literal stage states facts in the text: data, specifics, dates, traits, and settings, (b) the inferential stage is built on facts in the text: predictions, sequence, and settings, (c) and the evaluative stage is a judgment of text based on: fact or opinion, validity, appropriateness, comparison, and cause and effect.

Literal comprehension requires the reader to get the information in the text (Stead, 2006). He showed that literal comprehension focuses on the basic facts in the text, the meaning of new words or a sentence, context clues, the organization of a paragraph, and the ability to know the explicit information from the text. Moreover, Basaraba et al. (2013) added that in this level, the reader could answer simple questions such as who, when, and where; the reader can answer the questions without understanding the whole text.

In inferential comprehension, the reader must use his knowledge to interpret the message. Stead (2006) called it the interpretive comprehension skill. She added that it is based on going beyond the text to understand the writer's point of view. Also, it includes searching conclusions, making inferences, recognizing the purpose, predicting outcomes, making a generalization, and identifying the main idea (Runnelhart, Woods, Huggins, Morgan, Green, Webber, and Adams, 1980).

Critical comprehension is called evaluative skill, and it needs the reader to make judgments about the text. As a result, this level includes using both literal and interpretive understanding to reach high order thinking about the text (Stead, 2006). Furthermore, this skill is a creative one, which includes developing new ideas from the information in the text, and it is related to the idea of evaluating the sense of the text as well as intends to differentiate between the fact and opinion and judges the appropriateness of arguments and conclusions (Basaraba et al. 2013).

Active learning strategies

Many international research findings (e.g., Aziz, 2020; Bell and Kahrhoff, 2006; Hartikainen, Rintala, Pylväs, & Nokelainen, 2019) indicated that active learning strategies play a significant role in improving students’ reading strategies as well as they agree that students learn more in an active learning environment than in a passive learning environment.

Besides, other local research findings such as (e.g. Al Safadi, 2017; Assaf et al., 2020) justified that Jordanian EFL learners are expected to make determined efforts to hone their language production through language reading comprehension skills.

Active learning strategies (ALSs) under the study

The SQ3R is considered a strategy for absorbing written information. Stahl and Armstrong (2020) stated that (Robinson, 1946) was the pioneer in developing the SQ3R strategy in reading, which SQ3R is most widely known. Moreover, Robinson (1946) stated that SQ3R is efficient because it makes the students read faster, get the crucial points, and memorize the content in their minds. This strategy is ideally suited for textbook reading and assignments as it was initially developed to be used in expository text. Furthermore, Lipson and Wixson (2003) maintained that it has recently earned "the grandfather of study strategies."

Brainstorming is considered one of the best and most widely used creative strategies. Feathers (2004) showed that brainstorming is probably one of the most well-known creative problem-solving tools. Brainstorming is a useful approach for teaching English in a foreign setting. He claimed that brainstorming is an ideation strategy through which language learners are motivated to generate many ideas. He also added that brainstorming improves the global activation of the reader's schema, allowing them to anticipate concepts, terminology, history, grammatical elements, and genre frameworks that are most probably met in the text to be read.

Scaffolding is considered a way teachers lead the learners from something known to the unknown; according to (Hidden Curriculum, 2014), scaffolding refers to several teaching strategies used to guide students toward greater comprehension and, eventually, greater comprehension flexibility in the learning process. In other words, when teachers use scaffolding, they provide students with successive degrees of guidance, allowing them to achieve higher levels of comprehension. The students would not have achieved knowledge without help. Moreover, Alber (2014) pointed out that scaffolding breaks up the learning into chunks and then provides a tool by which structure is used with each chunk.

Snowball throwing provides opportunities for democratic learning, enhances students' appreciation for academic learning, changes norms related to achievement, and prepares students to learn using collaboration and social skills through active participation of learners in small groups (Slavin, 1991). Moreover, Hafid and Asmawati (2017) mentioned that the snowball throwing strategy allows students to think about their responses to issues and begin a collaboration process with those around them to consider their thoughts on the same question, and the strategy is creative, fun, and enjoyable. This

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strategy was developed from a cooperative learning approach. It involves a paper ball containing questions, then tossed to another group, expecting this group to answer the question.

