



## **Reading Comprehension Strategies**

### **Background**

The summary below presents the research evidence on teaching reading comprehension strategies in the Arab world.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of reading comprehension strategies on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on reading comprehension strategies in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions that could improve reading comprehension for Arabic-speaking pupils. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of reading comprehension strategies that have been delivered in an Arabic context.



## **Research Summary**

Implementing reading comprehension strategies in language classrooms has proved to support student's overall learning and improved their academic achievement. Students' ability to read fluently, and with comprehension will help them succeed in other subjects including math and science (Gallagher, 2011).

Within the Arabic language context, studies have found that students' capacity in reading comprehension is largely determined by their knowledge and understanding of orthographic features of the language (see also Phonics). In fact, researchers in the Arab world are called upon to explore ways to enhance students decoding skills (Asadi, 2018; Hussein, 2014) and phonological awareness (Asaad & Eviatar, 2014) as well as to discover new strategies of teaching reading comprehension (Abu-Hamour, 2013).

To this end, a large body of studies examined ways to improve students' understanding of the text, such as inferring meaning from context, summarizing or identifying key points, retelling, using graphic or semantic organizers, comparing and contrasting ideas, characters or events, predicting, using morphological clues to understand new vocabulary, developing questioning strategies, and monitoring their own comprehension and identifying difficulties themselves (Al-Alwan, 2012; Alshehri, 2014; Alhawamdeh, 2016).

Generally, in the Arab world, teachers teaching reading comprehension instruct students to do a silent reading of a text followed by oral and written questions. In order to investigate new strategies for improving reading comprehension, Abu-Hamour (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study on 66 fifth-grade students in a private school in Jordan. The control group used the traditional way of teaching reading comprehension which relies heavily on questioning the students after reading silently selected text. The experimental group received explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies, for four times a week for approximately 40 minutes for each session, such as: (a) visualization or creating mental pictures of what they are reading; (b) making connections by activating prior knowledge; (c) asking questions before, during, and after reading; (d) making inferences and drawing conclusions during and after reading; (e) determining the main ideas or recurring themes in the text; (f) synthesizing information and; (g)



using fix-up strategies when something doesn't make sense. Students in the experimental group scored better on their reading comprehension than students in the control group. Particularly, when their teacher explained the comprehension strategy clearly, modeled the strategy, guided the students as they learned and applied the strategy, and provided practice with the strategy until students were able to apply it independently.

On another note, reading fluency and reading comprehension need to be taught in the classroom as part of a well-designed, structured and research-based Arabic reading program that includes different types of reading such as reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading in addition to direct, explicit instruction (Taha-Thomure & Speaker, 2018). For instance, reading aloud by the teacher proved to hold significant positive effect on students reading comprehension because it provides opportunities to listen to the language in context. Students were able to connect their own experiences and personal knowledge with the texts and shared their opinions. This strategy enriched students' Arabic vocabulary and construction of knowledge (Alshehri, 2014). Collaborative strategic reading improved seventh grade Arabic-speaking reading comprehension when compared with the traditional teaching group (Demachkie & Oweini, 2011). This mixed-method study showed that working in groups gave students a chance to interact on a regular basis and support one another, which increased their self-confidence and improved their communication skills. These results were to happen if students were trained and given the necessary details about group work and the role of individual students in each group.

Furthermore, recent research emphasized the necessity of employing metacognitive strategies to improve reading comprehension. For instance, teaching reading comprehension using a digital program designed based on metacognitive strategies improved students reading comprehension, interaction, higher level thinking skills when compared with a control group who were taught by the ordinary methods (Alenizi & Alanazi, 2016). In this study, the use of the metacognitive teaching strategies motivated and challenged 65 students at the elementary level in the government schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and positively influenced students concept understanding, and deductive and critical understanding. Additionally, the KWL-Plus (what I Know, What I need to learn, and



what I Learned) is another metacognitive strategy that was effective in improving the performance of the Jordanian tenth grade male students in reading comprehension (Hamdan, 2014). The experimental group who was taught reading with the KWL-Plus strategy scored higher than the control group was taught with the conventional reading strategies. However, this strategy was tested for English language. Hence, it would be beneficial to see its implication on the Arabic language reading comprehension.

In another experimental study, Al-Alwan (2012) investigated the effect of using metacognition reading strategies on the reading comprehension of Arabic texts of ninth grade female students in Jordan. The control group was taught the reading passages using a traditional method, whereas, the experimental group was taught the same passages using metacognitive reading strategies. These strategies involved teachers modeling summarization, visualizing (when readers generate mental images of the story as they read the text to help them remember and understand what is read), predicting to help the readers set a purpose for their reading, and Text Structure (helps students get key concepts bound together to understand and remember the material better than just seeing the text as a series of isolated idea. As a result, the metacognition reading strategies improved students' overall reading comprehension. Students higher order thinking skills, self-awareness and critical analysis and reflective skills increased.

Through a semi-experimental method, Alhawamdeh (2016) examined the positive impact of using exploration and thinking aloud teaching strategies on developing analytical reading and linguistic intelligence skills for second middle grade female students in Saudi Arabia. Teachers encouraged students to guess, try, or shape an assumption about the meaning of the text read and to express their thinking loudly. As a result, teachers were able to see their students' thinking skills and gave them the chance to review any wrong or incomplete inference they made. This strategy has also increased students' ability to use Arabic language and its vocabularies. Additionally, through the exploration method, students gained skills in restoring the whole read text to its parts and go deeper through the shown context.



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Despite the summary of research presented above, there is a clear gap in research identifying effective strategies and interventions that could develop students reading comprehension in the Arab world. As such, researchers are recommended to conduct longitudinal studies and select larger samples to examine teaching strategies that could mostly impact students' reading comprehension. For instance, exploring the impact of collaborative reading strategy, exploration, and thinking aloud methods for a longer period of time will enrich the literature with reliable and valid data related to the development of students' reading comprehension (Alhawamdeh, 2016; Demachkie & Oweini, 2011). Other researchers are also advised to explore the impact of technology-facilitated approaches on reading comprehension, such as web-based leveled reading system, in comparison with a mainstream (traditional) ones. Such examination is strongly needed because studies to date have looked at the impact of digital technologies on students' attitude and engagement with reading in Arabic rather than on developing their understanding or critical thinking (Hammad, 2019).



### **Summary Paragraph**

Studies in Arabic speaking countries have examined strategies to improve reading comprehension, including: explicitly teaching reading comprehension, collaborative strategic reading, metacognitive strategies, reading aloud in class, and the use of digital technology.

When tested in schools in Saudi Arabia and Jordan metacognitive strategies increased students' abilities to construct meaning from texts and challenged them to be critical and reflective thinkers. A study in Jordan found that the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies showed evidence of promise when teachers modeled the strategies for their students. Another intervention used a digital program designed to teach reading comprehension to pupils in Saudi Arabia, which improved not only their concept understanding but also their deductive and critical understanding. As a result, their higher order thinking skills developed.

There are, however, still gaps in the literature aimed at identifying the effective strategies and interventions that could develop students' reading comprehension in the Arab world.



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### **Databases searched**

Academic Search Complete

ERIC

Google Scholar

ProQuest Central

### **Search Terms**

Reading comprehension strategies; Reading Intervention; Reading Skills; Students attainment, achievement, performance and success in Arabic reading; Students test scores in Arabic reading.