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Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment Strategies Used In Private High Schools

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF READING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND READING ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES USED IN PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

Eman Yousef Mahmoud

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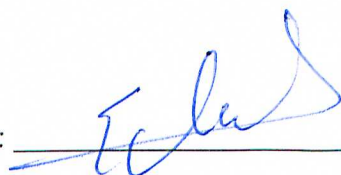
Under the Supervision of Dr. Sadiq Ismail

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Declaration of Original Work

I, Eman Yousef Mahmoud, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the author of this thesis entitled *"Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment Strategies Used in Private High Schools"*, hereby, solemnly declare that this thesis is my own original research work that has been done and prepared by me under the supervision of Dr. Sadiq Abdulwahed Ismail, in the College of Education at UAEU. This work has not previously been presented or published or formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my thesis have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation and/or publication of this thesis.

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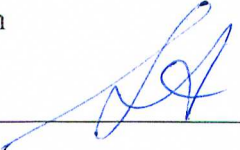
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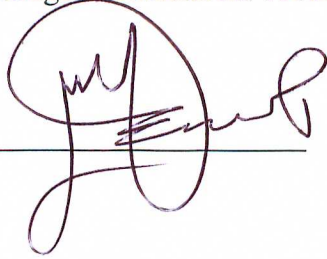   Institution: Al Ain University of Science and Technology

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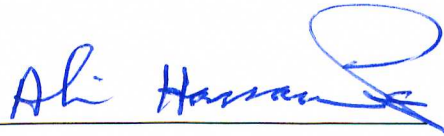Acting Dean of the College of Education: Professor Ahmed Murad

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Abstract

This research explores private high-school teachers' perceptions of reading instructions and assessment methods used in private high schools, in Al Ain city, in the UAE. The main objective of this study is to investigate reading instructional strategies, reading assessment strategies, the difficulties teachers face while teaching reading and the difficulties high-school students face during reading classes. This study used a mixed-method design to answer the research questions. Quantitative data were collected by using a questionnaire as a first stage (N=73), and qualitative data were later collected through interviews (N=7). The attained results shed light on the current situation of reading in private high schools. They show that high-school teachers use various reading strategies to teach reading. In addition, they use formative and summative assessment strategies of reading to revisit concepts, modify plans and curricula, collect data, identify students' levels and differentiate instruction. As ESL learners, the lack of reading motivation and habit, the weakness of vocabulary and language structure and the limited critical thinking skills are highlighted. The importance of this study is undeniable, for the findings of this research enrich the literature of research on ESL reading. They also add benefits to reading instructions and assessment strategies in the UAE. Furthermore, teachers, heads of departments, curriculum designers, schools, academic organizations, decision makers and researchers can build on the findings to gain more benefits for ESL learners. A very important aspect should be emphasized in teaching reading to high-school students is guiding students on how to independently choose and effectively use reading strategies to comprehend different reading texts. Building reading habits will better help students to improve reading skills, and consequently, improve all other English relative aspects.

Keywords: English as a second language (ESL), reading instructional strategies, reading assessment strategies

Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

دراسة آراء مدرسي اللغة الانجليزية حول استراتيجيات تعليم وتقييم القراءة لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية في المدارس الخاصة

الملخص

الهدف من هذه الأطروحة هو تسليط الضوء على آراء مدرسي المرحلة الثانوية للمدارس الخاصة بشأن أساليب تعليم القراءة وطرق التقييم المستخدمة في المدارس الخاصة الثانوية في مدينة العين في الامارات العربية المتحدة. يكمن الهدف الرئيس لهذه الدراسة في تحديد مفهوم الاستراتيجيات الخاصة بأساليب تعليم وتقييم القراءة وكذلك الصعوبات التي يواجهها المدرسون اثناء عملية تعليم القراءة ومن جهة أخرى الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب المرحلة الثانوية خلال حصص القراءة الصفية.

تتبنى هذه الدراسة مزيجا من الاساليب للإجابة على الاسئلة المتعلقة بالبحث. حيث تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال استخدام الاستبيان كمرحلة اولية، وتلى ذلك جمع البيانات النوعية من خلال اجراء المقابلات مع عدد من المدرسين المعنيين.

سلطت النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها الضوء على الوضع الحالي للقراءة في مدارس الثانوية الخاصة. حيث عرضت بمجملها استخدام المدرسين في تلك المدارس للعديد من الاستراتيجيات لتعليم القراءة. وعلاوة على ذلك، يقوم المدرسون باستخدام دراسات تقييم تكوينية وتلخيصية للقراءة وذلك بغية اعادة بلورة المفاهيم وتعديل الخطط والمناهج وجمع البيانات وتحديد مستويات الطلاب والتفريق بين وسائل التعليم. ونظراً لكون الطلاب من متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية وليست اللغة الأم، تم تسليط الضوء على ضعف الدافع للقراءة والتعود عليها وكذلك ضعف الالمام بمعاني المفردات والبنية اللغوية ومهارات التفكير النقدي.

تعتبر مخرجات هذه الدراسة من الأهمية بمكان حيث انها تعمل على اثراء الأدب البحثي لمفهوم قراءة اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية. ومن جهة اخرى تسعى لإضافة الفائدة على استراتيجيات تعليم وتقييم القراءة في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة. وعلاوة على ذلك، تمكّن هذه الدراسة جميع الشرائح من المدرسين ومدراء الادارات وأخصائيو المناهج والمؤسسات الأكاديمية وصناع القرار والباحثين من الاستعانة بمخرجاتها لتكون بمثابة حجر زاوية وتعود عليهم بالنفع بما يتعلق بموضوع القراءة. واختتمت الباحثة بأحد المحاور المهمة التي لا يمكن تجاهلها والذي يتوجب

تضمينها في منظومة تعليم القراءة لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية الا وهي التركيز على ارشاد الطلاب الى كيفية اختيار واستخدام استراتيجيات القراءة المناسبة لفهم مختلف نصوص القراءة والتركيز على تعليم المفردات.

مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية، استراتيجيات تعليم القراءة، استراتيجيات التقييم.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To my beloved parents and precious family

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List of Abbreviations

ADEK	Abu Dhabi Education and Knowledge
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learners
ESL	English as a Second Language
HCT	Higher College of Technology (A High School)
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
RTQ	Reading Teachers' Questionnaire
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAEU	United Arab Emirates University
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Reading is the fundamental part to gain knowledge in any field. Lempke (2016) believed that reading helps people grow and learn about the world around them, for reading is not one dimensional, and it affects all areas of language learning and other subjects too. However, reading is a daily practice in schools, yet many students do not read and simply understand what they read as they are expected to. Nezami (2012) stated that the excellence in reading and comprehension skills is one of the essential skills to acquire knowledge and flourish as a learner.

Many students in the Gulf region, including the UAE, view reading as a simple unnecessary task, and they usually look for a summary to study from rather than reading the explanations, illustrations and examples related to their topic. O'Sullivan (2009) stated that many Gulf college students have a significant discrepancy in their English language reading skills. Furthermore, when reading becomes an obligation in some tasks, such as reading comprehension exams, many students don't show proper understanding of the passage due to the lack of comprehension skills and the poor recognition of vocabulary words. Ibrahim (2016) highlighted that there is a direct impact of the familiarity, breadth, width, and depth of a student's vocabulary on comprehension and academic success.

This generation is exposed to media as the Internet is available almost everywhere, which means that information and entertainment are handy at all times. Moreover, the available access to the internet causes less reading and searching in solid books. The modern devices became children's best companions, and their favorite

pastime is related to social media websites or video games. Very few students enjoy reading fiction or nonfiction books as a hobby. Consequently, these factors reduce reading practices and frequencies.

Reading is not celebrated in the society because it is not supported by the culture, so reading is usually a burden to students. In a study on Arab students, Lempke (2016) highlighted the major role culture plays in students' motivation, and how childhood experiences can affect their perspective on assigned reading materials which results usually in avoiding reading. On the other hand, the UAE is recently paying more attention to the importance of reading. For example, 2016 was announced 'The Year of Reading' raising the motto "We read, we lead" by (Zayed University, 2016). Furthermore, many reading competitions have been taking place every year in the UAE like 'The Arab Reading Challenge' since 2015 to encourage reading in Arabic. Such practices show the imperative need and importance of having reading proficiency for students in the UAE.

1.2 Problem Statement

Reading is of utmost importance to students' learning not only in English language subject but also in all other subjects. Nezami (2012) clarified that the reading problem in Arabic-speaking countries is critical, and it is very important to be addressed. Nowadays, the majority of students do not read either their school textbooks or any other resources. To shed light on reading in schools, teachers can be the magnifying lens to reveal and analyze this phenomenon according to how they teach reading, their assessment strategies, and the influence on students' learning. O'Sullivan (2009) stated that English language teachers in the UAE and in other Arab countries verify that many students struggle to read at a proficiency level that is

considered appropriate to meet their current and future needs. Nezami (2012) asserted that the difficulty of reading for Arabic-speaking EFL learners in English language comprehension process is felt in different areas like the use of vocabulary, scanning, skimming, prediction and summarizing. Furthermore, the difficulties teachers face while applying strategies as well as the difficulties students face while learning and receiving assigned lessons in class need to be questioned. In addition, Nezami (2012) stated that the most significant problem instructors face today is the reading deficiency and the problems in comprehension among the university level students in Arabic-speaking countries. McGuire (2016) also specified that no matter what teachers may know about reading and reading instructions, positive and negative, it is important to determine the impact of these experiences on students' learning.

The problem of not reading basically arises from the background of reading and the lack of motivation students have towards reading, learning and gaining knowledge. Teaching students who are not used to reading as part of their daily life practices and culture is challenging. Lempke (2016) stated that teachers of Arabic-speaking students usually assume that their students are not doing their work because of laziness or indifference; however, the avoidance of reading goes beyond motivation levels because it is related to students' background with reading. The culture that avoids reading in the Arab World, including the Gulf area, is an important issue that constantly affects younger generations. Reading inefficiency in high schools is the result of the previous years of improper reading in schools or at home.

Unfortunately, reading and writing activities in the first language for many students do not exceed classwork, so such tasks are not used to construct a strong base for learning a second language. This was pointed out by Belhiah & Elhami (2015) as

they reported that students are becoming more and more averse to reading and writing, not only in English but in Arabic as well. Reading and writing in the first language leads students to gain confidence in learning the target language.

O'Sullivan (2004) asserted that many students in the UAE experience difficulties in learning English. He based this concern on a Higher College of Technology (HCT) report by the UAE Federal National Council's Committee for Education and Youth and Information and Culture Affairs. The report expresses anxiety over the general deterioration in the English standards of UAE students. O'Sullivan (2004) explained that despite the fact that the modern multicultural UAE society which facilitates the use of English language for real communicative purposes, the reality of the classroom at HCT and other educational institutions in the UAE does not match what is assumed. He referred to the problem in high schools mainly because of that learners can proceed to further learning of the language without mastering what they are supposed to learn in previous levels. In addition, a study was conducted on college students' reading comprehension abilities in the UAE, and three problems emerged from data analysis. Endley (2016) categorized them as problems with word recognition, focusing attention at word level, failure to build words into higher-level meaning and difficulty in analyzing complex grammatical structures in the texts.

The UAE students' level of reading in international exams is critical. According to International English Language Testing System formal website (IELTS, 2015 & 2017), the results show that the weakest part for test takers in the UAE is reading. The mean scores of reading test results for Academic tests are 4.5 in 2015, and 4.7 in 2017, and for General Training tests, it is 3.9 in 2015 (No score for UAE General Training test in 2017). Furthermore, the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) that organizes the triennial PISA test issued PISA results in the UAE which ranked the 42nd in 2009, the 46th in 2012 and the 36th in 2015 and retreated to the 48th rank in 2016. Students' reading skills are not up to the required level to meet expectations in schools and universities. Again, Ibrahim (2016) asserted that gulf students' weakness in English language may impact their ability to successfully complete their higher education when English is required because reading is an integral part of learning and studying. English deficiency sometimes causes students to repeat courses or dropout.

In continuous assessments, midterms, and final exams, students mainly lose marks in the reading comprehension part whether in simple, advanced or critical thinking questions. Unseen passages are the most difficult exam sections for many students, yet the text is available in the exam. The problem is not in finding answers to questions; it is of decoding vocabulary words, understanding sentences according to their structure, recognizing context clues, and eliciting information explicitly included or implicitly inferred from the passage. Nezami (2012) listed that factors that affect students' reading skills are slow reading, insufficient comprehension, total dependence on the print to get the meaning, inability to locate main ideas through scanning and skimming process, insufficient linguistic competence, lack of prediction and poor summarizing abilities. Moreover, it is not improving high-school students' skills to be only taught to pass reading exams. O'Sullivan (2009) highlighted that standardized testing does not encourage the development of reading skills because teachers focus on helping their students prepare for formal exams in English, and as a result, the school subject of English is more of a stuffing and exam preparation exercise than a communicative language learning experience.

Wessels (2011) asserted that vocabulary knowledge is essential to students' academic success. If students do not understand the meaning of the words in the text, they will have difficulty understanding the content. It is a problem when students struggle to understand vocabulary words because this affects their understanding of the sentence, and consequently, it affects their comprehension of the general explicit meaning of the passage and its specific and implicit details. For example, when students need to stop frequently while reading because they need to identify the meaning of many vocabulary words, including high frequency words, they won't be able to understand and comprehend the content. Monix (2012) stated that if a reader has to spend too much time and energy figuring out what the words are, he or she will be unable to concentrate on the overall meaning especially for the non-fluent readers.

On the other hand, teachers approach reading activities and teach differently. In order to view the problem clearly, teachers' perceptions and reflections on their own practices while delivering reading lessons should be investigated. Moreau (2014) stated that beliefs, experiences and content background knowledge of teachers indicate their behaviors and attitudes towards students, which affects their adaption of classroom strategies.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to identify different instructional strategies private high-school teachers use to teach reading for students in the UAE. It also sheds light on reading assessment strategies used to evaluate students' reading skills. The obstacles teachers face in applying their strategies in class and the difficulties students face while learning or receiving reading lessons are to be examined in this study too.

1.4 Research Questions

This research is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of instructional reading strategies do private high school teachers use to teach reading?

2. What kinds of assessment strategies do private high school teachers use to assess reading?

3. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties they face when they teach reading?

4. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties students face in reading classes?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Nezami (2012) declared that reading comprehension is considered the most important skill a child learns, and that the studies about reading strategies are few in comparison to studies done on other skills of English. The problem of reading can be identified through teachers' perceptions of their reading instructional strategies. Besides examining different strategies that are used to enhance reading for students in the UAE, it is important to highlight reading assessment strategies used to evaluate reading skills. Assessment strategies can explain many of the difficulties teachers and students face in second language reading classes. Addressing problems assists in reducing gaps, preventing or solving them. O'Sullivan (2009) listed key areas that classroom practitioners should pay attention to like addressing the reading problems many students have, so teachers may help prevent wasting resources, skills and efforts and recruit all in an effective and efficient way.

This study sheds light on instructional and assessment strategies, and it investigates difficulties teachers and students face while applying reading strategies in class. Stallings (2016) stated that it is imperative to determine if current classroom practices and instructional strategies are practical to meet the changing demands of schools. This study is important because it identifies the most common reading instructional and assessment practices in private schools that usually pay more attention to the English subject. The analytical explanation of various aspects related to ESL reading will clarify different issues in current setting. This study describes a serious problem of students in the UAE.

This critical situation needs close attention. Investigating teaching and assessment strategies of reading carefully along with identifying obstacles that teachers and students come across is important to understand many aspects of the problem. Since there are few studies about teachers' perceptions on reading, this study can add to the literature of reading in private schools for both males and females in the UAE. Lempke (2016) pointed out that it is important to have awareness of possible ways educators can help their students excel in the reading classes; as students struggle in understanding reading, their background and performance should help educators identify the current reading situation.

This study will help teachers plan instructional reading strategies from a different perspective. It can offer some kind of decision making to curriculum planners and school leaders regarding useful reading strategies to be implemented. McEwan (2006) noted that in order to create a successful school, the leader must be aware of the needs of the teachers and students, instructional resources, practices and necessary professional development. It will highlight the problem of reading in the UAE to pave

the way for further studies that will try to fill the gap within the same context. Understanding the situation will eventually benefit not only teachers in their planning and class practices, but also students who are the targeted group of the educational process.

1.6 Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the teachers who are included in this study are located in one city in the UAE. Secondly, only 73 high-school teachers responded to the questionnaire due to the limited number of private high-school teachers in each school, so some schools returned few responses. Finally, the interviews with the seven participants were held in one private school because the researcher has a full-time job in the same school, which may affect the generalization of the results of the research.

1.7 Definition of Terms

EFL: EFL is an acronym that stands for *English as a Foreign Language* where the learner has a different native language than English, so the language cannot be acquired in a natural setting.

ESL: ESL is an acronym that is used primarily in educational settings and stands for *English as a Second Language*. It refers to teaching English to a person whose native or primary language is not English. ESL and EFL are blurred terms, and they are used interchangeably in this study.

Reading Instructional Strategies are instructional techniques teachers use in classroom to help students read, identify words, link information and comprehend sentences or texts. They can be classified as strategies used before, during and after reading. They

can be categorized as summarizing, visualizing, making predictions and inferences, etc.

Reading Assessment Strategies are the techniques of assessment used to assess and evaluate knowledge and skills of learning. There are many types of assessments, yet they are mainly categorized as formative and summative assessments. The focus of this study is reading assessment strategies.

1.8 Summary

The main purpose of this study is to shed light on the critical reading problem in the UAE. First, an overview and problem statement introduced the chapter. Then, the chapter explained the purpose of the study and listed the research questions. Moreover, the significance of the study was described. Key terms in this study were defined. Finally, the limitations of the study were explained. The next chapter will review the relevant literature of reading types, problems, instructions and assessment strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Reading is one of the most important skills students need to master for successful learning in all fields. The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions on reading instructional strategies and reading assessment strategies used in English Language classrooms in private high schools. This chapter reviews relevant literature of instructional and assessment strategies globally and locally. James (2006) asserted that teachers need to have a view about the most valuable learning approaches and to keep developing teaching and assessment procedures according to students' needs.

To gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of instructional and assessment strategies of reading, this chapter includes a literature review in the following sections: the theoretical framework of this study, reading in a second language, reading strategies, teachers' perceptions on reading strategies, types of reading, reading assessment strategies, teachers' perceptions on reading assessment strategies, the relation between reading instructional and assessment strategies, the difficulties teachers face when they teach reading, ESL learners' reading difficulties, and finally, reading strategies and difficulties within the UAE context.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study springs from many educational theories that frame learning and teaching of reading. To begin with, Mathews (1976) described the history of teaching reading that started by learning the Greek alphabets about 3000 years ago when Greek schoolboys first learned the alphabets in order. Next, they learned commonly used

syllables before they learned to read words. Reading became more difficult after the art of printing reached England in 1475 when spelling was more fixed. Long ago, teaching reading was different than the focus of todays' classes. A teacher used to read, and young students repeat after him/her to practice the language as behaviorists typically do. Reading was not the most important subject to focus on. Strategies of comprehending and analyzing a passage were sort of a 'guessing game' where students needed to find similar words and copy the sentence as an answer. In this case, some direct questions were answered correctly, yet thoughtful questions were very difficult because they need students to analyze the information in the text and make inferences. Recently, things became a bit different with more ESL theories and strategies. There is much attention paid to reading and writing in the Communicative Approach because it does not only focus on forms and vocabulary, which previously was the only focus of many teaching methods like the Grammar-Translation Method. In this section, reading is viewed through two main theories: the Sociolinguistics Theory and ESL/EFL reading models.

2.2.1 Sociolinguistics Theory

The Sociolinguistic theory mainly explains the improvement and change of language according to social factors which is relevant to the topic of this study. First of all, Gumperz (1964) defined sociolinguistics as the effect of social characteristics on the spoken language considering the cultural background and the natural features of the environment in which they communicate and interact. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) identified the sociolinguistics theory in reading as the relation between the graphic symbols and the context, either the situational context of the text itself or the wider social context. Furthermore, a culture does not only play an important role in

shaping the characteristics of a language, but also defines other angles contributing to students' learning like their motivation and their relationship to reading. Lempke (2016) highlighted the major role of culture in student's motivation, and how childhood experiences can affect their perspective on assigned reading materials which results usually in avoiding reading in some Arab countries.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that language is central to our capacity to think, and it is developed through relationships between people because social relationships are necessary for learning; students need to communicate in a society to learn better. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) suggested student's zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is the possible capacity of the student to learn and improve. The ZPD is shaped and directed by cultural surroundings and circumstances that scaffold students' learning. To explain, scaffolding is the process of gradual support and guidance that enables a student to solve problems, complete tasks and reach a goal. Furthermore, reading skills and abilities to comprehend a passage grow and improve differently according to students' practice, and how reading was directed in early ages. James (2006) clarified that in order to improve a language and thinking skills, group work should be essential, and because learning is a collaborative social activity, what is learned should be shared. This assures that the learning environment plays an important role in the way learners read and analyze different texts.

Nevalainen (2011) compared historical linguistics and sociolinguistics and showed that they do not only emphasize grammatical and vocabulary variation and change but also emphasize the phonological variation. Non-native teachers and students do not notice much of this change as they mostly depend on books or other resources, yet this cannot deny the cultural impact the native language speakers have.

To demonstrate, this is shown in some outdated vocabulary that are not frequently used nowadays, but they are still taught for some reading texts. As an evidence, in writing or speaking, students may use words they learned in a historical fiction passage that are not used anymore, but students in non-native setting are not aware of this fact because of the lack of real-life application and practice of the language. On the other hand, second language learners may experience such differences if they live and practice the language naturally in native setting. Kim (2002) reported that one major factor that hinders the development of the communicative competences in English is that students have little access to authentic interaction with native speakers.

Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) described the five competences of readers in the Communicative Approach where communication and field experiences are essential as they provide the learners with better practice and application of language learned aspects. The first competence is the linguistic competence that is the awareness of language rules, vocabulary knowledge and mechanics rules such as punctuation marks. Second, the discourse competence is the ability to use and combine all discourse elements and the knowledge of different types of texts in a coherent way. In other words, it is the skill of analyzing different passages in relation to one's schemata. Third, the pragmatic competence is the ability to understand hidden messages in the text in which the author implies, and a reader infers. Pragmatics simply studies the language that is not directly spoken. Fourth, the intercultural competence is what Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) defined as the knowledge of how to interpret written texts appropriately within their sociocultural context, and the knowledge of the sociocultural background of the target language community, knowledge of dialects, and cross-cultural awareness. The final competence is the strategic competence that refers to possession of both communication and learning strategies, and it combines

all the previously mentioned language competences, for it links words and structure with the meaning and fills the gaps. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) referred to strategic competence as the ability to use reading strategies to make up for interpretation problems, and the ability to use reading strategies to enhance the communication between the writer and the reader.

2.2.2 Second Language Acquisition, ESL and EFL

Learning English in a foreign country where the language cannot be acquired in a natural setting is known as English as a Foreign Language (EFL), while acquiring English for non-native speakers in an English native country is known as second language acquisition (SLA). The strategies used to teach second language learners are known as English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies. ESL and EFL often overlap and can relate to one another. Moreover, Calderón, Slavin and Sánchez (2011) listed the factors that may influence students' learning a second or a foreign language in the following: school structures and leadership, language and literacy instruction, integration of languages, literacy and content instruction, cooperative learning, teachers' professional development, parent and family support, tutoring, and monitoring.

2.2.2.1 Second and Foreign Language Reading

Reading in a second language is frequently compared to reading in the first language, and the latter usually affects the former. Nation (2003) pointed out that the first language has a small but important role in helping ESL learners gain knowledge which can result in better meaning construction and higher-level performance. Interestingly, Cao, Kim, Liu, & Liu (2014) conducted a research on brain activities during reading in a first language and a second language, and they found similar brain

activation in both cases except that there was greater involvement in brain networks when the person reads using his/her native language. This is shown in their study of Chinese people being more engaged when they read passages written in Chinese rather than reading passages written in English.

The problem of reading in a second language has many angles. Besides the different phonetic and spelling systems of the language, readers may not have proper background to facilitate reading. Students' schemas have a role in understanding a passage either in their first or second language. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) described second language readers' persistent efforts to process what they read as failing when they try to understand and make sense of texts if they do not have relevant schemata. They also asserted that background knowledge can be supported by more reading in the target language as well as the ability to absorb cultural differences. To process a text, it is essential to have a suitable background of the topic and relevant vocabulary of the passage. Furthermore, Friesen & Haigh (2018) explained that background knowledge help students predict how a story typically unfolds, and it helps with text structures that enables a reader to organize information more effectively. Readers should have a proper body of knowledge that form a proper background for comprehension.

ESL students face reading comprehension problems around the world mainly because they find difficulties in some vocabulary recognition especially the complicated ones. Nezami (2012) indicated that ESL learners' lack of competence in vocabulary results in drawback in understanding process. Additionally, the variety of background information that is derived from different cultures helps in shaping a person's schema. The schema is the foundation students have and use to build on

during reading to comprehend and process continuous and interactive links of information in relation to words, sentences and paragraphs in a given text. Tan, Pandian and Jaganathan (2016) highlighted the difficulties ESL students usually face in reading, and they suggested useful strategies to help ESL Malay students read better which included assigning passages of simpler words, authentic topics, and more cultural relevant texts.

2.3 Reading Strategies

Reading is a combination of skills and strategies that can be described as a process. The way reading is taught or practiced in various ESL schools may be different. Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez (2011) declared that the quality of instruction is what matters most in educating English learners. The reading process models are classified into three models: the top-down model, the bottom-up model and the interactive model. The top-down model in reading starts with the processing from bigger components of the language like passages and context, and it ends with smaller ones like vocabulary items. This process is deductive as it moves from the general, context meaning to the specific, literal one. In the bottom-up model, the reader starts from the level of alphabets or sounds in the beginning, to the level of words, and moves to sentences, and finally to the passage and its context. O'Sullivan (2009) argued that it is an imperative need to elaborate pedagogic tools and strategies to help young adult learners overcome the shortfalls they have in their bottom-up reading processes. This model was called by Zainal (2017) data driven model which is the process of matching the phonemic representation with lexicons, and the gained information are temporarily kept in memory until a sentence is recognized. This inductive model is usually preferred by ESL although it was criticized in reading in a first language. The third

model is the interactive model which combines both the top-down and the bottom-up models. Accordingly, reading in the interactive model happens through processing information by understanding the small units of the language, like vocabulary words, and the general context of the text because reading doesn't happen only in one fixed way.

There is a famous model of teaching reading that uses strategies in before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading strategies. Alyousef (2006) claimed that most teachers tend to ignore the pre-reading procedure blaming the lack of time although the pre-reading activities are very important to motivate students and activate their schema before the actual reading takes place. Friesen & Haigh (2018) believed that it is important to engage students in pre-reading activities that activate their background knowledge and focus on text structure features and enable students to predict the content of a text; consequently, readers can insert content into the framework by implementing during-reading activities like using graphic organizers as an after reading strategy. An example of how such strategies work, Harris and Storr (2005) explained that reading nonfiction texts is important to be thoroughly understood where they described reading abilities in a science classroom; they stated that reading is everyone's responsibility. They suggested the use of before-reading strategies to activate students' schemata, during-reading strategies that encourage reading and summarizing important information, and after-reading strategies to sort information learned from the passage. This three-phase reading model is commonly used in ESL classrooms.

Informational texts require specific strategies like skimming and scanning and reading for details. Gibbons (2002) identified skimming and scanning as techniques

readers use when they read a text. Skimming is a quick process of reading that aims at getting the main idea of the passage which is also known as reading for a gist. Scanning happens on a rapid pace too, but it refers to finding specific information from the passage. Moreover, reading for details can be a second step after skimming and scanning. In this stage, readers can take notes, identify important information and elicit words' meanings from context.

