

**An Exploration of Reading Comprehension
Challenges in Saudi Arabian University EFL Students**

By

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Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a vertical line at the end, enclosed within a large, irregular oval shape.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father who believed in me and raised me with his support and prudence.

With love to the memory of my late mother who passed away tragically and unexpectedly at the beginning of my postgraduate journey. I wish you were here MUM to see how your prayer has lightened my way. Your passing is engraved on my heart and will never be forgotten.

To my brother Turki, and my best friend - my wife's brother Madhi, who have supported me during my absence abroad, facilitating everything in Saudi Arabia to enable me to stay in the United Kingdom and study without worry.

To my wife and children who dedicated their time and happiness with patience and tolerance in order for us to complete this long journey together.

Abstract

This is an interpretive study, framed by sociocultural theory, and employing qualitative data collection methods to explore the nature of reading comprehension challenges faced by English as Foreign Language learners. These challenges were identified through analysis of the students' reading aloud processes, and the factors to which students attributed these challenges were investigated from the perspectives of both the readers themselves and those of their lecturers.

Information about student reading aloud processes was obtained through participation in the Think Aloud Protocol by sixteen student volunteers from three universities in Saudi Arabia. Nine students then volunteered to reflect on their reading aloud processes in the follow-up Retrospective Verbal Report. All sixteen students then took part in a semi-structured interview in which they were questioned about the factors influencing their reading challenges. Six of their lecturers also volunteered to undertake a similar interview process with regard to their student's reading of English.

The findings showed that Saudi EFL students exhibited a number of reading processes which interfered with comprehension. They paid little attention to punctuation, and used ineffective reading strategies such as repetition and guessing, which were usually incorrect. Words were often incorrectly decoded and therefore, mispronounced, particularly vowels which were pronounced by their alphabetic names rather than phonically, and words were substituted for those which were graphically or phonologically similar, indicating a failure to monitor comprehension. Students also read slowly which interfered with the development of coherency, fluency and comprehension. A number of themes were identified with regard to the source of these challenges. These themes relate to the social and cultural framework surrounding the student, including a cohesive, authoritarian society with a strong social tradition and a culture which does not value or prioritise reading for pleasure. Participants believed that these social and cultural forces lead to a lack of resources, poor access to English, poor teaching methods and a lack of background knowledge as they read. They claimed that this generated states of mind which contributed to their reluctance, and largely negative attitudes towards, reading in English. In particular, participants reported that the social demands of their culture, the failure to teach good phonic skills, and of negative

mental and emotional states, influenced their reading fluency and contributed to their reading comprehension challenges.

The unique approach and design of this study, particularly in the context of the Arab world, has produced findings which demonstrate the relevance and influence of social and cultural factors on reading processes and comprehension challenges. These findings have led to a number of recommendations for the learning and teaching of English reading in international contexts. The study concludes by suggesting that these processes and factors be further investigated by future studies.

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

Abbreviation/Acron	Full wording
AERA	American Educational Research Association
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ESL	English as a Second Language
EIL	English as an International Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ELT	English Language Teaching
L1	First Language
GPGE	General Presidency for Girls' Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
IELTS	International English Language Test System
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
Lr1 to Lr6	Pseudonym for lecturers in the current study
S1 to S16	Pseudonym for students in this research
RVR	Retrospective Verbal Report
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
SR	Saudi Riyal
L2	Second Language
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other
TAP	Think Aloud Protocol
WTO	World Trade Organization,
NA	Non-Acrophonic

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the current study

Although English is the first language of only 10% of the global population, it is the international lingua franca. Graddol (2000) estimates that one-fifth of the global population speaks English with some degree of competence and that demand is increasing from the other four-fifths. English facilitates communication between a wide range of linguistic groups and being able to use it gives access to the global community (Graddol, 1997). The oral skills of speaking and listening are important for general linguistic competence, but the textual skills of writing and reading are essential in the education sector and, in particular, good reading skills are crucial for understanding of international texts in any academic discipline.

Broadly speaking, reading is the extraction of meaning from a text. It is a complex process for anyone reading in their first language let alone a foreign one. Smith (2006), reports research which suggests that reading in a second language – e.g. English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) - is a source of considerable difficulty. Success is not measured by the number of words read, but by the depth of understanding gained through the interaction between the reader and the text. According to Hammerberg (2004) the construction of meaning consists of more than the reader merely decoding words and saying them aloud in his/her head. Rather, it is an interactive process involving the active construction of meaning while reading. Even when the learner reads words correctly, s/he must be able to go beyond the text's literal meaning in order to appreciate the author's intent and think critically about deeper layers of meaning (Klingner, Vaugh & Boardman, 2007).

For native speakers of Arabic, Mourtaga, (2004) stated that learning to read English is associated with a variety of challenges and difficulties including poor vocabulary, grammar and syntax which need to be explored in order for them to be taught and these problems overcome. (Henceforth, 'challenges' and 'difficulties' are interchangeable).

For example, if a student does not understand the difference between simple, compound and complex sentences, this may result in misinterpretation of the meaning intended by the author. Such problems may lead to

misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the meaning intended by the author. This is particularly important at tertiary level where reading in English is a necessary part of learning and research at both undergraduate and post-graduate level.

On graduation, the majority of Saudi Arabian university EFL students progress to a career teaching English in Saudi Arabian schools and there is a risk that their reading comprehension difficulties will be passed on to their students. This study explores the nature of and factors contributing to the reading aloud process specifically and comprehension challenges amongst Saudi Arabian University students studying EFL in order to mitigate against that outcome.

1.2 The nature of the problem

The literature on reading proficiency shows that EFL learners routinely face a range of comprehension difficulties. These include: reading proficiency (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2003), prior knowledge on the subject domain or schemata (Carrell, 1984), and reading techniques (Duke & Pearson, 2002). In his research on Arabic-speaking EFL students, Farquharson (1988) identified four categories of such problems. These include problems related to misunderstanding the reading process; unfamiliarity with the use of English; challenges linked to the differences between English and Arabic; and problems related to the relationship between English spelling and phonetics. Schiefele & Krapp (1996) identified lack of interest in topics and Farquharson (ibid) also noted that inappropriate supplementary materials negatively affected comprehension.

In the Saudi EFL context, research has identified a number of further challenges and difficulties. These include factors relating to teaching practice such as unfavorable learning environments, lack of training in reading comprehension skills, ineffective traditional teaching methods and badly-designed English textbooks. Others relate to characteristics of students, such as lack of knowledge of reading strategies, lack of prior knowledge, lack of enthusiasm for reading, lack of vocabulary, lack of time spent on task and of attention. Students may also fail to appreciate the purpose of reading, and be poorly-motivated learners (Al-Sulaimani, 1990; Kondarge, 1991; Al-Ebsi, 1997; Alebsi, 2002; Awad, 2002; Alsamadani, 2009).

The above research described some problems related to EFL reading. However they did not explore the reading aloud process in its totality, or the comprehension challenges faced by EFL readers. Whilst they provide some insights faced by EFL readers, they did so from a purely cognitivist perspective. Limiting one's consideration to the cognitive approach with limited investigative tools does not address the multivariate and powerful social and cultural factors which affect the EFL reader. It also fails to take into account the mediative role of socio-cultural context (Gee, 1996; Smagorinsky, 2001). Exploring the reading aloud process more deeply and gaining a more detailed understanding of comprehension challenges requires a much broader approach and more sensitive and comprehensive research tools such as TAP for getting participants to read aloud in order to observe their errors or 'miscues'. Reading aloud is an important part of this design as a form of miscue analysis. Decoding is an important part of reading and exploring these decoding difficulties are essential to understanding comprehension difficulties. These issues will be addressed by the current study.

The sociocultural approach views reading comprehension from the perspective of social and cultural factors in the reading environment. Serafini (2012) described reading as:

"... the process of generating viable interpretations in transaction with texts, and one's ability to construct understandings from multiple perspectives; including the author's intentions, textual references, personal experiences, and sociocultural contexts in which one reads" (p.193).

It is the synthesis of textual elements such as design, image and text, meanings generated from interactions with the text, articulation of these meanings with other readers, and questioning the meanings recursively. This definition moves beyond cognitively-based approaches to include socio-cultural, historical, political, and pragmatic aspects of reading and takes into account the immediate, sociocultural, and historical contexts of reading.

As outlined by Serafini (*ibid*), the sociocultural perspective on reading comprehension makes a number of assumptions. They are:

1. There is no objective reading of text, only particular readings, some of which are privileged over others.
2. Both the writing and the reading of text are embedded in particular social contexts and practices.

3. Meaning is always socially constructed.
4. Meaning is always historically embedded.
5. Meaning is always political, promoting particular interests.
6. In the context of a classroom, certain readings will be privileged over others.

The perspective adopted in the current study is derived from the above theory and accepts that readers are not "solitary explorers trying to uncover the single main idea" of a text (Faust, 1994, p.25). Rather they come to reading with "prior cultural, linguistic, literary and life experiences" (Smagorinsky, 2001, p.141) and actively construct meaning which they draw on to make sense of what they read. The meanings they construct are socially embedded, temporary, partial, and plural (Corcoran, Hayhoe, & Pradl, 1994).

In addition to being limited to a cognitive approach, the studies mentioned above have also employed quantitative methodologies. In general, these methodologies reduce phenomena to numerical measures and overlook deeper, underlying explanations and interpretations. Very few studies have explored EFL reading comprehension in its totality. Rather, they have tended to investigate single factors, such as the impact of lexical knowledge in isolation instead of taking a holistic overview of the inter-related factors which constitute reading comprehension challenges in their totality. Such methodology does not enable the linking of comprehension challenges to reading processes and the readers' perspectives on these challenges and processes. This does not generate enough understanding of reading comprehension challenges to be able to identify strategies which would enhance both the standard of both EFL teaching in general, and the teaching of EFL reading in particular.

As research mentioned above has shown, Saudi Arabian school students are not adequately prepared for reading English in higher education by the pre-university EFL curriculum and teaching methods. As undergraduates, they cannot keep pace with the tertiary curriculum in subjects where English texts are important sources, and in particular the EFL tertiary curriculum. Their poor understanding of reading processes and challenges is perpetuated when they graduate to become EFL teachers themselves and are unable to teach EFL reading effectively to the next generation of Saudi school students. The problem also extends beyond academia in failing to prepare Saudi citizens adequately for participation in the global community. This has implications for many

important fields of global interaction, including diplomatic relations, business transactions and keeping pace with scientific developments and communication technologies which cannot be resolved until there is greater understanding of the reading comprehension challenges faced by Saudi students when they read in English.

1.3 Rationale for the current study

Many studies have indicated that reading is the most important linguistic skill for academic success in any language. For example, Sheorey (2009) pointed out that we learn to write by reading, and his research demonstrated a positive correlation between a student's participation in free reading programs and improvement in their writing skills. The development of good English reading skills is especially important for EFL students who need English for academic purposes and I have seen this in my own experience. The teaching of reading comprehension is multi-layered and complex. As Kirby asserts, "reading comprehension is ... challenging and requires deliberate instruction" (2007: 1).

Within the Arabic EFL context, the traditional and structured exercises of widely-used EFL reading material can trivialize the purpose of reading. For example, students are often required to focus on minutiae, such as memorizing a large number of small items of information, rather than on the overall meaning of text. Such a task addresses the skill of recall but not that of comprehension. There is also a strong focus on narrow interpretations of small units of vocabulary, such as words and phrases, rather than on larger units, such as sentences and paragraphs and on the wider meaning of the text as a whole. Because of this, there is a danger that the predominant Arab and Saudi EFL teaching methodologies will lead to further deterioration in the teaching of English reading and that teaching methods will remain traditional and perpetuate an under-developed university learning environment. This can only be remedied by better understanding of the challenges faced by Arab and Saudi EFL reading, and the reasons for their reading comprehension challenges.

The idea for this study arose from my experience as an educator in my home country of Saudi Arabia. Colleagues repeatedly complained about the poor English reading ability of their students, of poor or incomplete comprehension, slow reading speeds and lack of motivation or interest in

reading English text and I realized that Saudi Arabian EFL students faced serious reading comprehension challenges when reading English text.

These challenges could be influenced by many factors, including cultural schematic linguistic differences between the two languages, and motivational and vocabulary factors (Bergman, 2005). I realized that previous studies on reading challenges were limited in their aims, either investigating a developmental programme or exploring methods of improving the reading performance of EFL students. It was clear to me that they failed to investigate reading comprehension challenges in sufficient depth to redress those challenges, and that more research, and of a different type, was required in order to develop the reading capabilities of Saudi Arabian, and potentially Arabic EFL students.

Having realized that a number of factors, in addition to those mentioned in the literature, could be responsible for reading comprehension challenges, I decided to undertake a piece of interpretive research to look into these factors through the lens of sociocultural theory. The direction of my research was not simply to examine reading comprehension challenges through examination of the teaching and learning process, but to go beyond it and explore Saudi EFL students' reading aloud processes in order to identify the sources of the comprehension challenges they faced. Such understanding can only be gained by consulting the readers themselves in order to understand their reading experiences in their own words and from their own perspectives, in addition to the perspective of their lecturers on their student's reading comprehension. Such information is difficult to gain through the use of silent reading, which is the traditional assessment methodology. Rather, a method is required in which student reading processes can first be made explicit by reading aloud and thinking aloud simultaneously, and then supplemented by reflection on these processes in order to gain a fuller understanding of the challenges faced and how they are handled.

The insight gained from an understanding of the subjective factors which underpin EFL reading, will improve our understanding of the EFL reading process in general and reading aloud process in particular and of the factors which contribute to reading comprehension challenges. The findings could also make a positive contribution to the future effectiveness of the teaching and learning of EFL reading both in Saudi and other Arab schools. In so doing, the

findings from this study could also help to improve other EFL skills such as writing, speaking and listening.

1.4 Aim of the current study

The aim of this study is to explore the nature of the reading processes and reading comprehension challenges faced by Saudi Arabian EFL students as these challenges are identified in their reflective process of reading aloud, as a means of exploring the factors which contribute to these challenges, from both the perspectives of the readers themselves, and those of their lecturers. To achieve this, the process of reading aloud is elucidated and explored through the use of the Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) which exposes these processes and associated comprehension challenges, and also from students' reflections on the TAP during the Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR) protocol, which enables clarification of the reading processes and comprehension challenges. Both students and lecturers are also interviewed using a Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) format, which gives them the opportunity to expand on the reading aloud processes and comprehension challenges in their own words and from their own perspectives, and to explore their perspectives. The use of TAP, RVR and interview helps explore the two elements of reading: decoding and comprehension. Decoding is an essential part of comprehension particularly in languages which are so different from each other. One of the strengths of this research is that it combines reading aloud and TAP to give insight into the process of decoding as well as the outcome in comprehension. Decoding includes the meaning (semantic) clues, grammar and syntax of a sentence, word parts (base words, prefixes, suffixes), and familiarity with similar words (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). However, the current research focuses primarily on reading aloud and therefore does not shed light on comprehension when reading silently. The reasons for applying the protocol of reading aloud rather than that of reading silently was firstly, it fits in line with generally accepted classroom practice in a Saudi context and secondly, because the general standard of comprehension of the students in this study was expected to be below the average (for more details about reading aloud and silent reading, please see Chapter 3.5.2: Reading Modality and reading comprehension).

These methods complement each other to ensure a comprehensive coverage of reading comprehension challenges. An interpretive paradigm is utilized as an umbrella for analysing new, rich data, and identifying and interpreting emergent themes in the light of the research questions. In addition, it seeks to identify social and cultural factors which contribute to reading comprehension challenges.

1.5 Significance of the current study

On a theoretical level, the current study has the potential to contribute to the international understanding of EFL reading comprehension challenges in many first language groups. In particular, it may contribute to such understanding in Arab contexts as they are expected to have low or poorer levels of literacy in English, and also in contexts other than the Arabic context, where the first language of the learner is written in a script other than the Roman alphabet. As the protocol used in this research is predominantly reading aloud, this may facilitate further positive contributions to EFL comprehension studies, such as further understanding of the students' word identification strategies and the degree of their fluency. Reading silently may not allow these challenges to be exhibited amongst the participants.

On a pedagogical level it may contribute to learning and teaching practices both in and beyond Arabic EFL contexts. It also has the potential to make a practical contribution to educational policy and curriculum development in Saudi Arabia. It can serve as a reference point for future EFL curriculum design in both universities and schools and help curriculum planners develop new and more effective approaches to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension, thus ameliorating existing problems and making learning more progressive and holistic. Such improvements also have the potential to enhance academic achievement for students in courses other than EFL. In the age of globalization, suggestions for the improved teaching of EFL reading will ensure that universities are better placed to keep pace with developments in the rest of the world, and can contribute to the country's developmental plans of improving national human resources.

It also has the potential to contribute to the body of research and literature based on the sociocultural approach. In particular it contributes to the application of that approach to the EFL learning and teaching context. It will

bring new insights into reading comprehension challenges in EFL contexts, particularly those relating to the Arab world and Saudi Arabia. The identification of the reasons for these will provide insights into how social and cultural forces, in addition to cognitive factors, can affect reading comprehension in EFL learners, and has implications for the teaching and learning of EFL reading, not only in Saudi and Arabic contexts, but also in any context where aspects of local social forces, cultural pressures and orthographic differences can interfere with the acquisition of good EFL reading skills.

From a research perspective, to the best of my knowledge no previous research in the Arab EFL world has used the lens of sociocultural theory together with an interpretive research stance in order to explore this phenomenon. As the first research of its type on EFL reading comprehension challenges in Saudi Arabia, the current study breaks new academic ground. In addition to this, the use of this particular set of data collection tools sets a precedent for subsequent research in the field.

1.6 Research questions

In order to explore the reading comprehension challenges of Saudi Arabian University EFL students, the following research questions have been developed:

1. What are the reading aloud processes of Saudi Arabian university EFL students when reading English text and answering English comprehension questions and what factors influence these processes?
2. What are the Saudi Arabian EFL students' perspectives on their English reading comprehension challenges and to what factors do they ascribe them?
3. What are the EFL lecturers' perspectives on their EFL students' English reading comprehension challenges and are these perspectives consistent with their students' perspectives?

1.7 Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. The first, introduces the nature of the problem, provides a rationale for the focus and explains the potential contribution to knowledge.

The second chapter describes the context of the current study and includes a description of the teaching of EFL and the use of textbooks in educational settings in Saudi Arabia, together with cultural issues which affect reading as a practice.

The third chapter sets out the theoretical background to the current study. It reviews research on reading comprehension for EFL students and identifies the unique position of the current study in relation to previous studies. It outlines a number of theories of learning and a number of potential research paradigms, before providing the rationale for the use of the sociocultural framework as the basis of the current study.

The fourth chapter explains the research methodology of the current study including the rationale for the design and methodology of the study. The data collection methods are fully outlined and the sampling strategy is described. The procedures of both the pilot and the main study are explained and data analysis is also described.

The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study together with their analysis and interpretation in order to address the research questions.

The sixth chapter discusses the findings in the light of the theoretical background of the study and the body of literature from which it is derived.

The seventh chapter considers the contribution of these findings to the field and recommendations are made for the teaching of EFL in global, Arab and Saudi contexts. Suggestions are also made for future studies which arise from the research findings.

Chapter 2: Context and Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the social and educational context of English reading comprehension challenges in Saudi undergraduate EFL students. It will be set into the geographical, historical and social backgrounds of Saudi Arabia as a nation. The teaching of English reading will be considered in the context of the Saudi educational curriculum generally and of the principles and objectives which drive the education system at all stages from pre-school to higher education level. The English reading curriculum, textbooks and characteristics of teachers will be outlined and considered in the light of governmental aims and key features of reading behaviour in Saudi Arabia, such as reading habits and interests.

2.2 Saudi Arabia – background to the present situation

Due to its strategic location near the sea trade routes used to transport goods between India, China and Europe, the Arabian Peninsula has played a significant role in international trade for centuries. Trade in incense, spices and myrrh (used in medicine and cosmetic balms) also flourished between the Egyptians and Phoenicians who inhabited the area in ancient times (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

The current day kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, established by King Abdulaziz Al-Saud in 1932. Since his death in 1953 the kingdom has been governed by his sons. Since August 2005, the current ruler has been King Abdullah, the fifth son of the founding king (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the USA, 2014).

2.2.1 Geography of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is the largest country in the Middle East, covering approximately 2,250,000 square kilometers of mainly desert plateau in the central part of the Arabian Peninsula. The climate varies between extreme daytime heat combined with abrupt falls in night-time temperatures, to humidity in the coastal regions and a milder mountain climate in the south. It is bordered on the East by the Gulf of Arabia which forms a strategic link to Asia, and on the West by the Red Sea which forms a link to the continent of Africa and it is

bordered to the north and south by other Arabic nations. The country consists of thirteen regions: Riyadh (which contains the capital city), Makkah (which contains the holy mosque), Madinah (which contains the mosque of the prophet), the Eastern region (which borders Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, and is where most of the oil is extracted), Al-Qasim, Hail, the Northern Border region (which borders Iraq), Asir, Najran and Jizan (all of which border Yemen), Tabuk and Jouf (both of which border Jordan) and Al-Baha. Each region is governed by a member of the extended royal family (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2013)).

1) Figure 2.1: Map of Saudi Arabia



Source: (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in USA)

2.2.2 Saudi Arabian resources

In former times the economy was traditionally based on agriculture (camels, sheep, etc.) and horticulture (wheat, dates, palm trees, etc.) However following the discovery of oil in 1936, Saudi Arabia has become the major national resource, contributing more than 90% to the current Saudi national economy (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the USA, 2014). According to the Saudi Gazette (2008).

"... the country has more than a quarter of the world's total proven reserves, over 264 billion barrels, and is also the largest producer and exporter on the planet" (p. 1).

In 2006 Saudi Arabia produced 10.72 millions of barrels per day (14% of world production) making the kingdom the key member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with a major role to play in the global market. The continued availability of reliable sources of oil, particularly from Saudi Arabia, is important to major world economics such as the United States of America, Europe and Japan, to a sustained global economy, and to international relations.

Saudi Arabia's oil revenues have been used to diversify the economy. Land has been reclaimed and an infrastructure of roads, telephones, cities, hospitals and power stations has been established. In December 2005 Saudi Arabia became the 149th member of the World Trade Organization, and began the process of opening the economy to the outside world (WTO, 2005).

Another major source of income is that of the historical pilgrimage of Muslims to the shrines at Makkah and Madinah, known as the *Hajj*. It occurs annually between the eighth and thirteenth days of the last month of the Islamic calendar, and is the largest gathering of people in one place on the planet. More than three million pilgrims visit these two holy places each year, contributing significantly to the national economy. A similar pilgrimage, the *Umrah*, can be completed at any time of year (Arab News, 2013). Economists estimated the Kingdom's revenues from *Hajj* and *Umrah* services in 2012 at more than SR 62 billion (\$16.5 billion). This constitutes approximately 3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), (Arab News, *ibid*).

2.2.3 Saudi Arabian culture and society

Saudi Arabia has a population of more than 28 million people. Just under one third of this number are foreign expatriate workers drawn from a wide range of nationalities and with differing linguistic and cultural background (Worldatlas, n.d). The remaining two-thirds are native Saudis, sharing the single language of Arabic.

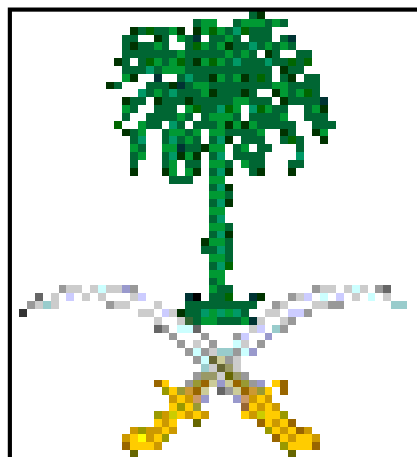
The Saudi Arabian flag first design was in 1932 and the current version adopted in 1973. Its colour of green reflects the significance of peace in Islam and the inscription reads "*La ilaha ila Allah, Mohammed Rasul Allah*" meaning "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his Messenger". Beneath the inscription, the sword and symbolises the military successes of Islam and of the founder of the kingdom.

2) Figure 2.2: Flag of Saudi Arabia



The Saudi coat of arms consists of two crossed swords symbolizing strength and sacrifice based on faith, surmounted by a date palm tree symbolizing growth, vitality and prosperity.

3) Figure 2.3: The Saudi Arabian coat of arms



The KSA is the heartland of Islam and Islam is the official and only publicly permitted religion in the country. It contains the site of the Kabbah at Makkah, built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ismael, and almost two billion of the global population pray five times each day, facing its direction. It is also the birthplace of the prophet Mohammed and the mosque at Madinah is built over his grave. The KSA contains two of the holiest cities in Islam and there is a strong imperative for every Muslim who is capable of completing the Hajj to do so (Islamic web, 2013). These religious factors give Saudi Arabia a unique importance, both in the local Arabic region and also in the Islamic population across the world.

Islam is a fundamental organising principle of Saudi culture; all values, beliefs and ideas stem from *Sharia* law. Social norms and behaviours, including how education is organised and conducted, are part of Islamic culture. The religious basis of the culture, together with the wealth derived from oil, gives the Kingdom a remarkable political and economic stability.

2.2.4 Saudi Arabia in the international context

One of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's main objectives is to maintain its own security, whilst also maintaining a powerful position on the Arabian Peninsula. It also seeks to defend Arabic and Islamic interests generally, to promote unity between Muslim countries, and to maintain cooperative relations with other members of oil-producing and oil-consuming countries. To this end, it is a member of a number of organisations which represent the interests of the local region, including The Arab League and the Gulf League.

The Kingdom is also a member of many of the major international organisations which seek to protect national populations and promote prosperity. These organisations include the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and the Twenty Wealthiest Nations (U.S Department of State, 2013).

2.3 The Saudi educational curriculum

Prior to the introduction of the formal system of education, Saudi Arabian children were educated informally by private tutors who were either volunteers or paid for by the local community. This schooling was conducted at local mosques and consisted of acquiring the basic skills of reading and writing in order to be able to communicate through letters, and to read the *Q'ran*. A formal system of education was implemented by the government in 1930s (Tatweer, 2014). More than sixty years later it has expanded to cover all parts of the kingdom with four agencies controlling its operation: The Ministry of Education, The General Presidency for Girls' Education, The Ministry of Higher education and the General Organisation for Vocational Education and Training.

2.3.1 The history and development of the education system

The Ministry of Education was established in 1952 and at first was the principal authority for both public and private boys' education from kindergarten through

secondary school. Eight years later, in 1960, the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE) was established as the parallel authority for both public and private female education at primary and secondary level. In 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established as an independent organization in charge of higher education for both males and females at university level, apart from in the health professions.

The General Organisation for Vocational Education and Training was established in 1949 as the principal authority for post-intermediate vocational education for boys (Alromi, 2000). Army schools are also involved in educational provision with different authorities, such as the Ministry of Defence and Presidency of the National Guard, following the same principles and policies as set out by the Ministry of Education. They are responsible for their own administration and finance and their functions are set out in more detail below.

2.3.2 The current education system

The Saudi education system is comprised of 42 district offices and 13 administrative regions covering more than 34,000 primary, intermediate and secondary schools, almost 6 million pupils and almost half a million teachers (Tatweer, 2014) It is built on the fundamental concepts, principles and contents of Islam, stressing its heritage, tradition, culture and identity (Bughdadi, 1985). The curriculum fosters an atmosphere conducive to the development of Islamic morals, values and ideals such as the separation of males and females. From kindergarten through primary, secondary and tertiary education, the sexes are educated on different campuses, the only exception to this being in the health professions where medical fieldwork necessitates the mixing of the sexes. This segregation is so complete that there are separate state agencies and different educational systems, each with its own authority, functions, principles, schools and materials (Alebsi, 2002).

In 1980 the Higher Committee for Educational Policy stipulated in its 28th Article that the governing principles of education are for students to understand Islam correctly and comprehensively, to plant and spread the faith, to furnish students with its teachings and ideals, to equip them with the skills and knowledge for constructive conduct and to develop society economically and

culturally with graduates who are useful members of their community. (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Despite the education system being only sixty years old, it has developed and grown in both quality of education provided, and in quantity, in terms of numbers of pupils and schools. This has been supported by government at all levels and includes the free provision of buildings, facilities, tuition, books and transport, from the beginning of primary school through to the end of secondary school. Education is available to every citizen and the government allocates a high percent of the total budget to education. The State grants a monthly stipend to school-aged pupils who live in a foreign country (El-Sanabary, 1994).

As in most countries, education in Saudi Arabia is divided into two main levels: General and Higher. The former refers to the three school levels of primary, intermediate and secondary, and the latter indicates education at tertiary level, including vocational, special and adult education, as well as university education at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. There are twenty-one universities in Saudi Arabia and students at all institutes of tertiary education receive a monthly stipend from the government of approximately US\$266 in order to attend. Eight of the universities were established between 1952 and 2004 and in recent years King Abdullah commissioned the opening of the remaining thirteen. These will be discussed in more detail below.

2.3.3 Stages in the education system

According to the Ministry of Education (2007) there are four educational stages in Saudi Arabia: Preschool, Primary, Intermediate and Secondary.

2.3.3.1 Preschool

Following the lead of many other countries, Saudi Arabia has established a two-year pre-school stage in both government and private schools. Children begin pre-school when they are aged between four and five years. However, preschool attendance is not a prerequisite for primary school and attendance is not compulsory. Private preschools teach English letters and numbers whereas government pre-schools do not.

2.3.3.2 Primary school

The stage following pre-school is primary education, which, as with pre-schools, can be either private or state-funded. Pupils attend six grades – numbered 1 to

6 – between the ages of six and twelve years and promotion from one grade to the next depends on observational evaluation throughout each year. Gender segregation begins at primary school and boys and girls attend different schools, under different authorities, until the third year of secondary school (Al-zaid, 1982). In public primary schools, English is now taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 4 up to the third year of secondary school. However in private primary schools the basics of the language are taught from the first year. This may include individual words, sentences about personal information, times of day and days of the week.

2.3.3.3 Intermediate school

The intermediate stage of Saudi Arabian schooling follows on from the successful completion of primary level and lasts for another three years - Grades 7 to 9. During this stage, promotion from one grade to the next depends on passing an annual examination. English is taught throughout this stage as a compulsory subject.

2.3.3.4 Secondary school

Secondary schooling in Saudi Arabia follows on from intermediate schooling and admission is conditional on graduation from intermediate school. It lasts for another three years, comprising Grades 10, 11 and 12. These grades prepare students either for college or for a professional career. In Grade 10, pupils follow a general programme of study, but in Grades 11 and 12, each student chooses to follow one of two distinct pathways, each with its own curriculum. The first pathway is Natural Science and focuses on the study of Mathematics and Sciences. The other is Islamic science and focuses on the study of literature and Islam. Some core subjects, such as Geography and History, are included on both pathways, though the specific content of the subject will be shaped by the emphasis of the overall pathway. A pupil's average marks are accumulated over these two years in order to qualify them for undergraduate studies at university. English is compulsory throughout this stage.

At all three grades, students must pass all subjects (including English) in order to be promoted to the next grade. If a student fails one or more subjects (up to half of the total number of subjects in each grade) they can retake the

examination/s. Students who fail more than half of the total number of subjects must repeat that grade.

2.3.3.5 The King Abdullah education development project (Tatweer)

Since its formation, the Saudi system of formal education has made remarkable achievements. However it currently faces new challenges relating to advances in information and communication technologies, increased globalization, and market competition. In 2007, the king established the Tatweer project in order to research and review many aspects of the current education system, including the generation of a new model for schools, and reviewing the role of the Ministry of Education. Its aim is to improve the quality, relevance and efficiency of the Saudi education system (Tatweer, 2014). Strategies for change have been developed to enable the attainment of a number of learning outcomes from early childhood education through to the end of secondary school. One of the aims of these strategies is the improvement of reading, writing and oral communication in both Arabic and English in order to provide students with twenty-first century capabilities and attitudes. This will enable creativity, talent and international engagement and ensure a sustainable future for the kingdom and its citizens. According to the Saudi-US-Relations Information Services, the reforms will be to the entire education system, including teacher training, textbook rewriting and many other steps (Elyas, 2011).

2.4 The background of English language in Saudi schools

English was first introduced to Saudi public schools in 1933. It entered first as a three-year compulsory subject on the curricula of boys' secondary schools (i.e., Grades 10-12). Thirty-five years later, in 1978, it was broadened to cover the three intermediate years (i.e, Grades 7-9) in government schools (Al-Abdulkader, 1978; Bergman, 2005). During this period, there were no private schools. English continued to be taught to these six grades up to 2004 when the Saudi educational system extended English lessons down to Grade 6 in public primary schools. These extensions demonstrate stages of development in the English learning programme, and since 2004 English has been taught to school children for seven of their twelve school years.

2.4.1 Principles of English education in the Saudi school

It is recognised that English is necessary in order for Saudi students to progress in their post-secondary education at either technical or vocational institutes and in higher education fields such as linguistics, medicine and engineering. Nowadays, it is expected that every Saudi Arabian who applies to work in industry or a profession in the country will possess a minimum level of English proficiency. The Ministry of Education has established seven principles which form the basis for the teaching of English in Saudi schools.

Firstly, it is the most widely used language in travel and the international mass media. Secondly, many Saudi Arabian citizens will be expected to hold positions in diplomatic and trade relations which will require them to deal with English-speaking people; therefore their instruction needs to match the level required for their professional development. Thirdly, English is the leading world language in science, technology, education, politics and business. Fourthly, scientific research and technical terms are written in English and Saudi students will need to understand them. Fifthly, in order to understand the culture and thinking of other nations, Saudis will need to understand the language which reflects that culture and thinking (Al-Kamookh, 1981). Sixthly, developing linguistic ability in another language strengthens understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic and ideational aspects of Arabic. Finally, learning another language enables the enrichment of science, the arts and affairs in the culture of that language, thus contributing to the spread of Islam and the service of humanity (Al-Zaid, 1982).

These principles, which stress the importance and power of English in the international context, underpin the goals and structure of English teaching in Saudi schools.

2.4.2 Objectives of English education in the Saudi school

The objectives of teaching English in Saudi schools are linked to its national function. English is widely used in business, industry, healthcare and many other fields, and is especially useful for Saudis when communicating with non-Arabic speakers (Habbash, 2011). It is the lingua franca of international relations and of the importing of foreign technology into the country, and the importance attributed to it is a function of both the strong trading relationship the Kingdom enjoys with the United States and Britain and of its commitment to the

World Trade Organisation (Alfahadi, 2012). For these reasons, English is seen by many Saudi Arabians as a key to development, and employers attempt to recruit applicants with a specified standard of fluency. As a result, many Saudi's see competence in English as central to their career progress, both within and beyond national borders. As the international medium of communication, English also facilitates interaction with non-Arabic speaking Muslims who attend the *Hajj* ordinance.

The objectives of the English teaching curriculum are stated in the series of texts adopted by the Ministry of Education for English education in Saudi Arabia. They include:

- To develop intellectual, personal and professional abilities
- To acquire basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in order to communicate with speakers of the English Language
- To acquire the linguistic competence necessary in various life situations
- To acquire the linguistic competence required in different professions
- To develop awareness of the importance of English as a means of international communication
- To develop positive attitudes towards learning English
- To develop the linguistic competence which enables awareness of cultural, economic and social issues in society, in order to contribute towards solutions
- To develop the linguistic competence that will enable the presentation and explanation of Islamic concepts and issues and the spread of Islam
- To develop the linguistic competence that will enable presentation of the culture and civilization of their nation
- To benefit from English-speaking nations, and enhance the international cooperation and understanding and respect of cultural differences among nations
- To acquire the linguistic bases that enable participation in transferring scientific and technological advances of other nations to their nation
- To acquire the linguistic bases that enables the presentation and explanation of Islamic concepts and issues, and participation in the dissemination of them. (Say it in English, 2006: VI).

From the above, it is clear that the main objective of teaching English in Saudi public schools is to appreciate its importance as the international language of communication. It is also a means for Saudis to introduce Islam, Islamic culture and the achievements of Muslims and Saudis to non-Muslim and non-Arab nations. It further enables Muslims and Arabs to benefit from the achievements of other cultures (Ministry of Education, 2007).

2.4.3 English language in Saudi schools: the current situation

Since 2010 the teaching of English as a compulsory subject has been extended further down the education process to Grade 4 of primary school. From this point on, students are taught English for four 45-minute periods per week through primary, intermediate and secondary levels.

When students graduate from secondary schools, they go on to study at the universities in pursuit of the qualifications required for progress in their future career. In the first undergraduate year, two compulsory English courses must be passed. However, only those enrolled in English language degrees will continue to learn English for another four years. Most English graduates go on to work as English teachers in Saudi Arabian schools (Alfahadi, 2012).