**Empirical Research**

This part includes empirical studies that were tackled using some ALSs: (SQ3R, brainstorming, scaffolding, and snowball throwing).

**SQ3R**

Fadillah, Suratno, Prastiti, and Hobri (2020) investigated a 4-D model development procedure to produce worksheets according to the SQ3R steps in learning object changes. Students’ worksheet with SQ3R was conducted on all fifth-grade students in SDN one Mimbaan and SDN two Mimbaan in Indonesia. A Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) questionnaire and pre-posttest were used. The findings revealed that the SQ3R strategy could be used or further developed by the teacher to change objects, invite students to develop metacognition skills and mastery of students’ concepts, and establish worksheets with SQ3R that produce better diverse material.

Pendidikan, Nugroho, Putu, Dewi, Putu, and Putri (2021) used the SQ3R strategy to investigate students’ reading comprehension of descriptive texts. The sample consisted of 30 SMP Negeri 1 Kediri’s class VII (seventh grade) students. Observation, documentation, testing, and questionnaires were utilized to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The findings demonstrated that using the SQ3R technique to teach reading comprehension can help students grasp and recognize many types and qualities of descriptive text.

**Brainstorming**

Virdaus (2019) examined the effect of brainstorming on students’ motivation in English writing for the second-semester students of Management Major of STIE Perbanas in Surabaya, sampling 25 students. The classroom Action Research (CAR) strategy was applied in this research. The findings revealed that brainstorming could improve students’ English writing skills and motivation in writing; the students could produce excellent and effective words and exciting answers. Moreover, a brainstorming strategy is suggested for teaching English Writing; this strategy makes students’ motivation in writing much higher than the group without a brainstorming strategy; they were more motivated to write English writing with a particular topic.

Rizal and Susanto (2021) investigated the impact of adopting the carousel brainstorming strategy on increasing reading comprehension in EFL students studying English at the IAIN of Bengkulu faculty in Indonesia. The sample was 30 male and female students. A mixed-method approach that included both qualitative and quantitative data. Reading tests, student observation checklists, lecturer observation checklists, file notes, and interviews were used in this study. The findings demonstrated that adopting the Carousel Brainstorming Strategy increased students’ reading comprehension; the Brainstorming Strategy can improve students’ capacity to grasp narrative passages in reading comprehension. Furthermore, findings revealed that students’ motivation and engagement in the learning and teaching process have increased.

**Scaffolding**

Wolf (2020) carried out a comparative and descriptive analysis to investigate the connection between text-type usage and early literacy outcomes in English language decoding capacity using scaffolded text when learning to read. A group of 80-grade students was chosen after reading lessons using English language materials, emphasizing Spanish-speaking-Hispanic English Language Learner (ELL) in Spain. A t-test, with the mean differences in the number of English words incorrectly decoded from a list of 253 words being noted. Three classes and two contrasts were used. The findings demonstrated support for the use of scaffolded text in helping Hispanic ELLs decode English text, and this initial data support using ST helps all students improve solving skills.

Mežek, McGrath, Negretti, and Berggren (2021) investigated the impact of an instructional scaffold combined with teacher feedback designed to foster students’ self-regulation in authentic academic reading comprehension contexts. The sample consisted of 75 student blog posts and 63 teacher answers collected over five weeks as part of a Swedish university’s initial teacher training program for English teachers. A qualitative approach design that included observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation was used. The findings revealed that a well-designed pedagogical approach, complete with a well-designed assignment and feedback that supports students’ reading, positively impacts what students perform outside of the classroom in an authentic reading situation.

**Snowball throwing**

Salim, Saini, and Paputungan (2020) studied research as a Classroom Action Research (CAR). The research aimed to improve students’ speaking skills in the 7th grade through the snowball throwing strategy at SMP in Indonesia. The participants were 21 girls and ten boys. However, only 25 students showed up for class. A mixed-method of qualitative and quantitative was used. A pre-posttest and observation were used. The findings clarified that the students were better at using the snowball throwing strategy. There was also an improvement in students’ speaking skills quantitatively; the students had a fun atmosphere like a game in a learning activity following the class, and the students could not feel any doubt or afraid of the English language like they used to feel.