Literature reading strategies are more classified in the communicative approach for different genres of reading passages. Friesen & Haigh (2018) identified strategies as behaviors that are chosen to simplify learning; for example, readers should decide how much time they need to spend looking for a word, whether to reread part of the text or to skip some details. They stressed that readers decide when to summarize, explore the text, or make predictions. Some strategies focus on identifying important information by summarizing main points of the text or providing a summary of the whole passage. Significantly, ignoring irrelevant information to focus on relevant information is also important for reading comprehension success (Friesen & Haigh, 2018). Furthermore, the visualization strategy keeps the reader's imagination active by creating imagery of the provided information in the text according to the author's description and the reader's interaction. Allen (2003) explained that visualizing works well with active readers by encouraging them to create pictures in their minds which enhances understanding. Another very commonly used strategy is making predictions, for the reader keeps guessing what may happen next in the text based on context clues. To demonstrate, readers communicate constantly with the text by predicting, for they modify or confirm their predictions by processing the information they read to construct meaning. Moreover, making inferences is a useful strategy for comprehending a text to understand inferred information. Friesen & Haigh

(2018) explained that in order to link distinct parts of the text, there is a need to make inferences which involves identifying information that is not explicitly found in the text but required for understanding the text. Also, mentoring, or the art of self-regulating (Allen, 2003), is a strategy that refers to the readers' awareness of the difficulty level of the text, and this should be evident for high-school students who should have built self-studying habits and techniques. Friesen & Haigh (2018) asserted that comprehension monitoring includes a series of behaviors to ensure text understanding like pausing to assess gained knowledge, re-reading and using context to understand which involves readers' metacognitive abilities. Finally, generating and answering questions are strategies that help students dig deeply into the text. Allen (2003) stated that asking questions keeps the reader more engaged as he/she clarifies ideas and works on making meaning. These strategies get the reader, the text and the author in continuous communication and active meaning construction as the communicative approach suggests. Allen (2003) illustrated the fact that students combine what they know and what they read through reviewing, sorting and shifting the information to produce new ideas that may change the way they think.

2.4 Types of Reading

Reading can be sorted according to many categories into different types. Independent reading can be classified into two types according to its purpose. The first type is extensive reading that usually refers to the quantity of reading materials, yet in some resources, extensive reading may refer to the activities of skimming and scanning, too. Alyousef (2006) stated that exposing students to a number of meaningful and interesting materials positively affects learners' second language; in this case, students are urged to read independently. The other type of independent

reading is the intensive reading. This type uses reading resources for specific purposes, text-related strategies like being aware of the organization of the text or the topic and meaning, or learner-related strategies that have to do with the learners' linguistics and metacognitive strategies. Chamot (2004) explained that the metacognitive model has been developed for organizing learning strategy instruction including four processes: planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating.

There are other categories of reading according to the members involved in the reading process. Other than the independent reading strategies presented above, guided reading, paired reading and shared reading are strategies used to teach reading. First, the guided reading is a strategy that the reader should be exposed to increasingly challenging texts. It starts with assessing the reader's current level and gradually improves his/her reading skills. In addition, the paired reading is another type where two learners, one is more experienced than the other, read together in tutoring sessions. They both learn from each other, and this kind of tutoring provides the pair with many benefits like pronunciation accuracy, fluency, expression and comprehension. Topping (2014) explained that paired reading is a form of supported oral reading which enables students to access and comprehend texts slightly above their independent readability level, and this usually happens within a predictable framework. Another type of an early reading stage is known as shared reading. This reading type is known as reading within a group of learners with the control of the teacher or an expert peer. Ruppar, Afacan & Pickett (2017) identified shared reading as a strategy that improves literacy, comprehension and engagement skills of students with significant incapacities; proficient readers such as teachers and peers read aloud, engage students and provide needed support.

2.5 Teachers' Perceptions on Reading Strategies

As teachers have many responsibilities, their perceptions towards priorities in teaching vary. McGuire (2016) stated that teachers' attitude, experience and perspective towards literacy instruction play a critical role in their performance in terms of reading instruction. Furthermore, Rose (2006) asserted that almost all children should have a secure grasp of phonics to make them fluent readers and confident writers by the age of seven at the latest. Many teachers believe that teaching reading skills is the responsibility of primary school teachers which may result in retreatment of reading proficiency levels in which learning would be affected, not only in English language classroom but also in other subjects. Friesen & Haigh (2018) pointed out that it is important to teach students the use of reading strategies by the fourth grade, and because this aspect cannot be acquired, it should be specifically taught when many students experience language difficulties as the content may exceed students' current abilities and knowledge. Also, Friesen & Haigh (2018) specified that modeling the use of reading strategies is among teachers' roles, and they should be effectively utilized at all grade levels particularly if the readers are encountering a new text structure.

Moreover, O'Sullivan (2009) indicated that English language teachers in the UAE and in other Arab countries recount that many students struggle to read at a level of proficiency appropriate to their needs. In addition, teachers are responsible for the process of learning and raising students' awareness and sense of responsibility towards their education. This poses more pressure on teachers who are held responsible for more than they can control. Reyna-Barron (2016) indicated that teachers' role is becoming increasingly demanding because of high stakes testing and accountability

that gets teachers teaching to the test rather than promoting learning, teachers are expected to prepare students more to apply critical thinking skills.

Teachers need to combine their knowledge of language and its rules with knowledge of education regarding teaching and learning. Language and education knowledge participate in teachers' practices whether in the instructional strategies they use in planning and reading application in class, or in the assessment strategies they use to evaluate students' performance. When teachers have different perceptions and teaching philosophies especially with the variety of grade levels, procedures and results would be different. However, Pierce & Pomerantz (2013) stated that teaching several reading strategies shows promising effects for students, but many teachers find strategy teaching difficult; if it is difficult for teachers, it will be more likely difficult for students to learn such strategies. Chamot (2004) also pointed out that research has variations in focusing on different explicit and implicit learning strategies and variations in the way they are perceived by students, teachers and researchers.

Abu Al Khair (2014) pointed out that using reading strategies while teaching reading is essential for students, and she also asserted that it is not enough that teachers only focus on students' acquisition of reading skills as a decoding method, but they should guide students to link and use these strategies to ensure comprehending a passage. She confirmed that it is equally necessary to keep English teachers engaged in professional development and continuous updating of reading strategies in collaboration with other teachers in the same field which will raise awareness towards effective reading strategies. Abu Al Khair (2014) concluded that teachers' engagement in professional reading workshops is a step to bring their perceptions, practiced reading strategies and assessment strategies closer.

Teachers should be aware of how their students learn better. They need to measure their students' prior knowledge, and how they usually read and analyze a text. Thus, teachers should build their instruction on a clear baseline to improve students' skills and guide them to learn through other methods. It is useful to measure students' growth through an academic year. Abu Al Khair (2014) clarified that teachers' knowledge about how students acquire languages, when and how to maximize the use of the spoken language, and how they demonstrate academic discourse in the first and second languages can altogether affect the way students learn language and content.

2.6 Reading Assessment Strategies

Assessment strategies are used to assess and examine students' knowledge of a given topic. Assessment is essentially classified into formative, during learning, and summative, after learning tools. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) explained that the effective use and combination of both assessment tools is important. They asserted that classroom teachers or administrators ensure that the information gained through assessment provides a sensible picture of the student's strengths and weaknesses when this happens by balancing both summative and formative classroom assessment practices. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) further explained that the formative is a descriptive assessment that informs both teachers and students about students' grasping of knowledge at times when adjustments can be made, while the summative assessment is the final measurement of students' learning. Besides, Morin and Williams (2016) were certain about the importance of combining differentiation and formative assessments because it leads to learning progressions, clear goals that integrate content and literacy standards, greater clarity about expectations and higher motivation to succeed.

Cerezo & Amengual (2013) explained in their article how assessing reading can be criterion-referenced when it follows pre-designed criteria like a national or a standard test, or it can be norm-referenced which is done within schools. Because language is considered one of the social sciences fields, it is usually measured through a norm-referenced assessment. Yet, this does not restrict its measurement by high-stakes tests. They also emphasized the role of oral assessment for reading, for it aligns assessment of language with the communicative approach.

The communicative approach is favored among language experts because it focuses more on the language as a means of communication, and rules of language are learned accordingly. Birjandi and Sarem (2012) explained that communicative tests' main concerns are the following issues: the use of language in communication as it emphasizes the context, authenticity that reflects the culture, learners' needs, and testing of English for specific purposes. Reviewing the history of assessment and its latest trends, they highlighted the changes in assessment practices. Previously, test results were the only indicator to students' level, but other ways of assessing emerge nowadays. For example, a dynamic assessment is a well-planned, continuous process that assesses the true potential of learners where the teacher is the guide to the most effective improvement a student can reach by immediate and constructive feedback. Here, Birjandi and Sarem (2012) showed that the dynamic assessment is a valid process that should be fully integrated as it serves the improvement of instruction to the maximum.

Amengual (2013) indicated that assessment is done on two main levels: the macro international level and the micro school level. Teachers need to improve assessment in the micro level that includes curriculum revision and classroom

assessment procedures along with teachers' and students' attitudes and practices. Meaningful practices on the micro level should be efficient to prepare students for the macro international assessment level.

Reading can be assessed in many ways. Initially, in younger grades, assessment of oral skills can be conducted for phonics and words accuracy, fluency and expression. Furthermore, written exams where students need to show comprehension of the passage, identifying basic or inferred information included in the text, and being able to construct meaning beyond the written words are other ways to assess reading as well. Students should be assessed regularly either by using oral or written assessment tools. These performance assessments are considered valid when they follow specific criteria.

English Language Learners' (ELL) achievements vary according to their motivation level, the higher their motivation is the more they read, and the better vocabulary they learn. Howard (2017) conducted other studies focusing on ELL reading competency which shows a variance in the level of reading and vocabulary compared to native speakers. ESL/EFL learners registered weaker levels in reading in general, yet surprisingly, ELL's were better in explaining explicitly taught vocabulary and making inferences in reading comprehension according to the presented study.

2.7 Teachers' Perceptions on Assessment Strategies

Different teachers' beliefs and purposes of assessment strategies would end up with different assessments practices. Barnes, Fives and Dacey (2017) investigated teachers' perceptions on the purpose of assessment strategies, and they found that teachers have various, and sometimes contradicting, beliefs about assessment which

influence their actual application and professional development. Barnes, Fives and Dacey (2017) also clarified that this issue was governed by many factors: first, assessment should be a valid and accountable ongoing process; second, the purpose of assessment should be to improve teaching and learning; finally, assessment should be relevant and serves the learning objectives.

The purpose of assessment varies in different institutions, and assessment data can be interpreted in various ways which can control teachers' views and efforts towards assessment. The most important point is that whatever the type or purpose of assessment is, it should be implemented to improve students' learning. On the other hand, Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) criticized the overuse of testing, and they pointed out that educators should frame their view of testing and assessment and direct it to gain information; the more information educators have about students' achievements, the clearer picture of gaps is realized.

In reference to the theoretical framework, James (2006) asserted that sociocultural approaches imply that it is important for the teacher to create a critical thinking and stimulating environment for students to develop their current abilities, which Vygotsky called the ZPD, where students can learn from peers or experts; thus, assessment should further depend on performance, authenticity and task observation.

2.8 The Relation between Instructional Strategies and Assessment Strategies of Reading

Whenever learning theories are created, reading instructional strategies are affected, and reading assessment strategies change accordingly. James (2006) specified that there should be consistency between assessment practices and learning principles which suggests that change in one almost always requires a change in the

other. Logically, there should be a kind of alignment and coordination between testing and teaching. Teaching and learning processes should be supported by a type of assessment conducted whether formative or summative. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) indicated that comprehensive formative and summative assessment programs at classroom level can balance students' learning and achievement of information which provides a clear picture of where a student is regarding learning targets and standards.

It is important to measure students' current level and the reading strategies they use at the beginning of the year. Accordingly, teachers can build on the driven data to improve learning, update methods and illustrate more useful reading strategies that can prepare students for advanced reading levels. Formative assessment is the best way to achieve this kind of development because it happens at various levels of the lesson and in many ways to serve both oral and written achievements of reading. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) stated that when teachers use sound instructional practices for the purpose of gathering information on students' learning, they apply formative assessment, and in this respect, it is pedagogy that cannot be separated from instruction.

Teachers should be aware of the importance of the quality of feedback they provide to students during assessment that should be constructive. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) asserted that feedback is the most significant instructional strategy that should be used to move students forward in their learning. Assessment strategies should be aligned step by step with the implemented reading strategies. Assessment should match what has been taught and practiced in class. The same reading strategies or techniques that students practiced apply on different passages. To explain, students

should acquire skills, not only memorize given information. James (2006) indicated that effective assessment for learning is integral to teaching and learning, and this raises some theoretical questions about the ways in which both assessment and learning are conceptualized and articulated.

For example, vocabulary should be taught and assessed frequently. O'Sullivan (2009) explained that ESL educators need to focus most of their efforts on improving two elements of students' reading development: the 'bottom-up' reading elements; and the acquisition and development of vocabulary. O'Sullivan (2009) stated that English language courses for Gulf Arab learners should include a systematic and elaborated vocabulary approach, as part of the bottom-up approach, and it needs to be a key priority of the teaching and learning process.

James (2006) verified that curriculum and teaching is influenced by assessment practices and students results which help in decision making of what learning outcomes should include, and this simply shows the direct relationship between learning and assessment. Whenever an assessment item is reported with weak results, more attention is paid towards filling that gap. Sometimes, it is only required to add or modify minor elements in daily planning or procedures, but in other cases, major changes should take place including curriculum changes like adding or removing some lessons, concepts or units. Instructional reading strategies definitely affect and shape reading assessment strategies from one direction, and the opposite is absolutely true.

2.9 Difficulties of Teaching Reading

Teachers are held responsible to improve students' learning, and reading is an essential part of any learning process. A great challenge to teachers is motivating

students to own their education. Alyousef (2006) mentioned that it is among teachers'
responsibilities to motivate reading by selecting the appropriate materials especially
for early stages of learning. Furthermore, motivation is a very important factor that
stirs education and stimulates students' success. Al Zayid (2012) conducted a study on
Saudi students' language acquisition and concluded that the presence of a role model
to be imitated can fuel the motivational energy of the learner, and this person can be a
teacher, a parent or a friend. In addition, Mourtaga (2006) presented an important
factor that the first step teachers should take is to motivate their students by creating a
healthy teaching/learning environment where students understand that problems in
reading exist, but there are ways to solve them. When students are aware of their
current situation and the specific problems they face, improvement should be more
accessible as they should be motivated to try tactics to solve these challenges.