Despite being a foreign language, English is the medium of instruction and communication in many large companies, hospitals and increasingly at university level in majors such as medicine, engineering and business. As many universities adopt English as the language of instruction, its importance in the school curriculum is increasing (Habbash, 2011). Despite this, students are permitted to pass on to the next stage of their education with lower marks in English than in other subjects, and even to fail English if their marks in others subjects are sufficiently high.

As with the entire curriculum, the English syllabus is centralised and controlled by the Saudi Ministry of Education. Each grade level follows an identical syllabus with guidelines and deadlines, and teachers are required to apply and follow it (Elyas, 2011). To ensure standardisation of teaching, the same EFL textbooks are assigned across the country for each grade level.

2.4.4 English textbooks in S.A. in primary and secondary schools

Since the introduction of English to the Saudi curriculum, a number of textbooks have formed the basis of English teaching in the kingdom. The first was *The*

basic way to English based on Charles Ogden's *Basic English* model. Along with most Arab countries, *Living in the Arab World* was adopted during the 1950s and 1960s and *Progressive Living English for the Arab World* in the 1970s for female students, while male students followed *Longman English*. In the 1980s *Saudi Arabian Schools English* was the first Saudi-developed text and in the 1990s, *English for Saudi Arabia* was used from 1st intermediate to third secondary grade (Al-Seghayer, 2005).

Throughout this history, language courses have been based on the format of a student textbook, together with a student workbook and teacher's guide. Only the *Longman English* and *Saudi Arabian Schools English* included supplementary readers, and the former was only available to male students. Private schools may include books or extended reading, but only for the minority and the current text *Say it in English* offers no consolidation of reading skills through supplementary materials. Although teachers complain of poor student reading levels, they still emphasise the text and seldom advise additional reading.

In 2003, the Ministry of Education adopted the textbook series *Say it in English* for use in all public schools from the first year of intermediate school to the end of secondary school. It is the main teaching material on which both students and teachers rely and integrates the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The series was written by a group of ELT specialists under supervision by the Ministry and reflects English culture in a way that previous texts did not. Rather than Arabic characters doing typically Arabic things using English language, the current series contains more references to target-language culture and shows Arabic people engaging in activities which reflect Western values. It is structured into the curriculum's four 45-minute lessons, is accompanied by workbooks and contains dialogues and passages, including expository, narrative, and descriptive subjects.

Despite textbook reform, there is agreement amongst teachers, parents and the Ministry of Education that the English language proficiency of students leaving secondary school is very low and does not reach government goals (Elyas, 2008). This demonstrates that six years of four lessons per week is not sufficient. A recent study showed that university students have very weak English and there was a 70% failure rate in English examinations at one of

Riyadh's main universities (Al-Toaimi 2011). The Ministry of Education is researching a number of new language courses to improve on existing ones.

2.4.5 EFL teachers

Teachers play an important role in the educational process. In Alfahadi (2012), Al-Juhani says "... teachers ... can contribute to the success or failure of the learning process". For some time the training of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia could not keep pace with the expansion of the school English-teaching curriculum and this led to a shortage, filled mainly by foreign native or non-native speakers. Now, most English language teachers in Saudi Arabia are Saudi English graduates with a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Most have completed a four-year programme in teaching English as a foreign language. Those who have already been teaching in schools can complete a 2-year Diploma programme. However, the English language teaching qualification does not require either teaching experience nor any teacher training (Elyas, 2008). This means that many English teachers in Saudi schools actually majored in English literature or translation, rather than teaching. As a result, EFL teachers have been recruited in from other, mainly Arabic-speaking, countries. (Elyas, *ibid*). To compensate for this, short in-service training for practising teachers has been introduced, though its standard is highly variable.

Due to these shortages and training problems, there is a widespread perception that Saudi Arabian English teachers are of poor quality and that their students develop poor linguistic proficiency. Studies have concluded that many teachers struggle with the curriculum and employ a number of problematic teaching methods such as discouraging student participation, under-using communicative teaching methods, speaking to students in Arabic or over-correcting errors so that students lose confidence and fluency. In addition, teachers are often over-reliant on textbooks, which become the centre of the lesson, rather than a tool in learning (Arishi, 1984; Alansari, 1995, cited in Almandeel, 1999).

Educational decisions are made at Ministerial level and managed by supervisors whom teachers strive to please. This discourages them from trying out innovative teaching practices which might be more effective. Parents also exert pressure on teachers by monitoring their children's schoolwork closely, further reducing the teacher's freedom to be creative in their teaching methods.

As an outcome of these two forces, teachers are seldom free to implement changes which may benefit the teaching and learning of English in Saudi schools.

2.5 Higher education in Saudi Arabia

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is based on the structures of the American education system, but incorporates Islamic traditions and customs. Since its formation in 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education has provided generous financial support, making possible the establishment of a number of new universities and colleges of science and applied and vocational fields so that there are now twenty-four government universities, eight private universities, ninety-eight primary teachers' colleges, thirty-seven health colleges and twelve technical colleges. These offer both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes up to and including both Master's and Doctorate level. The goal of these institutions is part of a national development plan which recognises the impact of increased globalisation and technology on competition between nations, and aims to provide an education which maximises the development of all Saudi people so that the kingdom will be able to engage positively on the 21st century international stage (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

In addition to local post-graduate education, since 2004, King Abdullah has also implemented an extensive scholarship programme to support Saudi applicants to prestigious universities in foreign countries. More than twenty thousand students have been sponsored to study in European, North American, Asian and Pacific countries at a cost of more than 7 billion Saudi riyals to the government (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). This financial expenditure demonstrates the commitment of the king to educational development for Saudi citizens and the welfare of the country.

2.5.1 Structure of the Saudi English degree

The English undergraduate degree is completed in four or five years with some variability between institutions. Each year consists of two semesters of fifteen weeks each. An optional summer semester of eight weeks is also available for students who wish to graduate more quickly or for those who wish to retake a subject before the start of the following academic year. Each

semester constitutes one level with a total of between eight and ten levels comprising the degree.

A minimum of twelve and a maximum of twenty credits (one credit equals one hour) are available at each level. Each subject is examined at the end of the level and students must attain 60% or more in order to pass. During a semester, a student may add to or withdraw from subjects in the curriculum plan, but must pass or retake any obligatory subjects during a later semester, and achieve at least eight levels in order to graduate. Classes are fifty minutes long.

If a student fails no more than three subjects, he/she must retake them during the next semester. However the maximum score for a retake is 60% irrespective of the actual percentage attained. If a student fails more than three levels, they are not permitted to retake examinations, but must repeat the entire semester without the addition of any further subjects. If attendance drops below 75% students are not permitted to enter for the examination and if an examination is missed, an acceptable reason must be submitted and the examination must be retaken at a later date. A student's overall score is calculated out of a maximum score of five, and they must achieve at least 2.5 in order to graduate.

The programme for the English undergraduate degree varies slightly between institutions. However, a typical example would be that followed at the King Saud University where over the course of 5 years, students study:

- Language including Listening, Speaking, Vocabulary, Reading, Reading in the target language, Culture, Writing, Grammar, Dictionary skills, Morphology, Semantics, Stylistics, Linguistics, Text linguistics
- Translation including in Science, The humanities, The military, Administration, Medicine, Engineering, Political science, Education, Commerce, Security, Computer science, Petroleum sciences, Law, Agriculture, Literature, The mass media, Computer applications in translation, Onsite translation, Bilateral translation, Consecutive translation, Simultaneous translation, Issues and problems in translation, Summary writing in translation, and a translation project
- Arabic and Islamic components including Arabic rhetoric, Introduction to Islamic culture, Islamic cultural studies, Comparative culture, Arabisation,

The role of Islam in the construction of society, Islamic economic systems, and the fundamentals of an Islamic political system.

Each subject is taught for between two and four hours per week, making a total of 174 possible hours. However this list includes both optional components and a minimum of approximately 140 hours are required across the degree structure.

2.5.2 Reading in the Saudi English degree

The current reading textbook for Saudi EFL undergraduates is *Interactions: Middle East Gold Edition*, published by McGraw-Hill in 2009. It has been developed for global learners and incorporates vocabulary acquisition, scaffolding instruction and is accompanied by an audio programme. It cultivates critical thinking through the incorporation of cross-cultural themes and self-assessment logs, and outlines simple reading strategies such as recognition of topics, ideas, details and points of view; recognition of structure at sentence and paragraph level including punctuation markers; skimming; inference; prediction and previewing. It contains ten learning exercises, each covering approximately twenty pages of reading material, together with instruction on skills and strategies for reading, critical thinking skills, vocabulary building, language skills and self-testing.

In my experience, Saudi lecturers claim that they are not able to cover more than approximately half of the content of this textbook because of reading challenges faced by students. They said that challenges with reading comprehension are preventing their students from achieving their English reading objectives. They also say that because their teaching depends so heavily on the textbook, the teaching of English reading needs to be carried out by a reading specialist so that students can fully benefit from the content and strategies the textbook contains.

2.5.3 Saudi Arabian HE classroom reading practice in English

The purpose of teaching reading is to develop attitudes, abilities and skills which enable the reader to respond to ideas, develop interests and derive pleasure from reading. Nuttall (1996) argues that we read in order to understand others' ideas. However this is hindered by poor linguistic knowledge and readers often make wrong associations and reach incorrect

conclusions. This becomes apparent when Saudi undergraduates are required in class to read quickly and extensively without prior experience of quick or extensive reading. Lengthy texts are treated like short classroom EFL texts and students often resort to translations in order to facilitate comprehension (Abdellah, 2012). Alsamadani (2009) describes a typical Saudi reading lesson in higher education as follows:

- *The presentation of new vocabulary, structure and language functions followed by extensive drilling, prior to or following reading of a text.* This prescriptive form of teaching could be detrimental to students' understanding of a text as there is not enough emphasis on theme, register and other essential aspects of understanding a text in general. Grammatical forms and structures are generally what are 'drilled' and this would seem inappropriate in an EFL lesson at university level, the focus of which is comprehension.
- *Low-level questioning by the teacher, sometimes in line with guiding questions.* I understand by this that he is referring to Bloom and his triangle of learning – higher order questioning at this level would be more useful and appropriate in my opinion, rather than simply recalling the facts.
- *Reading aloud of text, either by the teacher or by pre-recorded audio text, while students read along or read aloud after the teacher.* This strategy is a common one in EFL Saudi classrooms, which prompted the researcher to adopt the reading aloud process in the current study.
- *Individual, usually the most competent, students reading aloud.*

The benefits of this structure are that students are pre-familiarised with the text, making comprehension easier. However it does not encourage efficient reading, nor the development of cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies which silent reading may do.

2.6 Arab reading

Historically, reading in many Arabic cultures has been for religious purposes only and there is little history in Arabic culture of reading for entertainment. The teaching of Arabic reading happened mainly in religious schools and the only text many students read was the Quran (Alfahadi, 2012). This is consistent with findings from the Arab Thought Foundation, which claimed that Arabs do not

generally read extensively, and reported a research finding that Arabic children read an average of only six pages per year. (Arab Thought Foundation 4th Annual report of January, 2012).

Their conclusion is based on the insignificant number of books published for millions of Arab-speaking people. Darwish (2002) claimed that reading rituals such as reading while travelling or before bedtime are not developed in Arab culture and that electronic forms of entertainment are more likely to be found in an Arab home than a collection of good books. Though encouraging an interest in reading is important in the development of reading skills, little is known about students' reading interests in the Gulf Region.

2.6.1 Saudi Arabian reading habits in Arabic

Up to the age of six years, Saudi Arabian pupils cannot be enrolled in public primary schools. However during these years, and during pre-school, they begin to acquire literacy in their native language of Arabic.

Since the Saudi Arabian curriculum is so centralized and standardized, neither students nor teachers have much opportunity to select reading texts or textbooks to suit individual students' interests. At every grade, textbooks and reading materials are prescribed and every pupil follows the same path to acquiring reading skills. This lack of flexibility can lead to challenges for both teachers and students. Albednah, (1982) criticizes the reading of these textbooks by saying "[m]ost reading passages do not reflect the students' interests; also most of them are not accompanied by pictorial aids" (p.57).

The dominant method used to teach reading in Saudi Arabian schools is recitation. When the pupil makes a pronunciation error, the teacher corrects him/her directly and the pupil is required to echo the teacher's correction. This method provides no opportunity for students to reflect on the reasons for their errors, nor to generate their own solutions. This method also fails to provide pupils with a reading strategy which enables them to go beyond the reading of a particular text, nor to develop ideas which can be generalized to other learning situations.

From my observation, most children in Saudi Arabia do not read for pleasure and up to the fifth grade, many are incapable of reading any material other than that provided by the school. Most towns and cities, and many schools, do not have libraries, and teachers, parents and others do not

encourage students to use the libraries that they do have. Dean and Nichols (1986) state that "the child from a literate home, who sees his parents reading and using books, comes to school with certain attitudes to reading" (p.14), but in Saudi childrens' home environments, most parents do not read for pleasure and do not provide a role model for recreational reading. With regard to their children's reading, they mainly help them to practice what they are reading at school but do not encourage them to move beyond school reading during leisure time.

The educational level of the parent also affects the reading habits of Saudi Arabian children. Some educated parents are aware of the importance of reading, and encourage their children to read stories and books. However the majority of less educated parents consider reading outside of school to be a waste of time unless necessary to complete homework.

2.6.2 Saudi Arabian reading habits in English

Research on English reading habits, undertaken by one of the biggest teachers' training colleges in Saudi Arabia, shows that although Saudi teacher's college students have a wide range of reading interests, they do not read on topics they like and that they encounter a number of obstacles which hinder their reading efforts. They also hold beliefs which undermine good reading habits, such as that they have better things to do than reading, that improving reading is not as important as improving other language skills and that there is no relationship between reading and other language skills. They undertake reading, not for the development of reading skills, but for other reasons such as to improve their local status or to improve their academic achievement more generally (Department of English, Riyadh Teachers' College, King Saud University, 2009).

2.7 Conclusion

The current education English curriculum in Saudi Arabia is the outcome of distinguishing features of the kingdom which position it in the international context, and also of social forces, including the strong importance placed on religious precepts in its culture, which influence the way education is structured. Nonetheless, the principles, objectives and general features of the education system are broadly consistent with those of countries which are world leaders in

educational theory and practice. In its efforts to best educate its citizens and to remain up-to-date, the country has revised the education system a number of times, and continues to do so up to the present day. The teaching and learning of English is recognised as central to the kingdom's international relations and to the country's economic and political future and the English teaching programme in primary and secondary schools has expanded over the years to facilitate this. However reading skills remain less than satisfactory and reading comprehension weaker than it should be, in part because of generally low public levels of motivation to read so that English comprehension is a low priority to Saudi students (including those who are training to be English teachers) and in part because of over-reliance on textbooks by teachers who have not been specifically trained in teaching methods and have not specialised in teaching reading in English.

Chapter 3: The Literature Review

The aim of this study is to explore the reading processes and reading comprehension challenges experienced by undergraduate EFL students in Saudi Arabian universities, together with the reasons for these challenges, from the perspectives of both the readers themselves and their lecturers. In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical framework of the research undertaken in the current study, and review the background literature and prior research findings relating to this topic. Consideration of the extensive literature on this subject will form the basis of the rationale for the design of the current study and its contribution to the body of knowledge in this field.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first I will review the literature on reading aloud and silent reading processes and comprehension challenges and techniques which have been demonstrated as effective in EFL teaching and the facilitation of second-language skills. I will also review the previous use of the approaches used to study reading aloud and silent reading processes and comprehension challenges, including within the Arab context.

In the second part I will outline the relevant theories of learning theories in both social science and educational applications. These will be presented chronologically, taking into account the ways in which each successive theoretical perspective has developed from those which preceded it. This presentation will explain the theoretical framework of the current study and will conclude with a consideration of the gap in the literature which this study seeks to fill and the contributions its findings will make to the future teaching and learning of EFL reading, particularly in the Arabic and Saudi Arabian contexts.

Section One: Previous research

In this section the focus will be on reviewing the body of literature on linguistic development in both first and second languages. The purpose of this section is to examine how text is generally read and understood, and to explore reading theories and models in the light of both L1 and L2 learning. It is also to develop some understanding of the reading processes used by, and difficulties and comprehension challenges encountered by, L2 students in the Saudi context.

I will discuss research on reading processes and comprehension challenges faced by students when reading English texts. In doing so, I will

address both the characteristics of L1 readers, and of L1 readers of English, together with L1 developmental stages, linguistic aspects of L1 reading and personal abilities of L1 readers in order to elucidate the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 learner-reader processes and the difficulties and comprehension challenges that each face. Since L1 readers generally achieve a higher level of reading comprehension than L2 readers (Grabe and Stoller, 2011) an understanding of their processes could inform the practices of teaching and learning EFL reading.

3.1 Reading and reading comprehension

Previous research has identified reading as a complex interactive process with which students can experience much difficulty, (Maria, 1990; Pearson & Fielding, 1991) involving language, memory, sensory perception and motivational aspects (Woolley, 2008). Hughes (2007) defined it as:

"a complex interaction between the text, the reader and the purpose for the reading, which are shaped by the reader's prior knowledge and experiences, the reader's knowledge about reading and writing language, and the reader's language community which is culturally and socially situated" (p. 1).

Reading requires the integration of many aspects, including features of the text and what the writer brings to its writing, characteristics of the reader and what the reader brings to the reading, and cultural and social tools. All of these contribute to reading comprehension. The impact of social and cultural factors on reading is particularly relevant to the EFL context where the author of an EFL text is a native speaker and the text is embedded with cultural information. This is consistent with the definition in the quote above and with the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as the theoretical framework of this study.

3.2 Reading models

Reading models explain the stages through which a learner progresses when learning to read and identify factors which both precede and affect comprehension. There are number of such models but I will limit my discussion to the three which are dominant: bottom-up, top-down and interactive models. They have been the subject of much discussion in the literature on reading and are briefly reviewed below.

The first is the *bottom-up* or *text-driven model*. According to this model, readers follow three sequential steps: firstly decoding text starting with letters,

secondly forming words from letters, and finally forming sentences from words (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). In this model, readers begin with the most basic structures of text (the bottom) and acquire the blending and segmenting of these units in order to understand what they read. This enables readers to apply their knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence to read new, previously unseen words and combine them into sentences to make meaning.

The second model is *the top-down* or *reader-driven* in which readers use their prior knowledge to create expectations of text and to make predictions and test their hypotheses, either confirming or correcting their predictions (Goodman, 1988). This process depends on the mental organization of past experience (Schuman, 1996). Several studies based on schema theory (Akbulut, 2008; Bernhardt, 1991) emphasize the importance of background knowledge in facilitating comprehension in a foreign language. As Pearson-Casanave (1984) claims, text does not carry meaning in itself, but provides clues which enable the reader to construct meaning from his/her existing knowledge, what the cognitivists call schema.

The third model is *interactive*. According to this model, comprehension is the result of integrating both bottom-up and top-down processes. In other words, readers simultaneously take into account the contributions of both text-driven and reader-driven features. As Carrell (1984) states, “comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background and the text” (p. 33). In this model, “weakness in one area of knowledge can be compensated by strength in another area resulting in successful comprehension” (Akbulut, 2008, p. 38). In their research, Chun & Plass (1996) showed the importance of both visual and verbal information to support both top-down and bottom-up processing when reading in a foreign language.

3.3 The development of reading abilities

The literature indicates that there are four or five stages in the development of learning to read in L1 (eg. Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, 2012; Dorn & Soffos, 2001; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Chall, 1983). These stages take as a starting point the students' experiences, rather than their age or grade level. They also provide a framework for assessing how far EFL students have progressed through the stages and the challenges they encounter in the process. This makes them appropriate for

EFL students who learn to read English at various ages and provide a reference point for considering challenges encountered by EFL students in their development of L2 reading comprehension.

The stages are: emergent reader, early reader, transitional reader and, fluent reader.

Firstly, the *emergent* reader learns the processes of coding and recoding written symbols and associating them with sounds, syllables and words. Acquisition of phonological skills enables them to translate written letters into spoken sounds, which are then combined to form words in an increasingly automatic way, e.g., /s/-/a/-/t/ = sat. Phonic awareness develops when the reader is able to match letters with sounds and is a fundamental skill for any reader. The failure of EFL readers to develop phonic awareness may contribute to reading challenges.

Secondly, the *early* reader focuses on identifying individual words using several strategies, and often uses pictures to confirm predictions. During this stage readers develop cueing systems, where they pay close attention to visual cues and language patterns, and read for meaning. At this stage, readers are better able to control their reading processes but are not fully gaining new information or learning from their reading. If EFL readers fail to employ pre-reading strategies to confirm predictions and do not develop cueing systems to recognise words and their meanings, this may lead to miscomprehension.

Thirdly, *transitional* readers develop strategies to figure out the meaning of most words using prior knowledge and strategic knowledge. However they continue to need support with understanding increasingly more difficult text. They learn new information and are able to acquire knowledge from reading and to use it as a tool for gaining new information from simple texts. It may take EFL learners longer to pass through this stage, as their prior knowledge and reading strategies are limited by the EFL context in many ways, which can be difficult to redress without extensive teaching support.

Finally, *fluent* readers are able to read independently and with more confidence in their understanding of a text. The role of the teacher is to focus on readers' competence and use strategies to integrate cueing systems. At this stage, readers are able to think critically about what they read and analyse with good understanding of the information. This level of reading presents a

challenge to L1 readers and it is even less likely that an EFL reader will be able to attain it.

These stages provide a handy framework for considering the development, not only of L1 readers, but also of L2, on their path from novice to fluent reader. Learning to read English is harder for EFL students than for L1 English readers, as they encounter a range of challenges which act as hindrances to their comprehension of texts.

3.4 Linguistic aspects of reading comprehension

Linguistic ability contributes to the development of reading comprehension. It consists of a number of aspects including understanding of the orthography or written system; knowledge of phonology or the sound system; the ability to manipulate the morphology or units of meaning; knowledge of the lexicon or vocabulary; awareness of syntax or the rules governing combinations of linguistic units; and familiarity with the semantics or meaning extracted from text. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

3.4.1 Letters or orthography and reading comprehension

Recognition of the orthography or letters of language is the starting point of learning to read. The first step is to recognize graphemes (letters) of the target language and to acquire knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Each language has its own orthographic system which impacts on the reading comprehension process.

Grabe & Stoller (2011:66) claim that "early phoneme-identification skills [were] a powerful predictor of early literacy skills". Research in L1 contexts has shown much about the way in which orthographic ability affects reading comprehension. For example, Leppanen, Aunola, Niemi & Nurmi (2007) conducted a 5-year longitudinal study to examine whether letter knowledge is a good predictor of later reading abilities such as reading comprehension, text reading and word sequences. 158 kindergarten students were tested in Grades 1 and 4. Results showed that although meta-cognitive awareness, gender, mother's level of education, and visual attention were good predictors of reading skills at the end of Grade 4, children's letter knowledge in Grade 1 was the most powerful predictor. In addition, phonological awareness at kindergarten also affected reading skills at all levels from Grades 1 to 4.

Similarly, there is evidence that phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge are reliable longitudinal predictors of learning to read in L1 contexts. Hulme, Bowyer-Crane, Carroll, Duff, & Snowling (2012) reported that five months of intervention, enhancing letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness, produced significant improvement in word-level reading and spelling skills, which in turn positively impacted on the development of early literacy skills. Any beginner reader needs to acquire this awareness in order to progress in their reading.

This will also depend on the transparency of the target language, and languages vary. A transparent language is one in which there is singular grapheme/phoneme correspondence and the straightforwardness of the correspondence makes it easiest to learn to read. A reader simply looks at the word and is easily able to determine how it sounds. The most transparent language is Finnish (Kyostio, 1980) and L1 students normally acquire decoding skills by the end of year one (Leppanen et al., 2005). Education in Finland prioritises teaching letter recognition, phonemic awareness, phoneme segmenting, and blending phonemes and syllables (Holopainen, Ahonen, & Lyytinen, 2002). This process is based on fact, patterns and heuristics. These are of great importance in the early stages of reading as they form the basis for automaticity in word recognition. Without acquiring these, readers will not be able to reach high levels of fluency or comprehension. This is aligned with Stage 1 (see Section 3.3 above) where the learner begins reading with the recognition of letter-sound correspondence.

An opaque language, on the other hand, has more than one grapheme/phoneme correspondence. This leads to slower processing and makes reading phonetically very difficult unless certain strategies are employed. Birch states that:

"Orthographic strategies allow us to recognize the letter shapes of our alphabet (often called decoding) and match them with the sound of our language, forming a visual and auditory image of a word (often called recoding) in our minds" (2002:5).

Amongst L1 learners, opaque languages have an error-rate of 40-80% in Grade one compared to a maximum of 25% in transparent languages such as Greek, German and Italian. English is an opaque language (Seymour, Aro, & Erskine, 2003). The relationship is often ambiguous, e.g., the word 'sight' /sahyt/, has a less clear relationship between the grapheme and phoneme or letter to sound.

With transparent languages such as Spanish it is easier for both L1 and L2 learners to read words accurately. However because English is opaque, EFL learners, especially those from a different orthographic background, find it difficult to read English words because of this lack of correspondence.

The process of comprehending written language is linked to different types of orthographic structure (Wang & Koda, 2005) and challenges in L2/EFL reading occur even between languages which share the same alphabet. For example, Vietnamese has the same alphabet as English but different grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and therefore presents the Vietnamese English learner with decoding challenges. Gorsuch & Taguchi (2008) claim that, although Vietnamese English learners use a Romanized L1 writing system, they have not accumulated the same 'repertoire' of sound-symbol relationships as English L1 learners. It is likely that more challenges will be experienced by EFL learners whose first language is written in a different script. For example, Arabic differs from English, not only in script, but also in the direction of writing. Similarly, Chinese does not use an alphabet.

In 1981 the Center of Applied Linguistics investigated whether Haitian EFL students faced reading challenges as a result of differences between the sounds of the Haitian language and English. Results revealed that many such problems are encountered by these students and it was assumed that phonological differences between L1 and L2 constituted some of the reasons that make reading difficult (Duncan, 1983). Evidence suggests that L1 orthography influences L2 reading development even for advanced L2 readers (Hamada & Koda, 2008). The challenge of EFL reading and comprehension is therefore increased when there is a difference between the orthography of the native and target languages. According to Birch, (2002) some EFL readers find it difficult to understand relationships between letters and sounds, or lack the ability to extend their knowledge to know the meaning of new words.

Awareness of phonetics is critical to facilitating reading. Ganschow, Sparks, Patton & Javorsky (1992) state that the:

"use of the term phonology does not refer primarily to [learner's] ability to pronounce words either in the native or foreign language. It may include pronunciation but refers specifically to [the learner's] ability to learn sound [phoneme]/symbol [grapheme] correspondences, discriminate between sounds, and make explicit reports about sound segments in words. This latter skill [is] known as phonemic awareness" (pp. 57-58).

With regard to the current study, in addition to the opacity of English, Arabic is also considered to be an opaque consonantal-alphabetic language. Furthermore its orthography is different to the Romanized alphabet used in English. Thus Arab students may face two different types of challenge when reading in English. Abdulmalik (1983) found that when Arabic is the mother tongue of students reading English, they encounter challenges with both grammatical structures and specific characteristics of the orthography. For example, Arabic does not have capital letters, although many letters assume different shapes depending on their position in a word. Arabic is written in a line directly opposite to that of English, i.e., from right to left. In English, the adjective precedes the noun, whereas in Arabic the opposite is true. Arabic does not contain silent letters, whereas English does. Finally, English has many vowel sounds, requiring more oral, facial, labial and 'esophageal dexterity'. These differences make it difficult for the learner to adapt psychologically to reading English, and can contribute to problems with fast reading, such as skimming, scanning, and note-taking (Mourtaga, 2004). Several studies have attributed the reading problems of Arab EFL students to the orthographic differences between L1 and L2 (Block, 1992; Farquharson, 1988; Lebauer, 1985; Panos & Rusic, 1983; Duncan, 1983). It is anticipated that these orthographic features may influence the reading processes of EFL readers in the current study and affect their reading comprehension, though it is not clear to what extent.

3.4.2 Phonology and reading comprehension

In addition to the role of orthography in reading development, a number of studies argue that there is a close relationship between learning to read and learners' phonological awareness (e.g. Melby-Lervag, Lyster, & Hulme, 2012, and Bowey, 2005) and lack of phonological awareness also plays a significant role in reading comprehension challenges. According to Stanovich & Stanovich (1999) teachers must know that:

"...developing phonological sensitivity is critical for early success in reading acquisition; and instructional programs that emphasize spelling-sound decoding skills result in better reading outcomes because alphabetic coding is the critical subprocess that supports fluent reading" (p.29).

Phonological strategies help readers recognize the sounds of words in their language as they hear speech (Birch, 2002). This is a privilege enjoyed by L1

learners who are surrounded by L1 speakers from birth, repeatedly hear phonological segmentation patterns, and learn phonological strategies from a young age.

According to Jannuzi (1998), phonemic awareness is "a verifiable insight that one's native or non-native language can be broken down into sounds and sound combinations" (p. 8). Research does not show a clear-cut line between reading aloud and pronunciation since both are oral and if not handled properly might embed comprehension (Mourtaga, 2004). This is the reason for including phonological awareness in this reading comprehension research.

In addition to orthography, L2 phonology is a critical component influencing EFL reading comprehension. However EFL readers have developed phonological awareness consistent with their first language and may have limited opportunity to develop phonological sensitivity to their second language.

The sounds which cause most difficulty are generally those which do not exist in the mother tongue which confused with or substituted by sounds in the mother tongue which seem similar. .. it is generally believed nowadays that while it is quite possible theoretically for learners over the age of puberty to master a grammatical system efficiently, it gets increasingly difficult for them to overcome the barrier of the sound system, the phonology (Norrish, 1983: 52).

Addressing these challenges cannot effectively form part of a comprehension lesson unless students are asked to read aloud and not silently. Reading aloud gives important insights into the kind of difficulties that inhibit comprehension.

Research has indicated that L2/EFL learners face problems with word forms. For example Ellis (1996) studied the role of phonology in L2 learning of vocabulary, Harrington & Sawyer (1992) its role in L2 reading, Allan (1997) its role in phonemic awareness and Hamada & Koda (2008) and, Speciale, Ellis & Bywater (2004) the role of L1 phonological influence on L2 word-form acquisition. L2/EFL learners transfer their L1 processing strategies over to the target language in an attempt to process L2/EFL forms, whether those applications are appropriate or not (Saigh & Schmitt, 2012).

Phonemic awareness seems to be critical to learning to read English. As Jannuzi (1998) asserted, EFL students must acquire sufficient inter-language phonology to compensate for the lack of native competence, and that only after so doing can they acquire phonemic awareness. This suggests that effective

training in phonemic awareness can precede the development of an adequate, internalized inter-language phonology.

For example, Saigh & Schmitt (2012) studied Arabic-speaking ESL learners in order to explore the relative challenges of pronouncing short and long English vowels as a problem affecting the learning of English word forms. Results showed that Arabic speakers have more problems with short vowels than long ones. The researchers suggested that Arabic speakers process English short and long vowels in a way similar to their L1, which affects their ability to spell and recognize English words. However these researchers did not study the reasons for these challenges, such as whether the name of the letter in English impacted on their mispronunciation.

3.4.3 Morphology and reading comprehension

Likewise, a number of studies have shown that morphological awareness (e.g. knowledge of word prefixes, suffixes and word stem) is also significant in facilitating reading comprehension in L1 (e.g. Nagy, Berninger & Abbott (2006); Katz, 2004; Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). These writers have concluded that morphology alone, isolated from phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge, is a strong predictor and independent contributor to L1 reading comprehension.

Evidence of this comes from a study by Nagy, et al. (2006) which investigated whether morphological awareness contributed significantly to vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, and whether higher grade students used morphology more frequently than students in Grade 1, 2 and 3. Six hundred and seven students from Grades 4-9 were integrated into three two-year groups: Group one (Grades 4-5), Group two (Grades 6-7) and Group three (Grades 8-9). The researchers administered six tests of morphology, phonology, vocabulary, word decoding, spelling and reading comprehension to discover the specific impact of morphological knowledge on reading comprehension. Results showed a strong relationship (0.83, 0.76 and 0.62 correlation) between morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge, and also between morphological awareness and reading comprehension (0.76, 0.65 and 0.59) in all three groups. These findings clearly demonstrate that morphological awareness could also play a major role in facilitating L2 reading comprehension.

Linguistic differences between first and second languages could hinder reading comprehension in L2. For example, Spanish, French, Italian or Portuguese, of English often pay attention to the ends of words, because their languages contain grammatical information in suffixes. Also words in Arabic and Hebrew are read more slowly because they are more morphologically complex and contain more embedded grammar than English (Geva, 2007). Experience of L1 morphological processing has a lasting effect on L2 morphological awareness, accounting in part for performance variations in L2 lexical processing amongst EFL learners from typologically diverse L1 backgrounds (Koda, 2000, p. 315). As Geva, Wade-Woolley & Shany say:

"The heavy processing demands associated with morphemic [complexity] play a role even in the text-reading speed of highly literate bilingual Hebrew-English adults... it is not only the lack of L2 linguistic proficiency that slows down text reading for L2 beginners, but also the high morphemic density associated with inflected languages such as Hebrew" (1997, p.140).

Research has shown that Chinese and Japanese EFL learners make greater use than English readers of visual processing because of the visual differences within their first language (Hanley, Tzeng & Haung, 1999; Koda, 2005). In a study by Jeon (2011) 188 tenth-grade students in South Korea were measured on the reading components of (1) vocabulary knowledge, (2) listening comprehension, (3) passage-level reading comprehension, (4) meta-cognitive reading awareness, (5) phonological decoding and (6) morphological awareness. Results provided strong evidence that morphological awareness, in particular derivational morphological knowledge, was a major predictor of EFL reading comprehension. Because Arabic, like Hebrew, has a high morphemic density, morphological knowledge might also be a major challenge for EFL readers in the current study.

3.4.4 Lexical knowledge and reading comprehension

Another key component of reading development is word recognition through the acquisition of lexical access strategies. These are processes which readers use to recognize words and access their meaning (Birch, 2002). For example, when readers encounter common words they form a direct connection to meaning through the use of visual image decoding strategies. However, with less common words they may utilize more than one strategy, for example decoding the visual image and recoding auditorily to enable phonological recognition, and then secondarily gain access to meaning. The latter process of word recognition takes longer than the former.

For this reason, lexical knowledge has been the subject of several L1 studies (e.g., Perfetti, Landi & Oakhill, 2005; Stanovich, 2000). Hart & Risley (2003) examined the relationship between the first words a child hears, and later vocabulary knowledge and reading ability. This was a follow-up study to earlier research in which they investigated the longevity of vocabulary experiences of three-year-olds in order to ascertain whether early vocabulary faded or continued to later predict language skills, at the ages of nine and ten. They studied two variables: (a) the rate of vocabulary growth and, (b) the range of vocabulary used. Twenty-nine of the forty-two participants from their first study were followed up in 3rd Grade. At three years of age their vocabulary growth was measured by the number of new words used each month. This rate was strongly associated ($r=0.58$) with receptive vocabulary knowledge scores and language proficiency ($r=0.74$) in third Grade. Vocabulary range at three years of age was also strongly associated with receptive vocabulary knowledge ($r=0.57$) and language proficiency ($r=0.72$). It was also strongly associated with the reading comprehension score in 3rd Grade ($r=0.56$). The researchers concluded that the main factor influencing learners' vocabulary growth was the total words acquired, together with the variety of words in their environment. Thus, the key to learners' subsequent linguistic development is their exposure to and experience of words.

Given that L2 learners lack variety of L2 vocabulary in their environment, their lexical development is unlikely to match that of an L1 learner. Because EFL readers are likely to have a smaller L2 vocabulary than native English readers, there will be more unrecognized words for L2 readers than for L1. The decoding process for L2 readers is likely to be more complex and slowed down than for L1 and there may be less automatic processing of meaning. This is likely to impact on the reading comprehension of EFL students since Grabe & Stoller state that:

"The most fundamental requirement for fluent reading comprehension is rapid and automatic word recognition (or lexical access – the calling up of the meaning of a word as it is recognized). Fluent L1 readers can recognise almost all of the words they encounter (98-100 per cent of all words in a text), at least at some basic meaning level" (2011: 15).

Without good word recognition, reading comprehension cannot be extended over lengthy periods.

