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THE IMPACT OF PREDICTION-BASED READING INSTRUCTION ON THE READING COMPREHENSION OF IRAQI EFL FIFTH PREPARATORY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the impacts of prediction-based reading instruction on the reading comprehension of Iraqi EFL fifth preparatory school learners. To achieve the aim of the study, a true experimental study with a pre-test and post-test design was adopted. The present study participants were 72 female Iraqi learners from Bilad Al-Nahrain Preparatory School for Girls in Karbala Governorate. The participants were divided into two groups, experimental (n=38) and control (n=34). The learners in the experimental group (EG) received teaching through the DRTA strategy, which is based on prediction. The control group (CG) received instruction through traditional teaching methods. Both groups received the same instructional material for reading comprehension from the students' book, English for Iraq. The experiment was conducted during the first term of the academic year 2025-2026. The data was analyzed statistically by using SPSS. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group in the post-test of reading comprehension. These findings suggest that prediction-based reading instruction using the DRTA strategy is effective in enhancing the reading comprehension of Iraqi EFL learners.

KEYWORDS: Prediction, Reading Comprehension, Iraqi EFL Learners, DRTA Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an important cognitive skill that is essential for a learner's academic success and intellectual growth. At the preparatory level, the capacity to proficiently grasp and interpret texts is crucial for both academic success and lifelong learning. However, numerous learners face obstacles that hinder their reading comprehension skills, which may stem from various causes (Realiza, 2025). In Iraq, English is taught as an academic topic and does not occupy a significant position in everyday life communication. English is mandated as a core subject beginning in Grade 1. Implementation differs from curriculum goals, with inadequate teacher training identified as a significant problem (Borg & Capstick, 2024).

EFL learners may lack adequate background information due to intercultural disparities, while writers assume that readers share some past knowledge that need not be explicitly stated. Readers encounter numerous challenges in employing reading abilities; they comprehend easily, although they struggle to relate their past knowledge to the author's concepts outside the text (Lennon, 2020; Burhan, 2025). Comprehension is hindered when learners encounter words essential for understanding the text's core meaning that cannot be deduced, indicating that the material is overly difficult (Lennon, 2020). Despite growing research on reading comprehension instruction, the empirical evidence for numerous widely endorsed comprehension strategies remains inconsistent. A limited number of solutions have undergone thorough and methodologically sound investigations, resulting in significant ambiguity concerning the efficacy of alternative approaches (Ganske & Fisher, 2010).

Predictions practice helps students improve their reading comprehension skills. Before reading, students could use the prediction technique to understand the content by making predictions and clarifying them in the text. Students who can comprehend it while reading are given the key as they begin to engage with crucial ideas, activate background knowledge, and offer the key. They were working out connections between the text and what they already knew (Aliah et al., 2025). The DRTA is often advocated as an effective teaching strategy. Nonetheless, empirical research on DRTA has been scarce in both volume and comprehensiveness, with current studies providing disjointed or context-specific results. Moreover, there is limited understanding of how learners assimilate these tactics over time or the extent to which DRTA fosters

independent comprehension beyond structured classroom engagement (Ganske & Fisher, 2010).

The aim of the present study is to investigate the effect of using DRTA strategy on enhancing Iraqi EFL fifth preparatory learners' reading comprehension. It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level of significance between the mean scores of the experimental group students who are taught reading comprehension through DRTA strategy and the control group who are taught through the traditional method in the posttest.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a fundamental skill for English language learners. Indeed, for the majority of learners, it is the fundamental skill to acquire to guarantee success in education. Enhanced reading skills in second/foreign language (L2) learners of English typically facilitate more significant advances in other domains of language acquisition (Anderson, 2004). Reading comprehension is essential for academic achievement, since it supports content-area learning across all courses and correlates with improved results in subsequent education and employment (Castles et al. 2018; Smith et al. 2021).

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity is a strategy designed to enhance learners' reading comprehension. Stauffer initially presented this strategy in 1969. The main goal of the DRTA strategy is to improve learners' reading comprehension. The strategy was initially proposed by Stauffer in 1969 (Tierney et al., 2005). The prediction step of the DRTA strategy helps students understand the purpose of reading (Richardson et al., 2012). The DRTA strategy encourages critical awareness and thinking by including learners in prediction, verification, interpretation, and judgment. The teacher guides the reading and encourages reflection by using open questions frequently, like: What do you believe? Why do you think so? Can you prove it? (Vacca et al., 2021).

Prediction is an important strategy where students anticipate content before and during reading. Re-reading passages after completing tasks is also encouraged, as it helps learners become more familiar with the text and read more fluently. These strategies collectively enable learners to construct meaning efficiently and enhance their overall reading comprehension (Ur, 2024). Predicting works on book covers, photographs, headlines, content, etc. So, prediction plays a vital role in DRTA as a metacognitive strategy. It enables learners to engage in formulating predictions. Posing multiple open-

ended questions for learners to figure out their predictions regarding the material can facilitate the development of their prior knowledge. As a result, the DRTA strategy could be used to back up learners' predictions. The process is a cycle where learners formulate predictions, engage with a text, and assess the validity of their predictions (Harmer, 2007; Welson et al., 2020).

This theoretical efficacy is supported by empirical studies of the effectiveness of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy in EFL contexts for improving reading comprehension and learner engagement. Azzahara et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-method study in Indonesia and concluded that DRTA encourages predictions and active engagement, especially when combined with multimedia resources. Similarly, Al-Janaydeh and Al-Jamal (2024) found in Jordan that DRTA improves reading comprehension, enhances critical thinking, and creates an authentic environment for analytical reading.