Teachers should choose materials that are age and culturally appropriate for
students and suitable for their stage of learning. Most importantly, teachers should be
aware of their students' levels to make sure they can use the chosen reading materials
productively to improve each student at his/her own level. ESL teachers have a more
critical role to facilitate second language learning and to scaffold students with various
needs. Alyousef (2006) stated that it is among teachers' responsibilities to select the
appropriate materials to motivate reading especially for those at the early stages of
learning.

Another difficulty that faces teachers sometimes is the lack of enough time to
teach a fixed curriculum. This limited teaching time is frequently affected by the extra
support and scaffolding ESL learners intensively need in many cases. Teachers need
to pay more attention and time towards vocabulary words because ESL students

struggle mostly in this area, for they need repetitive explanation of high frequency words along with the new words of the lesson. Ibrahim (2016) focused on the point that vocabulary knowledge needs to be explicitly introduced to ESL learners, and that teachers should constantly have professional development to meet contemporary needs.

2.10 Reading Difficulties for ESL Learners

Reading in a second language implies many difficulties and challenges to learners on various levels. Gibbons (2002) explained that the reader of a given text should have four skills of literacy success. ESL students have challenges at many levels. First, the reader should be a code breaker which means that the reader should be aware of the basic format and text components like the alphabets and the orientation of writing, and our high-school students are aware of these basics. Although this type is necessary in language, it does not contribute to comprehend the meaning. Second, the reader as text participant where the reader is assumed to link the text to his/her background knowledge, including global and cultural knowledge, and text structure, and this requires deep understanding of the explicit and implicit information in the passage. Third, the reader as text user when the reader is able to use the information in the text to participate in different activities and social contexts. Fourth, the reader as being a text analyst who can critically read and assume what is implied, not only what is said. Readers read more effectively when they recognize the fact that any text written by an author has a specific view or theme of the world, and this needs critical thinking skills when the learner understands the passage first. Shortly, for a reader to be successful, he/she should function properly in the afore-mentioned elements.

Tan, Pandian and Jaganathan (2016) suggested strategies to encourage ESL/EFL readers. One of which is to provide students with passages that do not have too many complicated words to be able to understand the passage, and this would be less challenging for struggling readers, more engaging for students, and more encouraging for further reading. When students are puzzled during reading, they are frequently interrupted to look for meanings, so they lose interest in proceeding reading, and the full meaning is not clear. Tan, Pandian and Jaganathan (2016) stated that many linguists may disagree with simplifying passages, yet those researchers encouraged the use of simple and authentic texts. This can be a logical, and at the same time, a practical solution because it does not require ESL/EFL learners to spend much effort to understand a text in vain. In addition, the schema of a student in a certain culture may not simply support the processing of any text and information from another language or culture as it may include contradicting concepts or beliefs. This matches the idea of Vygotsky's ZPD and the strategy of guided reading that suggest moving systematically a little further than each student's current level to be able to scaffold him/her to the next level in a productive and smooth way.

ESL learners face many difficulties in reading. O'Sullivan (2009) stated that many UAE students lack certain general background knowledge and global awareness when a higher level of awareness facilitates their English reading development. O'Sullivan (2009) also believed that the English language reading comprehension difficulties that native Arabic speakers has may be due to deficient level of basic processes such as letter and word identification. In his study of secondary school ESL learners in Saudi Arabia, Alyousef (2006) believed that the major difficulties students face to comprehend a text are the limited vocabulary knowledge and background information because word recognition is essential in the mastery of reading. Besides,

Al-Qahtani (2016) reported that regarding Saudi EFL readers, most teachers believed that students' 'overall low level of language proficiency' and 'limited vocabulary' are internal factors that exist at the heart of this problem. In another article that represents reading problems of Arab EFL students, Mourtaga (2006) classified the major problems non-native students have in reading English texts as follows:

"Arab EFL students encounter problems classified into four categories: 1- problems related to the misunderstanding of the reading process; 2- problems related to insufficient competence in reading and use of English; 3- problems related to the differences between Arabic and English; and 4- problems related to the English spelling/ sound system."

While students find several difficulties of the above-mentioned categories, they are expected to comprehend assigned texts especially in the high-school level. Each problem has many factors that contribute to it. They are assumed to be aware of the cognitive and metacognitive processes to facilitate comprehension. Fitrisia, Tan and Yusuf (2015) explained that metacognition ensures that students can construct meaning from the context of reading comprehension, and they should be able to reflect on their own thinking process, identify reading strategies while reading and manage how they read.

2.11 Reading in the UAE

Although the UAE has recently paid more efforts towards reading, O'Sullivan (2004), (2009) asserted that reading is not up to the required level in the UAE. Abu Al Khair (2014) mentioned that EFL students around the world face many problems in their studies, and the UAE has the same worldwide reading comprehension problems;

nevertheless, there is a scarce of research regarding Arabic Native Speaking teachers' perceptions of efficient usage of reading strategies.

The study of Abu Al Khair (2014) was conducted in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi which included 134 middle-school English teachers, and it revealed some important points. First, the included teachers have high perceptions about using reading strategies as many teachers use before, during and after reading strategies with some variations focusing on some strategies rather than all of them. Second, there are few significant differences between the reading strategies used with boys and girls. Finally, there are no significant differences in using reading strategies when teachers' years of experience were calculated in that study.

O'Sullivan (2004) assumed that students find reading itself difficult because they are not used to read in their first language. Although Arabic is the mother tongue language for the learners in his study, O'Sullivan (2004) considered reading in standard Arabic for students in the UAE as reading in a second language, for it differs a great deal from the colloquial language they use in daily life. In this respect, he rated English as a third language, and in all cases, reading is viewed as a heavy task for students in both languages. O'Sullivan (2004) ranked reading skills in standardized Arabic at the second language level, and English reading skills at the third language level which has created a unique situation in the UAE. This point was stated in clarifying the weakness of the reading of high school students in some government high schools in the UAE. O'Sullivan (2004) mentioned some factors that influence the current EFL reading situation in Gulf countries, including the reading culture in the first language community and reading standards, background knowledge, methods of reading instruction, feedback from testing, and learners' motivation.

2.12 Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions on reading instructional strategies and reading assessment strategies for ESL private high-school students. This chapter reviewed the literature regarding this topic. The theoretical background was discussed through the Sociolinguistics theory and ESL Reading. In addition, teaching reading using different instructional strategies, reading types and teachers' perceptions towards it were depicted in this chapter. Moreover, reading assessment strategies and teachers' perceptions of assessment were presented. Accordingly, the relationship between reading assessment strategies and reading instructional strategies was described. Furthermore, the difficulties teachers and ESL students struggle with are reviewed. Then, the situation of reading in the UAE was presented in that there is a general use of reading strategies resembled in before, during and after reading strategies and that high-school students face many difficulties too. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to identify different strategies teachers use in reading classes in private high schools in the UAE. It also sheds light on reading assessment strategies used to evaluate reading skills, and the difficulties teachers and students struggle with in reading classes.

This chapter describes the methods used for conducting this study. First, the research follows a mixed method design that includes a questionnaire for quantitative data and interviews for qualitative data. Second, the setting, sample and participants are described. Next, the instruments are described along with the validity and reliability. In addition, data collection and methods of analyzing them are presented. Finally, the ethical issues considered in this study are highlighted. The following questions are answered by this study:

1. What kinds of instructional reading strategies do private high-school teachers use to teach reading?

2. What kinds of assessment strategies do private high-school teachers use to assess reading?

3. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties they face when they teach reading?

4. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties students face in reading classes?

3.2 Research Design

This study uses a mixed-method design with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Brown (2014) stated that the mixed-methods design is used to gain insights by fully understanding the relationships among participants' characteristics and research approaches. It is important for the nature of the study to use different sources of data through a questionnaire and interviews.

The rationale for using a mixed-method design is to comprehensively collect the needed data for the study. The first stage is the quantitative part which was attained by a questionnaire that helped to identify general perceptions of private high school teachers. The second stage is the interviews. It was designed to add insight to the perceptions reported by teachers when they answered the questionnaire first.

3.3 Setting

The study was conducted in private schools in one of the major cities, Al Ain City, in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in the UAE. The targeted group was private high-school English Language teachers. Private schools were specifically chosen for this research because of the emphasis they pay for the English curriculum. The questionnaire was distributed to various private schools in the same city. Interviews were held in one of those private schools because it was more suitable for the researcher and the interviewees having full-time jobs as teachers in the same school.

3.4 Sampling and Participants

According to recent reports provided by the Ministry of Education for 2018-2019 academic year, private schools in Al Ain city are 57 schools in total. This number includes 9 schools that have instruction languages and curricula other than Arabic or

English, 5 schools in the outskirts of the city, and 3 branches of other schools in the same area.

The questionnaire sample is a convenient one as the researcher visited many schools, and she provided the ones that accepted to be part of this study with copies of the questionnaire. The sample that provided the questionnaire quantitative data was taken from 19 private high schools out of the 40 schools that could serve this study. The teachers who volunteered to participate were part of this sample. The total participants were 73 high-school English language teachers.

For the interview, a purposive sample was used. High-school teachers of one private school participated in the interviews where the researcher works. Interview participants have good experience in teaching high-school students for several years, and they worked with different English reading books and resources provided by various publishers. Furthermore, they are working in the same school for years experiencing a good quality of professional development workshops like implementing numerous teaching methods, using various resources such as e-learning reading programs, special students' needs, effective planning, critical thinking activities, and cooperative learning techniques. Interview participants were specifically chosen for the above-mentioned reasons.

3.4.1 Participants

The questionnaire sample included 73 participants. All of them are English language high-school teachers who work in private schools in Al Ain City. The 73 participants consist of 29 Male teachers and 44 female teachers. Most of the participants have more than 5 years of teaching experience. These schools adopted

different curricula: Ministry of Education curriculum, the British curriculum and the American curriculum. Table 1 classifies the number of included schools in each curriculum.

Table 1: Number of Schools in Different Curricula

Private School Curriculum	Number of Participating Schools
Ministry of Education	4
British	5
American	10
Total	19

The sample that participated in the qualitative phase consisted of seven high-school language teachers. Most high-school teachers in that school showed willingness to be part of this study. The sample has two male and five female teachers. They are all high-school teachers of different university majors, different years of experience, and different cultures and ethnic groups, and all of them are ESL teachers. Table 2 includes information about the seven participants in the interview.

Table 2: Interview Participants

Code	Gender	Years of Experience	Teaching Grades
Teacher 1	Female	10 years	10 & 11
Teacher 2	Male	10 years	9 & 10
Teacher 3	Female	11 years	11
Teacher 4	Female	9 years	11 & 12
Teacher 5	Male	19 years	12
Teacher 6	Female	15 years	12
Teacher 7	Female	6 years	9 & 10

3.5 Instruments

3.5.1 Reading Teachers' Questionnaire

The Reading Teachers' Questionnaire (RTQ) was used as the first instrument to collect quantitative data about reading instructional and assessment strategies (See Appendix A). Initially, the researcher jotted down ideas of the relevant reading instructional and assessment strategies considering the literature review. Then, she listed the difficulties of reading lessons and application in classes that teachers and students might have. The researcher modified the questionnaire on several stages of rectifying sentences, separating or combining some points, assuring the relevance of these sentences to the core of the study to present an inclusive and visually appealing questionnaire. All these stages were done upon discussions between the researcher and the advisor of this research. Other notes and comments were given by her advisor and the panel of reviewers. After revision, the advisor of this research and members of the UAEU Faculty of Education approved the statements to guarantee the proper coverage of the research questions. It was edited upon their valuable notes. After a pilot study sample was conducted, a final edition was made that resulted in a minor change.

The final copy of the questionnaire included systematic statements in four sections that helped answering the four research questions. The first section discussed the most common reading strategies high-school teachers use in three subsections that are pre-reading, during reading and post-reading strategies. The second section presented reading assessment strategies and their relation to the instructional strategies. The third section highlighted the main difficulties teachers face when they teach reading, and the fourth section listed the main difficulties students face in reading lessons. The questionnaire followed a five-point Likert Scale, so the statements were

evaluated in the following degrees: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree. The data driven from this survey formed the basis of this research data.

3.5.2 Interview

The second instrument this research used was a semi-structured interview. (See Appendix B) The researcher originated four main interview questions that led to answering the four research questions. These questions were revised by a panel of reviewers and by the advisor of this study. Some points were raised to make questions less general, more specific, and free of specialization terms. Upon the given notes, the researcher modified the questions to make them simpler, clearer and more relevant to the focal point of this research. Hence, teachers answered brief, open-ended, and semi-structured questions. The semi-structured questions helped in forming the thematic coding and analyzing in relation to reading instructional strategies, reading assessment strategies, and the difficulties of reading lessons for teachers and students.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

3.6.1 Validity

Ensuring validity is an important feature of any good research. The most important means to have valid and reliable study is the use of different sources of data. For content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of 6 referees including 1 researcher and 5 university professors who are members of the Faculty of Education and work as instructors at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). The referees made sure that the questionnaire serves the purpose of the study. They checked that the statements used in the questionnaire were clear, simple, and consistent with the

research questions. Then, the questionnaire was piloted by 10 English language teachers who were not included in the formal research sample that contributed to research data. The pilot sample was only used to test the instrument before using it. Hence, teachers found the questionnaire clear and understandable, for they did not ask questions to clarify statements, so it did not require major changes. So, the questionnaire instrument was considered valid for the purpose of the study.

For the second instrument, interview questions were revised by the same researcher and university professors who evaluated the questionnaire to make sure that they are simple, reasonable, serve this study, represent the four research questions, and teachers can answer them smoothly. Therefore, the researcher revised and modified the interview questions based on the reviewers' comments. Finally, they were approved by the advisor and the same reviewers who approved the questionnaire.

3.6.2 Reliability

For reliability, Cronbach Alpha for the pilot questionnaire sample was used. It was 0.865 (see Table 3), and it showed that the instrument is significant because it is close to 1 and could be used for the purpose of the study. So, the questionnaire was considered valid and reliable. Other reliability features were considered like being sincere in recording and transcribing interview responses, accurate writing and precise data reporting added reliability to the interview instrument. Participants reviewed the elicited themes after the interviews were transcribed, and they agreed to the outline of themes.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.865	.861	47

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The data of this study were collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was sent to many school principals along with the needed permission, that is Abu Dhabi Education and Knowledge's (ADEK's) approval (See Appendix C) which followed a letter from the UAEU to facilitate the researchers' mission (See Appendix D). The quantitative data of the questionnaire were collected from 73 high school teachers from various private schools. Schools completed the questionnaire according to their preference either on Google Forms, which is an online platform, or on hardcopies. Both are copies of the same questionnaire. Some schools didn't return many responses. There were 37 responses collected online, and 36 responses completed on paper. Teachers who participated in this questionnaire filled it voluntarily when they received it. After the responses were collected, they were recorded on tables using Microsoft Excel Sheets.