EFL readers encounter more lexical challenges than L1 English readers. Problems with producing accurate letter-sound correspondences when reading English text, may contribute to challenges of comprehension. "L2 students cannot match a sounded-out word to a word that they know orally because they do not yet know the word orally" (Grabe & Stoller, 2011: 37). This happens particularly when EFL readers encounter new words and employ a recoded visual and auditory image to identify the word, primarily through sound, and secondarily to access meaning (Birch, 2002). Unknown words present a major problem to EFL readers who focus on both visual and auditory process in order to recode the word. This delays their access to its meaning, whereas with familiar words, the reader focuses only on visually decoding, and accesses meaning more quickly. When EFL students read English text containing unfamiliar words, they usually pause frequently to ascertain their meanings, and such interruptions result in poor comprehension of the flow or context of what they are reading (Laufer & Hill, 2000). Knowledge of vocabulary is fundamental to reading comprehension because it forms part of the background knowledge which facilitates the reading process.

Haynes & Baker (1993) concluded that the most important disadvantage for L2 readers is not a lack of reading comprehension practice, but inadequate comprehension of English vocabulary. Students who find it difficult to understand vocabulary from context often also find it difficult to comprehend the text as a whole (Laufer, 1997; Singer & Crouse, 1981). Mebarki (2011) investigated the factors which underlie EFL student reading performance in Algeria and found that (i) lexical knowledge, (ii) coherency, and (iii) comprehension underlie text comprehension. This study revealed that 46.21% of reading errors are attributable to lack of lexical knowledge, suggesting that lexical knowledge is a prerequisite to EFL text comprehension.

In both L1 and L2, it is essential for a reader to build their mental lexicon in order to understand text. Several studies have found that knowledge of vocabulary provides the learner with the ability to extract new details from texts, and is one of the best predictors of reading ability, including reading success in a second language (e.g., Qian, 2002; Nation ISP, 2001; Hu & Nation, 2000; Read, 2000; Hazenberg & Hulstijn, 1996; Hirsch & Nation, 1992; Laufer, 1992). Without sufficient knowledge of English vocabulary, challenges encountered while reading may negatively impact on learning performance. Consequently,

EFL students might think that reading is so difficult and complex that it prevents learning (Lin, 2002; Segler, Pain, & Sorace, 2002).

A number of EFL studies have demonstrated the relationship between lexical knowledge and reading comprehension. For example, Zhang & Anual (2008) studied the role of lexical knowledge in reading comprehension with thirty-seven secondary students learning English in Singapore. The Vocabulary Levels Test was used to measure students' vocabulary knowledge and results showed that vocabulary knowledge at the 2000-3000-word level was positively correlated with reading comprehension. Martin-Chang & Gould (2008) also found a strong link between vocabulary, reading comprehension, reading rate and text knowledge. Huang (2005) found that EFL Chinese students encountered a number of linguistic challenges and that limited vocabulary was mentioned in 27% of diary entries and by 35% of all diarists in the sample. Students believed that they read too slowly because of word limitation (entries/diarists = 17%/23%). Other problems identified in the study were the dilemma between acquiring speed or understanding, inferential processing, understanding real-life materials, and the deployment of appropriate strategies for a given task, and whether to read the question or the text first during reading practice.

These studies have not, however, addressed specific lexical challenges which might interfere with reading comprehension, such as the effect of the length of words, of words with multiple and compound vowels, or words which are similar in either structure or pronunciation.

3.4.5 Syntax and reading comprehension

In addition to letter decoding, phonological awareness, morphological knowledge and word recognition, syntax is a major component in reading comprehension. Syntactic awareness is a fundamental key to reading ability (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Syntactic strategies support the reader in unconsciously, accurately and quickly arranging recognized words into chunks, phrases and sentences, so that the gist of the meaning can be constructed at the top of the reading process (Birch, 2002). She states that when readers acquire the ability to recognize:

"phrasal groupings, word ordering information, subordinate and subordinate relations among clauses quickly...[they will be able]...to clarify how words are supposed to be understood. For

example, the word 'book' as in 'the book fell' will be recognized as a noun, rather than the verb 'to book' as in a hotel. It will be recognized as the clause subject that will be described and as an inanimate object that will be followed by an 'event' description, 'fell'" (ibid: 16).

The capable reader is "able to take in and store words together so that basic grammatical information can be extracted (a process known as syntactic parsing) to support clause-level meaning" (Grabe & Stoller, 2011: 16). They further claim that when a word has different meanings in different contexts, then syntactic parsing enables the reader to disambiguate these meanings (e.g. bank, cut, drop). Moreover, "it helps a reader determine what pronouns and definite articles are referring to in prior text" (Grabe, 2009: 16).

In the L1 context, Klauda & Guthre (2008) found that syntactic processing strongly correlated ($r=0.75$) with reading comprehension amongst six constituent skills in two hundred and seventy eight fifth-graders. Many L1 readers are considered to be automatic readers, without consciousness of parsing, although they often encounter challenges in completing conscious grammar exercises (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In other words, their knowledge of grammar is tacit and not explicit. This is evidence that much L1 grammar acquisition is automatic and does not involve explicit metalinguistic knowledge. However there are circumstances in which grammar is learned explicitly in grammar lessons, e.g., complex pluralisations such as datum/data and where common usage involves incorrect grammar usage, such as 'amount of', 'number of'. Tacit understanding of L2 syntax is unlikely to develop in L2 learners where all aspects of grammar have to be taught explicitly.

In contrast to the syntactic knowledge of the L1 learner reader, the grammatical knowledge of the L2 beginner student begins from a very different place. EFL students only begin to read in English after they have spent several years developing literacy skills and content knowledge in their first language. The process of L2 grammar acquisition will not be tacit, as it was for them in their L1 acquisition but will be acquired overtly. According to Grabe & Stoller (2011) this contributes to challenges in reading comprehension.

"The lack of tacit L2 grammatical knowledge ...suggests that L2 students need some foundation of structural knowledge ... in the L2 for more effective reading comprehension" (p.37).

Urquhart & Weir (1998) provide persuasive evidence that grammar strongly relates to reading comprehension for L2 readers and two further studies, by

Alderson (1993) and Van Gelderen, Schoonen, De Glopper, Hulstijn, ... & Stevenson (2004), observed remarkably high correlations ($r=0.8$) between syntactic knowledge and reading comprehension. Hay, Elias, & Booker (2005) also found that many middle and upper-class students with reading challenges had problems understanding text that they could not identify, with processing the information contained in phrases and sentences, and with identifying relationships between sentences. Paribakht (2004) reported that L2 grammatical knowledge might impact on L2 lexical-inference processing in L2 reading and that it could also contribute to the utilization of L2 reader's strategic competence. Similarly, Kaivanpanah & Alavi (2008) found that the syntactic complexity of texts, grammatical knowledge and the level of language proficiency of readers influenced the inferencing of word-meaning.

"With L2 students, what is often overlooked is not the fact that they need grammar knowledge to be readers but rather that, like developing L1 readers, they need countless hours of exposure to print (that are capable of comprehending successfully) if they are to develop automaticity in using information from grammatical structures to assist them in reading" (Grabe & Stoller, 2011:18).

The implication of these findings is that the automaticity of readers in an EFL context will be compromised by any lack of exposure to English texts and by their conscious processes of grammatical elements which are unconscious in the L1 reader.

3.4.6 Semantics and reading comprehension

In addition to the above reading skills, L1 readers also acquire semantic skills in order to link word meaning. Hoover & Tunmer in Urquhart & Weir (1998) defined semantic skill as recognizing an English word, together with the ability to pronounce it and know its meaning. They stated that integrating information in order to make sense of its meaning depends on the reader's ability to recognize words and keep them active in short-term memory for 1-2 seconds, together with grammatical cueing linked to what is being read. In this process, short-term memory has a major role to play. It is important to note that word recognition and phonetic awareness are linked to all reading components, including semantic skills. Given the likely shortcomings in L2 phonological awareness and grammatical cueing L2 semantic development is likely to fall behind that of L1.

Semantic knowledge in L2 is not isolated from the other reading components which readers need to acquire in order to achieve reading comprehension. However, some research shows that L1 semantic knowledge influences L2 word-meaning acquisition (e.g., Jiang, 2002; Paribakht, 2005). This serves to increase EFL reading comprehension challenges, including in the Arabic context (Al-Shormani & Al-Sohbani, 2012). These researchers investigated how semantic errors and probable L1 and L2 sources contributed to such errors. Results showed that when students did not understand what they read, they applied strategies, such as translating from their first language of Arabic. This was the case in some categories of lexical choice where collocation errors involved applying Arabic rules to English. An example of this was the derivative Arabic sound-system and the absence of /p/ and /v/ which led to spelling errors, amongst others. The researchers concluded that the lack of L2 semantic knowledge contributed to Arab students' semantic problems in English.

Reading a text intensively involves exploring it grammatically, lexically and semantically (John & Davies 1983). Al-Jarf (2001) asserts that Saudi Arabian EFL students lack semantic knowledge and concluded that with little exposure to English but intensive EFL reading practice, the reader will not be able to reach a sufficiently high level of comprehension. Gorsuch & Taguchi (2008) state that EFL readers are disadvantaged in the amount of exposure they have to English when compared with L1 readers. They attribute this potentially to the EFL readers' simultaneous acquisition of both oral and reading skills, whereas L1 readers have already acquired their mother tongue orally before learning to read.

In the context of EFL teaching and learning, the skills of both speaking and reading English begin at the same time and at a much older age than those learning English as a native language. Participants in the current study did not begin either oral or written English until the age of twelve, when they received 45-minute classes four times per week. The challenges created by this late introduction to English, and in particular to reading, are highlighted in a recent study by Fender (2008) who concluded that in order to develop reading skills, it is necessary to first secure the phonological and orthographic decoding skills that enable word recognition. Randall (2009) stated that "...word recognition is

the major factor involved in L2 reading and becomes the essential site where bottom-up and top-down processes unite” (p.116).

Cain et al., identified three levels of processing which contribute to text comprehension (Cain, Oakhill & Bryant, 2000 and Cain & Oakhill, 2006). The first, lower-level lexical skills, refers to word reading efficiency and vocabulary knowledge. Together these facilitate reading comprehension by enabling more resources to be devoted to higher-level comprehension processes. The second, sentence-level skills, are concerned with knowledge of grammatical structure. The third, higher-level text processing skills, include inference generation, comprehension monitoring and working memory capacity. Together these enable the reader to infer meaning from clues in the text and to thereby construct meaning.

3.5 Extra-linguistic abilities in reading

In addition to the development of linguistic abilities, reading comprehension also requires the acquisition of a number of extra-linguistic abilities. These include: fluency or the ability to read with ease and automaticity; prior knowledge, or what the reader brings with him or her to the reading of the text; awareness of text structure; teaching strategies employed by the instructor; and the ability to use reading strategies to improve understanding. Both L1 acquisition and L2 reading comprehension depend on a number of extra-linguistic factors. Although many of these are similar for both languages, the way they influence reading comprehension in L2 is different to their influence in L1 and the EFL learner needs to place greater emphasis on these abilities in order to cope with a lower level of understanding. These factors are discussed below.

3.5.1 Fluency and reading comprehension

Fluency is an important component of reading comprehension. It is consistent with Stage 2 of learning to read in L1 (see Section 3.3). Reading fluency is a product of two aspects of reading: automaticity and accuracy (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). When the reader increases his/her decoding automaticity, then the load on memory decreases so that more cognitive effort can be directed toward comprehension of the text than toward decoding (Perfetti et al., 2005). As a result of directing more of their attention to decoding, poor readers have less attention to spare for comprehension.

When a reader acquires automaticity they are able to rapidly process a word. If they also have well-developed skills in recognising the main ideas in the text, then the entire reading process will become an efficient coordination of processes within a limited time, and reading comprehension will be achieved. This is highly probable in L1.

Several studies have demonstrated the strong impact of fluency levels on reading comprehension. Klauda & Guthrie (2008) carried out research to investigate whether fluent understanding of words, sentences and passages influenced reading comprehension in 5th Grade L1 students. Two hundred and seventy eight fifth-Grade students were measured on three levels of reading fluency: word recognition fluency, syntactic fluency and passage reading fluency. They were also tested on reading comprehension, reading inference skills and background knowledge of the passage topics. After thirteen weeks students were tested again on reading comprehension abilities and syntactic fluency. Results showed strong evidence that each of these three reading fluency levels is directly linked to reading comprehension, and that reading inferencing skills, back ground level, word reading fluency, syntactic fluency, and passage reading fluency are all strongly related to reading comprehension abilities.

EFL fluency plays a major role in English reading comprehension. Only when the reader acquires sufficient automaticity and the ability to rapidly process words, together with the ability to understand the main ideas of the text being read within a limited time, will reading comprehension be achieved. The fluent reader, particularly in L1, takes these skills for granted and uses them automatically in order to understand what they are reading. However, it is unlikely that EFL readers will develop this skill to the same degree as L1 readers, given the absence of important contributing factors such as background knowledge, and inferencing and syntactic skills. Instead, they face comprehension complexities, because it is difficult for them to be fluent readers of long text under time constraints.

Reading fluency and cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, such as working memory and strategic knowledge, are important for reading comprehension (Geva & Farnia, 2011; Gottardo & Mueller, 2009). Some L2 learners face problems, not because of their L2 status, but because of language impairment and challenges in drawing inferences (Geva, 2011). Researchers find, rather

consistently, that L2 learners always achieve lower marks on standardized tests of reading comprehension than their mono-lingual peers (Nakamoto, Lindsey & Manis, 2007) and Abdellah (2012) reported that Saudi EFL levels of reading achievement have been known to be of a low standard. This finding has encouraged me to further explore why this is the case.

3.5.2 Reading modality and reading comprehension

The relationship between reading modality and reading comprehension is not clear-cut and there is a longstanding debate in the literature. The question of whether reading aloud or silently is favourable as a window to explore comprehension, or produces more or less understanding depends on theories of automaticity in language processing, and of verbal efficiency. Early theorists suggested that fluency is a prerequisite for comprehension, on the basis that both attention and working memory are limited in capacity and that, when reading aloud, an unskilled reader must dedicate more of their attention to lower-order processing, such as word recognition and pronunciation, leaving fewer attentional resources for higher-level comprehension (Jeon, 2012). In my view, to explore such factors, reading aloud could be a suitable protocol to identify these challenges. Also, other theorists assert that reading aloud facilitates linguistic progression as an integrated way of developing phonic skills and word meaning (Rounds, 1992).

The debate was outlined by Holmes (1985) who presented three points of view from theory and research in the field. The first view asserts that silent reading leads to better comprehension because readers need not divert their attention to the correctness of their pronunciation (e.g., cited in Holmes; Durkin, 1978; Cole, 1938; O'Brien, 1926; Stone, 1922; Jones & Lockhart, 1919; Mead, 1915, 1917; Pinter, 1913). The second view asserts that reading aloud improves comprehension because words are simultaneously processed in two modalities (auditorially as well as visually) rather than just one (e.g., Elgart, 1978; Rowell, 1976; Glenn, 1971; Collins, 1961; Duffy & Durrell, 1935-6; cited in Holmes). According to Homes, this view has been supported by research findings such as those by Juel & Holmes (1981), Poulton & Brown (1967), Gary (1958), and Rogers (1937).

However, according to the third view, there is no difference between the comprehension achieved by silent or by reading aloud, and this has also been

supported by research (e.g., Smiley et al, 1977, Sachs, 1974, and Carver, 1973). Factors other than the reading modality, such as situation, purpose (i.e., whether reading for entertainment or information) and the level of difficulty of the text, have also been found to affect comprehension levels. In her study of 48 participants, Holmes (ibid) used closed questions to measure comprehension following silent reading, reading aloud to self, reading aloud to an audience and listening to text being read by another person and found that reading aloud to an audience generated the poorest comprehension because participants were aware of their poor oral performance and this increased negativity and anxiety. This effect was worsened when the text was complex, and when participants knew their comprehension was going to be tested.

Research on these three views, has produced mixed findings. In the L1 context, some have found that reading aloud enhances comprehension (Alshumaimeri, 2005; McCallum, Sharp, Bell, & George, 2004; Prior & Welling, 2001; Jackson & Coltheart, 2001; Grabe, 1991; Juel & Holmes, 1981). For example, Juel and Holmes (1981) asked 48 students in grades 2-5 to read sentences, either silently or aloud, and match their meanings to pictures describing its content. They found that the cognitive processes for reading aloud and silent reading were similar. Although reading aloud required attention to phonology whereas silent reading may not, both required lexical access for comprehension. Contrary to received wisdom at the time, i.e., poor readers would truncate the comprehension process after achieving successful pronunciation, these researchers found that the additional time those reading aloud spent decoding, slowed the reading process but did not affect comprehension. They concluded that poor readers actually spent less time processing difficult words when reading silently than those who read aloud. Similarly, Hinchley and Levy (1988) cited findings by Torgeson and Goldemand (1977) and conducted two experiments to measure comprehension of passages which Canadian schoolchildren in grades 3-6 either listened to, read silently or read aloud. In the first experiment, they found that reading aloud facilitated the comprehension of good stories, and in the second, that reading aloud especially benefitted poor readers.

Benjamin and Schwanenflugel (2010) precisely measured aspects of comprehension when reading aloud. They focused on prosodic factors (such as stress, loudness, pitch, rhythm, vowel length and pausing), which Miller and

Schwanenflugel (2006) had found affected the meaning of morphemes and phonemes. Ninety second-grade students in an American school read text while their fluency (reading speed and accuracy) and prosodic competence (intonation contours grammatical and ungrammatical pauses, etc.) were measured spectrographically. The researchers found that "reading prosody by itself accounted for 54.3% of the variance in reading comprehension skill, but adding reading fluency to the equation accounted for an additional 6.2% of the variance in reading comprehension" (p.398).

On the other hand, some studies have found that reading silently benefits comprehension. For example, Stice (1978) asked 324 six-graders to either listen to a passage being read, or read it silently to themselves, and found greater comprehension amongst silent readers. However, she also found differences between different linguistic sub-groups, such as white and black, males and females and concluded that reading silently enabled readers to adapt written text to their own pattern of language use which improved comprehension. Bernhardt (1983), Leinhardt, Zigmond, & Cooley (1981) and Wilkinson & Anderson (1995), also found that silent reading benefits comprehension.

Still other research findings have found no difference in the comprehension of reading from different modalities. For example, in Salasoo's (1986) study, 16 American college student participants were presented with passages on an electronic screen which they were instructed to read either silently or aloud. Comprehension was measured by closed responses to questions also presented on the screen. Salasoo found no significant effect of reading mode on comprehension.

These three points of view are also prevalent in the EFL context. Griffin (1992) identified three similar schools of thought to those of Holmes (1985) above, regarding the value of reading aloud in class as a teaching method. One view is that it leads to more proficient silent reading; a second, that it is detrimental to the development of silent reading; and a third sees reading aloud as an art form in itself which is worth mastering for the purposes of performance and entertainment. According to the first view, reading aloud develops awareness of sound-symbol relationships, expands auditory language experience and students develop pride in reading aloud competence. According to the second, however, it leads to slow reading which inhibits comprehension

(Smith, 1971). Correction by teachers of phonological errors while reading aloud may also lead to negative self-concept in L2 readers, and because of the discomfort and nervousness it engenders in some students many educators say that reading aloud should be exclusively a voluntary classroom activity. From my experience this might be true for some students but not all when they read aloud. Without applying reading aloud in the current study I will not be able to explore the reading process and decoding factors which may contribute to comprehension challenges.

EFL research findings have been equally mixed. For example, some findings have concluded that both modalities benefit reading comprehension (Teng 2009). On the other hand, Al-Qurashi, Watson, Hafseth, Hickman, & Pond (1995) found that reading aloud enhanced comprehension of English text. Gibson (2008) attributed this to practice in pronunciation and intonation, especially in the early stages of learning. Jeon (2012) asked 267 10th-grade students to read aloud or silently and found that reading fluency explained just over 20% of the variance in reading comprehension in both aloud and silent reading. Using a design with similarities to my own, Jiang, Sawaki and Sabatini (2012) found that adult Chinese EFL learners demonstrated a stronger relationship between reading aloud and comprehension than between word recognition and comprehension, and recommended that reading aloud be given more attention in the literature on adult EFL reading research.

Alshumaimeri (2011) investigated the effect of reading modality on comprehension in the Saudi EFL context. He asked 145 male Saudi secondary students to read three passages, either aloud, subvocally, or silently. Each participant read one passage using each reading method, and then gave feedback on their preferred reading method. More than half the students said reading aloud helped them understand the text, compared with 27% who preferred subvocalisation, and 19% who preferred silent reading. These findings support those of many other researchers who agree that reading aloud could be important to explore reading comprehension, especially in the EFL context.

Based on the above literature and on the way we could approach reading comprehension challenges, my view is that reading aloud is an appropriate protocol for exploring reading comprehension challenges by applying the TAP

method of my study, particularly given Alshumaimeri's findings in relation to the Saudi EFL context in which the current study is will be conducted.

3.5.3 Prior knowledge and reading comprehension

However, the above skills are not sufficient for reading comprehension. Prior knowledge of content also plays an important role. Content and topic knowledge do not exist independently, but are inter-related (Alexander, 1991) and for the purposes of the current study will be grouped under the heading of prior knowledge.

When text information is new, readers often have reading comprehension challenges and most definitions of reading comprehension focus on the interaction between a reader's prior knowledge and the text they encounter.

"Background knowledge (whether understood as linked networks of reconstructed knowledge, instances of memory, schema theory or mental models) plays a supporting role and helps the reader anticipate the discourse organization of the text as well as disambiguate word-level and clausal meanings as new information is incorporated into the text" (Grabe & Stoller, 2011:21).

These writers list three reasons why readers encounter comprehension challenges when reading text: firstly, lack of background information; secondly, lack of the essential linguistic resources; and thirdly, lack of sufficient exposure to the language to build reading efficiency.

To test the importance of prior knowledge to reading comprehension, Tarchi (2010) recruited one hundred and forty nine seventh-Grade students and found that prior knowledge impacted on comprehension both directly as a set of components, and indirectly through the mediation of inferences. He concluded that "the more facts the reader knows about a topic, the better he/she will understand a text concerning that topic" (p. 419). Similarly, Kobayashi (2008) examined the impact of prior knowledge about the text topic, external strategies used during reading, and students' experience of using controversial texts, on reading comprehension. The results from eighty-six Year 1 and eighty Year 3 undergraduate students showed that topic knowledge enhances the processing of 'intra-textual' arguments. They noted that the strategies used during reading to summarize content had both direct and indirect positive effects and found that longer college experience led to better understanding of 'inter-textual' relations.

Prior knowledge is unlikely to be as developed in the L2 reading context as it is in the L1. Therefore these findings suggest that L2 reading comprehension will suffer as a result.

According to Grabe & Stoller (2011) one of the strongest resources for L2 beginner level students is their background knowledge of the world.

"Difficulties may arise when readers do not have adequate background information, do not have the necessary linguistic resources or have not read enough in the language to have developed efficiency in reading. Readers, especially, L2 readers, who encounter such difficulties, can try to understand the text by using a slow mechanical translation process; alternatively, they can make an effort to form a situation model from past experiences and try to force the text to fit preconceived notions. In the first case, working memory efficiencies cannot operate well; in the latter case, a situation model unconnected to text information is imposed on reading comprehension, activating inappropriate background information and leading to poor comprehension. In either cases, successful reading comprehension is not likely to occur" (p.24).

Barnett (1989) highlighted the importance of prior knowledge to EFL reading speed and considered that lack of knowledge contributes to comprehension challenges. Orasanu (1986) agreed that "the knowledge a reader brings to a text is a principal determiner of how that text will be comprehended, and what may be learned and remembered" (p.32). Poor reading comprehension is related both to insufficient relevant background and cultural knowledge, and to not having well-developed oral language and word reading skills (August & Shanahan, 2006). According to Alderson (2000) "...if readers do not know the language of the text, then they will have great difficulties in processing the text" (p.34).

Gabb (2000) asked why learners encounter challenges in moving into fluency despite possessing basic decoding skills. She identified two types of 'challenges': (1) limited vocabulary and (2) lack of background, or schematic, knowledge. This occurs when the reader and the writer of a text do not share the same language and their schemata and knowledge of the world are different. Mehrpour & Rahimi (2010) state that EFL learners' poor reading and listening comprehension can be attributed to factors such as insufficient knowledge of vocabulary or grammar, and/or familiarity with reading comprehension strategies.

Reading comprehension requires supporting knowledge and skills. Amongst these are knowledge of vocabulary, background knowledge, knowledge of grammar, meta-cognitive awareness, syntactic knowledge, and of how to use reading strategies (Bernhardt, 1991; Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005, 2007). For example, Grabe (1991) reported that prior knowledge plays a significant role in reading comprehension and Scarcella & Oxford (1992) argue that the failure to stimulate proper schema may contribute to reading comprehension failure. Such cultural knowledge is not only important in the EFL content but also plays an important role in comprehension. To investigate this Johnson (1981) conducted research on Iranian ESL students and Native American students. The two groups read different folk-tales based on Iranian and American culture. The result showed that the Iranian students gained higher marks on stories derived from an Iranian cultural context than those derived from an American cultural context, thus demonstrating the importance of background cultural knowledge to reading comprehension.

Whilst most EFL contexts are some distance from the cultures in which EFL texts originate, the impact on reading comprehension of this cultural 'gap' will depend on the extent to which the cultural concepts and knowledge embedded in the text differ from those in the society and culture surrounding the EFL learner.

3.5.4 Text structure and reading comprehension

Content and topic knowledge must include the knowledge of text structure which is essential for reading comprehension.

"Knowledge about text genre is an important factor in reading comprehension....Readers unaware of [text] structure will likely not have a plan of action for a particular text and may gain information from that text in a random manner, whereas those who are aware of the way a text is structured are better able to organize information as they read." (McCardle, Chhabra & Kapinus, 2008: pp, 145-6).

It has been seen that reading comprehension is a complex process which relates to many issues. One is the readers' discourse-structure-knowledge. Such knowledge includes the ability to understand text organization including where to find the main ideas, cause & effect, comparisons, contrasts and problem-solving. Meyer & Poon (2001) carried out structure-strategy training to see whether training students to recognize discourse structure would develop

their reading comprehension abilities, as well as their interest in text content. One hundred and eleven young and older adults enrolled in ten training sessions of ninety minutes each over a period of three weeks. During the first three sessions participants took language tests to measure reading, vocabulary, short term memory and reaction time. There was a questionnaire measuring biometrics, reading activities, health and interests. During training, participants were asked to write summaries and recall information from the texts they read, together with homework on the training sessions.

Results showed that the structure of the training strategy significantly increased participants' recall of text, thereby indicating the correspondence between recall and text organization and the consistent use of structure-strategy across passages read. They found that the use of structure-strategy to recognize text structures transfers subjects' remembering of daily reading materials and supports reading comprehension. The results of their study provide a full picture of how the awareness of discourse structure could facilitate reading comprehension and also how good training, even for a short period, in this case nine hours, could support learning, particularly with regard to text-structure knowledge.

Meyer & Poon's study demonstrates the importance of discourse structure knowledge in L1 and that good understanding of text structure could also facilitate reading comprehension in L2. This is also important because advanced L1 readers could transfer this strategy from L1 to L2. According to Wang & Koda (2005) L2 reading is an interactive process, as the priorities of both L1 and L2 interact and the incorporation of such skills could improve the L2 reading process. However, L2 readers also encounter problems which are not experienced by L1 readers, and Grabe & Stoller state that "...L2 students need some foundation of structural knowledge and text organization in the L2 for more effective reading comprehension" (2011: 37).

Research findings support the notion that text features play a vital role in text comprehension. For example, Parvaz (2006) found that text cohesion has a strong effect on reading comprehension amongst EFL students at university level. Moreover, text familiarity, task type and language proficiency, amongst other skills, were shown to affect university students' comprehension (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2003). Al-Jarf (2001) found that the major problem for Saudi Arabian female EFL students was in substitution followed by references and

ellipses. She concluded that cohesion anomalies happen due to a lack of linguistic competence, specifically because of poor syntactic and semantic awareness and insufficient knowledge of cohesion. Ozono & Ito (2003) also conducted research to clarify how text comprehension can be affected by different types of logical connectives. They found that low proficiency readers used a variety of logical relations, whereas high proficiency readers were little affected by type of logical relations. They concluded that 'cognitive load' is an additional factor causing differences in performance level amongst readers with different L2 proficiency levels.

These findings suggest that reducing the cognitive load of EFL reading by training readers in understanding of text structure could free up cognitive space for greater attention to making sense of what they read.

3.5.5 Reading strategies and reading comprehension

The knowledge of linguistic components, prior knowledge, above are "not sufficient for reading because [they] cannot interact directly with the text without some kinds of processing mechanism...The processing components consist of a variety of strategies that the reader has acquired or learned" (Birch, 2002: 2). Reader needs to know such strategies to draw on his/her prior knowledge and thereby support their understanding of text as a source of information.

Reading comprehension strategies are a combination of processes. Grabe & Stoller (2011) state that "no one process defines reading comprehension by itself, but together" (p.11) they affect reading comprehension in combination. These include: a rapid process, an effective process, an interactive process, a strategic process, a flexible process, an evaluative process, a purposeful process, a comprehending process, a learning process and a linguistic process. Similarly, Birch (2002) describes reading processes as interacting in three ways:

- Different processing strategies, both top and bottom, interact with the knowledge base.
- The reader's mind interacts with the written text.
- The reader interacts indirectly with the writer of the text across time and space because the writer communicates information to the reader and the reader grasps the information from the writer.

Some studies support the claim that the knowledge of reading strategies could facilitate reading comprehension. For example, Taboada & Guthrie (2006) examined whether a student's ability to question before reading would support their reading comprehension development. They also wanted to know whether topic knowledge would contribute to reading comprehension development when asked to formulate questions on a reading topic. Three hundred and sixty third and fourth grade students were assessed using four measures: questioning abilities, prior knowledge, multiple-text comprehension and reading comprehension. They found that questioning ability correlated with both prior knowledge and reading comprehension ability. They also found that the ability to formulate questions is correlated with prior knowledge. It is evident from this study that questioning ability acts as a major strategy to facilitate reading comprehension. This is valuable insight into the strategies a reader can use to improve their reading comprehension. These findings suggest that in the L2 context, the ability to question will play a key role in reading comprehension. By implication, EFL students will understand text better when they are aware of reading comprehension strategies which they use, particularly when faced with a comprehension difficulty.

A number of studies suggest that there is a direct and positive relationship between the teaching of reading strategies and effective EFL reading comprehension. According to Cain & Oakhill, (1999) one reason for the failure of those with lower comprehension scores may be that their focus is more on word-reading accuracy than on a comprehension-monitoring strategy. Ibrahim (2008) found that Egyptian EFL students used three main reading strategies' global, problem-solving and support strategies. However, the data from his study also revealed that whether or not a student used a strategy was less important than the efficiency with which they used it. As a result, it was found that the variables which influenced the reader's processes and style preferences were of two types: personal and situational. Personal variables included proficiency, self-perception, attitudes, learning strategies, and style preferences, while situational variables included past experiences, educational context, and social context. This second set of factors reflect the assumptions of the sociocultural approach.

As mentioned earlier, reading comprehension not depends only on readers' abilities to access appropriate content and formal schemata, but also

on their ability to monitor what they understand and to take appropriate strategic action to resolve comprehension problems (Cain & Oakhill, 1999). For example, comprehension could be enhanced by students learning to monitor and articulate their knowledge (Casanave, 1988; Adler, 2004). According to a number of researchers, the use of inappropriate reading strategies is one reason for students' poor reading comprehension (Brown, Ambruster & Baker, 1986). Padron & Waxman (1988) demonstrated this by investigating the effect of cognitive strategies on reading comprehension in eighty-two Hispanic ESL students randomly selected from third, fourth and fifth grades. They found that students who thought about something else while reading understood less of the story.

Macaro & Erler's (2008) longitudinal study examined the role of reading strategy training in L2 reading comprehension improvement. The researchers studied L1 English beginner-learners of French aged between eleven and twelve years. The students were pre-tested on reading comprehension and completed two questionnaires, one measuring strategies used while reading and the other measuring attitudes toward learning French. Students were then divided into an experimental and a control group. The researchers taught reading strategies for ten minutes per week over fourteen months to the experimental group in three phases. During the first phase, students identified the reading strategies they used and learned new ones through the process of modeling. During the second phase, teachers taught students how to monitor their use of reading strategies and how to change from one strategy to another. During the third phase students reflected on what they had learned and discussed their challenges and successes in order to overcome any problem in the future. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on all measures including their ability to scan familiar words, guess their meanings, shift engagements with the text and find the meaning of words in the dictionary or glossary. Hsu (2012) also found that English language knowledge and strategy-use in reading comprehension contributed to Taiwanese EFL senior high school students' reading comprehension.

From the above study I understand that reading strategies can be taught eclectically to improve reading comprehension. The most significant finding is that this would not necessarily require a lot of time. However it remains to be seen whether L2/EFL students are aware of strategies to facilitate their reading

or whether lack of awareness contributes to their reading comprehension challenges. Findings from the current study will contribute to this understanding in Arabic, non-Arabic and other EFL contexts.

3.5.6 Teaching strategies and reading comprehension

All the above reading skills and abilities are acquired through the employment of teaching strategies. A number of studies have tried a range of instructional strategies to optimize reading ability and comprehension. These relate to pre-reading, reading, and post-reading tasks (comprehension). It is widely known that effective teaching leads to successful outcomes. For example, Pressley, Gaskins, Solic & Collins (2006) undertook a case study in the highly reputable Benchmark Elementary and Middle School, whose curriculum was based on the research findings. The school curriculum targeted comprehension through intensive strategy instruction, together with the enhancements of teaching motivation, extensive reading vocabulary development, fluency reading and reading for content learning.

Researchers collected their data over a period of two months, triangulating the collection using observation, interview and note-taking. They generated a 5-point scale on nine elements including: (1) teachers' professional development; (2) small classes; (3) extensive and intensive instruction; (4) strategies of word recognition; (5) writing strategies; (6) comprehension strategies; (7) monitoring and reflection strategies; (8) motivation instruction and (9) pedagogical caring. In addition to these major elements, there were also other features related to the school's success: regular homework, parental commitment, three members of staff for each class, (12) a limited number of students in the class, regular feedback, and the daily comprehension strategy instruction. Results showed that average attainment rose from 34% to 77% on standardized reading tests and that all nine elements scored at 4.5 or more, showing that they all contributed to the effectiveness of the school curriculum.

This study has provided powerful curriculum features for successful learning in an L1 teaching environment. However, the implementation of such a high standard features is unlikely to take place in other L1 schools in the USA, let alone in an L2 context in other countries. The way in which L2 information is delivered also has a direct impact on how much L2 is learned. In many EFL contexts most student knowledge comes from either direct classroom

instruction or indirectly from instructional tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Therefore EFL students need to develop linguistic awareness and reading strategies in order to comprehend what they read. This is different to the experience of the L1 student whose linguistic knowledge is so tacit that they are often unable to discuss or reflect on their linguistic resource. However,

"For English teachers to provide instructional support and remediation, they must know about how expert readers read in English, what linguistic knowledge they have, and what processing strategies work best. They must know something about what linguistic knowledge and processing strategies ESL and EFL students have developed for their L1" (Birch, 2002: 10).

This can be achieved by EFL teachers creating an individual portfolio for each student containing information about his/her reading development. Without the teacher being aware of the students' reading stage, they will not be equipped to identify reading strategies which will help the student in their reading development. The reader will therefore lack awareness of reading strategies which could improve reading comprehension.

Zoghi, Mustapha, & Maasum, (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' awareness of reading comprehension strategies and their potential comprehension failures. Researchers interviewed twelve EFL university-level students and the results showed that there is an instructional void in reading strategy training in the Iranian educational settings.

The lessons learned from the Benchmark School study could be used to consider the efficacy of L2 teaching in the EFL context. The four strategies identified and the nine elements which led to successful learning, could be replicated in the EFL context with a similar improvement in reading abilities and comprehension. However a number of institutional and sociocultural factors which also contributed to reading development, such as homework patterns, parental commitment, staffing levels and class sizes, might be more difficult to achieve. The Benchmark Elementary School study has provided powerful curriculum features for successful learning which could be implemented in an EFL context.

Birch (2002) asserts that some EFL "students will require direct instruction in low-level processing strategies in order to progress in their ability to comprehend text" (p.10). In other words, EFL readers need to be closely supported by teachers in order to overcome their reading comprehension

problems and gain the ability to understand text without fear or hesitation. This is particularly important, given that throughout the process of learning English, EFL learners will constantly encounter aspects of the language which are unfamiliar.

In general, the quality of learning is based on the quality of teaching which has a direct impact on outcomes for learner readers. For example, Hung (2007) states that students have difficulty dealing with conventional instructional texts because EFL teachers have focused more on lesson design and teacher-directed classroom activities than on effective methods of instruction and on supporting comprehension. Mantero (2006) maintains that traditional approaches to the teaching of reading focus on the facts of a text and lack meaningful dialogic interaction between students about the ideas contained within it. This results in a lack of opportunity for students to fully comprehend its message. For example, teachers focus on a bottom-up view of reading instruction in the classroom, in which it is believed that the reader constructs overall meaning by working upwards from basic letter-level to word-level and to sentence-level as units of meaning (Stanovich, 1990). Teachers who adopt this perspective, work to simplify text, build vocabulary, encourage repetitive reading and answer comprehension questions. Such traditional teaching methods do not facilitate, and at worst impede, text comprehension.