Fatimah and Sari (2021) examined the effects of using the Snowball Throwing technique on the eighth-grade students’ abilities to perform outside of the classroom in an authentic reading situation.
utilized to choose 50 students, divided into experimental and control groups. In addition, a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was used with a pre-posttest. The findings demonstrated that Snowball throwing technique was proven to be helpful in teaching reading comprehension on recount texts.

**Concluding Remarks**

After reviewing and investigating the published literature studies and research related to active learning and reading comprehension and active learning strategies under study - ALSs, the results of previous studies are helpful for the current analysis because they aid the researcher in a variety of ways; they are closely related to ALSs and how to develop reading comprehension abilities. Moreover, a research gap tends to be apparent in the Jordanian context when it comes to combining the active learning strategies under the study.

Several previous international and local studies investigated some of the selected ALSs, which showed the effects of adopted ALSs in the current research on the learners' reading comprehension skills, through which all findings revealed positive effects on reading comprehension. For example: (Pendidikan et al., 2021; Rizal and Susanto, 2021; Mežek et al., 2021; Fatimah and Sari, 2021; Fadilah et al., 2020; Wolf, 2020; Salim et al., 2020; Virdaus, 2019), and the reviewed studies focus on just one active learning strategy as well as all these studies are international.

**Design of the Study**

A quantitative approach was applied in the current study. The data were collected using a quasi-experimental design through a pre-post-test for control and experimental groups. In addition, various active learning strategies (ALSs) were used to treat the experimental group. Whereas a control group was taught by the conventional teaching strategies, as suggested in the teacher's book. As such, the independent study variable was the four active learning strategies (SQ3R, brainstorming, scaffolding, and snowball throwing).* On the other hand, the dependent variable was the EFL tenth-grade students' reading comprehension.

**Participants of the study**

The sample was two out of three tenth-grade male students at twenty-five students for each section which were selected randomly from Balila secondary school for boys during the first semester of the scholastic year 2021/2022. The school was chosen conveniently to represent the target EFL population. The two sections were assigned randomly into control and experimental groups by tossing a coin.

**Equivalence of the Groups of the Study**

To test the equivalence of the two groups in the pre-test, a t-test was conducted to investigate any differences between the two groups in the three reading comprehension sub-skills and the overall reading comprehension levels scores. Table 1 illustrates the results.

| Table 1: T-test of the groups’ reading comprehension levels and overall score on the pre-test |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------|
| reading comprehension levels     | n               | Deviation| uc      |
| Literal                          | 0               | 0        | 11      |
| Inferential                      | 0               | 0        | 0       |
| Evaluative                       | 0               | 0        | 5       |
| Overall                          | 0               | 0        | 6       |

Table 1 shows that the differences between the performance of the two groups in the three reading comprehension levels and the overall skill in the pre-test were non-significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two groups were equivalent before the treatment.

**Instrumentation**

In this study, the reading comprehension test was used to collect data to achieve the goal of this study. This test was developed to assess students' reading comprehension ability before and after the experiment. The intended comprehension levels to be evaluated are: (literal, inferential, and evaluative). The test is extracted from the ELA Composition test (2012) with some researchers' modifications. It consists of a table of specifications, the pre/post-test, and the answers key.

The test was applied for the first time towards the beginning of the first semester of the scholastic year 2021/2022 (before the experiment started to check the equivalence of the two groups), and it was applied again after ending the investigation to check the students' achievement after treatment in terms of measuring reading comprehension development.

**Instruments Validity and Reliability**

To establish the face and content validity of the instruments, a validation jury of eight university professors and two EFL teachers was consulted. The jury approved the test and gave insightful comments. Furthermore, content validity has been established by conducting the textbook's content analysis utilizing a table of specification descriptions.

**Construct validity**

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The reading test's construct validity was evaluated using correlation analysis. As such, the reading comprehension test was piloted to 25 students from a sample outside the target sample and re-administered after two weeks. Pearson correlation coefficient was extracted between the item score and the total score of the comprehension levels. Furthermore, a corrected item-total Correlation between the item score and the comprehension levels' total score was extracted. Table 3 illustrates the results.