In the Iraqi context, Rajab and Yahya (2023) highlighted the superiority of DRTA over conventional teaching methods. Likewise, Welson et al. (2020) in Egypt recommended integrating DRTA into EFL programs to develop more strategic and active readers. Furthermore, Anaktototy and Lesnussa (2022) reported significant improvement in students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, concluding that DRTA creates a more interactive and analytical learning environment. Taken together, these findings indicate that DRTA enhances reading comprehension, prediction skills,

critical thinking, and learner engagement among EFL students. Building on these findings, the current study investigates the effect of prediction-based reading instruction through the DRTA strategy on Iraqi EFL preparatory school learners' reading comprehension.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design Of the Study

This is a quantitative study in which a pretest-posttest true experimental design was adopted to determine whether using the DRTA strategy has a significant impact on Iraqi EFL preparatory school learners' reading comprehension achievement. In this study, the participants were randomly selected. In the current study, the DRTA strategy served as the independent variable, and reading comprehension was the dependent variable.

3.2. Participants Of the Study

The current study involved a sample of 72 female learners selected from Bilad Al-Nahrin Preparatory School for girls in Karbala, Iraq. They were all Iraqi EFL learners whose native language is Arabic. The participants were divided into one experimental group (n=38) and one control group (n=34). The experimental group was taught reading comprehension through DRTA strategy steps, which focus on prediction, while the participants in the control group received instructions through traditional teaching methods.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants.

No. of Participants	Gender	Age Range	Native Language	Academic Year
72	Female	16-18	Arabic	2025-2026

3.3. Research Instruments

The researcher created a structured evaluation instrument based on the steps of designing effective tests established by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) as a core element of the research methodology. The pre-test and post-test contained five basic questions totaling 21 items: questions one, two, and three each included 5 items, and questions four and five each included 3 items.

To ensure the authenticity of the results, the researcher deliberately adapted reading passages for the pretest from Lee (2011) and the posttest from Lee and Gundersen (2011) rather than the designated textbook to reduce the impact of rote memorization. To ensure objectivity and consistency in evaluating performance in reading comprehension, the

researcher follows a dual-scoring system adapted from Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) to assess both accuracy and the depth of understanding.

To check the validity of the test, it was sent to a panel of expert jurors with specializations in English language teaching, curriculum design, and educational measurement to ensure high levels of content validity. The reliability of the tests was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The pre-test yielded a coefficient of 0.77, while the post-test was 0.85, indicating a high level of internal consistency, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2018).

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained, various statistical procedures were used. First, the data were analyzed

using SPSS version 26. Secondly, to estimate the reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's alpha method was calculated. Then descriptive statistics were used for pre- and post-tests. Finally, to test the hypothesis of this study, inferential statistics were utilized to analyze the collected data. To investigate the research hypothesis, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To evaluate the effect of strategy intervention after the treatment period, the researcher statistical hypothesis. The post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group. Since the data are not normally distributed, which requires non-parametric statistics, a Mann-Whitney U test The non-parametric

equivalents of the t-test for two independent samples. It is based on ranks: how many times a score from one group is ranked higher than a score from another group (Cohen et al., 2018). It was employed as the primary statistical tool to identify significant differences between the two independent samples.

As illustrated in **Table 2**, the mean rank for the EG was 51.11, significantly higher than the CG's mean rank of 20.18. The statistical analysis revealed a highly significant difference ($U = 91.000$, $z = -6.269$, $p < .001$), confirming that the learners in the experimental group substantially outperformed their peers in the control group. This large gap in mean ranks provides empirical evidence for the positive impact of the intervention on learners' overall performance.

Table 2: Independent Samples Mann-Whitney U Test.

		Group Statistics					
Group	N.	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z-Value	Level of Sig.	Asymp.Sig(2-tailed)	
EG	38	51.11	91.000	-6.269	0.05	.000	
CG	34	20.18					

Table 3: Effect Size of DRTA On Reading Comprehension.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Effect Size Value	Effect Size Quantity
DRTA Strategy	Reading Comprehension	0.74	Large

After applying the Mann-Whitney U test to compare the post-test scores of the EG and CG groups. The statistical analysis revealed a significant difference in favor of the EG ($z = -6.308$, $p < .05$). The researcher calculates the effect size (r) to determine the practical significance of the result. The effect size was 0.74, as shown in **Table 3**, which is considered a larger effect according to Cohen, 1988 (Cohen, 1992). The researcher relied on Cohen's R sequencing set, and the finding suggests that the DRTA strategy had a powerful impact on improving the learners' reading comprehension performance. It further confirms that the observed differences between the experimental and control groups are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful in an educational context.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The current study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of prediction-based reading instruction on the reading comprehension of Iraqi EFL fifth preparatory school learners. The results obtained in this study suggested that prediction-based reading instruction through the DRTA strategy can be

considered one of the most effective strategies in teaching reading comprehension. The implementation of the DRTA strategy revealed a significant improvement in the pedagogical environment, creating a safe linguistic space where learners could express opinions freely and view errors as a natural part of the learning process. By lowering the affective filter, the strategy fostered interaction through group work, strengthening the relationships among students and between students and their teacher.

The findings of this study imply that the DRTA strategy is a powerful tool for promoting higher-order thinking and metacognitive awareness. Prediction-based reading instruction facilitates vocabulary acquisition and independent reading. The results from the post-reading stage, which utilized critical thinking questions, confirm that students became more capable of responding creatively and critically. Finally, these results suggest that incorporating such predictive and reflective strategies into the EFL curriculum can lead to deeper understanding and more meaningful language achievement.

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