The sociocultural approach takes as its basis the interactive reading model outlined in Section 3.2. According to this approach, the meaning of a text is defined socially and, following on from an initial reading, an ongoing process of meaning-making takes place (Roebuck, 1998). A number of sociocultural researchers claim that cooperative learning and small-group task work which includes student-to-student scaffolding in the completion of a task has a positive impact on L2/EFL acquisition in the classroom (Anton, Dicomilla, & Lantoi, 2003; Donato & McCormick, 1994). Because of these findings, this approach has increasingly gained favour in the L2/EFL teaching community.

Gladwin & Stepp-Greany (2008) compared the effects of the Interactive Reading with Instructor Support (IRIS) teaching model with traditional teaching approaches (i.e., direct teaching/ lecture format) in a Spanish L2 context. The IRIS model combines reading strategies and social mediation and its strategies include strategy-focused instruction, scaffolding, and language-promoting assistance. Results showed a slight increase in recall performance of the

experimental group suggesting that the IRIS model improves L2 reading comprehension.

It has also been widely reported that simulating an L2 environment is universally considered to be a prerequisite of successful language learning and effective language teaching (Asher, 1993; Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 2008; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Krashen, 1990; Macdonald; 1993; Wong-Fillmore, 1985). However, such simulation is challenging when the language is being taught in foreign contexts such as teaching English in Arabic countries where the learner seldom or never encounters English words outside the EFL classroom.

In the Arabic EFL context, the attitudes of both teachers and students to the EFL classroom also need to be considered. Al-Nofaie (2010) found that, because of low-level student need, both teachers and students extensively used L1 (Arabic) within the classroom. In a survey of attitude of teachers, students and parents towards learning English in Saudi Arabian public schools, Alam, Hussein & Khan, (1988) found that 32.8% of respondents disagreed with the exclusion of Arabic from the EFL classroom. Furthermore, 62% of the students preferred to be taught by Arabic teachers who could translate what they did not understand from reading L2 text. However, in my view, this will prevent them from using different resources in order to understand what they have read and teachers may downgrade their expectations of students and the level of what they are taught and teach them accordingly. The current study will have to take into account teaching methodologies and curriculum issues in the EFL context in Saudi Arabia from the students' experiences.

3.5.7 Topic interest and EFL reading comprehension

Topic interest has been shown to be a powerful psychological factor in learning (Edgier, 1999). EFL students learn English after long experience and acquisition of literacy in their first language and attitudes acquired during L1 acquisition are brought with them into their L2 learning. These attitudes shape, positively or negatively, their perceptions of how well they have performed a task, and also their self-esteem. This in turn affects their perceptions of themselves as readers. Grabe and Stoller (2011) state that:

"perceptions,...influence students' self-esteem, emotional response to reading, interest in reading and willingness to persist...[however] Unfortunately, these issues are often ignored in [L2] discussions of reading comprehension instruction, but in L1

reading research they are now seen as important predictors of academic success” (p.49).

The reader’s motivation is also a key influence in determining levels of reading comprehension. Huang (2006) reported that this is because a lack of willingness to read makes reading instruction less effective. Huang’s research findings on EFL reading motivation showed that learners were most willing to read when (1) teachers were available to answer questions, (2) key points were highlighted clearly in textbooks, and (3) reading skills were taught. Similarly, a study conducted on EFL students in Saudi Arabia by Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman (2011) showed that the obstacles which hinder reading efforts are rare visits to the library, the inability to get books quickly, unavailability of reading materials, time constraints, lack of local libraries, and the belief that there are better things to do than reading. Other obstacles included the difficulty of reading materials provided by English departments, belief that improving reading is not as important as improving other language skills, belief that there is no relationship between reading and other language skills, and lack of family interest in reading. It is therefore prudent to facilitate Saudi students in their endeavours to read, and to motivate them to read in order to develop more effective reading processes and overcome their reading comprehension problems.

3.5.8 Text culture

Unlike L1 readers, EFL readers may also face new or different cultural notions embedded in English text, leading to problems with comprehension (Shen (2001). Steffensen & Joag-Dev (1984) designed an experiment to measure how cultural misunderstandings by L2 learners could cause reading comprehension challenges. Indian and American participants were asked to read and recall two passages, one describing an Indian and one an American wedding. Findings revealed that subjects read faster the text of their L1 culture, and that they experienced comprehension challenges when reading the passage from their L2 culture. These findings support the idea that cultural factors within L2 text affect reading comprehension and suggest either that greater awareness of L2 culture, or the 'nativisation' of English language texts could improve comprehension.

3.5.9 Text types

Texts also vary in feature and structure and these can impact on comprehension. The two main text types are expository text intended to give information, and narrative, designed to give an account. These differ from each other in both purpose and organisation. Expository text is the type most commonly encountered by EFL students in their studies.

Narrative text is structured in a chronological sequence, is written in the past tense, makes use of daily-life vocabulary and is often fictional (Medina, Pilonieta, & Schumm, 2006). Narrative texts are often read for entertainment; however, they still contribute to a learner's cognitive development. Once acquainted with the features of narrative text, the reader may understand it more fully (Lipson & Cooper, 2002). Expository text, on the other hand, provides information on a topic. Its structure tends to be thematic; consisting of superordinate and subordinate information and often includes technical or academic vocabulary which may not be often encountered in informal conversations (Medina, et al., 2006). It often contains examples, cause and effect, description and ordered lists. Awareness of types of text structure will facilitate the readers understanding of ideas and improve reading comprehension. The teaching approach plays a major role in exposing readers to a range of genres.

Some studies have found that narrative texts are generally easier to read than expository texts (e.g., Best, Floyd & McNamara, 2008; Diakidoy, Stylianou, Karefillidou, & Papageorgiou, 2004); however, they also tend to be less cohesive. Eason, Goldberg, Young, Geist & Cutting (2012) found that higher-order cognitive skills, including the ability to make inferences and to plan and organize information, contribute to comprehension of more complex texts. Best et al. (2008) discovered differential demands of narrative and expository texts, where word recognition is the strongest predictor for narrative text comprehension and background knowledge is the strongest for expository text.

3.5.10 Text features

Every text possesses physical features which highlight important content (Kinder & Bursuck (1991). If these features are presented clearly, they facilitate reading comprehension by enabling the reader to make predictions, anticipate learning and understand content (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2010; Dickson, Simmons, Kame'enui, 1995). The reader must recognize these features in order

to make effective use of them. Since expository text is the main type underpinning the current study, it is important to understand its features.

Fountas & Pinnell (2006) list five categories of features of expository texts:

- Text divisions identify how text is organized and presented. Examples include chapters, sections, introductions, summaries, and author information.
- Organizational tools and sources of information help readers understand information. Examples include titles, table of contents, index, headings and subheadings, glossary, pronunciation guide, and references.
- Graphics make textual information easier to understand through visual representation. Examples include diagrams, charts and tables, graphs, maps, labels, photographs, illustrations, paintings, cutaway views, timelines, and captions.
- Font size or formatting style, such as bold, italic, capitalization or a change in font, signal to the reader that these words are important.
- Layout includes aids such as insets and bullets, and numbers point readers to important information (in Hanson & Padua (2011: 5).

Kelley & Clausen-Grace (2010) highly recommend that students be explicitly taught about text features in order to build their background knowledge. Once readers are aware of them, they are alerted to points of focus in the text and topic they are reading.

Even the comprehension of experienced readers varies according to the type and feature of the text they are reading. In essence, the harder the text is, the more difficult it is to understand. This process is complicated for second language readers, when the writer and reader come from different linguistic and social backgrounds. McDonough (1995) states that “a constant difficulty posed by learning to read in a second language is that L2 texts are usually written within the cultural assumptions of speakers of that language, not within those of the reader's first language” (p.42). This can lead to misunderstanding and poor comprehension of content. Johnson (1982) conducted a study of seventy-two advanced EFL university students from twenty-three nationalities and found that prior cultural experience had a positive effect on reader's comprehension.

The purpose of writing is to convey meaning and of reading to understand this communication. This project only succeeds when the reader

can decode the message contained in the writing through effective information-processing methods (Nuttall, 2005). The better the reader is able to decode text, the more likely it is that s/he receives the message that the writer intended to convey. This suggests that reading is a process which goes beyond the cognitive model to incorporate the interaction between writer and reader, mediated by text. These findings suggest that the reading of more narrative text could enhance L2 reading development.

3.6 Transfer of L1 reading abilities to L2 and EFL reading comprehension

One major challenge to reading comprehension is the interference of the learner's first language when learning to read English as a foreign language. According to Norrish (1997), "[t]he influence of the L1 is that much more direct given the more restricted access to any forms of the target language" (p.1). Similarly, Birch (2002: 10) states that "each reader's knowledge base contains, at first, only that knowledge that is relevant to his or her own language and writing system". When L2/EFL beginner or intermediate readers have challenges reading L2/EFL text, they resort to their L1 resources in order to make sense of what they read (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Depending on the consistency between the two languages, this can result in interference, such as of morphological knowledge, phonological knowledge, general background knowledge, topical knowledge, problem-solving strategies and inferencing skills (ibid). Thus, the transference of L1 skills and knowledge into the L2 context can have both positive and negative consequences. These interferences will be addressed later in this thesis.

For example, Wang, Koda, & Perfetti (2003) researched the effect of differences in the writing systems of L1 and L2 on cognitive processes when learning to read in L2. In particular, they examined the effects of L1 alphabetic and non-alphabetic systems on L2 word identification. They compared 21 Korean (alphabetic) and 20 Chinese (non-alphabetic) English learners with an average age of 26.6 years. The majority were L1 graduates studying at an American English Language Institute. Students were measured on their reliance on phonological and orthographic processing in English word identification. In a semantic category judgment task, Korean ESL learners made more false positive errors in judging homophones to category exemplars than they did in judging spelling controls. However, there were no significant differences

between the two conditions for Chinese ESL learners. On the other hand, Chinese ESL learners made more accurate responses to stimuli that were less similar in spelling to category exemplars than those which were more similar. Researchers concluded that cross-writing system differences in L1s and L1 reading skills transfer could be responsible for these ESL performance differences and these findings demonstrate the effect that L1-L2 transfer can have on L2 reading processes and comprehension.

Such transfer could occur for participants in the current study whose first language is Arabic and whose English literacy skills developed several years after acquisition of their first language. In addition, English has a different writing system and is taught by non-native English-speaking teachers for whom English is not their mother tongue. As a result students may lack the opportunity to develop low-level reading skills in the way native English speakers do (Birch, 2002). Consequently, Saudi EFL students may face challenges to progress from lower to higher levels of reading developmental stages mentioned earlier (see Section 3.2).

3.7 Previous approaches to the study of reading comprehension in Arabic contexts

Four studies in particular have studied EFL reading comprehension in a range of Arabic contexts (e.g. Pathan & Al-Dersi, 2013; Alkhaldeh, 2012; Alsamadani, 2011; Mourtaga, 2006). These constitute a more closely relevant background to the current study and for this reason, their approaches will be discussed in detail as a basis for establishing the way in which the current study will be conducted.

Pathan & Al-Dersi (2013) investigated the reading of short stories in order to overcome problems encountered in EFL reading comprehension. One hundred undergraduate Libyan EFL students completed a questionnaire measuring reading comprehension problems. Participants expressed challenges with EFL reading comprehension in general, which the researchers attributed to deficiencies in vocabulary, inadequate training, lack of reading practice, and to pronunciation and punctuation problems. However, the researchers used short stories primarily as a strategy to teach reading, rather than as a way of exploring the reading challenges their participants

encountered. The tools for exploring such challenges are different in the current study. In addition to this, the researchers did not provide details on the types of challenges and the reasons for them, both of which will be addressed in the current study.

Like Parthan and Al-Dersi, Alkhaldeh (2012) used a questionnaire to investigate EFL reading comprehension in five hundred secondary students in Jordan. Results showed that students faced a range of EFL challenges including a problem of text memorization and their related questions, lack of familiarity with words, lack of cooperative learning in reading instruction, interference between L1 and L2, poor teaching practices related to reading comprehension, slow reading, lack of connection between intensive and extensive reading activities and incongruence between the learner's pre-knowledge and ideas contained in the passage.

Using both questionnaires and interviews, Alsamadani (2011) found that many factors impact on EFL reading comprehension in Saudi Arabia. These include prior knowledge (schemata), enthusiasm for reading, time spent reading, the purpose of reading, and vocabulary size.

In yet another questionnaire-based study, Mourtaga (2006) asked thirty EFL teachers in Gaza about the challenges their students faced when reading English text. Mourtaga also made observations and used case studies to explore these challenges in detail. He categorized Palestinian EFL reading comprehension challenges into four types: firstly, misunderstanding of the reading process; secondly, insufficient linguistic competence and reading practice; thirdly, interference between L1 and L2; and finally, the opaqueness of the relationship between spelling and sound in English.

These studies largely support the evidence provided so far of EFL reading problems beyond the Arabic context. However, for the most part, their methods reflect a positivistic approach to data collection and involved the use of quantitative methods such as tests and questionnaires. On the one hand, quantitative methods are regarded by many in the academic community as scientific, reliable, replicable and objective measures of human characteristics. However, on the other hand, they are also criticized by academics such as Alderson (2000) who note that data collected through methods such as multiple-choice questions or cloze tests omit the participant's own voice, and produce little or no insight into how the participant arrived at his/her answer.

They also shared other features. They approached reading comprehension from a cognitivist perspective and did not take into account the social and cultural context in which the reading took place. Whilst they provide valuable information, they do not explore the reading processes and comprehension challenges faced by EFL readers from the perspective of the readers themselves, nor in the readers' own voices. Most did not triangulate data collection methods in order to improve the quality of the data and the quantitative data they obtained did not provide great insight into the reasons for the comprehension challenges faced by EFL readers.

3.8 Previous uses of the TAP in reading comprehension research

A good method for tapping into a participant's perspective is the Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP) where introspective data about thought processes are provided by the participant while s/he undertakes a task or activity, and is collected by the researcher. Research findings which are informative and which can lead to meaningful understanding and improvement require a range of information to be collected and in a subjective field such as reading comprehension, in-depth qualitative studies are more appropriate than quantitative. Interpretive research involves data collection methods such as the interview and the TAP, which gives voice to the participant. Green (1998) asserts that the usefulness of the verbal protocol is:

"Its ability to capture the dynamic nature of skilled performance...[and to] provide a wealth of information on the cognitive processes used to carry out the task, information heeded as the task is carried out, but more importantly, changes occurring in both" (p.117).

Research tools such as the TAP are particularly important given the limitations of the traditional product-oriented approaches used in EFL research. Findings gained from the use of such a measuring instrument can be used to guide a supportive program to improve reading comprehension development in not only Saudi Arabian but also other Arab EFL contexts.

Many studies have been identified in the literature where the TAP has been used in different contexts and ways. As Kucan and Beck (1997) pointed out, its value lies in its use as a research tool, a teaching tool and as a means of facilitating social interaction in the language classroom. In some studies it has been used as a means of collecting information about general language

learning and to study reading development in diverse settings. The range of these studies illustrates the extent of its usefulness. For example, Fisher, Frey and Lapp (2011) used the TAP in an L1 context, to improve the reading of underperforming students. They trained teachers to think-aloud so they could model the process for their students who it was hoped would imitate them and improve literacy and reading achievement. Comer (2012) used it in a non-EFL, L2 setting to identify the reading strategies used by English learners of Russian. Twelve 5th-semester students at a Midwestern University in the USA were prompted to think aloud every three minutes as they read.

Several studies have used the TAP to compare reading strategies in both L1 and L2. For example Davis and Bistodeau (1993) asked English-speaking undergraduate French language students at Pennsylvania State University to think aloud while reading first in L1 (English) and then in L2 (French), and to then recall in writing what they had read. Other researchers have also used the TAP to study L1-L2 transference. For example, Block (1986) researched Spanish and Chinese EFL students at New York University and concluded that some general reading skills are a function of the reader rather than the language they are using, and are readily transferred from L1 to L2. Similarly, McKeown and Gentilucci (2007) used the TAP to study EFL learners whose first languages were Spanish, Urdu, Hebrew and Tagalog. In their study twenty-seven intermediate students read daily assignments and were prompted to respond about 'what was going on in their heads' as they read. Seng and Hashim (2006) also used it to study how L1 knowledge is used as a strategy to understand L2 reading. In their study, Malay-speaking undergraduates read in L2 (English) and then engaged in a group discussion about their English-reading process and comprehension, using their L1 (the Malay language) as the medium of conversation.

Several researchers have used the TAP to investigate EFL reading strategies. For example, Ketabi, Ghavamnia and Rezezadeh (2012) videotaped twenty-three Persian graduate TEFL students as they read a hypermedia English text. Paralinguistic features including body language, together with verbalizations were used to identify their reading strategies. Similarly,

Seng (2007) used the TAP to identify and improve the reading strategies of twenty undergraduate Malay BEd (English language) students. After being trained extensively in the use of the TAP (three training sessions lasting 1.5

hours each) participants read English text and then discussed their English-reading strategies in a group.

Kusumarasdyati (2007) used the TAP to explore EFL word-reading strategy. He wanted to identify strategies used by students to infer word meaning from context when faced with the challenge of unfamiliar words. Eight English undergraduates at Surabaya State University performed the TAP whilst reading two texts. Results showed that half used a bilingual (English-Indonesian) dictionary to look-up translations of unfamiliar words and only one used a monolingual (English-English) dictionary. Two used context cues to infer the meaning of the words as the major strategy, and one combined the use of context cues and a monolingual dictionary. All but one of the students skipped unknown lexical items, especially when the words did not play a key role in the meaning of the whole text.

Kaivanpanah & Alavi (2008) also used the TAP to examine the contribution of grammatical knowledge to inferring the meaning of unknown words. One-hundred and-two male and female undergraduates studying at Open Universities in Iran showed that both the syntactic complexity of texts and the level of language proficiency influenced the inferencing of word-meaning. Researchers concluded that grammatical knowledge contributed to the inference of word meaning.

Yang (2006) used the TAP to investigate the relationship between reading strategies and comprehension-monitoring strategies. Participants were twenty Taiwanese readers and results showed that:

"the engagement of reading strategies is a cognitive action by which readers solve their problems resulting from the insufficiency of language knowledge in understanding textual information (within the text), while the employment of comprehension monitoring strategies is an intentional and remedial action by which readers integrate, monitor, and control their own reading processes (beyond the text)" (p.313).

In addition to the above, the TAP has been used in several studies to research EFL reading comprehension. For example, Mária (2008) used it to examine multiple matching tasks in EFL reading comprehension testing in a Hungarian school. S/he used content analysis and the TAP to explore the skills, knowledge and processes students used when responding to the tasks and items in the reading comprehension test. Nine of the fifteen-item variables identified were shown to have important effects on the

perceived difficulty of the test. Jahandar, Khodabandehlou, Seyedi & Abadi (2012) used it as a strategy to train EFL reading comprehension. The participants were thirty-two Iranian EFL students, divided into an experimental and a control group. After the experimental group completed the TAP, each group took a Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Results showed a significant increase in mean score of the treatment group, confirming the positive effect of the TAP on improving learners' reading comprehension.

Wade's (1990) study was one of many which have used the TAP to measure reading comprehension strategies. In her study, readers were stopped at the end of each sentence and asked to retell its meaning in order to measure their understanding. Wade identified good and poor 'comprehenders' based on the extent to which they integrated what they had read, and were willing to take risks when inferring meaning. She concluded that the best comprehenders were risk-takers who integrated information effectively.

As well as being used to study diverse topics, the TAP has also been implemented in diverse ways. For example, in studies by Loxterman, Beck & McKeown, 1994, Block, 1986, and Davey, 1983, participants read text silently while they verbalised their thoughts out loud. On the other hand, in studies by Fisher Frey and Lapp, 2011, and Miller & Smith, 1985, participants both read aloud and verbalised aloud. For the most part, reports on studies using the TAP, did not specify whether the reading was aloud, or silent, (eg, Comer 2012; Ketabi, Ghavamnia & Rezezadeh, 2012; Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2011; McKeown & Gentilucci, 2007; Seng, 2007; Seng & Hashim, 2006; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Davis & Bistodeau 1993, and Wade, 1990). However, as Rankin (1988) said, most think-aloud studies involved silent reading. This suggests that few studies using the TAP protocol have been conducted where participants have both read text aloud and thought aloud. In my opinion, the reading aloud element of the method is a valuable source of information about reading processes and how they are linked to reading comprehension. Including data from reading aloud could provide more data and insights into the reading comprehension challenges faced by EFL readers.

Despite their many contributions to the EFL reading literature, none of the above studies have used the TAP to explore reading comprehension challenges.

3.9 Summary of section one

This discussion shows that L1 readers go through a number of stages of reading development from emergent to fluent reader. It shows that knowledge of grapheme/phoneme correspondence is essential to the development of early literacy and that the orthography of a language forms the basis for a number of heuristics which contribute to reading fluency which can be exhibited only through reading aloud. Phonological strategies are learned from a very young age and are strong predictors of subsequent reading comprehension. Good word recognition acquired early contributes to later success in reading and both semantic and syntactic strategies such as parsing are tacit and contribute to fluency and comprehension.

Reading fluency relates both to automaticity, and to integrated understanding of linguistic units of different sizes, from word to paragraphs.

The relationship between reading aloud/silently and reading comprehension is based on the purpose of the reading. For example, for exploring the automaticity of decoding, phonics, repetition or attention to punctuation, there would be little point in a reading that did not include reading aloud.

Prior knowledge, such as background information and prior exposure, also enhances comprehension, as does understanding how cues in a text structure direct the reader to important points. Both awareness of reading strategies and the teaching of them have been shown to improve reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension in L2/EFL depends partly on the relationship between L1 and L2/EFL such as whether the same alphabet is used. Some skills can be transferred whilst others relate to features which are unique to reading in a second language. One such feature will be grapheme/phoneme correspondence in L2/EFL; the more opaque it is, the more challenges the learner will encounter. Most EFL students have a limited vocabulary and can struggle with phonemes which are unfamiliar. Morphological understanding can be constrained by grammatical features of the first language such as whether a word-ending conveys specific meaning and how dense the grammar is. Knowledge of first language grammar can interfere with the acquisition of second/foreign language grammar and lack of exposure to L2/EFL limits semantic understanding. All of these constitute challenges to reading comprehension in foreign language.

Extra-linguistic abilities can also play an inhibitive role. Poor automaticity leads to reduced fluency and challenges in drawing inferences from text. Lack of relevant background information and cultural knowledge, means that learners lack the schemata for good comprehension. Topic interest is a powerful motivator and attitudes shape both self-concept and incentive to overcome challenges in understanding text. Poor knowledge of text structure can lead to an increased cognitive load, and awareness of text features such as organisation and layout can reduce this load. Cultural notions embedded in text can interfere with the processing of meaning and the type of purpose of the text, such as narrative or expository can make it easier or more difficult for readers to engage in higher-level processing such as the drawing of inferences.

All of these are further influenced by the way in which material is delivered by the instructor. The extent to which students are supported and errors remediated will influence how much is understood. This can depend as much on institutional factors such as class size and amount of homework, as on the teacher's approach to classroom activities and his/her theory of learning and teaching. The use of teaching strategies such as scaffolding and environmental simulation have been found to improve comprehension, as have the teaching of reading strategies.

The literature review presented in this section shows that there is an extensive body of research dedicated to the study of reading comprehension in both L1 and L2. Some studies have suggested optimizing reading comprehension through the teaching of specific reading strategies (e.g., Al-Nofai, 2010; Hung, 2007; Alam, *et al.*, 1988), while others suggest that this is best accomplished through a more general reading program (e.g. Pathan & Al-Dersi, 2013; Abdellah, 2012; Yamashita, 2008), or through making students aware of reading strategies and leaving them to explore the strategies independently (e.g. Alsamadani, 2009; Ibrahim, 2008; Amer, 1994).

Further studies have focused on reading comprehension skills including, vocabulary (e.g. Mebarki, 2011; Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008; Zhang & Annual, 2008; Huang, 2005, 2006; Haynes & Baker, 1993), including grammar (e.g. Kaivanpanah & Alavi, 2008; Hay *et. al.*, 2005; Gelderen *et al.*, 2004; Paribakht, 2004; Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Alderson, 1993), phonology (e.g. Saigh & Schmitt, 2012; Jannuzi, 1998; Allan, 1997; Ellis, 1996; Harrington &

Sawyer, 1992), morphology (e.g. Jeon, 2011; Hanley, Tzeng & Haung, 1999), and student interest in reading material (e.g. Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman, 2011).

Section Two: Theoretical Framework

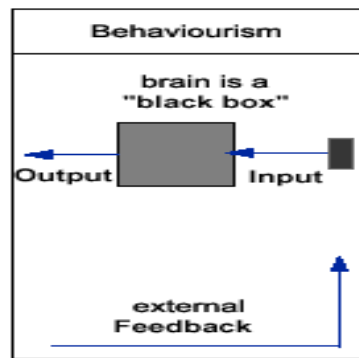
In the first part of this chapter a number of factors affecting the development of reading and reading comprehension were considered in the light of previous research in the field. Many theories and models have been proposed by educationalists and theorists in their attempt to understand and optimize teaching and learning. In this section, I will outline a number of these in order to position the theoretical framework of the current research.

Four theoretical perspectives will be considered: Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Sociocultural theory.

3.10 Behaviourism

Behaviourism is a theory of learning based on the assumptions of the positivist paradigm. It is primarily associated with four theorists: Pavlov (1849 - 1936), Thorndike (1874 - 1949), Watson (1878 - 1958) and, in particular, Skinner (1904 - 1990) who researched many practical applications of behavioural theories and research. Like all behaviourists, Skinner claimed that human behaviours can be observed and measured quantitatively (Mergel, 1998). Using the model of operant conditioning, he hypothesized that learning is a change in behaviour brought about as a result of the consequence of that behaviour in the form of an environmental stimulus. When the outcome of the behavior is negative, it constitutes punishment to the organism, and the behavior is unlikely to be repeated. However, when the outcome is positive, it constitutes reward and is likely to be repeated. Skinner called positive outcomes reinforcements. Repeated reinforcement leads to stable and consolidated learning. Figure 1 illustrates this dynamic, where input is the behavior, output its consequence and feedback is how the consequence relates to later behavior.

4) Figure 3.1: Model of the operant conditioning process (behaviourism)



Operant conditioning theorists claim that reinforcement or reward is essential in order to obtain a desired behaviour or response. However, other theorists within the behavioral perspective argue that some kinds of learning occur without the use of reinforcement or punishment (Cherry, n.d). For example, Bandura in McLeod (2011) found that children will imitate behavior simply by observing others being rewarded for that behavior: this is called 'vicarious reinforcement'. However, children, and indeed people in general, do not imitate all reinforced behavior that they see. Rather, they select particular 'role models' to follow on the basis of those models' characteristics, and sometimes even generate new behaviours based on unreinforced behaviors which they have observed (Mergel, 1998).

A major advantage of behavioural theory is the distinctive idea, contributed by Skinner, that learner's motivations can be explained in terms of quantifiable deprivation and reinforcement schedules (InstructionalDesign.org, 2014). The audio-lingual teaching method used in EFL classrooms uses listening and repetition so learners learn to react automatically to linguistic cues. According to the behavioural model, teachers should take this into consideration in their teaching practice.

In the reading process, the environmental cue (or stimulus) is the printed word on the page. According to Samuels & Kamil (1988: 25), behaviorism treats reading as a word-recognition response where "little attempt [is] made to explain what [goes] on within the recesses of the mind that allow the human to make sense of the printed page". In this model, meaning resides in the text, and readers are seen as passive recipients of textual information and merely reproduce it (Pardede, 2006). This perspective sees reading as a 'bottom-up'

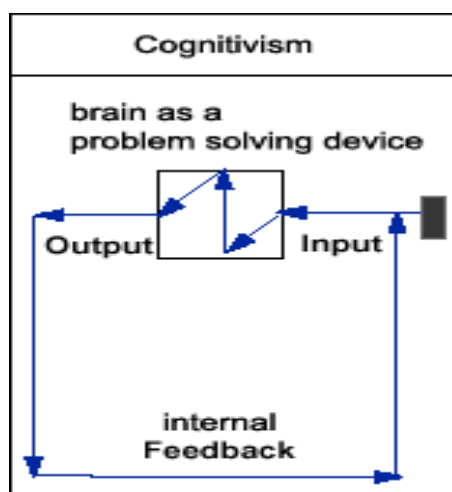
process, progressing from the parts of language (letters) to its whole meaning (see Section 3.2 above).

One criticism is that this theory implies that if learners find themselves in a situation where the stimulus for the desired response does not occur, they will not respond at all (Good & Brophy, 1990). Moreover, learners of language sometimes create words which they have never heard before, such as adding 's' to pluralise sheep (Harmer, 2010). This theory also fails to take into account any cognitive process which could occur during and after the learning interaction. In other words, behaviorists do not consider the internal mental states of individuals such as moods, feelings and thoughts (Good & Brophy, *ibid*). This last criticism was made, in particular by exponents of cognitivism.

3.11 Cognitivism

Cognitivism emerged as a reaction to the aforementioned limitations of behaviourism. Whilst cognitivists support behaviourist ideas such as reinforcement and its role in learning, they also stress the importance of the internal processes and cognitive structures by which humans acquire, organize, process and store information (Good & Brophy, *ibid*). Unlike behaviourists, cognitivists claim that people cannot be programmed to respond automatically to stimuli in their environment. Rather, changes in behaviour are an outcome of active mental processes including the consideration of potential outcomes (Good & Brophy, *ibid*). Learning is a cognitive process which takes place, not in environmental patterns, but within the dynamics of the learner's mind.

5) Figure 3.2: Model of Cognitive theory



Despite the empirical assertions of the behaviourist approach, cognitivists claim that mental functions (cognitive structures) can also be understood through study. They claim that each person's internal knowledge structure (schemata or background) recognises and processes new information and, where it conflicts with already-held schema, either accommodates to the new information by modifying or changing the schema (which leads to effective learning) or fails to accommodate and retains the old schema (which leads to failure to learn).

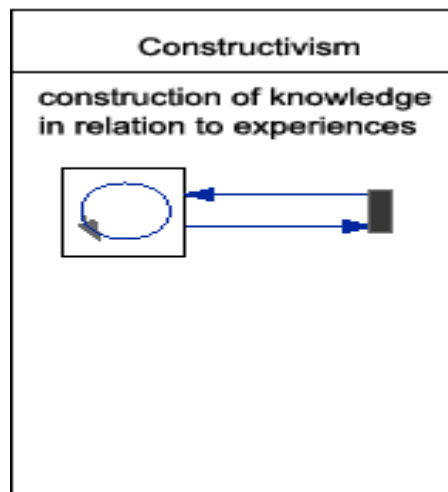
The cognitive approach supports the view that reading is not simply the extraction of meaning from a text, but an active mental process of connecting the text with knowledge which the reader brings with them to the act of reading, a process in which the reader's background knowledge plays a key role in the creation of meaning (Tierney and Pearson, 1994). Equal emphasis is placed on the role of schema and the printed word. Textual meaning becomes a whole set of experiences, rather than a verbatim rendering of content.

The most distinctive feature of cognitivism is that it trains learners to do a task consistently. However, this theory ignores the impact of the individuals' social experiences and their perspectives in viewing the reality of the external world (Good & Brophy, *ibid*). It may, for example, take account of the best way for a learner to accomplish the same task in two different learning situations (*ibid*). This shortcoming sets the stage for the emergence of opposing views, one of which is cognitive constructivist theory developed by Bruner.

3.12 Constructivism

Constructivism developed as a reaction to the programmed approaches of learning suggested by behaviourism and cognitivism. The objectivity of these approaches largely ignored the subjectivity of individual representations of external realities (Jonassen, 1994). In addition, the outcomes of cognitivist methods applied to learning could not easily be measured across different learners. Moreover, proponents of constructivism such as Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner claimed that both approaches neglected the significance of the learner's experience as a contributing factor to effective learning. In Schuman (1996), Bartlett (1932) and Piaget (1896-1980) argued that people construct their own unique perspective on the world through individual experiences and the formation of background or schema. Constructivist theory takes into account that the learner is able to problem-solve in different situations.

6) Figure 3.3: Model of the theory of constructivism



Some assumptions that frame constructivism were presented by (Merrill, 1991) as follows:

- experience constructs knowledge;
- learning is a personal interpretation of the world;
- learning is an active process in which meaning is developed and constructed on the basis of experience;
- conceptual growth comes from negotiating meaning, sharing of inter-personal perspectives and changing internal representations through collaborative learning;
- learning only becomes valuable when situated in realistic settings; when testing is integrated into the learning task and is not a separate activity.

From this it is clear that some constructivist views are based on both constructivism and cognitivism: in other words, constructivism accepts multiple individual perspectives and views learning as a personal interpretation of the world. Cognitivism has a place in constructivist theory since it recognizes the concept of schema and of building on accumulated prior knowledge (schemata) and experience (Mergel, 1998). Jonassen (1994, p.35) summarized the main characteristics which dominate constructivist learning environments and differentiate them from characteristics of other theories:

- provide multiple representations of reality;
- represent the natural complexity of the real world;
- focus on knowledge construction, not reproduction;

- present authentic tasks (contextualizing rather than abstracting instruction);
- provide real-world, case-based learning environments, rather than pre-determined instructional sequences;
- foster reflective practice;
- enable context-and content dependent knowledge construction;
- support collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation.

Constructivism was informed by Jean Piaget (1970) who developed a theory of cognitive development in which developmental stages relate to chronological ages. On one hand, this approach predicts what children are able to understand at different ages: on the other, it also predicts in what order and at what ages children develop cognitive abilities. Constructivists argue that humans cannot directly understand and use the information; rather, they construct learning or knowledge through concrete experiences which build schema through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. According to this approach, teachers should support students to be active constructors of their own knowledge-schemas, through providing experiences which encourage assimilation and accommodation in a rich learning environment.

Meaningful learning is at the core of constructivist theory. In the context of reading, it is a function of the integration of language cueing systems including syntax, semantics, grapho/phonics and pragmatics. At the centre of the reader's experience is the meaning of text, but according to one branch of this theory, that of social constructivism, this is processed through a number of layers including the grammatical and auditory components of language and, most significantly, the social and situational context of the text and the learner's encountering of it. Reading is therefore a whole-to-part-to-whole process in which the learner constructs a mental version of the text by using these cues (Urquhart & Weir, 1998).

Piaget's constructivism has been criticised on the basis that it overlooks the impact of culture and social interaction on learning (Santrock, 2001). Social constructivist theorists assert that the learner benefits from social interaction (Flavell, 1992; Matusov & Hayes, 2000). Bruner in *Instructional Design* (n.d) also included social values in his work on constructivism, claiming that learning is an active social process in which the learner constructs new ideas or

concepts based on current or past knowledge. According to social constructivism, learning is neither the passive shaping of behaviours through environmental manipulation, nor a purely internal process. Rather, the social context and experience bring out what is already present in the learner.

3.13 Sociocultural theory - the framework of the current study

In his Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) Vygotsky (1986) made an even stronger assertion about the impact of culture and society on learning. According to his sociocultural theory, learning is a social construct necessarily mediated by language and social discourse. According to this perspective, learning results from the individual's experience of the social which precedes personal cognitive development. In other words, language develops out of society, rather than the other way around. This approach is practical, empirical and suited to the current study for a number of reasons.

Firstly, SCT views learning as not merely an individual cognitive input-output process but as growth which occurs through interaction within the social context and with social actors. Cognitive processes do not develop in isolation so individual development cannot be understood without the cultural context within which it is embedded.