For qualitative data, interviews were held in one private school where the researcher works. Interviews were conducted with 7 participants, as a second step, after they were introduced to the topic, read and signed the informed consent form (See Appendix E) and answered the questionnaire in the first stage. Interviews lasted from 8-12 minutes, and they were voice recorded for later reference. They were carefully transcribed on Word Documents and revised to ensure accuracy.

3.8 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0.0 version) to obtain needed statistics. The analysis of the questionnaire data was mainly descriptive in nature that included the mean and standard deviation. The data were presented in tables to facilitate the reading of information. Each section was presented in a different table. The highest and lowest mean scores in each part were highlighted, and the overall mean of each category was calculated too.

For the interview, the Grounded Theory was used for analysis where themes were derived from data. Charmaz & Belgrave (2012) referred to the grounded theory for systematic analysis methods of qualitative data that gives explicit and implicit guidelines for analysis. The researcher used a thematic framework analysis as she transcribed the interviews from the voice recordings to word documents. Then, she read the transcriptions thoroughly more than once to become familiar with the main concepts. Next, the information elicited from the interviews were classified according to key concepts, similarities and differences among responses, and they were written in charts and graphic organizers to clarify relations for analysis purposes. In addition, the responses of interviews were annotated, coded and categorized which helped in initiating several themes. Then, the documented themes were arranged and grouped; some themes were expanded, and others were united. Shortly, the final themes were reported and supported by participants' responses in quotes as they are reported in the next chapter.

3.9 Ethical Issues

This study considered the needed ethical issues to be conducted. First, ADEK's approval form was completed before the beginning of the study, which is needed to conduct any research in any school within Abu Dhabi region. It followed the university letter to facilitate the researcher's work. In addition, the principal of the school at which interviews took place, granted the researcher a formal signed permission to facilitate needed research work. Other school principals where the questionnaires were conducted accepted to participate in the study. Teachers were also informed about the purpose of the study in the introductory part of the questionnaire. Participants read and signed the informed consent form before they participated in the study. Besides, all teachers were assured that they could leave the study whenever they feel the need to, and they were not forced by any means to participate or complete the same. At the end, they were thanked for their valuable participation.

3.10 Summary

This chapter explained the methodology this research used to investigate teachers' perceptions on reading instructional and assessment strategies used in private high schools. It started with the research purpose, research questions and research design. Then, it explained how the instruments were designed to answer the questions. Next, the chapter presented the setting, sampling, participants, and validity and reliability. Data collection procedures and data analysis methods were explained to verify research procedures. The next chapter will present the data considering the above-mentioned methods. Finally, the last chapter will combine, discuss and categorizes the results found, and will end up with conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study of teachers' perceptions on reading instructional strategies, reading assessment strategies, and the difficulties both teachers and students face in reading classes. This research used a mixed-methods design to answer research questions as follows: the quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire, and the qualitative data was collected through interviews with private high school teachers. The quantitative questionnaire, that 73 high-school teachers completed, included before, during and after reading instructional strategies, reading assessment strategies and the difficulties of teaching and learning reading. The results are presented in tables of descriptive statistics. To support the obtained results from the questionnaire, 7 interviews with private high-school ESL teachers were conducted. The findings of the interviews are classified into themes and sorted in relation to research questions. A summary of the main results concludes the chapter.

4.2 Ranking Scores Indications

The mean scores of the questionnaire are ranked into levels to clarify the results. Table 4 summarizes the ranking scores to analyze the responses of the questionnaire. They are classified into the following levels: 1 -1.79 show very low responses, 1.8 - 2.4 show low responses, 2.5 -3.4 show moderate responses, 3.5 - 4.19 show high strategy use and above 4.2 indicate very high responses. This interpretive measure scale for ranking scores was used by some researchers like Rastakhiz and Safari (2014).

Table 4: Ranking Scores Indications

Mean Score	Indicated Level
1 - 1.79	Very low
1.8 - 2.4	Low
2.5 - 3.4	Moderate
3.5 - 4.19	High
4.2 - 5	Very high

4.3 Results of Research Question One

<u>What kinds of instructional reading strategies do high school teachers use to teach reading?</u>

The Reading Teachers' Questionnaire (RTQ) has four sections, and the first one, which is the reading instructional strategies, is divided into three subsections: pre-reading, during reading and after reading strategies. Table 5 shows the results of the pre-reading strategies high-schools teachers use (N=73). It answers part of the first research question that investigates the use of reading strategies by high school English teachers. The mean score of responses range from 3.96 to 4.74 which indicates high to very high responses. In addition, the overall mean score for the 'pre-reading strategies' is 4.49 which is very high. Teachers responded positively to the use of such reading strategies before they teach reading. The highest two points are 'predict events of a story from the title and/or some images' with 4.74 mean score and 'predict the topic of a text' with a 4.68 mean score. The lowest mean was 3.96 for 'find information about the author of a text' statement.

Table 5: The Mean Scores for Pre-reading Strategies

A.1 Before I teach reading, I ask students to …	Mean	SD
1. Find information about the author of a text.	3.96	.857
2. Answer pre-reading questions.	4.53	.625
3. Predict the topic of a text.	4.68	.550
4. Identify key words related to a text.	4.58	.525
5. Predict events of a story from the title and/or some images.	4.74	.472
6. Write questions they are interested to find answers for in a text.	4.48	.626
The Overall Mean of Pre-Reading Strategies	4.49	

Table 6 presents the mean score of the second subsection of reading strategies that are the strategies used during teaching reading. The data answers part of the first research question too. The responses range from 4.05 to 4.67 which indicates high to very high responses. In addition, the overall mean score for the 'during reading strategies' is 4.40 which is very high. The highest two points are 'identify text elements like setting, characters and point of view' with 4.67 mean score and 'make prediction for what will happen in a text/story' with 4.63 mean score. They are closely followed by 'use context clues to guess words' meanings' and 'use skimming and scanning strategies' statements. The two lowest points are 'highlight high-frequency words' with 4.15 score and 'use a dictionary to look up difficult words' meanings' with 4.05 mean score.

Table 6: The Mean Scores for during Reading Strategies

A.2 During reading, I ask students to…	Mean	SD
1. Take notes while they read.	4.40	.721
2. Use a dictionary to look up difficult words' meanings.	4.05	.832
3. Highlight high-frequency words.	4.15	.923
4. Use context clues to guess words' meanings.	4.49	.556
5. Make prediction for what will happen in a text/story.	4.63	.540
6. Identify text elements like setting, characters and point of view.	4.67	.579
7. Generate challenging questions from a text.	4.47	.579
8. Answer questions generated by other students.	4.27	.692
9. Check each other's answers.	4.32	.685
10. Use skimming and scanning strategies.	4.48	.603
11. Evaluate the plot of a story.	4.44	.666
The Overall Mean of During Reading Strategies	4.40	

The last subsection of the first research question is presented by Table 7 which focuses on after-reading strategies. The responses range from 4.25 to 4.63 which indicates very high responses. In addition, the overall mean score for the 'after-reading strategies' is 4.49 which is very high. The highest two points are 'reflect on the theme of a text' and 'relate a story to their social/cultural experiences' both with 4.63 mean score. The lowest mean score in this category is 4.25 for the strategy 'create another possible conclusion for a text'.

Table 7: The Mean Scores for after Reading Strategies

A.3 After reading, I ask students to …	Mean	SD
1. Summarize the main idea of a text.	4.44	.552
2. Reflect on the theme of a text.	4.63	.540
3. Relate a story to their social/cultural experiences.	4.63	.486
4. Create another possible conclusion for a text.	4.25	.703
5. State their opinion of a text.	4.49	.580
6. Create a story map.	4.49	.710
The Overall Mean of After Reading Strategies	4.49	

4.4 Results of Research Question Two

What kinds of assessment strategies do high school teachers use to assess reading?

Table 8 sheds light on reading assessment strategies that private high school teachers use (N=73). In high-school reading assessment strategies, the mean scores for responses are very high for all statements. They range from 4.30 to 4.71, and the overall mean is 4.55. The two highest responses are 'assess their understanding of the main idea of a text' with 4.71 mean score, and 'provide constructive feedback to students' with a 4.67 score. The lowest mean score is 4.30 for 'assess students' ability to generate and answer questions' statement, yet it is still in the very high level.

Table 8: The Mean Score for Reading Assessment Strategies

B- When I assess my students for reading, I…	Mean	SD
1. Assess students' ability to generate and answer questions.	4.30	.639
2. Assess their understanding of the main idea of a text.	4.71	.485
3. Assess their ability to summarize a text.	4.40	.640
4. Assess their ability to identify story elements (setting, characters, plot and conflict).	4.64	.562
5. Assess students' critical thinking skills.	4.64	.537
6. Provide constructive feedback to students.	4.67	.473
7. Use assessment results to improve students' learning.	4.49	.580
8. Use assessment results to improve my instruction.	4.56	.552
The Overall Mean of Reading Assessment Strategies	4.55	

4.5 Results of Research Question Three

How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties they face when they teach reading?

Table 9 answers the third research question. It shows the mean score of the general difficulties that teachers face in teaching reading to high-school students. The responses in this category show more variation as they range from moderate to very high, from 3.15 to 4.26. The overall mean score for this section is 3.82 which is considered high. The highest point of the difficulties that teachers face in reading is 'some students haven't developed the habit of reading' with a 4.26 mean score. It is followed by 'some students depend on the teacher or their peers' with 4.10 and 'students' lack of motivation to read' with 4.04 mean score. The lowest two points are 'the inappropriateness of the school textbooks for students' levels' with a 3.30 mean score and 'the lack of reading resources' with a 3.15 mean score.

Table 9: The Mean Scores of the Difficulties Teachers Face in Teaching Reading

C- When I teach reading, I face the following problems:	Mean	SD
1. Students' lack of motivation to read.	4.04	.904
2. Some students perceive reading as a demanding task.	3.99	.754
3. Some students haven't developed the habit of reading.	4.26	.764
4. Some students depend on the teacher or their peers.	4.10	.869
5. The lack of reading resources.	3.15	1.309
6. Finding culturally appropriate texts to motivate students.	3.75	.997
7. Teaching students with different language proficiency and abilities.	3.95	.880
8. The inappropriateness of the school textbooks for students' levels.	3.30	1.266
The Overall Mean of Teaching Reading Difficulties	3.82	

4.6 Results of Research Question Four

How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties students face in reading classes?

Table 10 answers the fourth research question that addresses the difficulties students face in reading classes from their teachers' perspectives. The responses in this section fall in high and very high levels, from 4.04 to 4.36. The overall mean score is 4.16 which is a high level. The highest scoring statements are 'have limited vocabulary knowledge' with 4.36 score, 'do limited extra-curricular reading outside the classroom' with 4.25 score and 'have low language proficiency' with 4.23 mean score. The two lowest mean scores, yet record high responses, are 'have limited experience

in using context clues to understand a text' with 4.08 and 'have limited experience in reading different types of texts/stories' with 4.04 mean score.

Table 10: The Mean Scores of the Difficulties Students Face in Learning Reading

D- Some students find reading difficult because they …	Mean	SD
1. have limited experience in using ESL reading strategies.	4.12	.927
2. have low language proficiency.	4.23	.874
3. have limited vocabulary knowledge.	4.36	.823
4. have limited knowledge of sentence structures.	4.10	.885
5. have limited experience in reading different types of texts/stories.	4.04	.964
6. lack the sense of responsibility to own their learning.	4.12	.985
7. have limited experience in using context clues to understand a text.	4.08	1.010
8. do limited extra-curricular reading outside the classroom.	4.25	.969
The Overall Mean of Learning Reading Difficulties	4.16	

4.7 Results of the Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher interviewed 7 English Language high-school teachers for the qualitative part of the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, the participants responded to the questionnaire of the quantitative phase. After using the grounded theory of framework analysis, six themes were elicited from interviewees' responses as follows: reading strategies in relation to different reading texts, gaining basic information vs. critical thinking skills, assessment strategies push reading forward, fostering students' progress by motivating and paraphrasing, ESL learners with low language proficiency, and the way students deal with reading texts. Table 11 shows the themes elicited in relation to the research questions.

Table 11: Interview Themes

Research Question	Theme
1. What kind of instructional reading strategies do high school teachers use to teach reading?	1- reading strategies in relation to different reading texts
	2- gaining basic information vs. critical thinking skills
2. What kind of assessment strategies do high school teachers use to assess reading?	3- assessment strategies push reading forward
3. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties they face when they teach reading?	4- fostering students' progress by motivating and paraphrasing
4. How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties students face in reading classes?	5- ESL learners have low language proficiency
	6- the way students deal with reading texts

4.7.1 Interview Question One

What are the most effective reading strategies you use in class as a high school teacher?

In response to the first interview question, teachers included the most effective reading strategies they used in the following themes:

Theme one: Reading Strategies in Relation to Different Reading Texts

Teachers use various reading strategies to teach different reading texts either informational or literal fiction ones. Pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading strategies are used in both types of texts. Many teachers use strategies like skimming, scanning, and reading for gist when they teach informational texts which prepares

students more for international exams like SAT and IELTS. As Teacher 5 said, "Especially students in this category are target to IELTS, to SAT, so we are asking them questions which are embedded, so they need to make skimming and scanning." Also, Teacher 6 illustrated the strategies used for informational texts, "All of these depend on the basic skills of skimming and scanning, paraphrasing and summarizing when it comes to informational texts".

Literary texts in forms of poetry, Drama, stories, and novels require more than the previously mentioned strategies. To explain, all interviewed teachers focused on the strategy of making predictions not only as a pre-reading strategy but also during reading. Students' predictions are considered a way of communicating with the passage. Teacher 6 added to that, "We should make sure that the reader is more than a code-breaker of the language. The reader is also a participant, a language or a meaning analyst." Many teachers highlighted the importance of activating students' prior knowledge of the passage to grasp the main idea. Teacher 1 said, "I encourage students to know about the era in which the text is used because it will be helpful to know the background of the text to have an insight of the whole idea." Teachers use different strategies when they use different text genres.