**Reliability of the test**

The reliability of the reading comprehension test was evaluated by utilizing the Cronbach Alpha and test-retest approaches. Table 4 illustrates the results.

**Item difficulty and item discrimination**

The different levels of Item Difficulty and Item Discrimination for each item of the reading comprehension test were extracted.

**Data Analysis**

In terms of data analysis, One-way MANCOVA and One-way ANCOVA were used to answer the research question.

**Findings of the Study**

This section presents the results pertinent to the research question: Are there any statistically significant differences (at $\alpha = 0.05$) in the students’ mean scores of the reading comprehension post-test due to the instructional strategies (ALSs vs. conventional)?

The means and standard deviations of students’ reading comprehension in the experimental and control groups over the three reading comprehension levels and sub-levels were extracted. A One-way Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (One-way MANCOVA) using a Multivariate Test (Hoteling's Trace test) was used to assess the effect of the teaching strategy (using ALSs) on the linear combination of the three reading comprehension levels (i.e., literal, inferential, and evaluative) after controlling for the effects of pre-test comprehension. Table 2 illustrates MANCOVA results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Strategy</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALSs</td>
<td>2.306</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, the main effect of the teaching Strategy (using ALSs) was significant, with a large effect size: Hotelling’s Trace test = 2.306, $F (3, 43) = 33.049$, $p < .001$, Multivariate eta square = 0.697. This effect indicates that the linear composite of the three reading comprehension levels (viz., literal, inferential, and evaluative) differs between the experimental and control groups. The partial eta square value of .697 indicates that 69.7% of the variance in the composite of the three reading comprehension levels (literal, inferential, and evaluative) could be attributed to the teaching strategy using ALSs.

A One-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the significant impacts of the teaching strategy on overall reading comprehension levels after controlling the effect of pre-test scores. Table 3 illustrates the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Strategy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>42.790</td>
<td>42.790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 revealed that the mean score of the experimental group in the overall reading comprehension levels is significantly higher than the mean score of the control group. The partial eta squared values of .682 indicate that the active learning strategies explained 68.2% of the overall reading comprehension levels variance. Thus, it can be stated that using Active Learning Strategies instruction enhanced students' comprehension in general reading comprehension levels.

**Discussion of the study**

The findings showed that the reading comprehension performance of the experimental group is superior to that of the control group in the three levels and overall. Thus, it can be concluded that active learning strategies in reading instruction enhanced students' comprehension in the three comprehension levels in favor of the experimental group. Therefore, it can be surmised that using active learning strategies instruction improved students' comprehension in overall reading comprehension levels.

The result of the previous research supported these findings. Therefore, using active learning strategies in teaching reading comprehension improved EFL tenth grade students’ ability to understand the information they had already learned in the text, and consequently, it improved reading comprehension skills. These results match the results of other
studies that approve using active learning strategies (e.g., Fadilah et al., 2020; Fatimah and Sari, 2021; Mežek et al., 2021; Pendidikan et al., 2021; Rizal and Susanto, 2021; Salim et al., 2020; Virdaus, 2019; Wolf, 2020). More specifically, the experimental group's mean comprehension scores are higher than the control group's mean scores in all three reading comprehension levels, sub-levels, and overall comprehension. Upon close analysis, it is shown that the mean score of students in the experimental group in the overall pre-tests scores was developed in the post-test. The researcher attributed the findings to the students' reading comprehension results, which assured that the experimental group achieved a good result in the post-test by using ALSs named SQ3R, brainstorming scaffolding, and snowball throwing. Therefore, it can be concluded that active learning strategies in reading comprehension instruction enhanced students' literal, inferential, and evaluative levels by making observed differences in the overall results in favor of the experimental group. The findings of this question corroborate the findings of previous literature, which supported the use of ALSs named SQ3R, brainstorming scaffolding, and snowball throwing as successful instructional strategies to improve reading comprehension. The researcher recommends using the selected ALSs on different EFL skills and different levels of students.

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