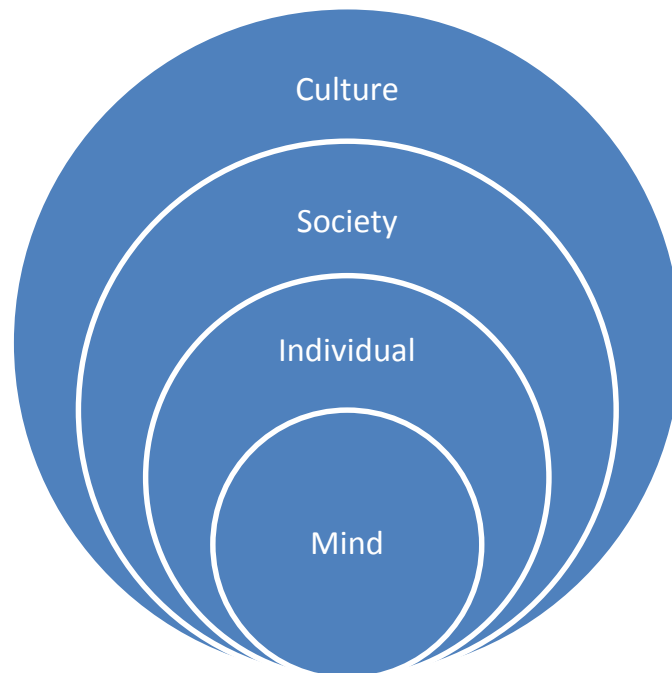
Secondly, reading comprehension which is the subject of this study, is grounded in a social context, used by people in their daily and working lives and relies for development on more than regular structured school lessons (Street, 1994). The development of literacy skills is more than the acquisition of a simple set of skills transferred from teacher to learner. Rather it involves the interaction of teacher, students, school and wider society. Vygotsky argues that consciousness develops as a result of socialization and states that "all the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Wertsch (1985) also argues that SCT is a way of describing human mental functioning as a product of both participation in and appropriation of forms of culturally mediated and integrated social activities. Vygotsky (1978) stated:

"Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher

functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (p.57).

Rather than taking the view that learners and their peers shape their own learning, SCT takes the view that social and cultural beliefs, attitudes, and personal history affect the nature of teaching and learning. If this theory is correct, then in the current study, Saudi Arabian social and cultural factors will influence the reading comprehension of Saudi EFL university students.

7) Figure 3.4: Model of sociocultural theory



Thirdly, Vygotsky emphasises the role of language as a mediative tool in cognitive development. He argues that “thought and language [interaction] are the key to the nature of human consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1962: 28). According to this perspective the whole process of acquiring language is derived from and defined by social processes, including linguistic interactions with other language users. Its influence is not limited to the learning of language itself, but also shapes the mental activities which lie behind language use. This is especially true of reading comprehension and the thought processes which underlie the meaning of text. This suggests that the process of learning a second language will involve also learning the cultural world view of the second-language users. Where the social opportunity to acquire that world view is lacking, it is likely to interfere with reading comprehension.

Having considered the above theories of learning and their implications for effective language learning and given the focus of this research on reading comprehension challenges which are the result of interactions between individual readers and the texts they read, the current study is informed by Vygotsky's theory of learning and psychological development and in particular by SCT as a theoretical framework and a lens for interpreting the data collected. I believe it to be the most relevant theory because it provides a framework which accommodates both the inter-individual and intra-individual sides of the reader's linguistic interaction with text. The socio-cultural perspective on interaction as the way of bringing personal meaning to a task integrates well with my purpose of collecting data on comprehension as an interaction between the reader, their social and cultural world and the text.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss the value of other approaches. Therefore, in places I have also incorporated concepts from other perspectives into the learning framework and research methodology of this study, and in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. In particular, cognitivism, with its emphasis on intra-individual aspects of learning, has contributed greatly to theories of learning through a wide and varied body of research and literature and to my own consciousness-raising. It is also widely acknowledged that eclecticism is valuable in generating a clearer and comprehensive picture of a subject under investigation than any single point of view.

3.14 The gab in literature

Much of the literature on EFL learning and teaching, does not differentiate between the various social and cultural settings in which EFL learners learn English. The very acronym, suggest that English is 'foreign' to all learners in a similar way. However, EFL readers vary in the nature of their L1 (e.g., whether it shares a script or script direction with English, phonic system, etc.). They also vary in the amount and type of access they have to English (e.g., to native speakers, reading materials, English media etc.). This means that EFL learners are not a homogeneous group, but that the cognitive processes which underpin the learning of English as a foreign language will be different for different learners, based on their social and cultural context. This study takes into account not only the linguistic, but also the social and cultural factors which

affect the development of EFL reading, the processes which readers employ and the comprehension challenges they face.

Very few studies have explored EFL reading comprehension in its totality. None have linked reading processes to reading comprehension challenges from the reader's perspective by studying both within a single context. The current study will explore both EFL reading processes and reading comprehension challenges together with the reasons which underlie them through the lens of socio-cultural theory, using the TAP protocol supported by the Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR), in combination with the interview method. The simultaneous study of a number of reading processes and comprehension challenges from the participant's experience and perspective, using a combination of qualitative methods, is novel, particularly in the Arabic and Saudi Arabian EFL contexts. Its outcomes will be significant because it is exploring the status quo of the teaching and learning of English reading in the Arab world, and particularly in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the current study should provide a better understanding of EFL reading processes and comprehension challenges, and present a clearer picture to teachers, educators and policy-makers of the challenges experienced by students in their reading of English text.

3.15 Summary of section two

It can be seen that there is theoretical disagreement about the constituents of successful learning. Theories vary both in their fundamental principles and in the importance placed on external, or environmental, and internal, or cognitive, factors in learning. Early theorists focused on the impact of the environment and saw behavior as a response to the environmental outcomes of earlier or observed behavior. As a reaction to the empirical limitations of this approach, subsequent theories focused increasingly on the role of internal factors to the learning process. Initially they theorized and researched the role of mental activities such as the processing of schema as part of integrating new information but then moved on to consider the subjectivity of learners as participants in the learning process and learning as the construction of a private world of meaning. The final approach considered here re-introduced the role of the external environment in the form of social factors within which the learner is unavoidably embedded and which s/he brings with him/her into the learning

context and process. Such factors precede specific learning content and shape the efficacy of methods used by both teachers and learners.

This latter approach of Sociocultural Theory forms the theoretical framework of the current study.

3.16 Conclusion to chapter 3

This chapter has set out the theoretical background to the current study. In the first part, a number of theories of learning were outlined. They differed in the role assigned by each to internal and external factors in learning. These differences are largely a function of chronology and constitute a shift from largely external to largely internal emphases on learning. So, early theories such as behaviourism attributed learning to conditional environmental factors, whereas cognitivism, which followed emphasized the role of mental factors, such as the development of schema, in learning. The dialectic of theoretical development led to constructivism and sociocultural theory, both of which see learning as an individual combination of both internal and external influences as the social world both shapes and is shaped by experience and perception.

All students of English as a second language are already masters of their native tongue. The chapter went on to explore how L1 readers develop reading comprehension in order to understand how their processes and strategies might inform EFL comprehension. However, EFL acquisition differs from L1 in a number of important ways. Writing, sound and meaning systems vary widely, as do rules of syntax and semantics, so that many L1 skills are often not easily transferable into EFL learning.

A number of extra-linguistics abilities also affect EFL reading comprehension. For example, L1 vocabulary, syntax and semantics are acquired in everyday situations and from a very young age, whereas EFL is acquired later in life and explicitly, so that EFL fluency is more difficult to attain since linguistic processes are less automatic. Lack of EFL reading resources can also be loaded with unfamiliar cultural content, and poor levels of skill can interfere with both self-esteem and motivation to read and thereby could negatively impact on improving reading skills and comprehension. Features of EFL text, such as structure, cohesion, type and layout can also interfere with fluency and comprehension. However a number of supportive and student-centred teaching strategies can improve EFL reading comprehension. Specific

reading strategies can be taught to intentionally improve reading comprehension. EFL students can also be taught to recognise text features which improve comprehension.

The literature in this field is extensive. However much of it is positivistic in stance and quantitative in method. Such theories and methods overlook the experience of the very people whom EFL teaching is designed to develop. Interpretivist and qualitative alternatives to such theoretical perspectives and methods exist, including the Think-Aloud Protocol, the Retrospective Verbal Report and the interview. These methods will be used in the current study in order to make a unique contribution to this field of research and fill a gap in the literature on the subject.

Chapter 4: The Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore EFL reading comprehension challenges experienced by students in the Saudi Arabian university context. This chapter explains the methodology adopted in order to answer the three research questions listed below (see Section 4.4). These questions address five main areas of enquiry; the first is to identify the processes used by the students as they read; the second is to identify the reading comprehension challenges which result from these processes; the third is to explore the factors which affect these processes and challenges; the fourth is to explore these from the students' perspectives; the fifth is to explore them from the lecturers' perspectives. By approaching these enquiries from the perspectives of both students and teachers, on the one hand students are given a voice in describing their own experience, and on the other their lecturers, as experts in the field, can provide the researcher with informed understanding of these challenges. Together, these perspectives show how different points of view can be held about a phenomenon by multiple participants in the same context. They provide both a broader, more detailed and fuller picture of reading comprehension processes and challenges than information gathered from only one perspective.

I will outline the philosophical positions and ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin the research. I will then explain the research paradigm, interpretive design and, characteristics of the sample. Having reminded the reader of the research questions, I will then describe the qualitative data collection tools, research procedures, and data analysis procedures. This will demonstrate how trustworthiness is achieved in this study. Ethical considerations will also be addressed together with a consideration of limitations of the study and its findings.

4.2 Philosophical theories underpinning the current study

Educational research is designed to explore and understand cultural, social and psychological processes in educational frameworks. This can be done through the posing of questions and hypotheses which are investigated using methods which produce results which are useful in educational contexts (Dash, 1993).

Theoretical questions emerge from different conceptions and interpretations of reality. A variety of ontologies and epistemologies emanate from different paradigms, and determine the criteria of the theoretical framework and methodology of a study. Using these, the researcher can select and define problems for inquiry.

In Dash (1993) Kuhn 1962 defined a paradigm as “accepted examples of actual scientific practice, examples of which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together” (p.10). However Dash redefined it as “An integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools...” (p.10), and in 1996, Capra redefined it again as “a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way a community organizes itself” (p. 6).

A range of theoretical perspectives have emerged as a result of the historical growth in social sciences and educational research. In the exploration of social reality, Positivism was an early paradigm and acted as a platform for the development of post-positivism. These paradigms will be briefly outlined below in order to illustrate how they have informed the framework of the current study.

4.2.1 Positivism

The first proponent of this paradigm was August Comte who outlined his philosophical assumptions in 1845 (Crotty, 1998). According to this paradigm, social reality is explored through observation and measurement. This fits with the principles and assumptions of the scientific paradigm and is known as 'logical positivism' or 'logical empiricism'. Comte argues that true, objective knowledge is based on the experience of the senses and in order to understand human behavior, a researcher must limit investigation to what can be directly observed and measured. The positivistic goal is to quantitatively integrate and systematise findings into a meaningful pattern which is regarded as tentative and subject to further investigation. This involves the use of quantitative approaches which enhance precision in the description of variables and the understanding of relationships between them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Behaviorists adopted this paradigm in their theory and research. Skinner, for example, argued that the researcher must look to environmental conditions, and to positive and negative reinforcements, in order to explain and predict human behavior. Behavioural researchers conduct studies which employ measurement and analysis, such as surveys, correlation studies, experimental, quasi-experimental, and ex-post-facto research.

Positivists are criticized for their analysis of human behaviour as passive and environmentally determined. Furthermore, since we cannot directly observe some (mental) aspects of human activity, such as emotions and thoughts, objectivity was seen by critics as an inadequate account of human behaviour. According to other perspectives, subjectivity forms an important component of human experience, and needed to be included in the analysis. The subjective interpretation of social reality was brought onto the agenda and this provided the opportunity for post-positivism to emerge.

4.2.2 Post-positivism

Post-positivism emerged as a rejection of positivistic ideas and assumptions. It was established by Werner Heisenberg (1901-76) and Niels Bohr (1885-1962) who argued that the observer and the observed cannot be totally detached from each other and that the adoption of a positivistic stance in social science sacrifices accuracy (Crotty, 1998). Post-positivism emphasizes the role of human perception in the construction of knowledge; according to this perspective, we construct our view of social reality based on our perceptions and on the ideological positions we adopt; knowledge is individually experienced rather than externally acquired; social reality is multi-layered and complex and each phenomenon has multiple interpretations (Cohen et al, 2007). Post-positivists emphasize the deep understanding of phenomena and the importance, in research, of using multiple measures (triangulation) in order to verify and interpret findings. Their approach to social enquiry is subjectivist (interpretive) and focuses on qualitative data collection using methods such as personal interviews, participant observations, individual accounts and personal constructs. This is in direct contrast to the quantitative methods employed by positivists. The post-positivist perspective, in particular, the interpretivist stance, forms the basis of the current study.

4.2.3 The ontological assumption

Ontology is defined as “the study of being” and of “answering the question, what is there that can be known?” or “what is the nature of the reality?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 83; Crotty, 2003:10). There is a tension in social science research between the positivist/quantitative and interpretive/qualitative stances, on how to study social phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Each perspective adheres to its own ontological assumptions with regard to how research should be approached and conducted (Howe, 1988). Positivistic ontology assumes that there is an external reality which is separate from the individual who observes it. In the context of research, the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation are seen as two separate entities (Weber, 2004). Moreover, positivist epistemology aims to build knowledge of a reality which exists independently of the human mind but which forms the basis of human experience and provides the foundation for human knowledge. Positivists are interested primarily in numerical data as objective measurement of this reality, and adopt statistical methods to analyse observed patterns. This perspective maintains that social science inquiry should be objective; that is, that social observations should be treated with the same unbiased detachment as physical scientists treat physical phenomena.

The notion that meaning is objective has been challenged by the interpretivist perspective. According to Crotty (1998: 9) meaning "does not come out of an interplay between subject and object, but is imposed on the object by the subject. Here the object as such makes no contribution to the generation of meaning".

Interpretivists assume ontologically that reality and the individual who observes it are mutually dependent upon each other. Human perceptions of the world reflect a stream of experiences which the individual has accumulated throughout his/her life. According to this perspective, the individual's life-world is simultaneously both subjective and objective: the former reflects private perceptions about the meaning of the world, while the latter reflects negotiation of this meaning as individuals interact with others (Weber, 2004). Interpretive epistemology recognizes that knowledge reflects particularized goals, culture, experience and history. It is built through the social construction of meaning and of the world. Whilst interpretivists strive to make sense of the world, they also recognize that their sense-making activities take place within the framework of

their life-worlds and the goals they have for their work. They give precedence to subjectivity and are principally interested in the collection of narrative data and qualitative analysis.

4.2.4 The epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions emerge from ontological assumptions. An epistemology is a philosophical approach concerned with answering the question, 'what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and known?' It is defined as a "way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2003: 3). The epistemology of the current study is rooted in the interpretivist perspective, which is defined as the "view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality ... is contingent upon human practice, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 2003:42). According to this stance, individuals are constantly trying to attribute meaning to their experiences, and their understanding of the world is based on their interaction with it, together with subsequent reflection on experience. So when we encounter something new we must reconcile it with our previous experience and current ideas. This process may lead to either a change in what we believe, or to the rejection of new information as either incorrect or irrelevant. In this way, our world is constructed rather than discovered, and we are the active participants in the creation of our knowledge.

People as social actors also impact on each other through their intentions, beliefs, feelings and emotions, together with the context in which they live. Therefore, understanding a person's knowledge of the world is only possible through the interpretive process (Radnor, 2002). This argument was supported by Erickson who claimed that "different humans make sense differently" (p, 98). The current study is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed, and that a deep understanding of people's complex perceptions and experiences can only be gained through the collection of information which includes a combination of both participant contributions and interpretations by the researcher in the light of sensitive and in-depth questioning and analysis. The data collection tools used in such research allow for freedom and spontaneity on the part of participants which permit the expression of thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Such methods are open and exploratory and permit

researchers to be flexible and tailor subsequent enquiries to responses already given.

4.3 Methodology and design

The methodology of any study stems from the ontological assumptions and epistemological approach adopted by the researcher. In the current study, the methodology is shaped by the nature of interpretivist and socio-cultural perspectives on reading processes and comprehension challenges. This in turn shapes the particular methods used to collect data. This section discusses the methodology of the current study, justifies the choice of data collection methods and also the design and procedures of the fieldwork.

In the context of EFL in the Arab world, the current research is a case study of the Saudi Arabian setting. Because no earlier study has been conducted on EFL reading comprehension challenges in the Saudi setting, it is exploratory in nature.

4.3.1 The interpretivist approach

As stated above, the epistemology of this study arises from the interpretivist position and this section illustrates how this position has informed the design of current study. According to this approach, knowledge is socially constructed. However, in his socio-cultural theory Vygotsky (1986) made the stronger assertion that learning is not a mainly cognitive function, but a construct mediated by language and social discourse. Therefore, rather than language developing out of social interaction, learning is the product of the social which in turn is the product of linguistic interaction. This social interaction provides learners with the cognitive tools they need for development. Radnor stated that "...we interpret experience through the filters of existing knowledge and beliefs, and these existing knowledge and beliefs that we hold are a product of ourselves as active subjects construing meaning" (2002: 3).

Schwandt defined interpretivism as "an approach that assumes that the meaning of human action is inherent in that action, and the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning" (2007:106). Applying this stance to educational research, it is argued that individuals are unique and non-generalizable; each event or situation has multiple interpretations and perspectives; situations need

to be examined not only through the perspective of the researcher, but through that of the participants too (Cohen et al, 2007).

Vygotsky emphasises language as a tool which mediates cognitive development, arguing that, together, thought and language form the basis of human consciousness. From this perspective, language acquisition is both derived from and defined by the social process of linguistic interaction with other language users. In view of the exploratory nature of this study, and the specificity of its context, the interpretive/qualitative research is an appropriate choice, since it takes account of both the context within which participants act and their experience of experience from an emic point of view (Maxwell, 1996).

The aims of an interpretive approach are to understand how different points of view about a single phenomenon can be held by multiple participants in the same context. In the current study, the aim is to understand how different students' and lecturers' points of view can be integrated in order to create comprehensive data about reading comprehension challenges faced by university EFL Saudi students when reading English text.

The interpretative approach will enable the researcher to explain events from the insider's point of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It involves developing a description of an individual or setting from different perspectives, analyzing data for themes or categories and finally interpreting and drawing conclusions about meaning, both personally and theoretically (Wolcott, 1994).

From my point of view, there are multiple realities within the social world that can be understood only through the socio-cultural lens (see chapter 3.13: the sociocultural theory). This research focuses on the complexity of attempting to understand reading comprehension challenges by analysing the meanings that readers assign to them. Participants will each have their own thoughts and interpretations, and each will assign different meaning to the reading comprehension challenges they face. These are not only a product of their social interaction, but also of their perspectives which influence their social context, and undergo continuous change and revision.

The research questions of the current study reflect the multi-perspective nature of the interpretivist approach.

4.4 Research questions

The research questions are both a product of the approach outlined above, and lead to the selection of appropriate data collection methods. These are outlined in Chapter 1, but also bear repeating here in the context of the way on which they lead the methods used to answer them. They are as follows:

1. What are the reading aloud processes of Saudi Arabian university EFL students when reading English text and answering English comprehension questions and what factors influence these processes?
2. What are the Saudi Arabian EFL students' perspectives on their English reading comprehension challenges and to what factors do they ascribe them?
3. What are the EFL lecturers' perspectives on their EFL students' English reading comprehension challenges and are these perspectives consistent with their students' perspectives?

4.5 Data collection methods

According to Wellington (2000), research questions determine the research methods to be used. In order to be consistent with the interpretivist stance, qualitative data collection methods were employed in the current study. These methods enable researchers to mindfully create designs that effectively answer their research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzi.e, 2004). According to Radnor (2002), qualitative data "is the essence of the interpretive research" (p.29). It contrasts sharply with quantitative data collection methods where participants are given a selection of pre-coded, closed responses from which to select, thereby limiting their options to what the researcher has already designed. I therefore believe qualitative methods to be the most appropriate methods of data collection as they are consistent with the research aims, and that the data generated will answer the research questions.

In the current study, three highly effective but different qualitative data collection methods have been used to holistically explore the reading comprehension challenges which EFL Saudi university students encounter when reading English text. These are the Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP), Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR) and the Semi-Structured Interview (SSI). I have combined these three data collection techniques in order to devise a verification of the socially-constructed world, and will use them to interpret both

students' and lecturers' ideas, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, experiences and perceptions of the reality of reading comprehension challenges.

Patton (1990) conveys the importance of using pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge in the social sciences. Triangulation is "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005: 112). The more research findings are triangulated, the deeper the analysis and interpretation of phenomena they provide, and the more detailed and holistic the information that can be obtained (Johnson & Onwuegbuzi, 2004; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In the current study, the use of more than one method ensures a more thorough approach to answering the research questions than the use of only one. The quality of qualitative research findings is improved through the process of triangulation: of obtaining data from a number of different sources and in a number of different ways in order to obtain rich and valid information and answer a research question. In the current study, lecturers were asked about their students' reading comprehension challenges in order to explore them further from the additional perspective of experts in teaching related to those challenges.

One reason for conducting these interviews was that using their professional experience, lecturers might be able to contribute additional insights into the challenges their students face when reading and trying to understand English text. Their perspectives are valuable in a number of ways. Firstly, they are trained experts in the field of language teaching. Secondly, for the most part they come from and understand the Arabic culture of their students. Thirdly, living in Saudi Arabia, they have first-hand experience of the society their students come from and are learning in. Fourthly they know and regularly interact with the students both inside and outside of the classroom. This gives them many opportunities to observe students and their behaviour close-up. Another reason for the lecturer interviews was to find out whether their perspectives were consistent with those of their students.

The differences between the different data collections methods enable the weaknesses of each to be overcome by the strengths of the others. Their uses are justified as follows.

4.5.1 Verbal report types

Verbal Protocol Analysis is a method used to discover the psychological processes used by a person as they perform a task (Færch & Kasper, 1987; Ericsson & Simon, 1984, 1993). In this method, participants are asked to verbalise descriptions and elaborations of their thoughts, either as they become aware of them, or retrospectively. Cohen (1998) classified verbal reports into three types: self-report, self-observation and self-revelation.

Self-report is where learners explain their behaviour in general statements. An example of this would be on a questionnaire where a student is asked to describe how they learn language and responds with "I tend to be a speed listener" (ibid, p.34).

Self-revelation (think-aloud) is "stream of consciousness disclosure of thought processes while the information is being attended to" (ibid, p.34). For example, when a student uses the referent "they" in a sentence and the researcher asks "*Who does the word 'they' refer to?*" when the student is reading the word 'they' in a sentence. The TAP is a form of verbal report in which participants reveal their mental processes and learning behaviours whilst engaged in a task. It is considered the best method to access reading processes and to thereby discover reading comprehension challenges in a real-life situation (Whitney & Budd, 1996). The TAP was a protocol used in this study to gather information on reading comprehension challenges encountered by Saudi EFL university students. Participants were provided with a reading task and asked to read it aloud and verbalise their thoughts and responses whilst reading. Their reading was recorded using two audio recorders (see Section 4.8.2.1).

Self-observation is where a response relates to specific rather than general behaviour. It provides data which is either introspective or retrospective. For example, during reading, introspection would be a comment on what the reader was doing at the time, such as "I wonder what this word means". Retrospection would be a response to subsequent questioning, such as "*Why are you having difficulty reading this word?*" leading to the response "*Because I have never seen it before.*" Self-report is used in the current research in the RVR, where students participants listen to and respond to questions about their TAP reading.

4.5.1.1 The Think Aloud Protocol (TAP)

The TAP is an introspective technique used to elicit data about thought processes whilst engaged in carrying out a task or activity (Ericsson and Simon, 1993). It is used primarily by researchers working in the social sciences. In second language research, it has been widely used to gain access to and identify learners' mental processes and thinking strategies. Green (1998) asserts that the usefulness of the verbal protocol lies in "its ability to capture the dynamic nature of skilled performance...[and] provide a wealth of information on the cognitive processes used to carry out the task, information heeded as the task is carried out, but more importantly, changes occurring in both" (p.117).

By the year 2000, seventy-one research projects in the field of EFL had used the TAP to investigate reading and writing; speaking, vocabulary and grammar; translation, second language test-taking and second language reading (Gass & Mackey 2000). The use of the TAP in EFL research is particularly important in the light of limitations to the traditional product-oriented approaches often used by EFL researchers. For example, in his critique of research on reading comprehension, Alderson (2000) pointed out that much research in the field has been quantitative in nature, rather than qualitative (e.g., Abdallah, 2012; Alkhawaldeh, 2012; Mehrpour & Rahimi, 2010; Zhang & Annual, 2008; Huang, 2005, 2006; Mourtaga, 2004) and that the measured outcomes are usually provided in the form of test results. These frequently take the form of multiple choice or cloze tests and omit detailed information in the participant's voice, so that little insight is gained into how the reader has arrived at their interpretation. However, as he argued, to produce informative research about EFL reading, a broad range of information about learners is required. He further claimed that this gives substance to the notion that in-depth qualitative studies, rather than extensive quantitative research, are appropriate for the purpose of researching foreign language reading. However, to the best of my knowledge, none have used this method to explore EFL reading processes and comprehension challenges. Therefore, the current study is making a unique contribution to knowledge in the field of EFL reading comprehension challenges as the method may reveal information which has not been available when other methods are employed.

As a data collection method, the TAP has both strengths and limitations. Advocates of the method assert that the process of verbalising thoughts does not interfere with the thoughts themselves. Many influential researchers in the

field have supported its use as a popular protocol analysis. Its main strength lies in its ability to deliver insights into mental processes which are otherwise hidden, and to bring to light deep mechanisms relating to reading comprehension (Seng, 2007). It facilitates awareness, elaboration and discussion of methods and strategies used by readers in their efforts to make sense of text (Seng, 2007). Its powerfulness rests on the immediacy of the data it produces and it stands to contribute extensively to our knowledge of second-language reading (Rankin, 1988). Its open-ended and non-directive nature, enables second-language learners in particular, to stop, explore and monitor their understanding of what they are reading (McKeown and Gentilucci, 2007). Refinement of its implementation by subsequent researchers has led to the development of further data collection methods based on its foundations, such as Miscue Analysis and to the inclusion of prosodic and non-verbal communication (Schramm, 2005).

However, the TAP has also been criticised. The strongest criticism has been argued that the constant interruption of the reading process, either by marks in the text or by prompts by the researcher, disrupts the very process that the protocol claims to measure. For example, in Block's (1986) study, participants complained that being required to respond at the end of each sentence actually disrupted their comprehension, rather than enhancing it, as many advocates of the TAP instructional method assert. For this reason, Elekes (2000) advises that participants ought to be permitted to verbalise at their own pace. Cohen (1987) also argued that the presence and constant intervention of the researcher has a negative effect on both the amount and content of verbalisations. Participants are likely to be influenced by both experimenter expectancy and by social desirability bias. This makes them likely to produce verbalisations which they believe the researcher is looking for, and unlikely to verbalise verbalisations which paint them in a bad light. For this reason, Elekes also suggests that participants ought to be left on their own during recording of their thinking aloud (Elekes, *ibid*).

Ultimately, the quality and value of the TAP as a research method depends on the way in which it is implemented by researchers. Church and Beretier, (1983) said that the quality of information obtained could be improved by extensive training of participants in the method so that it becomes more familiar. Such training would involve the three stages of explanation of how the method

words, modelling so that participants can learn by observation, and supervised practice so that verbalisation becomes more automatic and natural.

Most studies of EFL reading comprehension challenges have also tested the effectiveness of intervention strategies designed to remedy a specific problem. However, in the current study, the TAP was used to explore EFL students' reading comprehension challenges. This verbal protocol enabled the researcher to access reading processes through the direct observation of difficulties encountered by student participants as they read text aloud. "Oral reading is the more easily observed mode and, therefore, has been the window through which researchers have commonly viewed the reading process" (Juel & Holmes, 1981, p.546). This reading aloud of the text, together with think-aloud comments about the difficulties participants encountered, created the potential for a much deeper understanding of the reading processes and the difficulties which could limit comprehension, than thinking aloud on its own would have done. These difficulties manifested in two different ways. Reading the text aloud enabled problems with the oral aspects of language (i.e., pronunciation) and student participants were also able to comment on these in the think-aloud aspect of the protocol. These comments also enabled participants to comment on the challenges they faced with regard to comprehension.

The TAP is being used here in a context where L1 orthography (Arabic) is completely different to that of L2 (English). The current study is unique both in being the first to use TAP to explore the range of reading comprehension challenges in this context, and in using the lens of socio-cultural theory to interpret data. This will constitute an important contribution to research in this field.

4.5.1.2 The Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR)

Some researchers have advocated the use of further verbal reporting to complement the TAP protocol. Rankin (1988) suggested that "as an additional safeguard, it may be advisable to have subjects do a retrospective analysis of the research passage after the thinking aloud session" (p. 125). Retrospective reports are obtained after the participant has completed the initial task, with the purpose of clarifying information obtained in the first data collection method. The purpose of a retrospective protocol is to enable the researcher to explore further the reasons for particular aspects of their participants' reading aloud and

think aloud comments. This is accomplished through playback of the audio recording, accompanied by direct and spontaneous questioning. It enables both clarification and deeper understanding of reading processes and challenges to comprehension and provides a far more comprehensive picture.

4.5.2 The interview method

An interview is "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situation of research data" (Kvale, 1996:14). In the research context, the interview 'conversation' involves the interviewer and interviewee in an imbalanced dialogue where the interviewer asks questions and the participant responds. Questions are fitted to a research question, formatted in advance, and follow a pre-designed schedule so that responses from different participants can be compared.

The literature on the interview method identifies a number of different types. For example, Patton (1990) outlines three types: informal conversational interviews, interview guide approaches and standardized open-ended interviews. Lincoln & Guba (1985) added structured interviews and Oppenheim (1992) added exploratory interviews. LeCompte & Preissle (1993) described six types: standardized, in-depth, ethnographic, elite, life history and focus groups. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) added group and semi-structured interviews (the latter of which has been used in this study). The types which dominate educational research are the structured, semi-structured, unstructured and group interview (focus group) (Grix, 2004).

The interview is a flexible tool, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the contexts in which they live and express how they perceive situations from their own viewpoint. According to the socio-cultural perspective, the reality of the world and knowledge emerge from interactions between people, so that "the interview is not exclusively either subjective or objective, it is inter-subjective" (Laing, 1967: 66, in Cohen, et al. 2007).

In line with this, and based on my epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed between participants, the interview is suitable for the theoretical principles of the socio-cultural and interpretivist stance. The best way

to extract meaning is to question participants in an interview setting where they feel free to say what they think. In addition to the TAP and the RVR, the interview is an appropriate and effective data collection method.

4.5.2.1 The semi-structured interview

Building on the data collected during the TAP and RVR protocols, the current study also used the qualitative semi-structured interview in order to focus on and further investigate the reading processes and challenges to comprehension faced by student participants. The interview enabled interviewees to elaborate on their reading in their own words, and thereby enabled me to understand their individual perspectives more thoroughly and to place them into the broader contexts of their social and cultural experiences. The semi-structured interview was deemed the best format for creating an open opportunity for participants to relate their experiences.

The structured interview in that pre-formatted questions form an interview schedule. However it is more flexible in that the order of questions can be changed based on the interviewer's perception of what seems appropriate. The wording of questions can be modified to suit individual participants and questions which seem inappropriate to a particular interviewee can be omitted. Where potentially interesting information is suggested, additional supplementary questions can be asked, and explanations can be provided for clarification. As Borg & Gall (1979) in Cohen, et al. (2007) recommend "in educational research [the researcher] usually includes some highly structured questions in their interview guide, but then ... aims toward a semi-structured level" (p.312). The main advantage of the semi-structured interview is that of flexibility - of using native language as a facilitator, the clarification of ambiguity and the ordering of questions and responses. In addition, the semi-structured interview creates space for the establishment of 'rapport' between the interviewer and interviewee so that the social relationship between them becomes closer and information can be gathered more easily.

The advantages and flexibility of the semi-structured interview make it more suitable than a structured interview to the objectives of the current study where the interview schedule is combined with an allowance of space for modifications, deletions and inclusion of questions and issues in order to

identify the range of reading processes and reading comprehension challenges that EFL University students in Saudi Arabia can encounter.

The semi-structured interview method also has limitations. For example, Cohen et al. (2007) argue that the flexibility in semi-structured interviews of changing the questions' sequence or wording can lead to different questions being asked of different participants so that the data obtained from one cannot be compared with the data from another on the same subject. In the current study, this shortcoming was overcome by reminding participants of the purpose of the interview whenever they diverted too far from its purpose.

4.5.3 Design of the data collection tools

Research and data collection methods provide parameters for the type of data obtained and the way in which it is collected. However the particular context of each study will generate design issues unique to that study. This section outlines the ways in which general design issues, including those relating to materials, were handled in the context of the current study.

4.5.3.1 Think Aloud Protocol (TAP)

The TAP protocol involved the reading of English expository text selected purposefully for the study. The TAP can be implemented either with the text being read silently while participants verbalise only about their thinking processes, or with reading aloud of the text together with think-aloud verbalizations. Most studies using the TAP have employed the silent reading method, but in the current study I have followed the example of the few who have used the reading aloud method because I am convinced by the literature which says that reading aloud gives you insight into the process of reading and the challenge to automaticity of punctuation, unfamiliar script, and phoneme grapheme relationships. Also none of this can be identified from silent reading alone. Hinchley and Levy (1988) found that reading aloud facilitated comprehension and that it also benefitted poor readers which as poorly-skilled EFL readers, participants in this study are likely to be. In my opinion, reading processes are inextricably linked to reading comprehension challenges and cannot be directly manifested apart from reading aloud.

In selecting this text I took into account the participants' English reading level and the text's linguistic challenges (see Section 4.5.3.2). In order to

ascertain this, I consulted three EFL teachers and experts in the field who said that the text matched the proficiency of participants. It was an extract from a Level One reading book, *Tapestry Reading 1, Middle East Edition*, published by Thomson Heinle in 2005 (Guleff, Sokolik, Lowther, 2005), which has been assigned as reading for EFL students at the King Saud university in Saudi Arabia. Because it is assigned for reading at female colleges, I was certain that the male participants in the current study had not read it before.

Two such texts were used, one for training student participants in how to perform the TAP, and the other for the research data collection. To ensure that student participants had not encountered the texts before, both were extracted from a text of the same level used at a different college. The first was entitled "*Comet Hale-Bopp*" (see Appendix 1). The second text was entitled "*Malls: Public places or private businesses?*" (see Appendix 2) which consisted of 338 words in ten short paragraphs and was followed by nine open-ended comprehension questions, both direct factual questions and general questions about the main ideas in the text. Below is the summary of the use of each of the data collection tools.

8) Table 4.1: The summary of the use of each data collection method

Method	Focus	Reason
Think Aloud Protocol during reading aloud (TAP)	Decoding process	The importance of automatic decoding in facilitating comprehension
Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR)	Challenges experienced by students in reading the text aloud	To understand students' perceptions of difficulty in decoding and comprehending while reading aloud
Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) with readers	Students' thoughts about the challenges they face in comprehending text	To understand challenges students think they face in comprehending text and what reasons they give for these difficulties
Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) with lecturers	Lecturers' thoughts about the challenges students face in comprehending text	To understand challenges lecturer think their students face in comprehending text

4.5.3.2 Criteria for selecting the reading materials text

According to Burmeister (1987), "there is a definite interaction between factors found in written materials and factors found within the person who is reading" (p.31). In selecting the text for the study, I had to take into consideration participants' reading levels, their content knowledge and interest, the linguistic challenges of the text, its suitability to Saudi Arabian cultural values and its length and layout, including support given by illustrations. I also believed that the text needed to pose a moderate challenge in order to explore the kinds of challenges faced by students in reading comprehension.

Alderson & Urquhart (1992: xxii) constructed a mathematical formula based on the length of words, measured in syllables, and of sentence to measure text readability. It is called *The Fog Index* and is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{No. of words} + \text{No. of 3-syllable words} \times 100 \times 0.4}{\text{No. of sentences} + \text{No. of words}}$$

$$\text{No. of sentences} + \text{No. of words}$$

David & Norazit (2000) assert that this formula is particularly suitable to measure the difficulty of text in the context of L2 reading. They categorized scores to match learning levels so that, for example, a score of 13-16 is suitable for undergraduate level. A score of 12 would indicate that the text was too easy and a score over 16 that it was too difficult. The readability of the text of the current study was calculated using the above formula, as follows:

$$\frac{\text{No. of words (338)} + \text{No. of 3-syllable words (20)} \times 100 \times 0.4}{\text{No. of sentences (31)} + \text{No. of words (338)}}$$

$$\text{No. of sentences (31)} + \text{No. of words (338)}$$

The result of 13.27 falls into the range of suitability for EFL undergraduate students.

In addition to the readability score, I consulted three EFL teachers and experts in this field and asked them to choose one of three potential texts, all of which seemed equally suitable for the research purpose. The text they chose was that mentioned above (Design and materials for the Think Aloud Protocol 4.5.3.1).

In the current study, three audio recorders were used to collect the TAP data a USB Sony recorder, an Apple iPad and an Apple iPhone. All were rechargeable with built-in memory storage. The USB was used to gather data

because of the ease with which data can be transferred to a computer, and the iPhone acted as a spare in the event of failure of the first recording device. The iPad recording was later used to replay the TAP recording, as part of the RVR procedure.