Theme Two: Gaining Basic Information Vs. Critical Thinking

Teachers indicated the level of students' concentration and text analysis skills in relation to reading informational and literal texts. The general situation is that most students don't focus on the reading text by linking information or making inferences as Teacher 1 said, "If they get the main idea, they don't have the skills to look or read beyond the lines. If I ask them critical thinking questions, they just struggle; they just

answer direct questions about the events." Teacher 6 also highlighted that some students can analyze the text, yet she criticized their analytical skills saying:

"There are some students who can, but in general, dealing with analytical and critical thinking, let's say, understanding of the text is one major difficulty that all of them face… to some extent, the language structure can be a barrier in many incidents, but at the same time, it's the culture of thinking about the text, about making sense of it, and trying to go beyond what is written, or what is literal. When they want to give an example of a powerful imagery, they would just simply give you a word or two without being able to analyze why this is powerful, why this contributed to the plot, why this fleshed out the theme. They lack this aspect of looking at the text form the perspective of a critical thinker."

Many participants explained the variety and deepness of students' reading and getting explicit and implicit information from a text, and they illustrated the fact that their students' levels determine the use and application of reading strategies.

4.7.2 Interview Question Two

In what ways do you assess your students' reading? How does reading assessment affect your teaching?

The second interview question discusses the assessment strategies that high school teachers use and their relation to reading strategies. The third theme explains interview responses in this respect.

Theme Three: Assessment Strategies Push Reading Forward

Assessment, as interviewees confirmed, is a tool used to improve reading. Teachers use different assessment strategies to assess reading. They implement both

formative and summative assessments. For instance, they use quizzes to check for understanding as a form of formative assessment. They also use summative assessments in forms of midterm and final exams that provide data for students' reports and teachers' reference.

There are three main purposes for assessing reading. Teachers assess to identify students' levels, differentiate learning activities and outcomes, and improve the quality of learning. Four teachers mentioned that they assign part of the reading as homework. They use quizzes either in the beginning or at the end of the lesson to guarantee students' reading and understanding. For example, Teacher 5 commented, "Reading is always assessed. It starts at home, so we are assessing students to read, and this is called formative assessment." And Teacher 2 said "I give them a short quiz especially in the plenary. I need to check if the students are going with the flow, or the level I am expecting or not. If not, I should go back and, let's say, bridge some gaps."

Assessment strategies and the derived data affect teaching. As Teacher 2 mentioned above, he goes back to the concept to bridge the gaps and re-explain confusing parts to students. In addition, Teacher 6 said that the way to deal with the misunderstanding of concepts is to "revisit the concept, or re-engage them in what they find difficult, and for the post-teaching phase, of course you can modify instruction, create activities that tackle the specific skills they are lacking." She specified that assessment levels can be different according to the types of questioning whether students need to look for explicit or implicit information; Teacher 6 confirmed, "It depends on what kind of question; does it require a lot of input, or does it require simply thinking about words, themes and concepts." Teachers mentioned that they have various levels of questions in formal assessments, and different tools for

assessing reading itself, understanding the main idea of the text, identifying basic information and critical thinking skills.

4.7.3 Interview Question Three

<u>What are the difficulties you face when you teach reading?</u>

Themes four, five and six demonstrate the difficulties found in reading classes. Eventually, the problems that teachers face, and the ones students face overlap and mix to pour in the same vessel.

<u>Theme Four: Fostering Students' Progress by Motivating and Paraphrasing</u>

Interviewees responded to the difficulties they face stating many aspects, yet there were three main points that all teachers agreed upon. The first one is that their students don't have the culture or habit of reading. Teacher 5 said this clearly, "The most challenging difficulty that I'm facing is that students don't read. Students are not avid readers; they don't read at all." When students don't usually read, they won't have reading and comprehension skills; consequently, they won't develop background information or reading habits. Teacher 1 said, "The very first difficulty is students' background of reading because sometimes we deal with a category of students who do not read at all," so this is a massive obstacle that hinders reading progress. She referred to the culture of reading being not present on the scene, and this is reflected on other reading aspects in different school stages confirming what Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 explained.

Furthermore, teachers found it very difficult to motivate students to read. Getting students to work on and analyze a lesson they are not interested to read is challenging to teachers. Teacher 3 explained, "It is to motivate some students

especially I am teaching grade 11. I have few who are not interested in reading, and even when we ask them to do so, they read, but they don't understand what they are reading." Other teachers shed light on the lack of reading habit as a reason of the lack of motivation, and that students perceive reading as a heavy task which they are unwilling to perform on their own. Teacher 2 highlighted that he has a difficulty to keep students on reading tasks saying, "Students will not focus for long if you aren't creative in creating your activities." As a result, he tries to keep students engaged by using different reading activities in class relying on that they read their assignment at home.

In addition, teachers referred to the extra time and effort they spend in simplifying and paraphrasing reading texts as a main difficulty. Teacher 7 stressed on this point saying, "You know, we are second language learners; our students are not native learners, so our students need paraphrasing or simplifying the idea or the structure of Literature." Teachers frequently need to re-explain more than the assigned vocabulary words because students don't know the meaning of high-frequency words too. Teacher 4 said, "You do not only, as teacher, explain words as mentioned in the lesson; students do not understand even other words, so vocab is the difficult area for students." They showed annoyance of the repetitive and lengthy explanation of reading lessons, for basic vocabulary and high-frequency words, and for inferred details that pose many challenges to them when they teach reading.

4.7.4 Interview Question Four

<u>What are the difficulties students in your classes face during reading lessons?</u>

Students, being ESL learners, have various difficulties during reading lessons from teachers' perspective. Teachers responded to this question verifying what was said in the previous question about the difficulties they face themselves. The following two themes were derived from interviewees' responses.

<u>Theme Five: Teaching ESL Learners Have Low Language Proficiency</u>

The main challenge that private high-school students face is the low language proficiency. Teacher 6 highlighted, "I think one fundamental difficulty that our ESL face is the lack of understanding of key language sometimes related to the text." Mainly, language structure and sentence structure, if not understood well, are barriers to students' understanding and analysis of the text. Also, teachers mentioned that students' weak sentence structure when they write is part of their language deficiency. Teacher 1 said, "The problem is the lack of reading, so they don't have efficient convenient vocabulary to use in their writing." Furthermore, the interviewed teachers focused on the weakness of vocabulary as being an essential problem that students face. Teacher 3 specified why some students face much difficulty with reading; she said, "They are not used to read. They do not specify time for reading from earlier stages, and they also have low vocab… sometimes they don't understand the sentence structure, and they don't know how to write a good sentence structure, so they don't understand what they read on the spot." Also, Teacher 4 said,

"Sometimes, students come to you with no background, their basics are weak, they cannot pronounce words properly, they cannot understand the main idea,

but I feel, behind all of these is the vocab because they don't understand the meanings of some of the words which are mentioned in the story."

As teachers explained, students face difficulties in understanding vocabulary words, and they have limited understanding of sentence structure which eventually limits the comprehension of the text they are reading.

Theme Six: The Way Students Deal with Reading Texts

High-school students have reading classes since primary school. The way each student deals with the reading text is different according to the genre of the text and his/her own abilities. Part of the difficulties high school students face is that they still didn't develop their own strategies of understanding and analyzing the passage. Teacher 6 clarified,

"Another thing is the lack of experience in using the reading strategies, so you feel that reading is not really directed. So, they read without having the focus in mind which makes them need to reread more than once in order to make sense of the text or comprehend it in a way that is effective."

The use of reading strategies by students is closely relevant to many factors like having a reading habit and the responsibility towards reading. Teacher 5 said, "Reading is a routine, and if students do not get it at an early age, they don't get it later," and teacher 3 pointed to the fact that this problem occurs from younger ages as well. She stressed that students should read more frequently from younger ages too. Furthermore, students don't have responsibility to own their learning which reflects on reading. Teacher 7 said, "I assign them to read at home; they have to read two or three pages. Very few students read and do a summary for the materials. Other students

don't care." This means that many students will not read although it is set by the teacher as homework, and many of the students who read assignments at home, do it for the sake of a quiz or marks which doesn't necessarily lead to the understanding of the passage. This simply relates to students' relation to the text, or more specifically, students' responsibility towards the reading text. Teacher 1 completed this thought saying, "Of course they lack the sense of responsibility among students towards reading. They don't have the passion to read and the passion to go in depth in text." Students should read more independently, and this requires more than skimming the text.

4.8 Summary of Main Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this study using a questionnaire and interviews. There are important results concluded from the Reading Teachers' Questionnaire (RTQ) which was completed by 73 private high-school teachers. Section one of reading strategies was positively responded to in the following three subsections: Pre-reading strategies (M=4.49), during reading strategies (M=4.40) and after reading strategies (M=4.48). The results clearly point out that teachers use reading strategies in teaching reading. The second section shows the use of reading assessment strategies, their relation to reading strategies, and their influence on the teaching and learning process (M=4.55). The third section addresses the difficulties teachers face in teaching reading (M=3.81) which identifies the major problems of teaching reading to ESL learners, and the last section highlights the difficulties students experience in reading classes from teachers' perspectives (M=4.16).

Interviews with 7 participants were conducted, and major themes were found from their responses. The findings were categorized into 6 themes that support the

RTQ's results in answering the four research questions. The first question has two themes: 'reading strategies in relation to reading texts' and 'gaining basic information vs. critical thinking skills.' The second research question of the assessment strategies is highlighted by the theme: 'assessment strategies push reading forward'. Teachers' challenges are mainly resembled in the theme 'fostering students' progress by motivating and paraphrasing', and students' challenges are clarified by 'ESL learners have low language proficiency' and 'the way students deal with reading texts' themes. Both teachers' and students' difficulties are relevant and assembled in the low language proficiency of ESL learners.

The final chapter will include discussion of results, conclusion and recommendations for teachers' practices, heads of departments, curriculum designers, decision makers, academic institutions and for conducting further studies.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This study aims at investigating private high-school teachers' perceptions of reading instructional strategies and reading assessment strategies used in private high schools. An essential part of this research is to shed light on the difficulties teachers face when they teach reading and the difficulties students struggle with in reading lessons. The previous chapter recorded the results of the RTQ, a questionnaire that was answered by 73 private high-school English teachers, providing numerical data, and it recorded the findings of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 7 participants. This chapter discusses the research results in relation to the literature, summarizes the study, and concludes with recommendations. It recommends practices for ESL teachers; heads of departments and curriculum developers; schools, academic organizations, and decision makers as well as recommendations for further studies.

5.2 Research Question One

<u>What kinds of instructional reading strategies do high school teachers use to teach reading?</u>

The first research question refers to the reading instructions and strategies that teachers use in reading lessons in private high schools. There are several ways of teaching reading in relation to participants' responses to the questionnaire and interviews. Teachers responded positively to the use of a dominant model of teaching reading which is the before reading, during reading, and after reading strategies. The use of reading strategies is essential in reading lessons, and this was stated in many studies. Moats (1999) specified that effective classroom instruction is critical to teach

reading and to prevent reading problems more than any other factor. The results of the first research question were presented by questionnaire data in Table 5 for pre-reading strategies, Table 6 for during reading strategies and Table 7 for post-reading strategies along with two interview themes: 'reading strategies in relation to reading texts' and 'gaining basic information vs. basic knowledge'.

Each teacher has his/her own style of teaching which differs according to the text and students in a classroom. For the interviews, although all participants were from one school, each teacher has his/her techniques. Initially, the most strategy that teachers agreed upon in their responses to the questionnaire and interviews is making predictions as an active technique not only before reading but also during reading. For example, Teacher 6 said, "You engage students more in making predictions about the text in the pre-reading activities for example, trying to determine from the title, from the images and from the illustrations what kind of text is going to be explored, and to what extent it has relation to the title, or what kind of predictions or initial analysis they can make depending on the basic information that they can get." Similarly, Friesen & Haigh (2018) stated that engaging students in pre-reading strategies to activate their background helps them predict and insert content related to predictions in light of background knowledge. Making predictions attempts at connecting students to the passage before they start reading and to get them involved in a more critical thinking process while they are reading. This strategy is implemented by the communicative approach. It keeps students engaged as they desire to know what happens next, so they either confirm or modify their predictions according to the details they read.

Furthermore, teachers stated that there is a frequent use of during-reading strategies listed in the questionnaire like identifying basic literary elements, evaluating the plot and generating/ answering questions. The use of reading strategies was further reflected in the interviews as the participants clarified that informational texts need different strategies like reading for a gist and using skimming and scanning strategies. Teacher 5 and 6, who are grade 12 teachers, focused more than other participants on this strategy. Teacher 5 stressed on that "Our students are target to IELTS, to SAT. They need to make skimming and scanning." In other studies, Nezami (2012) explained that the category of skimming and scanning is essential in comprehension, and EFL students fail to achieve the target due to disinterest in pre-reading activities, self-study at home and slow skimming and scanning processes. Students should be trained to apply reading strategies like skimming and scanning and reading for details, for they are essential skills in understanding non-fiction texts.

The reading strategies teachers use for high-school students are various, yet teachers are limited to choose techniques that require critical thinking and deep analysis skills. As evidence, all interview participants highlighted the fact that most students struggle with the basic understanding of the assigned text, and they need guidance to be able to read between the lines and make inferences. Teacher 6 asserted, "This is something that most of our students lack. They cannot really go into the depth of the text and try to make sense of the style, the language, the alternation between the usage of certain words." Regarding this point, Friesen & Haigh (2018) stated that teachers should model the use of reading strategies to all grade levels especially when new text structures are introduced.

The inadequate analytical abilities of ESL students springs from the lack of intensive and extensive reading for school subjects or other resources at home. Because students are not used to read, they are not used to implement reading strategies, and they are not used to text formats and analysis. For example, Teacher 1 said, "Sometimes we deal with a category of students who do not read at all," and Teacher 5 said, "Students are not avid readers; they don't read at all." Furthermore, the level of questions that teachers pose, and the information students get from a text as answers are indicators to this aspect. Teacher 6 explained that saying, "It depends on what kind of question; does it require a lot of input, or does it require simply thinking about words, themes and concepts?" Also, Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) indicated that asking better questions gives students an opportunity for deeper thinking and provides teachers with significant insight into the depth of students' understanding. Also, it was illustrated that the information most students get are explicit rather than implicit. Very few students can read and make inferences in a way they utilize their abilities to analyze and think critically about ideas authors embed in texts.