4.5.3.3 Design for the Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR)

The audio recordings from the TAP were used to carry out the RVR. The iPad was used to replay the TAP material and both the USB and iPhone were used to record the RVR in order to provide both a primary and back-up source.

The researcher identified challenges manifested in the recording of the reading. Some of these challenges were comments made by student which indicated problems they were having in reading or understanding the text. Some were manifested in reading behaviours such as hesitation, mispronunciation and repetition of words. At these points the researcher asked direct questions of the participant about the reasons for the comments and behaviours in order to evoke explanations and provide insights into their reading processes and comprehension challenges. The RVR complemented the TAP and achieved a more comprehensive understanding of participants' cognitive processes during reading (Lau, 2006).

In the current study, in addition to the TAP, following each participant's contribution, I carried out an RVR protocol in order to gain a deeper understanding and clarification of what the participant had reported at a number of points during the TAP. This was accomplished by replaying the recording to the participant so that he could hear his reading and asking questions about comments made or reading behaviours manifested in the TAP recording.

4.5.3.4 Design for the Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI)

I designed two semi-structured interview schedules to explore the challenges EFL students encounter when reading English text. One was designed for students in order to gather data about their perspectives on their reading processes and challenges and factors affecting them. The other was for their lecturers to gather data about their perspectives on their students' reading processes and challenges and the factors affecting them. Both interviews consisted of a number of questions which covered participants' experiences and memories of learning to read in English including their access to reading,

reading habits, teaching styles and methods, reading strategies and techniques, comprehension challenges and ideas for improving their EFL reading and overcoming their challenges.

The interview schedule for both students and lecturers consisted of questions in six sections designed on the basis of the literature review and were designed to answer the research questions. For example, questions about the availability of reading resources were based on studies which suggest limited access to resources is linked to poor reading, and questions on the teaching of English phonic patterns in school were linked to studies which have found that phonic awareness is a key element of reading comprehension. Similarly, questions about factors affecting reading challenges were designed to answer the third research question on students' perspectives on their reading comprehension challenges, and the similar questions in the lecturer interview were designed to answer the third research question on the lecturer's perspectives on their students' reading challenges.

The interview questions were grouped into six sections as indicated in the table below.

9) Table 4.1 Sections of the interview schedule

SECTION	TITLE
1	Access to reading
2	Teaching reading
3	Cues to reading comprehension
4	The reading process
5	Student's recurrent reading behaviours
6	Factors affecting reading challenges

The purpose of interpretive research is to obtain elaborated information and in the interview method, this is best accomplished by open-ended questioning where the participant can freely express whatever they want to say. This is the opposite of closed questioning where responses are mainly limited to numbers indicating frequency (e.g., '5') and to polar choices (e.g., Yes/No). Most of the questions on the interview schedule in the current study were open-ended in nature. However, there were a few exceptions. For example, most of the questions in Section 1 on Access to reading, were designed to provide background information on the participant and their context. No elaboration was required or necessary, although participants were always free to say as much as they wished and to expand verbally on polar responses, and tended to disagree with my prompts most of the time. On the other hand, the questions in

Section 4 on Reading processes were entirely open-ended. These questions were central to the research questions so it was important to get as much explanatory detail as possible in order to fully understand student participants' reading processes and challenges. They responded quite freely to this kind of open questioning.

Most of the questions in the other four sections were also open-ended, although there were exceptions, such as the question in Section 2 about the teaching of the pronunciation of final, stable syllables. The question was formulated in terms of strong prior research findings, and expression of opinion was not relevant to whether or not the pronunciations had or had not been taught. Questions in Section 3, on Cues to reading comprehension, appear to be closed, but were indirect invitations for participants to speak openly. For example, 'Do you think you are good at English spelling?' invites the interviewee, not only to say 'yes' or 'no', but to elaborate, such as giving reasons as to why he believes he is or is not good at spelling. Several questions in Sections 4 and 5, were in two parts, consisting of an initial closed question, such as 'Do you skip over parts of an English text as you read?', followed by 'If so, why do you do this?'. Although elaboration was overtly requested here, such direct questioning is not always necessary in order to obtain full responses. Because this was a long interview, question structures were deliberately varied so that the interview process did not appear mechanized and with the aims of the research constantly in mind.

Together, I believed that both student and lecturer responses to these questions would yield a comprehensive understanding of the reading comprehension challenges faced by the student participants (see Appendix 3).

The student interview schedule (see Appendix 4) was constructed in such a way as to be easily understood and to gather the appropriate information in the minimum time. The questions were written in English and then translated into Arabic for ease of understanding by student participants. To ensure accurate translation, two Saudi academic colleagues who are English experts checked the Arabic translation against the English version. They advised some small changes which were implemented by the researcher and then validated the translation as an accurate representation of the intended meaning.

The lecturer interview schedule (see Appendix 5) was derived from the student interview schedule and was similar in structure. For the most part it

paralleled the student interview so that student and lecturer responses could be compared in order to find out whether they supported each other. Some questions were removed from the student interview schedule and wording changed appropriately. The lecturer interview was written and administered in English so that no translation was necessary. The removed questions related to student experiences which the lecturer would have no knowledge about, e.g., whether their parents had a home library and how often they read English text. Questions about the subjective experiences which were asked of student participants were omitted so that it was shorter. It was both written and delivered in English.

A great deal of attention was paid to ensuring the trustworthiness of the interviews and to making sure that the two sets of interview questions provided valid information from both students and lecturers. Because "what seems straightforward to the researcher may be baffling to another person not fully in the picture" (Wragg, 1978: 15), the first draft of the interview schedule was revised by my supervisors, and circulated to experienced people in this field of research for comment. As a result, some questions were modified and others excluded and the number of questions was reduced from sixty-one to forty in the student's interview and thirty out of fifty-seven in the lecturers'. These are both longer than standard interviews which average fifteen to twenty questions, but it was felt that this number of questions was necessary in order to cover the many aspects of the reading process and comprehension challenges.

4.6 Participants

All research is carried out on a sample extracted from the target population to whom the researcher seeks to generalize the findings of the study. Samples can be selected using a number of methods, such as random, stratified, etc. but when research topics address particular groups or issues, they are recruited purposively; that is, from a specific group of people (Silverman, 2001). Samples can also be convenient in the sense that participants are recruited on the basis of ease of access by the researcher and willingness to participate (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). In the current study, the target population was Arab, and particularly Saudi, EFL students and the sampling method was purposive and convenience (Given, 2008).

A purposive sample is one where the characteristics of the participants match the purpose of the research. Participants are taken from a sampling frame or list of all potential participants and are recruited, either by a method imposed by the researcher, or by invitation to volunteer. The latter is a self-selecting sample. In the current study, the sampling frame was all EFL students and lecturers at three rural Saudi Arabian universities (TR, SH and MA), which had been established within five years prior to the beginning of the study. The purpose of using three universities in this study was to maximise the number of potential volunteers. The sample was self-selecting.

The strict segregation of the sexes in Saudi society, including educational institutions, meant that, as a researcher, I could only have access to male students and lecturers. It was also not possible to conduct the data collection using mechanical communications such as the telephone, because in many places in Saudi Arabia, particularly in rural areas, such as where this research was conducted, it is still not considered appropriate to record female voices (Alsubaie, 2007).

A total of sixteen male students and six male lecturers volunteered to take part. This is an average of 5 students and 2 lecturers per university. The characteristics of both the student and lecturer participants are described below.

4.6.1 Students

All the student participants were reading for a Bachelor's degree with English as their major subject. All were male and aged either 20 or 21 years of age. They came from a culturally homogenous social background and had a similar level of expertise in English.

The English Bachelor of Arts programmes delivered by these universities consist of eight levels taught across four years and students with the following characteristics were recruited to volunteer. Firstly, they were completing the fourth of these levels and were therefore at the mid-point of their undergraduate studies. Secondly, they had recently finished reading comprehension courses which included the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and were therefore assumed to be aware of their comprehension challenges and factors which could contribute to them. Thirdly, they had recent links (within the last two years) to their prior learning experiences in their previous schools.

Students were told by their lecturers that they would gain three marks towards their learning module assignment for taking part in the study. They were also made aware of the learning opportunity which participation represented. Sixteen students volunteered to take part and participated in the TAP and the SSI. I found that they were eager to say what was on their minds.

After participating in the TAP, the sixteen student participants were all asked to take part in the RVR. Nine of these students volunteered and completed the RVR.

4.6.2 Lecturers

Six lecturers from the English Departments in these universities also volunteered to take part in the interview. Four held a Masters degree and two held PhD level qualification in English and were teaching reading as part of the delivery of the Bachelor of Arts EFL degree. However, despite being made responsible for teaching reading in English, none were specialists in the topic. None of them were trained teachers.

The lecturers were all aged between thirty-five and forty-five years. None were Saudi citizens. Two were from Jordan, two from Egypt, one from Sudan and one from India. Most had obtained their qualifications in their home countries; however one of the Egyptian lecturers had obtained his Masters degree in the United Kingdom.

4.7 Data collection procedures

Before undertaking the research data collection, it was necessary to assess the usability of the data collection methods and the materials used. This involved conducting trials of data collection methods in order to identify issues arising from the way the research was to be carried out and which could affect the trustworthiness of the findings.

4.7.1 Piloting the data collection tools

Pilot studies give advance warning about where research protocols can be adopted in the main study and where they need to be changed because they are either inappropriate or too complicated (Teijlingen & Hundley 2001). Before embarking on the research data collection, I conducted pilot studies of each of the research protocols in order to assess how realistic and workable they were,

to identify and remedy any logistical problems which could arise during the research data collection and to gain experience of and familiarity with the protocols before collecting the research data. The interviews were also piloted. The pilot studies for the current study were conducted about two months before the research data collection. This enabled me to review the research protocols and make improvements where necessary. All three research protocols were piloted: the TAP, the RVR and the SSI, in that order.

The TAP pilot sample consisted of two EFL students from the fourth level at the English department of TR University who volunteered to take part. They were from the same target population as the participants in the research data collection. The purpose of this process was to assess the level of difficulty of the text and identify any challenges the participants may encounter in comprehending and answering its questions. Findings from piloting the TAP showed that the text and its questions were moderately comprehensible. On questioning, both students stated that the text was generally understandable but also contained some comprehension challenges. However, in order to explore the challenges faced by students in reading comprehension, the text needed to pose a moderate challenge to readers. Since such challenges are essential to the purpose of this research, the text level was retained for use in the research data collection. Piloting the TAP also gave me greater confidence about how to administer this protocol with the research sample.

The same two students who participated in the TAP pilot above, also volunteered to participate in piloting the RVR protocol and the pilot RVR was conducted immediately after the pilot TAP as it would be in the research data collection.

Piloting the RVR gave me valuable insights into how the protocol was shaped by the unique individual responses of each participant during their TAP data collection, and how RVR questions needed to be shaped to suit the specific pattern of TAP responses for each participant. As a result of the RVR pilot, the procedure became more familiar to me and I was able to become more flexible in how and when to pose questions and extract more valuable comments from participants in the main study.

For piloting the students' interviews, the same two students who volunteered to participate in both the TAP and RVR pilots also agreed to pilot the semi-structured interview which followed on immediately from the end of the

RVR. Responses given by the students during the piloting of the interview highlighted areas of overlap between questions so that I combined several in the revised interview schedule. It also highlighted issues with the wording of some questions, which I reworded in the final version of the interview schedule. These improvements ensured greater clarity and improved the trustworthiness of the interview findings.

The lecturer's interview was piloted by two of my colleagues who are currently completing their PhDs in the United Kingdom. Although they are not currently lecturing at universities in Saudi Arabia, they have done so in the past. I requested feedback on the interview schedule and they made suggestions which led to some questions being reworded and others omitted so that overall the number of questions was reduced.

4.7.2 Training students to use the Think Aloud Protocol (TAP)

Ericsson and Simon (1984/93) suggest that before undertaking TAP research data collection it is wise to train participants on the use of the protocol in order for them to develop the skill of thinking aloud and to become familiar with and comfortable in doing so while reading English text. I therefore implemented a training programme to familiarise student participants with verbalizing while engaged in reading. Participants were briefed in Arabic on the research purpose and on how to use the TAP and RVR. This training occurred at the end of each school day in a small, quiet lecturer's room.

Previous researchers in the field have used markers such as asterisks (i.e., *) to mark reminder points. However because of the possibility of readers confusing asterisks with punctuation marks and affecting their comprehension, the current study used underlining. I inserted a line under every fifth word of the text as a cue to participants to verbalise their thinking at that point. Because underlining was used, markers could be placed at the beginning, middle or end of sentences, without interfering with the punctuation or meaning of the text. I also trained participants to think-aloud whenever I raised my pen in case they did not notice the underlining. I reassured them they could use either Arabic or English when verbalising their thoughts.

I began by demonstrating to participants how I verbalized while reading English text. However I also made them aware that there are wide individual differences in verbalizations and that whatever they said would be acceptable.

When they had been trained in how to use the TAP protocol, participants also learned how to participate in the RVR. I trained each participant individually in this way for 20-25 minutes before moving on to undertake the research data TAP and RVR collections.

4.7.3 Data collection

Following the pilot study and the training of participants on how to use the TAP and RVR protocols, the research data collection took place. This happened during any free time which students had during weekday mornings. The data collections were undertaken in a quiet room provided by the university. For a breakdown of the timing of the data collections please see Appendix 23.

4.7.3.1 The Think Aloud Protocol data collection

Following immediately the TAP and RVR training, each participant continued on to participate in the research data collection. They were informed that they could use whichever language, Arabic or English, they were most comfortable in to verbalise and to report any ideas, thoughts or challenges they encountered while reading the text.

Before each participant entered the research room, I prepared the environment, including adjusting lighting, seating, air-conditioning and laying out the text for reading. I switched on and checked the three recording devices. When all was ready, I switched on the recording devices and the participant was given a sign to begin. I had earlier informed participants that I would try not to interrupt while they were engaged in the TAP. However, I had also informed them that they could ask questions while reading and that I would answer them when the TAP had been completed.

When the TAP had been completed, each participant then answered the nine comprehension questions at the end of the text (see Appendix 2). The purpose of these questions was to provide a measure of comprehension of the text they had just read. However, it should be noted that responses to questioning may be a measure, not of comprehension, but of memory as material which has been understood, can be forgotten. The questions were presented in written form at the end of, and on the same sheet as, the text they had just read. Participants were told they could read the questions silently or out loud, or that I could read the questions to them orally. Most asked for the

questions to be read aloud to them by me. They answered the questions verbally, and the responses were audio-taped and later transcribed.

It took a total of approximately thirty-five minutes for each participant to complete the TAP protocol. This included the reading, and answering the comprehension questions at the end of the text.

4.7.3.2 The Retrospective Verbal Report data collection

When each participant finished his reading and TAP protocol, I replayed to him the recording of his material. I stopped the replay at any point where it was clear that he had experienced a comprehension problem, for example, difficulty reading words, neglecting conjunctions, overlooking punctuation etc. and asked him to comment on his behaviour or thoughts at that point. Each participant's RVR task lasted for approximately fifteen minutes.

4.7.3.3 Student interviews

All students who participated in the TAP and/or the RVR also agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview which followed on from the RVR protocol. The use of the same participants for the Semi Structured Interview (SSI) means that participant variables which could reduce the trustworthiness of the study were reduced. Material in the SSI also related to the TAP and RVR protocols so that it was possible triangulate the data from all three sources.

The SSI was conducted in the same room as the TAP and RVR protocols. After a short break of a few minutes, students completed their interviews in an average of forty minutes. Student interviews were conducted in Arabic.

Student interviews followed the student interview schedule (see Appendix 4). When a participant's response required clarification, I employed supplementary questioning. After conducting the first few interviews, I found it easier to spontaneously recall the interview schedule and the interview process became smoother and more informal. In order not to discomfort participants, I avoided facing participants directly and invited them to sit at an approximately ninety-degree angle to me where I could also have full view of their gestures, verbal cues and hesitations. If they seemed to be having difficulty in understanding a question, I rephrased and simplified it.

Most students stated that it was the first time they had participated in research and that they had been motivated to volunteer because they were curious to see how it was conducted. At the end of the SSI, I thanked each participant and informed him of the value of information he had contributed. As each participant left, I asked him not to discuss the text or comprehension questions with any other students until all the data had been collected from all the participants and each participant agreed not to do so.

All student interviews were audio-taped for later translation and transcription.

4.7.3.4 The Interview with lecturers

Lecturer interviews were conducted during their free time on campus. They took place in offices which were available at the time on campus. Most interviews took place in the late afternoon when lessons had finished. Lecturers were told they could choose which language to be interviewed in, Arabic or English, and they all chose English. The interviews took an average of thirty minutes to conduct. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

4.8 Data analysis of the TAP, RVR and SSIs

Following the collection of data from student and lecturer participants, the data was analysed in order to answer the research questions. Information which identified the reading processes provided data which answered the first research question. Information about reading comprehension challenges of the student participants provided data which answered the second research question. Information gathered from the lecturer interview, provided data which answered the third research questions. This section will describe how data was analysed using techniques developed for analysis of qualitative/interpretative data.

According to Little (1999) such analysis is a reciprocal process, rather than a sequence of discrete activities undertaken by the researcher alone. Thus, the data analysis was informed by what I have read and learnt from the background literature and from what expert colleagues told me about their experiences with data analysis.

The data collected from all three research protocols were qualitative in nature, and similar processes for analysing their data were followed.

Firstly, responses for all protocols were transcribed. Where the responses had been provided in Arabic (i.e., some student TAP and RVR responses and all of their interview data) they were translated into English. A sample of the transcripts and their translations were checked against recordings by two expert colleagues. They were also validated via Skype by both student and lecturer participants. Together, these measures contribute to the trustworthiness of the findings (see Section 4.9).

The data was then analysed using the six steps of data analysis advocated by Radnor (2002). These involve:

topic ordering; responses of all three qualitative data procedures were identified as explicitly addressing the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study together with those which were implicitly embedded in the text and need to be identified and drawn out.

constructing categories; responses which related to each other were fitted into categories which were checked for distinctness in a meaningful way from other categories. Some categories were clearly stated whilst others were embedded implicitly in responses and need to be drawn out.

reading for content; data were chunked through coding and labelling to assign units of meaning to the data. Codes were assigned to operational definitions and headings reflecting the concepts they describe in relation to the conceptual framework of the study. The broad categories were divided into sub-categories.

completing coded sheets; coded responses from all participants were collated to identify where themes were shared (see coding frameworks in Appendices, 12, 14, 15 & 16)

generating coded transcripts; transcripts were highlighted and annotated using the generated codes (see Appendices 15 & 16). Codes are reduced and subsumed into a number of themes by integrating similar categories into one main theme to be controllable fragments. Check-coding was conducted by doing the coding twice at two different times).

analysis to interpreting the data; the data was analysed manually. Conclusions will be drawn through what Holliday (2002) calls the combining of data, commentary and argument in order to produce substantial descriptions and insightful views of participants with regard to their reading comprehension challenges.

4.8.1 TAP analysis

Reading comprehension challenges were made evident in the reading process, in two main ways: in cued comments made while reading (thinking aloud) and, in spontaneous reading behaviours exhibited by student participants while reading.

4.8.1.1 Analysis of comments made during the TAP

The purpose of the TAP was to elicit comments while students participants read aloud. These comments were cued and took the form of reflections such "this word is new to me" or "I think that 'government' means 'corporation' " These comments indicated where students did not understand lexical elements. Such comments were noted on the TAP transcript and coded on the basis of the type of difficulty encountered, e.g., 'new word' in the case of the former and 'guessing meaning incorrectly' in the case of the latter. Each time a new type of comment was made, a new code was formed. Comments which essentially indicated the same kind of comprehension difficulty were grouped into a single code, e.g., "this is a new word for me" was grouped with "I have not seen this word before" because they both indicate failure to comprehend due to novelty.

Each student transcript was coded and the numbers of each type of comment exhibited were totalled. These totals were then entered for each student into the correct categories of the coding framework. A sample transcript of the TAP protocol is shown in Appendix 12, together with mark-ups of the codes and totals for each type of comment.

4.8.1.2 Analysis of behaviours exhibited during the TAP

As students read, a number of behaviours were exhibited. Many of these behaviours demonstrated that they had not understood the text. Examples included leaving out a word or ignoring a punctuation mark. These behaviours were noted on the TAP transcript and a new code was formed for each new type encountered. As more codes were developed, different themes emerged. For example, 'substituting an incorrect word' (e.g., 'our' instead of 'or') and 'substituting a non-word for a word' (e.g., 'bobli' for 'public') are both lexical errors which mean that the student failed to understand the word. A category containing a range of lexical/semantic deficits was therefore created. Several

such categories were formed based on such themes, e.g., pronunciation, phonics etc.

When a behaviour was clearly of a type that had already been coded, e.g., 'unsuccessful repetition of a word', it was allocated to that code. So, for example, repetition of a non-word such as 'preevat ... preevat' [private] or "scorty ... scorty" [security] demonstrates a failure to understand the word.

However, unique and original responses were not assimilated into pre-existing categories and all uncommon responses received a separate code. E.g., inserting a vowel produced a different and usually incorrect word (e.g., 'mean' instead of 'men'), which is different to inserting a consonant (e.g., 'illeglilly' instead of 'illegally).

Each student transcript was coded and the numbers of each type of behaviour were totaled. These totals were then entered for each student into the correct categories of the coding framework. These totals are shown in Appendix 12, together with mark-ups of the codes and totals for each type of reading behaviour.

4.8.1.3 Comprehension question analysis

Responses to the comprehension questions were coded as correct, incorrect or unanswered (see Appendix 13). Correct responses were coded into three types: correct, partially-correct or correct-but-contradictory. Correct answers demonstrated that the student understood both the text and the question (e.g., Question; "Why were some people upset about the arrests?"; Answer; "*Because they had some problems in the mall*"). Partially-correct answers demonstrated incomplete understanding of both the text and the question (e.g., Question; "Why does the mall say that freedom of speech does not apply there?", Answer; "*Because the place is private or public*"). Correct but contradictory answers were where part of the answer was correct, but another part was not, which demonstrated that the student had not fully understood either the text or the question (e.g., Question; "Do you think malls should be considered private or public places? Why?", Answer; "*From my point of view is to be private because it helped by the government*").

Incorrect answers were also coded into a number of types: answers which were unrelated to the question (e.g., Question; "What is freedom of speech?", Answer; "*So they do not miss it*"); answers where a key word had

been misinterpreted (e.g., Question; "What information were they giving people?", Answer; "*For freedom of speech*"); answers where it was evident that the student lacked lexical understanding (e.g., Question; "Why were people were upset about their arrests?", Answer; "*Meaning 'upset', forgotten*"), and answers which were based on students' personal experiences rather than on information they had gained from the text (e.g., Question; "Do you think malls should be considered private or public places? Why?", Answer; "*Private, because it is available all time and easy access*").

4.8.2. RVR analysis

In order to collect data for the Retrospective Verbal Report, I played back the audiotape of the participant's read text and questioned them as they listened to it. There was great variety in the way students read text, so questions were not standardized and differed greatly between participants, depending on the unique features of each student's reading. Questions were comments they made in the TAP, behaviours (such as repetition) which were evident from the playback, and errors they made while reading. Further questions about the understanding of specific words and of the text in general were also asked. Nine students of the sixteen students who took part in the TAP also volunteered to participate in the RVR. They are Students 1-7, 13 and 16.

To analyse the data, I asked questions and responses were copied in their entirety into a table in order to compare individual RVR's (see Appendix 19). A number of patterns of questioning emerged, such as questions about why students read slowly, why they struggled with particular words, why they mispronounced certain sounds and whether and why they used reading strategies. These question patterns were grouped into six categories: Beginning reading, Slow/hesitant reading, Reading challenges, Pronunciation, Reading strategies and Comprehension.

Student responses to the researcher's questions were then considered and themes emerged within each category, forming the basis of a coding framework (see Appendix 14).

4.8.3 Semi-Structured Interview analysis (both student and lecturer)

Interview responses for students and lecturers were both analysed in the same way. Responses were coded as they were encountered. Many fell into

dualistic categories, such as 'yes/no', 'do/don't'. When a response was clearly of this type, e.g., 'yes', it was allocated to the appropriate code. When additional comments were made, e.g., 'yes, but ...' then additional sub-categories were formed. When other responses appeared, e.g., 'I don't know', they were coded separately. All atypical responses received a separate individual code (see Appendices 15 & 16).

As dominant themes emerged, the findings for each interview question were summarized. However, atypical and individual responses were not subsumed under already-formed categories but retained as separate codes. In many places a single student gave a response which included a number of different codes. For this reason, the total number of responses to a question may be more than the total number of students.

4.9 Trustworthiness

Just as validity and reliability are measures of the dependability of quantitative studies and their findings, Bryman (2008:700) has defined 'trustworthiness' as, "a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research". Guba & Lincoln (1994) suggested that qualitative research would benefit from having its own criteria to measure quality. Given (2008) has asserted that the parameters used to assess quantitative research are often ill-suited to its purpose, so that the notion of trustworthiness provides an ideal platform which researchers can use to demonstrate the soundness of their findings. Since this is now a well-recognised research practice, trustworthiness was used as the main criteria for assessing the qualitative elements of this study.

To ensure the data collected in this study was of the highest possible standard, a number of techniques were employed. These included: triangulation of data collection tools (TAP, RVR and SSI); validation of transcriptions of verbal reports and interviews; validation of translations from English to Arabic (interview schedule) and from Arabic to English (transcriptions of student TAP, RVR and interview); triangulation of codes and categories for data analysis.

For it to be successfully established in a qualitative study, Creswell & Miller (2000), Bryman (2008), and Given (2008) all agree that four criteria must be in place.

4.9.1 Credibility

The first of these is credibility. Given (2008:138) defines credibility as, “the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researcher’s interpretations of them.” The effective researcher must ensure that the paradigm constructs within data interpretations are aligned with and sympathetic to the realities understood and experienced by the study’s participants, a view endorsed by (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In the current study the accurate transcription, translation and recording of interpretive data accounts were maximised through the process of researcher/colleague triangulation and cross-checking with participant feedback. Triangulation was strengthened through the use of two expert Saudi Arabian colleagues, both of whom hold PhDs from the School of Education at Exeter University in the United Kingdom. They reviewed the translations from English into Arabic of the interview schedule, and from Arabic into English of student-participants’ responses in all three data collection methods and made some slight changes.

Participant feedback checks were facilitated through Skype validating their transcripts in order to determine accuracy and agreement, and to identify and ameliorate areas of disagreement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This methodology ensured that the researcher was able to formulate a credible and defensible understanding of the process from the participants’ perspective, thus validating the accuracy of the findings.

Credibility was further enhanced through the triangulation of the categorizing and coding procedures during data analysis. The same expert colleagues as mentioned above also checked the data for accuracy of coding and categorization. This was accomplished by asking one colleague to code the responses of one participant for a segment of data. This will be later correlated with my initial coding and a reliability co-efficient will be calculated to measure agreement.

4.9.2 Dependability

The second procedure to establish trustworthiness to measure the quality of qualitative data collection methods is dependability. This is defined by Schwandt (2007:258) as “the process of the enquiry and the inquirer’s

responsibility for ensuring that the process of the enquiry is logical, traceable and documented.” Mathison (1988) and Murray (1999) have identified that methodological triangulation can be used as a tool to augment the legitimacy of research findings through the use of a range of interrogation techniques within a single study.

The legitimacy of methodological triangulation is supported by Jack & Raturi’s (2006) assertion that the weaknesses inherent in one research method can be counter-balanced by the strengths of another. In order to ensure an adequate level of dependability within this study, a range of data collection methods were used (i.e. the TAP, RVR and SSI) to ensure deeper exploration of participants’ views. This triangulation improved the probability of data being comprehensive.

4.9.3 Authenticity

A third procedure for establishing trustworthiness is authenticity. Given (2008) states that a key requirement of research is to ensure that only inferences which match the data are drawn, and also that the researcher does not make assertions which are not properly supported by the underlying data.

Authenticity was achieved in the current study through the use of two strategies:

1. A clear and unambiguous description of the data collection process and forms of data analysis to be employed;
2. The adoption of Given’s (2008) model of an ‘audit trail’. In this procedure an independent reviewer is brought in to ensure that both the research process and interpretations of any data are consistent with each other and accurate from both a literature and methodological perspective.

The authenticity of the current study was gained by cross-checking via Skype to validate student-participants’ transcripts of interviews to confirm the transcripts as accurate representations of their meanings. Where anomalies were found, these were examined and corrected to be consistent with the participant’s version of what should be transcribed.

4.9.4 Transferability

The fourth procedure for establishing trustworthiness is transferability. Given (2008) identifies transferability as a reflection of the researcher’s awareness of

the extent of his/her qualitative study so that its applicability to other contexts can be easily recognised. Ritchie & Lewis (2003) assert that assessing representational generalisation is based on two broad issues:

1. The accuracy of the data collection and analysis processes. The current study ensured this through the use of methodological triangulation and adherence to rigorous data collection procedures and analysis as described above.
2. The representativeness of the sample. Ritchie & Lewis (2003) also assert that representation in this context is inclusive, rather than statistical. In the current study this was achieved through investigating the experience and perceptions of a number of participants who are typical of the range of reading comprehension challenges faced by Saudi Arabian EFL students.

The students in this sample are from the same cultures and pre-Higher Education educational background as Saudi undergraduate EFL students in general. It is therefore reasonable to transfer these findings to Saudi Arabian EFL students in general.

There are approximately fifty EFL students in the English departments of the three universities from which the sample is drawn. This sample of sixteen therefore constitutes approximately one third of the target population. This suggests a high level of transferability of findings.

4.10 Ethical issues

Any social research, including that conducted in educational settings and involves human participants contains the potential for harm to be caused to those participants. To protect participants ethical codes provide a framework of moral principles which guide it from inception through to the completion and publication of results and beyond. Research ethics involve more than simple conduct during the collection of data, and include all steps from writing the proposal through to disseminating and archiving the findings. To facilitate awareness of the possible implications of such harm, I attended a workshop conducted by the Ethics committee at the University of Exeter. This has enabled me to appreciate and understand the ethical issues that can arise from conducting the current study.

Harm to participants can have its source in a number of aspects of the research setting and procedure. These include but are not limited to interventions enacted by the researcher, power relationships between the researcher and participants, participants' autonomy (their right to withdraw at any stage of the study), the confidentiality of data obtained and anonymity of participants. Rights of participant consent, acknowledgement, and privacy are also ethical issues in educational research.

This is becoming an increasingly salient issue in many developed countries. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) have drawn up codes of inquiry - principles and rules which should guide research from an ethical point of view. These principles in educational research enable researchers to operate defensibly in the political context (Pring, 2000). European, UK and International Law require that participants give unambiguous consent to participate, to opt out of data collection and to be protected from having their data transferred to countries with less vigorous protection of privacy (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 1995). The key elements of this code are autonomy, information-giving, understanding, competence, voluntariness and consent-giving. Autonomy affirms individual rights to give informed consent once the risks and benefits have been made clear. Proposed research is also scrutinized by Ethics Committees to minimize or eliminate any potential harm to participants.

Principles of harm and of ethics are however culturally and socially relative and can only be assessed within the contexts of research studies. What constitutes harm in one country may not in another; similarly, consent may be obtained in different ways according to different patterns of social organization. In the Saudi Arabian setting, consent is centralized in the institutions of the university, as well as individual participants agreeing to take part.

In the current study, several ethical issues were addressed. Participants were informed of the purpose of this study and assured that there was no risk involved in participation. They were given a consent form to read and sign confirming their voluntary participation and assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were told that their records would be kept anonymously in order to maintain personal confidentiality. Finally, participants were asked for permission for the use of transcribed verbalisations which would

not render them identifiable, or highlight information that could jeopardise their future. This was achieved by informing them that the data would be kept in a secure place and that apart from the researcher and his supervisor, no other party would have access to that data. In total, these measures minimized the risk that participants could come to any harm as a result of participating in the current study.

4.10.1 Consents of institutions and participants

Consent for participation was obtained in writing from a variety of sources, including the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London, the Vice-Principals of the Universities, and from both student and lecturer participants. The consent of Heads of Departments was given verbally.

To undertake the current study it was necessary to obtain a letter from the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London, which represents Saudi higher education institutions and is my sponsor. The letter was addressed to each of the Saudi universities, requesting their official agreement to permit their English departments and students to participate in the current study (see Appendix: 6 permission letter). Once permission was received from the Bureau, I searched the Internet for the contact details of members of staff from each of the universities. However, no results were forthcoming, so I emailed each university's general email address. When I did not receive a reply I posted letters from the United Kingdom to each of the universities by recorded post and waited for more than 20 days without a reply. The Saudi Cultural Bureau in London could not permit me to undertake data collection without official agreement from at least one of the three universities.

I asked a friend in Saudi to obtain the telephone number of one of the lecturers or principals in one of the universities. At last I established telephone contact with one of the college Vice Principals who facilitated the issuing of permission to conduct the research in the English Department of that university. Fifteen days later he emailed his agreement which I forwarded to the Cultural Bureau in London who then authorised me to gather the research information in Saudi Arabia. Based on this permission I travelled to Saudi Arabia to undertake the fieldwork.

On arrival in Saudi Arabia I located the postal addresses of the remaining two universities and forwarded letters requesting permission to undertake the

research in their institutions. Unfortunately, one of the letters was lost in the post so I travelled to that university and personally delivered a copy to the university's administration office. It then took two weeks to reach the required department. During this time I discovered that my third letter had reached the third university but not its English department. Miscommunication, lack of reliable lines of communication, lack of motivation amongst administrative-staff and bureaucracy all played a major role in delaying the obtaining of permissions and presented something of a challenge to be overcome. However, during the process of gaining the two outstanding permissions, and in order to make positive use of my time, I started gathering data from the university from which I had first received permission before my arrival.

After gaining all the permissions, I met the chairman of each English department and explained the significance, purpose and procedure of the research and how it could contribute to the Saudi EFL context. They approved my requests and encouraged English students and lecturers to volunteer to participate. I met the students in class and explained the value of the research and its potential significance to Saudi students, culture and to the university. Each student participant signed a consent form immediately prior to embarking on the actual data collection protocol in order to be fully aware of the assurance of confidentiality and security of data and of his right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Faculty members welcomed me and asked for a brief about my research purposes and methods. They were all very interested and most volunteered to take part during their free time. I registered their names and contacts details and organized a place and time for each SSI to take place.

Prior to interview, each lecturer signed the consent form and agreed to restrictions on confidentiality and anonymity. Most agreed for the interview to be audio-taped and said that they preferred to be interviewed in English as they felt more comfortable. Following each interview I thanked each participant and informed him of the value of information he had contributed.

4.11 Limitations

No matter how well a researcher plans and carries out a study, there will always be limitations on the quality and generalisability of data. Limitations of studies centre on a number of topics such as sample characteristics, the validity of data

protocols, standardization of procedures and research settings, potential deficits in data analysis and procedures, researcher bias etc.

Firstly with regard to the sample, it could be argued that since only males took part, the findings do not describe the experiences of female EFL students in Saudi Arabian universities. The sample was a convenience sample, selected for ease of access which means that findings may be biased by characteristics of the particular social sub-group to which the researcher happens to have access such as geographical location. They were also volunteers which introduces the potential for uncharacteristic 'helpfulness' and 'confidence' (in their reading comprehension) amongst those willing to subject themselves to research scrutiny. Both teacher and student participants were from universities which are 'emergent' in that they are less than five years old and so may face more challenges than those in universities where practices are more established. Data was also collected in the 2011/12 academic year so that findings may not represent the experience of students and lecturers in other cohorts.

Secondly, a number of limitations derive from the data collection protocols. For example, the TAP relies heavily on verbal report which may be affected by problems such as the verbal ability of each participant, inadvertent cueing by the researcher or from the text, the 'strangeness' of the environment, the disruption to the reading process of speaking whilst reading and of unconscious thinking processes which may interfere with the participants stream of consciousness (Henk, 1993; Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991, Singhal, 2001). The RVR is criticized for the time interval between initial and retrospective data collection which can reduce accuracy due to forgetting of previously-generated material due to the constraints of working memory, omission of information not attended to, filtering to give the impression of completeness and rationalization to give the impression of coherence (Green 1998).

Similarly the interview and, in particular the semi-structured interview are subject to a range of limitations. For example, the personal nature of the semi structured interview may make findings difficult to be generalised (respondents may effectively be answering different questions).

Although aspects of the data collection procedures were standardized, such as the university room in which student interviews took places, the layout

of the room and material and time of day, it was not possible to standardize others. For example, lecturer interviews were conducted in a variety of situations which varied in degree of formality. Although student participation took place in the morning, the specific time varied so that some students had already attended lectures etc. and may have been fatigued throughout the procedure.

A major source of bias can be that of researcher expectancy. Because the data in the current study was collected by me as the researcher, it is possible that the interpretive approach of the study could have influenced interactions with participants and data provided, in a number of ways which the epistemology of the design makes more probable. Similarly, interpretive data analysis is subject to bias at a number of stages. For example, where responses were provided in Arabic and translated into English for analysis, implicit meaning may be lost such as where an Arabic word does not have a parallel in English. Despite attempts to validate verbal information obtained during all three data collection methods, the entire thematic, categorizing and coding process is prone to the subjectivity of the researcher.

All research, whether quantitative or qualitative is subject to limitations and they cannot ever be entirely eliminated from the research process. This may be the case with interpretivist research. However limitations are not only shortcomings; they also serve as points for increasing awareness and consideration. Such limitations are the price researchers pay for detailed, explanatory, rich, in-depth data which leads to a much more developed understanding of the topic under study.

4.12 Conclusions

It can be seen that the methodology outlined above is appropriate to the philosophical underpinnings and epistemological assumptions of the research. Verbal protocols and interview are consistent with the interpretivist approach and fit well with the research goal of understanding the subjectivity of reading comprehension processes used by Saudi Arabian EFL students as they encounter comprehension challenges when reading English text. They also appropriately inform the exploration of lecturer's perceptions of these challenges. Audio-recording the TAP, RVR and SSI directly 'give voice' to both sides of the teaching/learning interaction and the inclusion of both students and

lecturers in the sample provides a broad perspective on Saudi EFL reading challenges.

It is necessary for research in the social sciences to conform to ethical standards of practice and these were taken into account as well as considerations of potential harm and benefits to participants as a result of taking part in the study. Issues relating to the sampling method and representativeness of the sample were also considered in relation to the generalisability of research findings and limitations arising from them.

From the preceding discussion it is also clear that the methodologies employed bring with them a range of advantages which enhance the data obtained, as well as limitations which need to be faced and, if possible, overcome. Triangulation improves the quality of data gathered and techniques such as piloting materials and procedures and pre-training participants in the skills required for participation constitute such measures to strengthen the data collection procedure. The quality of data obtained is further enhanced by measures taken to improve trustworthiness and to restrict sources of bias or distortion in the findings.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the data together with their analysis and then consider them with respect to the research questions in Chapter One. This chapter will be divided into two parts.

In the first part, I will present the findings from each of the four data sets. Firstly, I will present a measure of student comprehension from their responses to the nine questions which form part of one of the data collection methods - the Think-Aloud Protocol. Secondly, I will present the findings of the Think-Aloud Protocol in two sections: (1) in the form of comments made by students during the data collection and (2) by analysis of their reading behaviours while reading aloud. Thirdly, I will present the findings of the Retrospective Verbal Report. Fourthly, I will present the findings of the interviews with students. Finally, I will present the findings of the interview with lecturers.

In the second part I will present the analysis of the data sets in terms of the research questions presented in Chapter 1. With respect to Research Question 1, I will address the reading processes of Saudi Arabian University EFL students by exploring their responses during the Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) and the Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR), and consider the factors influencing the reading aloud processes. Secondly, with respect to Research Question 2, I will explore student participants' perceptions of their reading comprehension challenges and the factors to which they ascribe them. Thirdly, with respect to Research Question 3, I will address lecturer's perceptions of their students' reading comprehension challenges by exploring their responses to questions in the lecturer interviews.

Part I: The Findings from Each of the Four Data Sets

5.2 Student reading comprehension

The comprehension questions followed on from the TAP and were coded using data analysis methods described in Chapter 4.8.1.3. The findings from the comprehension questions are summarized in the Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.2a below. Blank spaces in the table indicate unanswered questions where

students remained silent rather than answering the question. All percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

10) Table 5.1: No. of correct answers by question no. and category

Comprehension questions by category										
Category keys	C- Completely correct									
	PC – Partially correct									
	CC – Correct but contradictory									
	V – lacking vocabulary knowledge									
	M – misinterpreted word									
	U – unrelated answer									
E – answer based on experience, not reading the text										
Categories	Comprehension Question No.									TOTAL
	Q: 1	Q: 2	Q: 3	Q: 4	Q: 5	Q: 6	Q: 7	Q: 8	Q: 9	
C			1	4	3		2	1	2	13
PC	1		3		1	1			1	7
CC									2	2
Total correct	1		4	4	4	1	2	1	5	22 (15.3%)
V	6	2	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	20
M	7	5	1	3	1	1	1			19
U	1	2		2	1		1	1		8
E							2	3	4	9
Total incorrect	14	9	5	6	4	3	5	5	5	56 (38.8%)
Unanswered	1	7	7	6	8	12	9	10	6	66 (45.8%)
Total – incorrect and unanswered	15	16	12	12	12	15	14	15	11	122 (84.7%)
Grand total										144 (100%)

Four key findings are evident in Table 5.1. Firstly only 15% of answers were correct (ranging from completely to partly correct). Secondly, 46% of questions were not answered at all and the participant remained silent rather than answering the question. Another 39% of questions were answered incorrectly. This makes a total of 85% of questions either not answered at all, or answered incorrectly. Thirdly, incorrect answers were mainly due to lack of vocabulary (36% - 20 out of 56 incorrect answers), or misunderstanding of the text (34% - 19 out of 56 incorrect answers). Finally 16% of answers (9 out of 56 incorrect answers) were derived from students' own experiences rather than from understanding derived from the text. This was made particularly clear in responses to the question which asked their opinion about whether malls should be public or private places. For example, S8 said:

"Places you can see people talk, not private".

Similarly S11 answered:

"Public because there are activities or social gatherings".

Students also confused the meanings of 'public' and 'private' as S3 indicated when he said:

"From my point of view to be private because it helped by the government".

Their perceptions were that if a mall was private, then it would only be used by the mall-owner and nobody would go there (S6) or that if it was public people would treat it like their own house (S13).

The comprehension questions varied in the amount of L2 cultural knowledge required to answer them. For example, question 2, the question which showed least comprehension of all, and which no student answered correctly, was about sweatshops which are generally an alien concept to Saudi citizens. Question 8 was also very poorly answered (15 out of 16 participants showed no understanding). It was also very culturally loaded, asking about activities which Americans usually engage in at malls but which Saudis do not.

11) Table 5.2: No. of correct answers by participant and category

Student No.	Total no. of correct answers					Total incorrect	Unanswered	Total incorrect and unanswered	TOTAL
1	0 (0%)					4	5	9	9
2	1 (11.11%)					4	4	8	9
3	3 (33.33%)					5	1	6	9
4	2 (22.22%)					6	1	7	9
5	1 (11.11%)					4	4	8	9
6	3 (33.33%)					4	2	6	9
7	0 (0%)					2	7	9	9
8	1 (11.11%)					6	2	8	9
9	0 (0%)					2	7	9	9
10	0 (0%)					6	3	9	9
11	6 (66.66%)					1	2	3	9
12	0 (0%)					1	8	9	9
13	4 (44.44%)					4	1	5	9
14	0 (0%)					1	8	9	9
15	0 (0%)					3	6	9	9
16	1 (11.11%)					3	5	8	9
Total	22 (15.28%)					56		122	144

12) Table 5.2a: No. of students who obtained each correct score		
Score	No. of students	Percentage of students who obtained that score
9	0	0 %
8	0	0 %
7	0	0 %
6	1	6.25 %
5	0	0 %
4	1	6.25 %
3	2	12.5 %
2	1	6.25 %
1	4	25 %
0	7	43.75 %
Total	16	100 %

Two key findings are evident in Table 5.2. Firstly, there are large individual differences ranging from 0% to 67% accuracy. Secondly, a total of 44% (seven out of sixteen) of students gave no correct answers at all and a further 25% (four out of sixteen) gave only one correct answer out of nine. Altogether this makes a total of 69% of students who gave one or less correct answers.

Overall, this data shows that there was very little comprehension of the

text. Only 15% of answers were correct in any way and only one student gave more than 50% correct answers. This suggests that these students could be experiencing reading comprehension challenges and thereby provides a rationale for the study of these challenges using the reading aloud process with thinking aloud protocol. The reasons for these challenges will be considered through analysis of the following data sets as they relate to the research questions.

5.3 Findings and analysis of participants verbal protocols

In order to collect research data which would answer the research questions in Chapter One, four verbal protocols were used. One of these was the Lecturer Interview (see Section 5.3.4 below). The other three were student verbal protocols including the TAP, RVR and Student Interview (SSI). Findings from these protocols and analysis of these findings are presented below.

5.3.1 The Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP)

As outlined in Chapter 4.8.1, the TAP protocol yielded two types of information: comments made by student participants while they read aloud, and behaviours exhibited by them as they read. The data for the TAP comments were coded according to protocols described in Chapter 4.8.1.1 and the findings are presented below.

5.3.1.1 Comments made while reading

A total of 399 comments were made by the sixteen students. This constitutes an average of twenty-five comments per student.

13) Table 5.3: Summary of comments made during the TAP

CATEGORY OF COMMENT	TYPE OF COMMENT	No. CO M	% OF TOTAL	EXAMPLE OF COMMENT
Failure to understand	New word	121	30.32%	'argument – this is a new word for me'
	Comment on lack of knowledge	90	22.55%	'I don't know the meaning of this word'
	Questioning word meaning	43	10.77%	'what does demonstration mean'
	Long words are difficult	6	1.50%	'long syllable words are difficult for me'
	Guess phrase/sentence meaning incorrectly	32	8.02%	'Paying a fine for freedom'
	Guess word meaning incorrectly	13	3.26%	'I think 'mall' means 'mile'
	Incorrect translation into Arabic	15	3.76%	'steal' means 'buy' in Arabic
	Failure to understand phrase	5	1.25%	'I don't understand the final segment'
	Failure to understand	5	1.25%	'I don't understand this sentence'

	sentence			
	Confusing of different words	2	0.50%	Confusion of 'public', distance' and 'space'
	Confusing similar spelling	2	0.50%	'private', 'protestors', 'property'
	Confused meaning of phrase	3	0.75%	'freedom' and 'speeches' [freedom of speech]
Total		337	84.46%	
Reading challenges	Expression of anxiety	7	1.75%	'This is the first time I read a text'
	Difficult to decode and pronounce	9	2.25%	'demo..nstratshon [demonstration] is difficult for me'
	Hard to read/remember	15	3.76%	'these are hard to read'
Total		31	7.77%	
Correct understanding	Guessing meaning correctly	31	7.77%	'punishment' is 'penalty'
Overall total		399	100%	Average of 25 comments per student

Table 5.3 shows that in total, more than 85% of comments demonstrated a clear failure on the part of students to understand what they were reading and the commonest reason given for this was lack of vocabulary; the failure to recognise words, and confusion of words which are similar, particularly those which start with the same sound. A further 8% of comments related to challenges with reading because the student found a word hard to decode and pronounce with automaticity, often because it was long, i.e., contained more than one or two syllables, (henceforth, decoding means being able to recognise and analyse a printed word and to connect it to the spoken word it represents).

The think-aloud comments fell into three main categories: Failure to understand, Reading challenges and Correct understanding.

The largest category, accounting for 85% of comments, was where students indicated failures to understand what they were reading. The largest group of failures (30% or 121 comments) involved encountering new words, e.g., S2 says "*I don't understand 'properly'. It is new to me*" and S12 says "*Ill...illgly ... I struggle with this word, I don't know it*". Long words also posed a problem (2%); as S7 and S8 said:

"The long syllable words are difficult for me" (S7).

"Long words are hard to read" (S8).

Students also noted lack of knowledge (23% of comments) and of failing to understand the meaning of a word (e.g., "*'Arrested' ... I do not know the meaning of this word*" or phrase or sentence (3% of comments). 11% questioned the meaning of a word, phrase or sentence (e.g., "*What does 'demonstration' mean?*") making a total of 68% about problems with new, long or difficult words. They were also confused by words with similar spelling when reading aloud or similar meaning (2% of comments) (e.g., e.g., '*private' ... 'protestors' ... 'property' ... these are all similar words for me.*") and S7

commented that *"They are hard to read or remember particularly if they have similar spelling"*. Students also tried to guess meaning without success (11% of comments).

The second category related to reading challenges. Students expressed anxiety about reading aloud (2% of comments), (e.g., S9 said *"I feel anxious when I read aloud in front of others. That's what is happening to me now."*) and expressed challenges with decoding (2% of comments). Students also commented on words being difficult to decode and pronounce, e.g., S11 said: *"I don't understand this word and it is hard to sound it"* and similarly S14 said: *"[suburbs] ... it is hard to sound"*. They also remarked on words being hard to read (4% of comments). Altogether, this category constituted 8% of all think-aloud comments.

The third category consisted of fifteen comments where students translated an English term into Arabic in order to clarify the meaning of a misunderstood term. For example, S4 translated 'steal' into the Arabic word for 'buy' because 'steal' sounds similar to 'sale' and buying and selling are two complementary aspects of shopping.

The fourth category was of comments where students guessed the meaning of a word correctly. This accounted for 8% of comments showing that students lacked confidence in their comprehension.

However, after making a number of such comments, students appeared to feel embarrassed about their continued failure to understand and stopped commenting, despite the researcher urging them to do so. If they had continued to think aloud without self-censorship, this figure would probably be much higher. This is evident from the large number of errors detected during transcription of the audio-taped reading.

The reason for the failure to understand a word was not always clearly indicated. However new words were not only new in terms of presentation, but also in terms of the cultural concept which underpinned its meaning and was an element of EFL culture which the participant did not understand. For example, baking contests and charity fundraisers do not generally take place in Saudi malls so that participants would have been unfamiliar with both the notion and the practice (see Section 5.3.1.2.h below). Challenges with decoding, particularly of long words, is mentioned in the interview as a major source of incomprehension and reading challenges.

5.3.1.2 Behaviours exhibited while reading

The data for the TAP reading behaviours were coded according to protocols described in Chapter 4.8.1.2 and the findings are presented below. A total of 3219 reading behaviours were observed.

14) Table 5.4: Summary of student reading behaviours exhibited during the TAP

CATEGORIES OF READING BEHAVIOURS	TYPES OF READING BEHAVIOURS	SUB-TYPES OF READING BEHAVIOURS	NO.	% OF TOTAL	EXAMPLES OF READING BEHAVIOURS
Strategies	Self-correction	Successful	131		Work – workers
		Unsuccessful	78		Boblic ... buplic
	Repeating	Part of word, word or phrase	399		'Re p ... represent', Arrested...arrested'. Three young men. ...three young men
	Prediction	Difficulty of text	1		'I predict this text is semi-comprehensible'
	Identify key word		2		'the theme is about arrests because it is repeated several times'
	Preparation	Failure to read the title, photo or scan the text	44		Failure to look at the title, photo or scan the text
TOTAL STRATEGIC BEHAVIOURS			655	20.3%	
Punctuation	Ignoring punctuation	Ignoring question marks, fullstops, quotations marks commas and colons	439		Failed to raise or lower pitch of voice, pause, read capital letters incorrectly.
	Capitalisation		44		'L' for 'l' in Iowa
	TOTAL PUNCTUATION BEHAVIOURS			483	15%
Phonics	Decoding/Mispronunciation	Incorrectly decoding and Mispronouncing vowels - Omitting and inserting vowels, combining double vowels, omitting vowels, Incorrectly decoding and mispronouncing 'u'	523		'mall'→'male', 'steal'→'still', 'ea' in 'sweat', 'ai' in 'fundraisers', 'gathrings' instead of 'gatherings' 'mean' instead of 'men' 'u' in 'guilty', 'suburbs', 'upset', 'guards'
		Inserting, omitting and mispronouncing consonants - hard and soft consonants, pronounce silent consonant	447		'P' to 'b', 'ci' to 'k' in 'social', 'g' and 'j', 'ch' and 'sh', 'part' instead of 'parts'. 'l' in 'would', 'gh' in 'fight' 'ilygillgly' instead of 'illegally'
		Added and separating syllables	117		
		Final stable syllable pronunciation	71		'ti' in 'demonstration', 'ci' in 'social',
		Incorrectly decoding and Mispronouncing word	27		'there' 'three' constation/constitution
		TOTAL PHONIC BEHAVIOURS			1185
Lexical/Semantics	Substitution - word for word	Word for word	227		'Our' for 'or' 'cream' for 'crime'
		Non-word for word	467		'Bobli' for 'public'
	TOTAL LEXICAL/SEMANTIC BEHAVIOURS			694	21.6%
Syntax	Changing tense and conjugation	Personal to impersonal, singular to plural, Singular/plural, subject/verb match	30		'don't' to 'does', 'protector' 'protectors', 'Use' to 'uses', 'Didn't' to 'don't'
	Separating compound phrase		4		'Handing' and 'out' [handing out]

	Omitted	Word, phrase or line	46		'At', 'Their crime' Participant 1 skipped lines 10 and 12
TOTAL SYNTACTIC BEHAVIOURS			80	2.5%	
Morphology	Suffixes/prefixes/affixes	Omitted, changed, added, prefixes and suffixes, extended contractions and inserted words	100	3.1	'-s' on the end of 'demonstrations', '-s' instead of '-ed' 'rest' instead of 'arrest'. 'aplay' instead of 'play' 'That is' – 'that's'
TOTAL MORPHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURS			100	3.1%	
Gave up			13	0.4%	Stopped trying to say 'suburbs'
Cultural knowledge		Lack of cultural knowledge	9	0.28%	State names – Des Moines, 'he' instead of 'she' – female lawyer
GRAND TOTAL			3219	100%	

The reading behaviours fell into eight main categories as follows:

a. Strategies

Strategies are actions which the reader did, or could have done, before and while reading, in order to maximise comprehension. A number of types of strategies were manifested. They were generally of three types – Preparing, Self-correction and Repetition.

The first type concerned preparation for reading. Preparing, e.g., by reading titles and looking at photos, provides clues to text content and produces an overview prior to reading which can help with comprehension. No student scanned the text or looked at the photo before reading and only four out of sixteen read the title. This constitutes only 8% of the opportunities for preparation and shows that almost all (92%) students are not using preparation strategies to improve their comprehension.

The second types concerned attempts at self-correction. Such attempts indicate that the reader realized they have failed to understand on the first attempt and were trying to correct that failure. All of the sixteen students attempted self-correction, one as often as twenty-one times. Of the 209 self-corrections, 131 (63%) were successful (e.g., "'work ... 'workers'"). This shows that students are generally using self-correction successfully. However, even when several repetitions were made (up to four), 37% of corrections still did not lead to correct decoding (e.g., "'preevate' ... 'preevate'" [private] and even correct decoding does not necessarily indicate comprehension.

The third type concerned re-reading of a part-word, whole word or phrase. These repetitions could indicate that participants did not understand what they had read, and constituted 93% of the total number of reading strategies used. They could also indicate checking that the word was correctly

pronounced and understood. This was a common strategy, used by every student at least twice and up to forty-six times by one student. Of the 399 repetitions, 70% were of part of a word, (e.g., "*Rep ... repre ... represents*"). A further 22% were of a complete word (e.g., "*public ... public*") and the rest (9%) were of a larger unit such as a phrase or group of words (e.g., "*Three young men ... three young men*"). The largest single strategy used, by every student at least twice and up to 46 times by one student, was the repetition of part of an entire word. This constituted 42% of all strategies used. 22% of these repetitions resulted in a correction of the first attempt. However, the majority, 78%, were unsuccessful.

A few other strategies were used, including the identification of key words (2 students did this once) and predicting future text (one student did this once). However their use was minimal and, overall, the poor or incorrect use of strategies or failure to use appropriate strategies accounted for 20% of reading errors.

b. Punctuation

Punctuation errors are manifested when students read aloud and are made when a punctuation mark, such as a full-stop or question mark, is ignored or misinterpreted. Ignoring a punctuation mark was evidenced in incorrect reading behaviours, such as failing to pause at a comma or colon, failure to stop at a full-stop, failure to raise voice pitch at a question mark or lower voice pitch at a full-stop. Punctuation influences comprehension in that, if a reader fails to understand that a question is being asked, rather than a statement being made, then they will fail to understand the purpose of the text.

Ignoring punctuation constituted 15% of all errors made and ignoring full-stops and commas constituted 74% of all punctuation errors. This suggests that in texts where the verb "said" is not included in the sentence, and only quotation marks are present, students are unlikely to understand that speech is being made. Only one student (S3) indicated that he understood that speech was indicated from the use of the word 'says' in the text.

Using these indicators, question marks in the text were ignored 95% of the time, quotation marks 97% of the time, and colons, 92% of the time. (Note, these figures have taken into account those students who failed to read the title which contained one colon and one question mark.) There were twenty-nine full-stops in the text which were ignored 53% of the time, and thirteen commas

which were ignored 52% of the time. Overall they constituted 15% of reading behaviours and suggest that readers may have failed to realise that the expression of one idea has ended and another begun in a second sentence. This could lead to confusion, as in the case of S5 who commented that "*two of them died and one escaped*".

A further 9% of punctuation-related reading behaviours consisted of failing to recognise capitalization. Capital letters occur in three places in this text: at the beginning of names, titles and sentences. Every failure to recognise a full-stop above could therefore also be interpreted as a failure to recognise the significance of a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence which follows. There are twenty-nine of these in the text. There are also sixteen name or title capitalizations in the text. Punctuation errors were made most obvious in the case of 'Iowa' where the upper case 'I' was substituted by the lower case 'l' [Lowa]. This may indicate that students did not understand that 'Iowa' is a name. (It is worth mentioning that written Arabic has only one case so that capitalization is not learned in the student's L1, and because students are reading aloud and pause many times, this could affect their apparent misinterpretation of punctuation and indeed may not be misinterpretation at all but rather simply a matter of fractured reading).

c. Phonics

Phonic errors are errors of decoding, where the sound made by the reader does not match the grapheme they are reading. Examples include the incorrect decoding of vowels (e.g., a long 'e' instead of a short 'e') or of consonants e.g., ('b' instead of 'p'). Although an EFL student may recognise words in speech from their sounds, unless they are able to produce those sounds when reading, they may fail to connect the written word with the corresponding phonemes. Decoding errors were by far the largest single category of error (37%) and incorrect decoding fell into four main types – Vowels, Consonants, Syllables and Words.

The first type related to the incorrect decoding of vowels (e.g., '*pooblic*' instead of '*public*'). 44% (523 occurrences) of incorrect decoding was of vowels. 21% of all incorrect decoding and 47% of vowels incorrectly decoded were of a single vowel on its own (e.g., short 'i'). Other vowels wrongly decoded included double vowels (diphthongs) (e.g., "steal" as "still"), omitting or inserting vowels

(e.g., 'gathrings' instead of 'gatherings'), and incorrect decoded of the letter 'u' (e.g., in 'suburbs', 'guard', 'upset').).

Many incorrect decoding of vowels were the outcome of students sounding out the name of the letter, rather than its phonic sound. Table 3 (below) shows examples of errors of this type.

15) Table 5.5: Incorrect decoding of English vowels

letter	Letter name	Word	Example of decoding	
			Verbalization	IPA
A	Long a	Priv <u>a</u> te	priv – <u>eight</u>	praɪvert
	Long a	M <u>a</u> ll	Male	meɪl
E	Long e	<u>E</u> nded	<u>ee</u> – nded	i:nded
	Long e	M <u>e</u> n	m- ee-n	mi:n
I	Long i	<u>I</u> llegally	<u>eye</u> – legally	aɪli:gəli:
O	Long o	Sh <u>o</u> pping	sh – <u>ow</u> – pping	ʃaɒpɪŋ
	Long o	Fre <u>o</u> dom	free-dome	fri:doʊm
U	Long u	P <u>u</u> blic	p – <u>you</u> – blic	pju:blɪk
	Long u	<u>U</u> pset	you-pset	ju:pset
	Long u	<u>G</u> uard	g-you-ard	ɡju:ɑ:rd
Eo	Compound vowel	<u>Pe</u> ople	p-eeyo-ple	pi:jɒpl
	Compound vowel	Swe <u>a</u> tshops	Sw-ee-tshops, sw-ate-shops	swi:tʃɒps swetʃɒps

These errors may have resulted from English letters being taught in schools by name rather than phonically, and could be reduced or eliminated by the teaching of English letters phonically rather than by name.

The second type of wrong decoding was that of consonants. 38% (447 occurrences) of incorrect decoding were of consonants (e.g., 'p' instead of 'b') . 27% of total wrong decoding and 71% of consonant incorrect decoding were of a single consonant. Other wrongly decoded consonants included the decoding of silent consonants, such as the 'l' in 'walking' and the substitution of soft for hard consonants (e.g., 'ch' and 'sh' in 'speech' and 'd' and 'j' in 'judge').

Where the sound of one consonant was replaced by another, this was often the result of transferring the L1 phonic system onto L2 learning. Table 5.6 (below) shows the relationship between the decoding of consonants in Arabic and English and how the importing of the Arabic consonant sound into English reading influenced word decoding.

16) Table 5.6: Incorrect decoding of English consonants

letter	Arabic	English	Substitution	Example	
				Verbalization	IPA
G	soft only	Soft and hard	Soft 'g' (j)	guilty – 'juilty'	ɟʒʌst
P	None	P	B	public - 'buoblic'	bɒblɪk
Q	None	'kw'	'queue'	Question – 'queue-estion'	kju:stʃn
R	Rolled	Unrolled	'rrr'	arrested – 'a-rrrr-ested'	ə[r]estɪd
V	None	V	F	Leave – 'leaf'	li:f

This incorrect decoding suggests a lack of English phonic awareness, particularly of letter sounds which are either not present, or which are pronounced differently in Arabic.

The third type of wrong decoding was that of syllables. 16% (188 occurrences) were of syllables. The largest group of incorrectly decoded syllables occurred where syllables which together constituted a word were pronounced separately as if two separate words (e.g., 'free-' and '-dom'). These made up 9% of all wrong decoding and 54% of syllabic incorrect decoding. Other incorrectly decoded syllables were where syllables were added, (e.g., 'speeches' instead of 'speech'). Such errors can lead to changes in tense or quantity, compounding the probability of incorrect decoding. Final stable syllables (i.e, containing endings such as '-tion' or '-cial') were also wrongly decoded.

The fourth and final type was the incorrect decoding of entire words (e.g., 'constation' instead of 'constitution'). These 27 occurrences made up 2% of total incorrect decoding. Where entire words or parts of words are mispronounced by a reader, this suggests a failure to understand a word in its entirety.

d. *Lexicon/semantics*

Lexical errors occurred when students misread or incorrectly decoded a word to the extent that it was replaced either by another word with an entirely different meaning (e.g., when 'our' was replaced by 'or'), or by a collection of letters which did not constitute a word, i.e, a non-word, (e.g., when 'public' was replaced by 'bobli'). Replacement of entire words constituted 22% of all reading behaviours. 33% of these resulted in substitution of one word for a different one. The substituted words contained similar graphemes or phonics but were completely different in meaning. 67% of such substitutions resulted in a non-word (a verbalization which has no meaning in English). Either way, this could indicate a complete failure to understand and that participants were not monitoring their comprehension as they read. When a non-word is substituted,

there is probably a gap in understanding. Where an incorrect word is substituted, the meaning of a phrase, sentence or paragraph may either be changed or become nonsensical. Both types of substitution have been made by S1 in the phrase "*There yong mean*" [*three young men*]" and in the substitution of 'cream' for 'crime'.

e. Syntax

Syntactic errors are mistakes related to the structure of words and sentences. 3% of reading behaviours were syntactical errors and the commonest by far (50% of these) was the straightforward omission of a word. An example is the repeated omission of the indefinite article from the phrase "*Is a mall a public or a private place?*" (Note: underlining indicates omission in the previous sentence).

Other examples of errors included skipping and omitting whole lines of text (three students), separating compound phrases into their constituent parts (e.g., 'handing out' became 'handing' and 'out') by pronouncing the two words separately to each other. Separating these words means that the individual components of the phrasal verb have different meanings to their combination as a phrase and render a sentence meaningless or change its meaning completely. Errors of conjugation (five students) led to confusion of personal possessives (e.g., 'doesn't' for 'don't'), loss of verb/subject match (e.g., 'use' and 'uses') and changes of tense (e.g., 'don't' for 'didn't'). Syntactic errors of all types appeared to lead to comprehension failures.

f. Morphology

Morphological errors are changes to the internal structure of a word. 3% of reading behaviours were where students added, omitted or changed prefixes, suffixes and affixes such as adding '-ed' to the end of a word (e.g., 'arrested' instead of 'arrest'), adding 'a-' to the beginning (e.g., 'aplay' instead of 'play') or changing the suffix '-s' to '-ed'. These changes led to inconsistencies of tense (e.g., 'decided' instead of 'decides'), confusions of singular and plural (e.g., 'demonstration' for 'demonstrations') and the misuse of verb conjugations (e.g., 'do' and 'does') which may have led to errors or failures of comprehension.

g. Giving up

After repeatedly attempting to pronounce a word correctly, some students clearly gave up trying and passed on to the next word. For example, after several attempts to say 'suburbs', five students gave up and moved on to the

next word without further attempts. This giving up was indicated by mumbling. It constituted 0.4% of reading behaviours and is perhaps an indication that the student may not have understood a word, no matter how hard he tried. After such giving up, students continued reading passively, without expression and appeared to sound out words without thinking about or understanding their meaning.

h. Culture

The text used for this TAP is clearly American in origin (see Appendix 2) It mentions places which are familiar to Americans, but not necessarily to an L2 reader from a different culture. Examples include names of American states (e.g., New Jersey), American cities (e.g., Minnesota) and forms of address (e.g., Professor). It also mentions practices which form part of the text culture but not necessarily that of an L2 reader, such as baking contests and charity fundraisers. For example, S1's TAP question, was typical of many students:

"... meaning of fundraisers?"

At places in the text, words are cues to cultural information which may form part of the background experience of an L1 reader but not necessarily that of an L2 reader. For example, words such as 'right', 'demonstrations', 'protestors', 'constitution', and phrases such as 'freedom of speech' and 'baking contests' are loaded with cultural assumptions and interpretations which may be unfamiliar to Saudi people. 0.28% of reading behaviours were obviously of this type where participants overtly expressed a failure to understand. Although these constitute only a small proportion of the errors made, this is partly because there are only about fourteen words and six 2-3 word phrases (see Appendix 2, Research Text, NB) in the 334-word text the meaning of which are embedded in L1 culture. However as a member of the participant's L2 culture, I know that these words and phrases would have been incomprehensible to the participants, even if they did not say so. These words are particularly important because understanding of the entire meaning of the text depends on understanding these words. Secondly, many other errors presented here, such as those of pronunciation, refer to parts of words, such as a single letter or syllable, and not to entire words. However, these 'cultural' errors refer to entire words, made up of many letters and syllables, so that the magnitude of each error is much greater than the percentage of total errors which is reported here.

5.3.1.3. Observations made by the researcher

While collecting and reviewing the TAP data, I noted a number of student reading behaviours which appeared to indicate processes which underlay their reading. For example, students often read very slowly and hesitantly and there were many pauses both between words and between syllables of words. Students often read without expression or repeated words and struggled to decode and sound out clearly. These and other observations formed the basis of RVR questioning which took place immediately after the TAP.

5.3.1.4 Summary of findings from the TAP

In summary, the TAP showed that the vast majority (more than 85%) of comments made by students, related to their failure to understand words. These included new and long words, as well as confusion between similar words, and attempts to guess understanding, including through translation into Arabic. Almost a further 6% related to decoding problems, especially of new or long words. Less than 8% of guesses resulted in correct understanding indicating comprehension of what had been read.

Students employed a number of strategies in their attempt to understand the text. By far the most common and most successful of these was the repetition of a part or whole, word or phrase. Students struggled enormously with the decoding of both vowels and consonants, but also of syllables and entire words. This often led to the substitution of a word by an entirely different meaning, or of a verbalization with no meaning in English. From this evidence it did not appear that readers were monitoring their comprehension as they read. Components of words, such as prefixes and suffixes were also omitted, added and substituted, leading to grammatical errors of tense, person etc. From time to time students gave up completely in their attempts to read and understand. They did very little preparation before reading. Punctuation was also largely ignored. Students paused between and within words while reading aloud.

A number of problems also appeared to stem from unfamiliarity with the culture of the text and cultural issues embedded in its writing (see Section 5.5.5.4 below).

5.3.2 The Retrospective Verbal Report (RVR)

After they completed the TAP, student participants took part in the RVR. Data were analysed according to protocols described in Chapter 4.8.2. The findings are presented in Table 5.7 below. Within each category the particular wordings of questions varied, e.g., with regard to slow/hesitant reading, "Why do you sometimes pause between words?" and "Why do you read word by word?" The number of students who were asked each type of question is given in the third column of the table.

17) Table 5.7: Summary of the RVR findings

CATEGORY	TYPES OF QUESTION	NO. OF STUDENTS ASKED (OUT OF 9)	EXAMPLES OF RESPONSES
Beginning reading	Why did you not look at the title?	6	"I did not notice it"
	Why did you not look at the photo?	7	"I forgot to"
	Beginning reading	6	"For the first minute I don't know what I am reading"
Slow/hesitant reading	Why do you not read continuously? Why do you pause between words?	7	"There are words I don't understand" "To read correctly" "To know the meaning of words"
Reading challenges	Why are you struggling with some words? What were the greatest challenges you faced when reading the text?	8	"I don't know them" "They are difficult to deode/pronounce and their meaning is hard to guess" "Sometimes I mix up words with similar letters"
decoding	Why do you change the pronunciation in this way?	6	"I don't know" "I have never learned this" [final stable syllables] "We don't have these sounds in Arabic" [p]
Reading strategies	Why did you repeat that word?	4	"To clarify its ambiguity"
	Why did you not pay attention to the full-stops/question marks?	5	"Maybe because I concentrate on the individual words"
	Why did you pronounce 'l' and 'I'?	4	"I did not recognise it as L because it is in the middle of the text. It should be at the beginning of the sentence."
	Why is 'arrest' an important word?	1	"I came across this word several times in the text"
Comprehension	Do you understand the meaning of words you have substituted?	7	"Sometimes I pronounce it like the absent word because I came across it before. This doesn't mean I know its meaning."
	What do you understand about the text in general?	3	"I have forgotten most of the text but it is about shopping in America"

5.3.2.1 Beginning reading

Six students were asked why they did not read the title and five replied that they had not noticed it. For example S5 said:

"I was thinking of reading the text and forgot about the title".

Another said he noticed it but thought that the researcher wanted him to read only from the start of the text.

Seven students were asked why they did not look at the photo. Three replied that they had either forgotten or did not notice it and a further two said that they thought the researcher wanted them to begin reading straight away. Two students said that they looked at it, but that it was of poor quality and they did not recognise what it depicted.

Six students were asked whether they had understood the text from the beginning of their reading and only one said that he had identified the theme quickly. Others expressed confusion such as S13 who said:

"For the first minute of reading I don't know what I am reading".

S2 expressed himself as follows:

"Well, I can't visualise the text from the beginning. I have to read it twice to familiarise myself with it".

Early confusion led to anxiety, as expressed by S4:

"I get worried from the beginning because I am guessing and I don't know if I am correct or not. Some words have more than one meaning and I don't know which one is correct in this context. For example, the word "close" I know it means shut, but I say to myself it may have another meaning here.

This confusion and anxiety interfered with comprehension. For example S4 said:

"This uncertainty stops me understanding the text."

S13 said that, because he lacked reading experience, he found it difficult to settle to the task:

"Sometimes my thinking goes away for a few seconds and then comes back. I can't concentrate continuously when I am reading. For the first minute of reading I don't know what I am reading."

Lack of experience was reiterated by S7 who said:

"I lost concentration because this is the first time I have read a text. In class we never read more than two lines. The lecturers never give us stories or books to read. They only ever gave us two stories in the whole curriculum and we just recited them in order to pass the exam. In the class we panic if we start reading because we did not get used of reading".

The question "Why are you struggling with reading this text?" provoked an extended response from S7 who used it as a platform to comment on his dissatisfaction with the teaching of English reading at his university:

"When I enrolled in the BA program, I thought they would assess us and build our background level, but they think we are better than we are so we have challenges coping. I got shocked. I thought I would find good teaching and strict rules and facilities ... but as you see ... Some [lecturers] are from other countries and pronounce words differently so we cannot understand what they say. There are no tutorial sessions or meetings with students to know what we need ... Sometimes I ask to see them out of class, but they say "we are busy".

Mohammed: "So what do you need from the lecturers?"

"We need to say what we want. We need to learn reading strategies. The gap between students and lecturers is too big. I

joined an English school in summer and there I can discuss what I don't know with the teacher, but here they just teach and go".

These findings show that students did not prepare for reading, were confused during the first few moments of reading, and that this confusion generated anxiety which appeared to interfere with comprehension.