In addition, the questionnaire and interviews showed that teachers use reading strategies, but most students are not able to use them when they read independently. Teacher 6 said, "I think one fundamental difficulty that our ESL face is the lack of understanding of key language sometimes related to the text. Another thing is the lack of experience in using reading strategies, so you feel that reading is not really directed." Furthermore, comprehension skills are essential in reading lessons, and high-school students, by this stage, should have built reading habits and self-reading strategies to facilitate digesting information from passages. Allen (2003) explained that the act of reading truly takes place through comprehension, and there is no reading

without decoding and all its associated skills. Occasionally, when students have no other choice but to read, like in reading comprehension exams, they don't show proper comprehension of the given passages. To recap, ESL students in high schools, should have developed reading strategies to comprehend reading assignments.

The comprehensive understanding and analysis of a text are results of collective skills and competencies on various levels; hence, a high-school student should have reasonable abilities and knowledge in sentence structure, vocabulary and text structure. In addition, some of the common strategies in the questionnaire, that scored a high level, were 'to highlight high-frequency words' and 'check difficult words in a dictionary'. This clarifies the imperative need of understanding vocabulary words while reading. Moreover, the results emphasize that the lack of vocabulary knowledge is a major problem for ESL students.

Another important issue in reading that restricts comprehension is the limited background of students. Teacher 1 mentioned, "I encourage students to know about the era in which the text is used because it will be helpful to know the background of the text to have an insight of the whole idea." ESL students read less than expected, and they don't have a fertile schema to support what teachers introduce, so no link is made to their prior knowledge. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) explained that any spoken or written text does not carry any meaning in itself, and the meaning is constructed through directions provided by cognitive structures of prior knowledge. Allen (2003) also stated that the more student's range of knowledge, the less scaffolding is needed.

Additionally, Interviewees stressed the point that when students read an interesting story, they show better engagement in the lesson and the implemented

activities. Teacher 4 said, "I feel the strategy depends on the topic. Sometimes, if a topic is interesting for students, you can give them silent reading, or solo reading; if the topic is difficult, you need to adopt certain other techniques." Teacher 2 also said, "The choice of the book itself will actually help me to get students interested in what they are reading." In other studies, Nezami (2012) concluded that EFL learners usually fail in getting the general idea in an adequate manner when the materials of arguments, stories and poems are less attractive for them. On the other hand, students need to be introduced to various sorts of knowledge whether they prefer the specific topic and genre or not. Considering the sociolinguistics theory, this describes the effects of social characteristics on the spoken language considering the cultural background and the natural features of the environment in which they communicate and interact. In a nut shell, students do not usually read, and this affects their background, comprehension skills and analytical abilities.

5.3 Research Question Two

What kind of assessment strategies do high school teachers use to assess reading?

The second research question is the assessment strategies used by private high-school teachers to evaluate reading skills. Table 8 of questionnaire results and interview third theme 'assessment strategies push reading forward' show teachers' responses in this regard.

Reading assessment is a continuous and necessary process to guarantee students' learning. First, formative assessment for reading includes teachers' observations of students' interaction and responses to different types of basic and open-ended questions in reading classes. Teacher 5 said, "Reading is always assessed. It starts at home. So, we are assessing students to read, and this is called formative

assessment." Teacher 4 also said, "The students have to answer the question: 'What did you read about?' so it automatically tells how much they have learned."

In various studies like Friesen & Haigh (2018), they asserted that it is a priority to assess students' strengths and needs. Moreover, there are some quizzes conducted during reading lessons to make sure that students are on the right track. Some of these quizzes check the understanding of main concepts covered in the class, and others check if students read their assignment at home. Teachers reported that they assess reading at home because very few students would read if they are not worried about having a quiz the next day. Teacher 3 said, "I assess students by asking questions, checking for understanding, and some quizzes," and Teacher 7 said, "I assign them to read at home. Very few students read and do a summary for the materials. Other students do not care. Sometimes I use quick or pop-quiz to make them read."

Formative assessment participates in useful modifications of many aspects to improve learning. Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) highlighted that formative assessment procedures are required to provide information at the classroom level and to make instructional adjustments and interventions during the learning process, and this can be done by using students' work, classroom tests, or models of what is expected. As Teacher 2 said, "I will give them a short quiz especially in the plenary. I need to check if the students are going with the flow, or the level I am expecting or not. If not, I should go back and bridge some gaps." Teacher 3 also said, "It affects the teaching in many ways especially you know students' levels, and you know the students who are reading and who are not, so you can find what are the problems, and you can think about solutions."

According to questionnaire results, teachers also use summative assessment procedures in forms of exams to report students' data. Teachers reported that they assess students' abilities to identify main literary elements, generate and answer questions, predict and make inferences, and summarize the text/story. Hence, students' marks are considered a tangible evidence of reading skills, and most importantly, a foundation for other procedures like modifying the curriculum. Teacher 5 said, "Always when we assess, we get marks, and we change or adapt our teaching strategies or make some modifications. Sometimes, for the critical thinking questions, I see that many students did not get it, so I have to change my way of teaching and get better results next time." The required changes lead to modification in reading instructions by using various strategies that encourage students' understanding and motivation. Furthermore, assessment data help teachers define each student's level and assign a suitable reading task for him/her that can enhance the development of individuals which supports Vygotsky's ZPD. As evidence, teachers use differentiated activities that tackle different levels of reading strategies and analytical skills, yet this happens within the same assigned text in the curriculum for all students similarly. Shortly, teachers assess reading to identify students' levels, use differentiated activities and outcomes effectively, and improve learning quality.

Garrison & Ehringhaus (2007) clarified that the use of a comprehensive assessment program at the classroom level where there is a balance between formative and summative strategies, a clear picture of students' learning and achievement shows where a student is when learning targets and standards are considered. In the interviews, Teacher 3 asserted, "I set a purpose for reading like summarizing, taking main events maybe, and I give them a task to do, so students set a goal before they start reading." As Morin and Williams (2016) concluded that the combination of

differentiation, formative assessments, learning progressions, and clear goals that integrate content and literacy standards leads to greater clarity about expectations and enhanced motivation to succeed.

Interview participants referred to another reading challenge that is the national and international language exams like IELTS and SAT. Teacher 5 mentioned IELTS when he illustrated skimming and scanning strategies, and Teacher 6 said, "We have to think about skimming and scanning, reading for a gist, summarizing, paraphrasing, especially when it comes to reading that is related to international exam strategies that are related to the SAT." Amengual (2013) indicated that teachers should improve assessment in the micro school level to help students achieve better in macro international assessments. High-school teachers should direct part of their instruction to prepare students to take international exams because they determine students' future and academic choices. Interviewees focused on the threat of the low language level and lack of reading proficiency of high-school students on their achievements in international exams. To explain, students at the high-school level are expected to perform well in such exams, but many of them barely achieve average requirements.

5.4 Research Question Three

<u>How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties they face when they teach reading?</u>

The third research question investigates teachers' perceptions of the difficulties of teaching reading to high-school students in private schools. Study results of this question were presented in Table 9 and the fourth theme 'fostering students' progress by motivating and paraphrasing'.

The difficulties teachers have in reading classes are summarized in that they should improve language skills of ESL students while many of them do not practice reading. First, teachers deal with students who are not motivated to read. Teacher 5 said, "The most challenging difficulty that I'm facing is that students don't read. They are not avid readers; they do not read at all, and this is of course a burden, and it is a hurdle to understanding later." The lack of reading culture is a main problem of students in the UAE. Similarly, Lempke (2016) emphasized the major role culture plays in students' motivation, and how childhood experiences affect their perception on reading materials which results usually in avoiding reading. As an evidence, there was a noticeable difference of questionnaire responses returned by two high schools in which participants disagreed to statements like 'students' lack motivation to read' and 'some students have not developed the habit of reading' where students are mostly expats from native English-speaking countries with a minor number of local or Arab students.

Participants also pointed out that motivating students to read is a challenging task. Teacher 1 said, "They do not have keenness on reading and getting more knowledge by reading." In addition, Nezami (2012) asserted that the mother of all reading problems is that students show very less interest in reading materials because they seem unmotivated and bored. To explain, teachers included motivating students among their responsibilities, and that they are required to choose suitable materials for their interests, age and level, yet students should be exposed to a variety of genres and topics, and they should practice reading strategies of different informational and literal texts. Similarly, Friesen & Haigh (2018) concluded that students need explicit instructions to engage them in effective reading strategies for different texts at their

reading level, and they confirmed that educators should further support ESL learners with lower language proficiency.

Morin and Williams (2016) explained that a classroom needs an abundance of resources to meet the diverse needs of its students, and teachers should be supported by experts to meet students' needs. In addition, most participants did not have a problem with the scarcity of resources as most participants chose 'Neutral' or 'disagree' to the statement 'the lack of reading resources' as a difficulty they may face. Private schools usually provide teachers and students with good resources, but students and sometimes teachers, don't use them effectively. O'Sullivan (2009) pointed out in a review of teachers and students in his study made minimal use of school libraries in the UAE. The problem lies beyond the lack of reading resources and strategies; it lies in avoiding reading and strategy usage which is very important to be done from early learning stages.

As per interviewees, the major difficulty teachers struggle with is the low vocabulary knowledge of students. In this case, they need to teach, and sometimes reteach, extra words and simplify sentences every reading lesson. This is similar to what Al-Qahtani (2016) mentioned that most teachers believe that the overall low level of language proficiency and limited vocabulary are at the heart of the problem of reading weakness of ESL students. O'Sullivan (2009) also pointed out that vocabulary teaching and learning strategies and pedagogy need a considerable effort because vocabulary development has a key role in the successful development of reading skills, so action must be taken. Moreover, Teacher 4 stressed that vocabulary words are very important in understanding the content of reading. She said, "Students come to you with no background, their basics are weak, they cannot pronounce words properly,

they cannot understand the main idea, but I feel behind all of these is the vocabulary because they do not understand the meanings of some of the words which are mentioned in the story."

Intensive vocabulary explanation may cause delay of other lessons. This may force teachers to carry over some plans for later days or weeks to make up for the time consumed in detailed clarification. It is problematic for teachers to go over all the words students struggle with, or the teacher and students lose focus of the focal point of the passage. To explain, if students need to stop frequently to define words, they will lose track of the main idea and lose interest eventually. Students should be trained to elicit meaning from context, but this can be effective when few words in the text are unfamiliar. Friesen & Haigh (2018) explained that students usually focus on identifying individual word meanings and the relationship between words rather than combining main ideas with their background knowledge. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) explained that learners should be able to read dynamically and selectively in order to construct text meaning with confidence where they do not need to understand every single word in a passage.

High-school students in this study are ESL learners, and they need to be taught with more techniques suggested by the communicative approach from earlier stages. They need more practice of the language and more exposition to texts and real-life situations where they can practice the language authentically. Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor (2006) asserted that the strategic reading is an essential competence for successful comprehension including cognitive, social and affective features, and the ability to use them effectively has received major consideration in ESL reading. Although teachers re-explain and paraphrase texts, students still struggle with relatively known and

supposedly familiar words. Likewise, the lack of practice and genuine usage are the key reasons. Equally important, students do not meaningfully use the vocabulary they learn in their speaking or writing, so these words remain passive and eventually forgotten which forces teachers to explain them repeatedly.

Research questions three and four addressed the difficulties teachers and students face in reading lessons. Although the statements of the questionnaire were different in each part, most interviewees combined those problems and referred to similar concepts. Teacher 4's first reaction to the fourth interview question about students' difficulties was, "Same as I said, when the student is struggling, the teacher is struggling."

5.5 Research Question four

<u>How do private high-school teachers perceive the difficulties students face in reading classes?</u>

The fourth research question addresses the difficulties private high-school students struggle with from their teachers' perceptions. Table 10 of questionnaire results and interview themes five and six, 'ESL learners have low language proficiency' and 'the way students deal with reading texts' answer this question.

The major problem ESL learners face while reading is having low language proficiency which includes the lack of vocabulary knowledge and the lack of understanding of language structures. Teacher 6 said, "I think one fundamental difficulty that our ESL face is the lack of understanding of key language sometimes related to the text." And teacher 3 emphasized, "If they start reading from early stages, they will gain more vocabulary, and their vocabulary will be rich. Sometimes they do

not understand the sentence structure, and they do not know how to write a good sentence structure, so they don't understand what they read on the spot." A similar conclusion was stated by Nezami (2012) that the slow reading process of EFL learners is due to the lack of competence in vocabulary, lack of talent in prediction and summarizing of the supposed meaning, so students fail to understand the text. Also, Friesen & Haigh (2018) explained that if ESL readers have less knowledge about second language vocabulary and language structures, this may weaken their reading comprehension abilities. The inability to recognize many words in a text blocks reading. As evidence, participants asserted that students in reading lessons show low vocabulary knowledge and weak text awareness. This clarifies why reading is still a tangled issue for high-school students.

A major part of students' problems is their lack of responsibility towards reading. Most students do not read, and when they read, they don't focus to make useful links of text-included ideas and their own knowledge. Furthermore, many students don't try to make much effort to improve their reading, so they depend on teachers or peers in classwork which limits their abilities and achievements. Nathanson, Pruslow and Levitt (2008) stated that home and school experiences should be designed to sustain personal reading development in young children and later stages. The responsibility towards reading can be enhanced by regular reading and practice. If students are used to read more when they were younger, reading will not be that challenging to them as many participants mentioned. In addition, most students do not develop reading habits that naturally makes reading different genres and topics simpler. Most importantly, students do not develop the independent use of reading strategies to help them deal with different types of texts. Allen (2003) asserted that ESL learners' language development can be enhanced through visualization and

vocabulary as crucial knowledge, for students need to be aware of the techniques they need to use with different text structures.

For text comprehension, interview participants explained that ESL students can usually answer basic, direct questions, struggle with advanced ones and mostly miss, if they do not ignore, the critical thinking and analytical questions. Reyna-Barron (2016) clarified that students are considered good readers when they are able to actively comprehend and interpret various types of texts; therefore, it is necessary to teach all students research-based strategies through direct instructions and modeling. In addition, different studies found that using effective strategies can be one solution to text analysis problems. Friesen & Haigh (2018) presented a particularly relevant concern of ESL learners as they need more support to approach difficult texts using instructions and strategies in a way that enables readers to employ their knowledge more effectively during text comprehension. A similar conclusion was asserted in a study that investigated university level EFL Saudi learners' comprehension strategies and reading skills. (Nezami, 2012, p3) described the major problems for Saudi EFL readers that are:

> "limited vocabulary, difficulty in understanding the meaning of text, lack of self-study activities, spelling and pronunciation problems, disinterest in collaborative work and group discussions, lack of extensive reading, difficulties in scanning and skimming, lack of motivation, syntactic parsing difficulties, difficulties in prediction and in using prior knowledge, and inability to summarize a text."

Briefly, students of this study face difficulties in understanding vocabulary words, and they have limited understanding of sentence structure and text format. Being ESL learners marked with low language proficiency, they lack the ability to use proper reading strategies. Each factor lessens the comprehension of the text the students are reading. In addition, this fact is directly affected by the fact that students have no motivation to read, do not regularly read, and avoid reading from earlier ages which enlarges the problem. All these practices, or lack of practices, influence in a way or another the reading abilities and skills of high-school students.

5.6 Conclusions

To conclude, reading is the key to all knowledge, and this is the reason to choose this topic for my thesis. It is peculiar that our cultures do not include reading as an essential practice. I believe that we are a nation that has the rich Arabic language as a mother tongue. We should strive to gain all sorts of knowledge by reading. Nowadays, most of the available body of knowledge is written in English, so it is essential for every person to be able to comprehend texts written in English.

The purpose of this research is to explore private high-school reading status through teachers' perceptions of reading instructional strategies and reading assessment strategies. Teachers' perceptions of the difficulties they face and what their students struggle with in reading lessons is questioned. The study originally springs from the critical situation of reading in the Arab countries including the UAE. Students usually avoid reading regardless of the language, genre, topic or size of the text.

Mixed methods were used to gain quantitative and qualitative data which was useful to dig deeply into this issue. The participants who took part in the questionnaire

were 73 English language private high-school teachers from Al Ain City. The qualitative data were collected by semi-structured interviews conducted with 7 English private high-school teachers from one private school in Al Ain City too.

The findings of the study proved perceptions stated by many teachers who responded to the questionnaire and the interviews. Private high-school English Language teachers described the situation of teaching and assessing reading as the following:

1. High-school teachers use different reading instructional strategies for informational and literal texts in reading lessons.

2. Formative and summative reading assessment strategies are used to identify students' levels, differentiate learning activities and outcomes, and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

3. Teachers are mainly challenged to find effective ways to motivate students to read and think critically about what they read.

4. It is challenging to teachers to improve ESL learners' reading skills when they have low language proficiency, and they do not frequently read or practice the language.

5. The limited vocabulary level and low language proficiency are barriers to students' understanding and reading comprehension.

6. High school students are expected to have a good bank of vocabulary, yet many of them still struggle with high-frequency words.

7. The lack of reading culture in the society and the lack of reading habits in young students lead to increasing reading challenges in high-school level.

8. Students' use of reading strategies is determined by two main factors: having responsibility towards reading and forming a reading habit.

9. The more students read, the more vocabulary they gain, the better background they have, and the more comprehension and communication they can make.

5.7 Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested based on the findings of this study:

5.7.1 Recommendations for ESL Teachers

1. All language teachers should try their best to instill the love, passion and importance of reading in their students, and they should scaffold them by teaching them how to decode sentences and elicit important information.

2. Teachers should assess students' reading skills formatively before their summative assessments. They should ensure that students reflect on their practices and strategies, and they benefit from the effective feedback and feedforward given by their teachers.

3. Teachers should frequently join professional development sessions on how to actively implement reading strategies. New instructions and activities including cooperative learning structures can be introduced to students for more enjoyable reading classes.

4. For the importance of vocabulary words in understanding reading, vocabulary instruction should be explicitly taught to students. Teachers can ask students to list their vocabulary words whenever they read, so they can benefit from their own lists and be more responsible and independent.

5. Nowadays, students are more used to technology, so they can use different applications in a productive way to support reading.

6. Teachers need to coach students to choose the appropriate reading strategies in relation to different types of texts.

5.7.2 Recommendations for Heads of Departments and Curriculum Developers

1. Heads of Department and curriculum designers should ensure the right choices of texts/stories that suit students' levels, so they will not be detached due to the gap between their abilities and the level of the text. Most texts/stories should have interesting topics that appeal to students' generation and interests to lessen the difficulties teachers face to motivate students.

2. Students should be assessed frequently to determine their reading achievement and level of improvement. Assessment should be followed by a constructive feedback to scaffold students.

3. The reading curriculum should be revised and modified periodically to ensure the effectiveness of its elements, and this should be done with considerations of teachers' feedback on teaching specific texts or stories.

4. The heads of English department should ensure that their teachers use various and enjoyable reading strategies that encourage students to love reading from earlier stages.

5. Vocabulary lessons should be included in English language high-school curriculum, and these lessons should be taught with explicit instruction and followed up regularly.

5.7.3 Recommendations for Schools, Academic Organizations and Decision Makers

1. Reading in both Arabic, the mother tongue, and English as a second language should be given more emphasis not only at schools, but also at home.

2. Raising parents' awareness of the status of reading is of utmost importance. They might be introduced to the risks of lack of reading before their children are enrolled in schools, so they can try to enhance reading regardless of the way they perceived or experienced it in their childhood.

3. Schools should design programs to prepare high-school teachers and students more for international exams. They should ensure that teachers are qualified to train students on specific techniques and reading strategies that are useful for comprehension. Students should also be tested in reading comprehension with reasonable frequency and constructive feedback.

5.7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study can be examined on a larger scale to gain more in-depth knowledge, and it can be replicated in different setting.

2. The impact of implementing a curriculum that is rich with vocabulary instruction and assessment strategies on ESL students' reading achievement can be studied.

3. The impact of coaching active readers to independently select effective reading strategies on their comprehension skills and achievement scores can be examined.

4. Possible ways qualified teachers defeat challenges to enhance reading in different school levels can be investigated.

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Appendices

Appendix A: (RTQ)

First Page

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment Strategies Used in High Schools

I am a student in the Master program, in the College of Education at the UAE University. The purpose of my study is to investigate high school teachers' perceptions of reading instructional and assessment strategies. The other purpose is to shed light on the difficulties teachers and students face in reading classes. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, and it will take about ten minutes to be completed. Your answers will remain confidential, and they will only be used for this research purposes. In case you require any further information, feel free to contact the researcher. Your participation is highly appreciated. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

Years of teaching experience: ☐ 0 - 5   ☐ 6 - 10   ☐ More than 10

A	Reading instructional strategies high school teachers use including	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
	Before I teach reading, I ask students to …	-	-	-	-	-
1	find information about the author of a text.					
2	answer pre-reading questions.					
3	predict the topic of a text.					
4	identify key words related to a text.					
5	predict events of a story from the title and/or some images.					
6	write questions they are interested to find answers for in a text.					
	During reading, I ask students to …	-	-	-	-	-
7	take notes while they read.					
8	use a dictionary to look up difficult words' meanings.					
9	highlight high-frequency words.					
10	use context clues to guess words' meanings.					
11	make prediction for what will happen in a text/story.					
12	identify text elements like setting, characters and point of view.					
13	generate challenging questions from a text.					
14	answer questions generated by other students.					
15	check each other's answers.					
16	use skimming and scanning strategies.					
17	evaluate the plot of a story.					

Turn Over Please

Second Page

		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
	After reading, I ask students to …					
18	summarize the main idea of a text.					
19	reflect on the theme of a text.					
20	relate a story to their social/cultural experiences.					
21	write another possible conclusion for a text.					
22	state their opinion of a text.					
23	create a story map.					
B	**When I assess my students for reading, I …**	-	-	-	-	-
1	assess students' ability to generate and answer questions.					
2	assess their understanding of the main idea of a text.					
3	assess their ability to summarize a text.					
4	assess their ability to identify story elements (setting, characters, plot and conflict).					
5	assess students' critical thinking skills.					
6	provide constructive feedback to students.					
7	use assessment results to improve students' learning.					
8	use assessment results to improve my instruction.					
C	**When I teach reading, I face the following problems:**	-	-	-	-	-
1	students' lack of motivation to read.					
2	some students perceive reading as a demanding task.					
3	some students haven't developed the habit of reading.					
4	some students depend on the teacher or their peers.					
5	the lack of reading resources.					
6	finding culturally appropriate texts to motivate students.					
7	teaching students with different language proficiency and abilities.					
8	the inappropriateness of the school textbooks for students' levels.					
D	**Some students find reading difficult because they …**	-	-	-	-	-
1	have limited experience in using ESL reading strategies.					
2	have low language proficiency.					
3	have limited vocabulary knowledge.					
4	have limited knowledge of sentence structures.					
5	have limited experience in reading different types of texts/stories.					
6	lack the sense of responsibility to own their learning.					
7	have limited experience in using context clues to understand a text.					
8	do limited extra-curricular reading outside the classroom.					

Contact Information:

Ms. Eman Yousef Mahmoud   UAEU, Al Ain, UAE

Mobile No. 0503384009   Email address: eman.mahmoud@liwaschool.com

Appendix B: (Interview Questions)

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment

Strategies Used in High School

The purposes of this semi-structured interview is to investigate teachers' instructional and assessment strategies in teaching reading in high school. This interview will be conducted in partial fulfillment of a Master degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the UAE University. Participants will sign a consent form before the interview. Collected information will remain confidential and will only be used for the assigned purpose.

Interview Questions:

1- What are the most effective reading strategies you use in class?

2- In what ways do you assess your students' reading? How does reading assessment affect your teaching?

3- What are the difficulties you face when you teach reading?

4- What are the difficulties students in your classes face during reading lessons?

Appendix C: (ADEK's Approval)

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Date:15/10/2018	التاريخ : 15/10/2018
To:Private Schools Principals	الساده / مديرى المدارس الخاصة المحترمين
Subject : Letter Of Permission	الموضوع : تسهيل مهمة باحثين
Dear Principals,	تحية طيبة وبعد،

The Department of Education and Knowlegde would like to express its gratitude for your generous efforts and sincere cooperation in serving our dear researchers.

يطيب لدائرة التعليم و المعرفة ان تتوجه لكم بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجهودكم الكريمة و التعاون الصادق لخدمة ابنائنا الباحثين

You are kindly requested to allow the researcher /**Eman Mahmoud**, to complete his research on:

و نود اعلامكم بموافقة دائرة التعليم و المعرفة علي موضوع الدراسة التى سيجريها الباحث / **Eman Mahmoud** بعنوان:

Teachers' Perception of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment Strategies Used in High School

Teachers' Perception of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment Strategies Used in High School

Please indicate your approval of this permission by facilitating her meetings with the sample groups at your resoected schools.

لذا يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهام الباحث و مساعدتة علي إجراء الدراسة المشار إليها

For Futher information : please contact **Mr Helmy Seada** on 02/6150140

للاستفسار : يرجي الاتصال بالسيد / **حلمى سعدة علي** هاتف 02/6150140

Thank you four ur cooperation.
Sincerely yours,

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم
وتفضلوا بقبول خالص الاحترام و التقدير
أ.د. مسعاد عبد الله بدري
مدير وحدة البحوث والتخطيط وقياس الأداء

Appendix D: (UAEU Facilitation Letter)

UAEU College of Education

جامعة الإمارات العربية المتحدة
United Arab Emirates University

التاريخ: 2018/09/5

السادة الكرام

لمن يهمه الأمر

نود إفادتكم علماً بأن الطالبة: إيمان يوسف راغب محمود - ID: 201670108

التخصص : مناهج وطرق التدريس

مسجله في برنامج الماجستير في كلية التربية، تقوم بإعداد بحث بعنوان:

Teachers' Perception of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading

Assessment Strategies Used in High School

نرجو التكرم بالموافقة على تسهيل مهمتها البحثية.

شاكرين ومقدرين حسن تعاونكم.
هذا وتفضلوا بقبول فائق التحية والتقدير.

منسق برنامج الماجستير

د. هالة الحويرص

كلية التربية
مساعد العميد لشؤون البحث العلمي والدراسات العليا
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ت 971 3 713 6260 + ف 971 3 713 6249+
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College of Education
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www.cedu.uaeu.ac.ae/graduateprogram/

Appendix E: (Informed Consent Form)

Page 1

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Instructional Strategies and Reading Assessment

Strategies Used in High School

<u>Please read the consent form carefully before you sign it.</u>

You are invited to take place in a study that investigates reading instructional strategies and reading assessment strategies used in high school. This study is conducted by Mrs. Eman Yousef Mahmoud who is an English teacher in a private school, and a Master student, in Curriculum and Instruction Department, in the College of Education, in the UAE University. She can be reached by phone number 0503384009 or email at amoon_tm@hotmail.com. Kindly feel free to contact Mrs. Eman at any stage of the research study.

The research study takes place at (participant's location), and the questionnaire will take about 10-15 minutes to be completed.

The interview will be conducted in an office in (participant's location) and will take about 20 minutes.

Your participation is greatly valued to improve students' learning and reading skills. The study will contribute to education in general, and to high-school reading instructional strategies and assessment strategies in specific. There have been few studies on reading of high school students in the UAE, and this research will enrich relevant literature.

The information you provide for this study and share with us will remain confidential. You do not need to mention your name as it will not be revealed; it may be coded like all other participants in this study. Evidence will be kept for the duration of the study and will be discarded later.

You can withdraw from the study at any phase with no worries, penalties or any kind of risks. Please feel free to contact Mrs. Eman in case you have any question, or you need any further information about the study.

<u>Contact Information</u>

Ms. Eman Yousef Mahmoud

UAEU, Al Ain, UAE

Mobile No. 0503384009

Email address: amoon_tm@hotmail.com

1

Page 2

<u>Informed Consent:</u>

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the purpose of the study and have had the chance to ask questions.

2. I learned that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time of the study without any risks.

3. I understand that the information I participate with will remain confidential, and my name will not be used in the study, but may be coded for the researcher's reference.

Therefore, I agree to take part in this study.

Name and signature of the participant: Date:

_____   _____

Name and signature of the researcher: Date:

_____   _____