5.3.2.2 Slow/hesitant reading

Eight students were asked why they read slowly, word-by-word or hesitantly. The responses of five students showed that by slow reading, they were trying to ensure that they had correctly understood what they were reading. For example, the following two students said:

"I can't read English fast as it is a new language to me. I am not a good reader, so I have to stop to recognise some words and understand their meanings" (S13).

"I read slowly to try to understand unfamiliar words" (S5).

Difficult words were read particularly slowly. As S7 said:

"Because I sometimes encounter difficult words or words which are new to me and I pause, trying to read them correctly and know their meanings."

S3 put his slow reading of words into the wider context of the sentence and text:

"I stop a bit when words are unknown to me. I read word by word trying to comprehend the sentence. If I read faster I would not be able to articulate the ideas in the text."

However, students were also aware that different words contained similar letter patterns and were concerned about confusing them with each other, and thereby confusing the meaning of the text. As the following students said:

"I read word by word because some words are similar and I mix up the letters." (S1).

"Sometimes I change a word or replace it in the text while reading without meaning to because I have seen one like it and it comes to my mind" (S13).

S4 and S16 both added that slow reading posed a problem. As S4 said:

"This hesitation acts as a barrier to comprehend the text".

These findings show that both the slow reading of unfamiliar words and the struggle to make sense of them as part of a larger body of text, could act as barriers to comprehension.

5.3.2.3 Reading challenges and difficult words

Reading challenges centred on three themes: New and long words, Confusion between words which were similar and Lack of practice:

a. New and long words

Eight students were asked why they struggled with particular words in the text. Results showed that they struggled with three classes of words – those which were new (4 students), those which were long (3 students) and those which were difficult to pronounce (3 students). Many students linked these three factors as the following quotes show:

"I get stuck with pronouncing words which are new or long." (S1)
"It [demonstrations] is a very long word and I am not familiar with it so it is hard to ... understand" (S7).

When asked which particular words they found difficult, eight students listed an average of twenty-four problematic words in the text. For example, S4 identified:

"'Arrested', 'steal', 'sweatshops', 'illegally', 'demonstration', 'upset', 'freedom', 'protesters', 'private', 'property', 'apply', 'security', 'guards', 'pleaded', guilty, punishment, represents, dismissed, violated, Iowa, constitution, suburbs, baking, contests, charity fundraisers, leaflets'."

The length of these lists highlights the challenges students had with reading new and long words. Many were loaded with cultural meaning with which they were unfamiliar, so that it was not only the novelty of the configuration of letters and syllables which caused them problems, but the novelty of the concept to which the word referred. Examples include 'sweatshops', 'demonstration', 'protestors', 'constitution', 'baking contests' and 'charity fundraisers' (see Section 5.3.1.2.h above).

b. Confusion between words which are similar

Five of the eight students said that they confused words which were similar. For example:

"I think 'property' means 'prepare'" (S16).
"I am trying to get its meaning and I thought 'sweatshops' means 'switch' and 'keys'." (S5)
"There some words have similar spellings such as private, protestors and property...I feel they are the same." (S7)

S6 highlighted a problem which others seem to share:

"I read the first letters in a word and if I think I have seen it before. I think it is the same word. Sometimes I am wrong and it makes me face challenges in understanding text".

Paying attention only to the beginning of a word meant that words with similar initial sounds were easily misunderstood, as the following exchange illustrates:

"I think 'mall' means 'distance'."
Mohammed: *"But this is 'Mall' and you meant 'Mile'. They are different"*.
"But they have similar shapes and letters and that's why I mixed them".

Attempting to guess the meaning of similar words could lead to further errors as S1 showed:

"Sometimes I mix up words with similar letters ... I don't know the words 'private' or 'protestors', but I guess 'protestors' is a religious word same as Catholic".

These findings show that students struggled with unfamiliar and difficult text and appeared to become confused by components of words which were similar.

c. Lack of practice

Student 7 commented extensively on problems relating to the teaching of English reading in the university he attended.

Mohammed: "Why are you struggling with reading this text?"

S7: *"Because this is the first time I read a text; in class we never read more than two lines. We panic if we have to read because we are not used to it. We have only one course of reading in the program. The lecturers gave us no books and only two stories and we recited them to pass the exam. In lessons the lecturers just answer the text questions for us without reading".*

5.3.2.4 Decoding

In addition to the decoding challenges outlined in the previous sub-section, three common patterns of incorrect decoding became evident from the reading: Final stable syllables, The substitution of 'p' and 'b', and Vowels.

a. Final stable syllables

Six students were asked about their wrong decoding of final stable syllables, such as the 't' and 'i' in '-tion' and the 'c' and 'i' in '-cial'. None were aware of the rules governing decoding.

"I thought it is 'sokal' [social]...I don't know that 'ci' sound as 'sh' (S6).

"I did not realize it should be 'sh' sound ... I did not learn such pronunciation" (S16).

b. The substitution of 'b' for 'p'.

Only one student was aware of the 'p/b' confusion and pointed out that:

"I have tried many times to correct myself but you know we don't have such sounds in Arabic" (S4).

c. Vowels

Many students commented that they faced challenges decoding and pronouncing vowels in words. Two students indicated that they struggled with the decoding of the non-associated vowel 'u' and that this may interfere with their understanding:

"Suburb' is hard to sound out and I don't know what it means." (S13)

"I did not understand the word 'upset'. This is why I couldn't understand the text" (S3).

Five others, S2, 3, 4, 5, and 8, specified challenges with words containing multiple vowels. For example:

"They are either ... difficult to pronounce because they ... have many vowels" (S5).

S8 linked this struggle to understanding the overall meaning of the text:

"The words that ... have compound sounds i.e, two letters ... I spend time pronouncing them and forget what I have already readfrom this point I start isolating the ideas" (S8).

The final part of S8's comment illustrates that as readers struggled to articulate the sounds of written English text and recognise the meanings of the words they were articulating, comprehension could have suffered. As S2 also said:

"They are difficult to pronounce and their meaning is hard to guess".

5.3.2.5 Reading strategies

Students were asked five types of questions about reading strategies they used: Repetition, Punctuation, Capitalization, Key words and Translation.

a. Repetition

Four students were asked why they had repeated words. Two answered that they re-read words which were new, in order to pronounce them correctly and two said they re-read to clarify the word's meaning, to differentiate it from similar words or to ensure that they had correctly understood. For example, S2 said:

"Sometimes I re-read the word twice, because it is the first time for me to see such a word or phrase, I try to understand it and pronounce it correctly".

A problem with repetition as a strategy is that it can seriously interfere with comprehension by interrupting the flow of words and the continuity of thought.

b. Punctuation

Five students were asked why they had ignored punctuation when reading aloud, such as full-stops, question marks and quotation marks. Two replied that they had not realised they had done so, and when asked what quotation marks indicated, both S7 and S16 said that they did not know.

Three students said that focusing on the decoding and comprehension of difficult words distracted them from attending properly to decoding. S5 put it as follows:

"(Laughing) I don't know, - maybe because they are smaller than words. This is dangerous....like if you drive a car you focus on cars, not bicycles. I am focusing on reading and pronouncing

words and trying to guess their meanings and lose my attention to punctuation".

Since punctuation is a valuable indicator of meaning, lack of awareness of punctuation marks could impact negatively on comprehension.

c. Capitalisation

Four students were asked about their awareness of capitalisation. S16 indicated that he did not understand the capitalization rule for English names.

"S16: "I thought fundraiser is a name ... is it?"

Mohammed: "But it does not start with capital letter.

S16: "Oh. Yes, yes ... it is not a name ... I just realized."

Similarly, S6's understanding of capitalization was limited to the beginning of sentences so that he failed to distinguish between the upper case 'I' and the lower case 'l' (L), and when asked about his wrong decoding of 'Iowa', said

"I did not recognise it as I because it is in the middle of the text. It should be at the beginning of the sentence".

d. Key words

One student (S3) was asked about a key word in the text. His response was:

"I think 'arrest' is an important word, because I came across it several times in the text".

However this strategy was not employed consistently as he failed to identify other key words (e.g., 'private' and 'public'), which were repeated more often than 'arrest'.

e. Translation

Mistranslation compounded the effect of incorrect decoding when a student attempted to guess the meaning of a word by mentally translating it into Arabic:

"S7: I thought the word steal means yeshteri [Arabic for 'buy'].

Mohammed: Did you mix it with the word sale?

S7: Yes, yes, because they have similar letters".

This example illustrates how cumulative errors can affect comprehension.

5.3.2.6 Comprehension

Students were asked two types of question about comprehension: Word substitution and Overall meaning

a. Word substitution

While reading, students often substituted a component of a word, leading to its replacement by an entirely new word. When asked about this, several students said they were not aware that they had done so. For example S1 said that he did not know he had made an error and S2 illustrated how this affected his comprehension:

"Sometimes I pronounce it like the absent word because I came across it before. This doesn't mean I know its meaning".

Seven students were asked whether they understood the meanings of words they had incorrectly substituted in the text e.g., 'mile' for 'mall'. Two said that they did not understand the meanings of the incorrectly-substituted words and a further three said that whenever they did not recognise a word, they habitually replaced it with a similar word which they already knew. However they said they did not always know the meaning of the substituted word.

Incorrect substitution demonstrated the impact of cultural factors on reading when S4 substituted the pronoun 'he' for 'she' with reference to the lawyer in the text. When asked why he had done so, he replied:

S4: "I thought it means judge because we don't have a lawyer in our culture.

Mohammed: But we have them recently working in the court.

S4: I don't know, maybe this is something new to me. Oh, no no, I have not expected the lawyer to be female. It is not in my culture."

Only one student described word-substitution as a conscious process and said that he understood the meaning of what he had done.

b. Overall meaning

Three students were asked about the overall meaning of the text they had read, two were unable to provide even a basic summary and mentioned fragmented components of the text such as that it was about "*shopping in America*" (S1) or that it had something to do with lawyers and corporations (S7). S5 partly identified the meaning correctly but then went on to make a comprehension error:

S5: "I think they are trying to stop freedom and speaking in malls... and they killed someone for speech"

Mohammed: "Why do you think of killing was there?"

S5: "Because of the word 'fight'."

5.3.2.7 Summary of findings from the RVR

In summary, the findings of the RVR show that most students said they did not read the title or look at the photograph because they did not notice it or forgot to do so. Consequently, most said they were initially very confused about what they were reading and struggled to make sense of it. They read slowly, trying to decode and pronounce words correctly perhaps as an aid to understanding. In particular, they struggled with new words, long words and words which were difficult to decode and pronounce, and re-reading was one way of

accomplishing this. They said they were aware of similarities between different English words and were concerned about decoding and comprehension errors to the extent that this concern interfered with their reading fluency and understanding.

Some said they attended only to the beginnings of words and when a word was unfamiliar, substituted words with similar beginnings with which they were already familiar. They acknowledged that this contributed to miscomprehension of what they were reading. They said that employed few or no reading strategies and paid little or no attention to punctuation because they were too busy attending to decoding and trying to determine the meaning of individual words. Some comprehension failures appeared to be due to cultural differences (see Section 5.5.5.4 below), for example, where the masculine gender pronoun was substituted in reference to a female lawyer. Most were unable to provide even the briefest summary of the meaning of the text.

5.3.3 The student interview

As outlined in Chapter 4.7.3.3, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all sixteen students who took part in the TAP. The student interview questions were divided into six sections (see Table 5.8 and Appendix 4).

18) Table 5.8: Sections of the student interview

SECTION	TITLE
1	Access to reading
2	Teaching reading
3	Cues to reading comprehension
4	The reading process
5	Student's recurrent reading behaviours
6	Factors affecting reading challenges

Student responses were coded according to protocols outlined in Chapter 4.8.3 and the findings are presented below. In the following section, numbers in brackets represent the number of sixteen students who made the response. The results from the six sections are as follows:

5.3.3.1 Access to reading

A number of questions were asked about the access student participants had to English text. Their responses emerged in four themes: Time spent reading, Types of reading, Reading resources, and Role models and influences,

a. Time spent reading

More than half the sample (9) said they never read English outside of the classroom. The first reason, given by half of these (4), was because they were too busy helping their families. For example:

"I have many things to do such as helping my family shopping and working in the farm...we have social-gathering everyday in our culture for having coffee and tea" (S4).

"You can say there is time but you know the external works i.e. taking care of the animals and family takes most of my time, in addition to society-gatherings and relations, so I don't have time to read" (S5).

"I have a little time to read. The reason is the relationship with friends, relatives and family ... My time is not my own" (S3).

This must be interpreted in the context of Saudi culture where, for religious reasons, women are not permitted to go out unless accompanied by a male. This norm puts pressure on Saudi males, both to obtain goods required for the household, and to escort female family members whenever they leave the house. Since all the students in this study were young males, a significant amount of their time was probably required to escort mothers, sisters, aunties and female cousins.

Secondly, there is a strong tradition in Saudi society of regular, mutual invitation to gatherings at the houses of extended families and within neighbourhoods. These gatherings include coffee, small meals, dinners and banquets. A typical weekly pattern might include three coffee invitations, two dinners and a banquet once every two weeks so that people are either attending or hosting a social occasion almost every day. So S4 says:

"We have social-gathering everyday in our culture for having coffee and tea".

They take place in the afternoons and evenings and require attendance for several hours. S5 elaborated on this:

"The problem is that there is no excuse from the society and community gatherings ... if you try to apologise from attending or joining them, they will blame you and you will be considered as lonely ... the culture of invitation and gathering happen at least every two days and this makes the time is very short to read".

The seven students who said that they read English text sometimes, reported doing so for only about one hour per week, and one of these read only on a mobile phone. Another said he watched television for this hour, and another spent it chatting on the Internet. These students also reported reading only

course materials in order to pass the exam. The theme of required socializing was repeated here:

"You know we students rent places for gathering every night, and this takes our time ... I sit with my family to drink some coffee ... I go for gathering with friends ... after midnight I go to bed" (S7).

Three students said they did not read because they were too lazy or slept in their free time, rather than reading.

"I sleep regularly in the afternoon until 5 o'clock ... I have some stories to read but I very rarely read because I am lazy" (S9).

Five students said they did not read English texts because of their poor language skills:

"I have tried to read English but I cannot, it is very hard to read...I find it hard to know words meanings" (S13).

Three students said they preferred to read in Arabic:

"I prefer to read in Arabic as I feel it easier" (S1).

S7 preferred to read English with an Arabic translation

"Sometimes if there is a page of story translated into Arabic, one page is English and the other page is Arabic, I read it because I feel it is easy for me to understand it".

Two students admitted that they did not read often enough and only one student said he made time each day for reading, and that he liked reading English books. At the other end of the scale, one said he never read, not even in Arabic.

These findings show that the students in this study were aware that they read very little in any language and that their English reading was very limited.

b. Types of reading

Six students mentioned reading in mediums other than books, e.g., magazines and catalogues, Internet including Wikipedia etc..., and one included internet 'chat' as his reading. One said he read news and cultural information, but three said they did not read in English at all and several admitted that they did not read enough. One claimed to learn English by watching television instead of reading and one rarely read, limiting himself to short stories with accompanying CDs. Of the whole sample, seven could not remember what they had read in English, suggesting that their reading is not recent, and only one student said he made time every day to read English. He was also the only one who said he liked reading English books.

These findings show that the English text that students read was very seldom in book form, but via a variety of media.

c. Reading resources

Students were asked a number of questions about the availability of reading materials in a range of environments. Their responses are presented under sub-headings below.

Home libraries

Half (8) of the sample said they had no library at home. Where home libraries existed, they were described as small and stocking only religious or Arabic books and students said they did not use them. Only two students reported having large home libraries. These findings show that the home environments of these students did not generally support reading, and particularly not reading in English.

Public libraries

Almost half (7) of the sample said there was no public library in their town. Where there was a library, five said that it was unattractive and unused, and that they did not go there. According to one student, Saudi society needs to be more aware of the importance of reading and of English. These findings show that the wider Saudi culture does not generally support reading.

Reading in public spaces

Most students (ten) reported no reading materials in public spaces in their towns, and five said that public spaces were used only for chatting and using mobile phones. Two students said any public spaces with reading material contained no English books, only religious or Urdu books. They reported that people who read in public were ridiculed and do so is seen as strange, disgraceful and showing-off. Almost half the students (7) said they would not read in public due to embarrassment.. As S7 said:

"It is hard to find a Saudi who reads ... because the community does not help us to read and our fathers do not read in public and if I read in public others laugh at me..."

In a similar vein, S6 said:

"I feel embarrassed to read in front of others in the public area".

S1 also said:

"No, we do not have this culture or even encourage each other to read. We do not have the culture of carrying a book or story to

read in our free time. We feel it embarrassing to read in front of the other outside the college, as the other will look at me as if I am from different planet or if I show of reading".

These findings show that Saudi culture actively discourages reading in public.

School libraries

All students said their previous schools had libraries. However, these libraries were universally described in negative terms; as dusty, closed, out of date, inactive, not used, small and that they had no English books. They also said that reading was not encouraged and that students were not familiarized with library use. S1 described this clearly as follows:

"Yes ...[we had libraries at school]... but they were not activated as they should be, they did not encourage us to come and read or select any kinds of books. We did not visit those libraries or feel as if they were there. They were dusty and closed most of the time. They did not update it or even try to familiarize us with library's contents".

These findings show that Saudi schools do not encourage good reading habits from an early age.

University libraries

All students said that the three universities they attended did not have libraries. A few students attributed this to the newness of the university or that the university was housed in rented, temporary premises. They said they hoped their universities would gain libraries in the future. S2 expressed this hope as follows:

"I think this is because it is a new university only five years old. I think they will build a new library in the future when they build a university building because this is a rented place".

One student said that because of the lack of libraries, there was nowhere to go if they had spare time to read while on campus. Some students added that the university lacked other associated facilities such as photocopying or printing and a few students mentioned that even course textbooks have to be obtained from a distance.

Because there were no university libraries, students said that they cannot borrow books to read. It appears that there are very limited opportunities within educational establishments for students to improve their English reading and comprehension. This is a surprising finding for a university, where reading and

research form the basis of academic activity. Four students commented on the effect of the low priority given to the provision of reading resources. For example:

"It makes the country look like it is poor but they have a lot of money" (S14).

English department libraries

Students also agreed that the three English Departments they were enrolled in did not have libraries. Four students expressed regret about this, and were keen for reading facilities to expand in their universities. As evidence of this, S5 said:

"We asked the head of English department to establish English club including computers, but they did not do anything".

Despite this optimism, one student commented that even if there was a library he did not believe it would be promoted because the university would not value it. This lack of reading resources was made further evident in the poor provision of the English textbook required to complete the course.

"Some of the textbooks we have to travel about 3 hours driving to buy them or ask our teachers to bring them from there if they are going to ... city" (S2).

Because there were no libraries, students said that they could not borrow books from their Departments. Almost all students (15) said their lecturers did not encourage them to borrow reading books, and that if any reading was assigned, it related only to homework or exams. Only one student mentioned occasional referral to assignment reading. Only one student said that book borrowing was encouraged, and then only prior to an exam.

These findings show that the pattern of poor reading access and habits established in schools is continued at the level of higher education.

d. Role models and influences

The vast majority of students (14) said that nobody outside of the English classroom encouraged them to read in English. Most (13) also said they did not see their parents reading, even in Arabic, and that this was mainly because their parents could not read or were poorly educated. Despite this, two of these students added that their parents would buy English books for them if they asked. Only one had a father whom he saw reading frequently, though he said this did not influence his reading behaviour, and one student mentioned an

uncle who read. These findings suggest that there are few familial role models for reading behaviour in Saudi culture.

They are supported by responses to the question relating to public reading. Almost all students (ten) said that people do not read in public areas and that to do so would be embarrassing and seen as either pompous or disgraceful. S1 commented in particular that Saudi society does not promote reading.

5.3.3.2 The teaching of reading

Students were asked a number of questions about the teaching of English in their schools and on their university EFL course.

a. Teaching in schools

All students said that the standard of English teaching in their intermediate and secondary schools was unsatisfactory and a number of reasons were given. The commonest, accounting for 75% of all responses, was that learning to read English consisted only of reading aloud and reciting words in a rote-learning style. Five students described the teaching style as 'traditional' and by implication 'out-dated'. Seven said that they only ever read aloud, and only in Arabic. For example:

"In the intermediate school there was enthusiasm from the students ... but in the secondary school we were frustrated ... the teachers think that we are already good at reading...they neglect our reading in English ... some of my peers graduate from the secondary school but were not able to read even in Arabic ... let alone English" (S4).

Almost all students attributed their poor English reading skills to poor teaching methods:

"[At secondary school] in English we focus on words' meaning only ... teachers ask us to recite 6 words from the lesson ... before the final exam, the teacher provided us with small summary to recite by heart to pass the exam ... we do not know what it means ... sometimes we drew it by shape on the exam paper..." (S4).

Other students made similar comments:

"We only read in Arabic. The teacher asked us to read by turn. No activities at all. We didn't read with expressions but only same level of voice. We didn't read a lot, only a few sentences because of the large size of the class"(S5).

"They did not teach us reading ... only letters ... I depended on myself for learning" (S8).

"In English we never read ... we learned grammar and words only"
(S7).

Four students said that their English teachers were either absent or poorly-qualified. For example:

"There was no reading at all in English in the previous school ... the problem was the unqualified teachers" (S13).

"We were the victims of the new teachers who do not have English proficiency" (S14).

All students said that their previous schools assigned no reading in English and five added that this was because there were no English books in the school libraries. Three concluded that their school English teaching had failed to prepare them for university study. One said that he graduated from high school but could not write his name in English. Only one student (S13) attributed his poor reading skills to his own laziness.

All students said they learned the sounds of English letters by name, rather than phonically in school, and only three added that they had since learned to read phonically at university.

These findings show that students believe that the English they learned in schools was of a poor standard, poorly taught and did not prepare them for university study.

b. Teaching at the university

All of the students said the teaching of English reading at the university was unsatisfactory. Most said they did not learn anything of value and could not remember the content of lessons. In his interview, S2 said:

"To be honest, we did not learn anything worth of learning from the reading subject. We read very little from the textbook and it has reduced to be no more than three subjects in the exam, because teachers know it is difficult for us to finish the textbook".

A number of reasons were given for dissatisfaction with the standard of teaching. One was teaching style, which was described by S14 and S16, as too traditional.

For example, S14 said:

"It is old teaching way just grammar and translation".

S10 also said:

"The lecturer comes and reads the whole the text and lets us recite some words".

Seven students described their lecturers as distant and unavailable, stating that *".. they just check attendance and go ..."*, (S10) and *"check attendance and talk a bit"*. (S9) On the other hand, one said the teaching was too informal and five

claimed that poor teaching meant they had not learned anything and/or could not remember lessons.

Two students said their lecturers failed to encourage them (S12 and 13) and another that they did not engage in discussion (S1). S7 criticised lecturers for focusing "... *on the good reader only and neglect the others ...*". S9 said:

"Lecturers need to be friendly and helpful ...there is a big gap between the students and the lecturers ... I can't go and ask them in their offices".

Lecturers were also described as lacking proficiency in reading English:

"Some lectures in the university are very low level of proficiency in reading" (S3).

This student attributed this lack of proficiency to a lack of specialisation.

"I am not happy about the way of teaching this subject in the university because I feel the lectures are not specialised in this subject of reading and are below standard" (S3).

Only one good lecturer was mentioned, by a single student. Unfortunately, he had left the institution.

All students stated that lecturers did not assess reading levels and almost all, that they had not been assigned reading, either by teachers in their schools where libraries did not contain English books, or by their university lecturers. They said that if reading was ever assigned by lecturers, it related only to homework or exams. Most (13) agreed that English reading strategies were not taught at the university or that they could not remember any. However, three students said they had learned silent reading, some decoding and punctuation.

Most of the students (12) said they had not learned the stable syllabic patterns such as '-tion' and '-cial', at the university, although five of these said that such knowledge would make comprehension up to 25% easier. Four said they learned the basics and one of these that he had learned some of them from a private tutor.

Three students mentioned the need for a specific reading comprehension programme within the structure of the degree. One student said that the syllabus has been reduced by lecturers because of the student's poor reading abilities, although three attributed this to poor teaching in previous schools, rather than the universities. One student, (S13) went so far as to say:

"I suggest replacing the literature in the BA programme by English reading".

With regard to the course textbook, most students (thirteen) said that the textbook for their English reading course was not sufficient in order to train them to be good English readers. More than half of these students said that they did not learn from it and several mentioned that a separate, specific course on reading comprehension should be incorporated into the syllabus. Four students said they found the textbook (and the curriculum) too hard: however one disagreed and said that it needed to be more extensive. Three students said that there was a problem with the textbook, but that it was not about the book itself but rather their relationship to the book. For example, at interview, S14 said:

"I think the problem is not from the textbooks but from us as students ... we were not able to cope with these textbooks and complete the module as needed ... we were very poor readers and teachers face challenges teaching us straightforwardly our background knowledge in regards with English is very low".

These findings show that many students are dissatisfied in a number of ways with the standard of teaching of English reading at their universities.

5.3.3.3 Cues to reading comprehension

Students were questioned about their awareness and use of cues which could help them in their reading and comprehension of English text. Their responses fell into three categories: Punctuation, Phonics and Spelling.

a. Punctuation

All students said that they realised punctuation was important and that it helped a reader by giving cues to meaning. However, only three said they knew a few punctuation marks, such as full-stops and commas, and that they had only learned them while at university or by themselves. Most (9) said they paid attention to punctuation, especially to full-stops and commas (3) although one of these also said he did not recognise quotation marks. The rest (6) said they were too busy focusing on the meaning of words to notice punctuation, or that differences between English and Arabic made it difficult for them (1 student).

Differences between English and Arabic punctuation was cited by one student (S3) as a reason for challenges with English decoding:

"If I read in Arabic I apply it properly, but when I read in English I always forget them as my attention focus in reading words and pronunciations. In English there are many full-stops and comas while in Arabic they are few in the paragraph".

b. Phonics

All students agreed that knowing English phonics was important and ten said that it would make reading flow more easily, two that it would lead to better decoding and two that it would improve comprehension. However, two students emphasised that it needed to be taught from the very beginning of learning to read English.

"I think if we have learned phonically from the very first school would be easier for us to read phonically" (S2).

S14 described it as *"... a base stone [foundation] of reading."*

c. Spelling

An important component of word identification and reading is knowing how to spell English words. Almost all the students (15) said either that they had never been taught English spelling, or that they had learned only the basics, such as adding an 's' to make a plural. S4 said:

"We did not learn the spelling rule ... only the basics ... for example the letter 's' in third person-present simple. Sometimes when I read, I came across two letters having only one sound but I don't know and read them separately with two different sounds".

Because of this, six students did not think that they were good at English spelling and the other ten described their spelling as 'limited' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Despite this, they all said that knowing how to spell improves reading comprehension and were not satisfied with their current level. One student (S3) described it as an important contributor to fluency:

"... I think that because it will facilitate recognising the word and make easy to read it quickly".

5.3.3.4 The reading process

Students were asked a number of questions about the processes whereby they embark on, proceed through and conclude their reading. Their responses are described below:

a. Before reading

When asked what preparation they did before reading a text in order to optimize understanding, half replied that they did none. The other half said that they looked at the title (four students), scanned the text (three students) or looked at the picture (1 student). When asked where they looked for cues in the text, eleven said that they looked at the title, and six that they looked at pictures. Two said they considered the context of the writing, and a further two said they

looked at the introduction. One student said he learned to do this in Media Studies rather than in English. One said he prepared by avoiding distractions.

b. During reading

Almost all of the students (14) used cues when reading and identified the first/topic and last/conclusion sentences as the most important in expository text. Only two thought all sentences were equally important. Two students said they did not know how to use cues.

All students said they experienced reading challenges. Ten said they struggled with identifying long or difficult words and twelve said they struggled with decoding issues such as compound vowels or silent letters. Another found the L2 text culture to be a problem.

Despite this, six students said they used no reading techniques. Two of these said they struggled with linking word meanings in order to understand a sentence. The other ten students said they used a range of techniques such as re-reading (2), looking at context (2), translation (1) and trying to predict coming text (3). None of the students was able to describe how they knew whether they had understood the meaning of a text correctly. Only three clearly stated that they knew when they did not understand.

Negative emotions also interfered with their reading. For example:

"I try to read but I feel bored and stop reading." (S7)

"I feel dull when I read because I don't understand" (S5).

S5 and S6 also commented on frustration at the constant use of a translation dictionary, which led to boredom. For example, S5 said:

"It is hard for me to look up the dictionary for each word...that is annoying .. finding the meaning of the words and looking up to the dictionary takes my time and makes me feeling frustration".

Because of this, almost all (15) students said they only read English text in order to pass exams. They only read what the lecturer asked them to read and were too busy to read more. Despite this, they believed that their lecturers exercised poor discipline. As S7 put it:

"We need some enforcement to read."

When asked what would improve their reading processes, most students (11) clearly identified more reading practice and experience. Six said they needed better background knowledge (e.g., of vocabulary, spelling etc.) and five said their reading could be improved through more exposure to English, including access to native speakers (2) and going abroad (1). Two said they needed to

overcome embarrassment at reading poorly aloud, and one added that more time for reading could be gained by avoiding social gatherings. One suggested the extrinsic motivation of reading competitions with prizes.

The need for intrinsic motivation (interest in what they read) was also cited. . Students said that they read only course material, the content of which did not necessarily fit with their interests. Only one student said that he read for interest:

Mohamed: "*What are your reasons for reading English text?*"

S10: "*Interests ... liking the topic*".

c. After reading

When asked what they did to consolidate their understanding once they had finished reading, almost half the sample (7) said they did nothing. Of the nine students who said they did, four said they revised difficult words, two reviewed key features and themes, two answered comprehension questions, and one re-read the text.

These findings show that students claim to engage in little preparation, little consolidation and that their reading processes are very limited. Most said that they understood only a few reading cues to meaning and that they read as little as possible. Uninteresting topics and negative emotions were said to play a part in this lack of motivation.

5.3.3.5 Recurrent reading behaviours

Almost all the students (14) said that they re-read for better comprehension. Ten said that they do so to check that they have correctly understood, particularly when they could not understand the sentence which followed. Only two students said they did not re-read.

Making sense of new or difficult words is an important strategy for comprehension and all students said that they used a translation dictionary to look up words they did not understand. Nine said they also looked at context for cues to help them understand. Two said that they asked friends or teachers for help, and one said he sounded out words, syllable-by-syllable, in an effort to recognise and understand.

Most students (ten) said that they did not skip text for this reason. The six who said they did skip text, for the most part, skipped parts which they did not understand or which made them anxious. For example S4, demonstrated how this interfered significantly with his comprehension, when he said:

"I read the hard word soundless[ly] and pass it...I don't want to feel embarrassed ... when I read I just focus in word-sounds...not comprehension ... I just want to finish reading ..."

Only two students said they were sufficiently confident readers to be able to identify unimportant details and skip them.

The importance of experience to fluency is illustrated by responses to the interview schedule. All students said that they read more quickly those parts of the text which were more simple, easy or familiar. For example, S11 said:

"I read faster the words I know or have read before ... if it is new or hard I read it slowly".

Familiarity can only be gained from experience which suggests that more reading would improve fluency and therefore comprehension.

Lack of reading experience manifested in two main ways: Lack of time spent reading, and lack of access to reading resources.

5.3.3.6 Factors affecting reading difficulty

In this section, students were asked about factors which made English reading difficult and factors which would improve both their reading and their comprehension.

a. What makes reading difficult

A number of themes emerged. The first, cited by eight students, related to poor linguistic knowledge – of new or long words, vowels, grammar, non-English words in the English language. For example:

"The most difficult is the word meaning, word pronunciation specially the long syllabus" (S1).

When I (Mohammed) asked *"What are the most difficult aspects of reading English text for you?"* S3 replied:

"I think the new words or long ones. I cannot read in front of the others, I feel embarrassed because I know my reading and pronunciation is wrong."

Six students cited the second theme of culture (see Section 5.5.5.4 below), some related to social pressures, such as when S2 said:

"We face challenges from our culture and customs as our parents and community have many invitations during the week. They distract our reading and study. We sometimes have 2-3 invitations weekly. My time is not mine. This wastes our time but we cannot say anything against that as it is our culture".

S8 agreed that:

"The community frustrates us the gathering every day takes my time".

Others related to the cultural gap between the text and the reader.

"I have a problem if the text has different culture". (S12)

Six students also referred to factors to do with teaching at both school and university and pre-university institutes of learning. For example, S15 had the following to say about Saudi schools:

"We have not been taught properly from the beginnings and from the early stages."

S9 also made the following point about teaching at the university:

"We cannot say what we want. There is a big distance or gap between the student and the lecturer".

Almost all students (13) said the course textbook was not sufficient to make them a better English reader. Of these four said the text was too difficult and one that it needed to be more extensive.

Five students cited factors to do with negative emotional states such as frustration, anxiety, embarrassment and disinterest affecting their English reading. As S4 said:

"I think internal psychological issues could impact on reading comprehension. If I were able to overcome these I think my reading would be better... I remember at previous schools they laughed if I read poorly. This was very embarrassing ... I feel anxious when I read in front of a strict lecturer ... I don't want to make a mistake".

Student 3 linked motivation and difficulty in his comment:

"I have no enthusiasm to read English as I see it as difficult now".

Three students said that poor decoding made reading difficult and two said it was due to reading resources. S1 commented on general lack of access to English:

"I hardly listen to English except at the university or some films. There is no chance to read or to here English words".

These findings show that Saudi students attribute much of their poor reading ability to a number of wide-ranging factors, including elements of the teaching system from the earliest stages, and of the culture.

b. What would improve reading

Students identified a number of factors which would improve their English reading and comprehension and a number of themes again emerged.

The first and strongest theme was that of practice. Almost all students (13) attributed their reading comprehension challenges to lack of practice. Most said that reading every day, or reading a lot, would improve their

comprehension and make them better readers. S11 articulated this clearly when he said:

"I need to read ... read ... read".

The second theme was that of teaching and greater lexical knowledge. For example, S9 said they needed more facilities and resources:

"We need a laboratory for learning, reading, speaking, listening and computers."

Seven students said that reading comprehension should be taught as a separate subject. Four students suggested friendly or private teaching would help and three added that more choice about what they read would motivate them to read more. S7 said the reading about what he loved ("*... sports ... clubs ... cars*") was a key factor.

The third theme was that of a change in attitude, such as greater self-discipline. So S9 suggested:

"...if I will stop gathering with friends and social gatherings. "

S3 also suggested:

"Avoid cultural restrictions like many invitations during the week at home".

However, S2 suggested it was the entire culture which needed changing:

"I think if the community will change its culture towards reading, this will help."

The fourth theme was that of access to resources. S8 expressed a desire for :

".. books availability...English program...Education... channels..."

The fifth theme was that of decoding. Many of the students (10) agreed that the way English letters were taught was important. For example S3 said:

"When we begin learning English we only learn the alphabetic names. This make it difficult to read them sometimes."

Similarly, S1 said:

"I think if we have learned the phonics might help to decode the words correctly and in turn will increase comprehension".

Finally, five students said they were not exposed to sufficient English. S5 suggested:

"A private tutor might help me read better or audio reading books".

Two other students believed access to native speakers would improve their reading comprehension:

"They should bring native speakers to teach us English." (S9)

"I think if I will speak English with others will be helpful." (S2)

Four said this access could be brought about by moving abroad or travelling to English-speaking countries:

"It is impossible to be a good reader or learner in a country speaks other than English" (S14).

"... go abroad for English courses" (S10).

These findings show that most Saudi EFL students believe that their reading comprehension could be improved by better teaching to improve their knowledge and skills, and also by more access to English. The latter could be attained by reducing social commitments in order to spend more time reading, and by improved access to English resources, from books and media to native speakers and teachers.

5.3.3.7 Summary of findings from the student interviews

Overall, students said they read very little English text and almost only that which was necessary in order to prepare for examinations. They said they were not assigned reading by their lecturers nor encouraged by others. Most said there was no library in their home and their parents did not read. Their lack of reading was also due to lack of resources. Most reported poor or unused libraries in their previous schools, there were either no public libraries or they were unused, and nobody read in public places such as waiting rooms. There were also no university or departmental libraries and that even course textbooks were difficult to get hold of.

All students were disappointed by the standard of English teaching in their previous schools which they described as too traditional, and were also disappointed by the teaching of reading on their university course and doubted the proficiency of their lecturers. Several said that a specific reading programme should form part of their course, though the programme had already been cut due to their poor reading ability. Students generally agreed that the textbook was not sufficient to develop good English reading skills.

All students said they struggled with reading. Although they acknowledged the important of punctuation to comprehension, few had any knowledge of it and, for the most part, ignored it. Similarly, although they understood the importance of knowing English phonic systems and spelling patterns, for the most part they did not know enough of either and realized that this interfered with their comprehension. They understood some reading cues, but few prepared for reading and only half said they consolidated their knowledge on completion. Few said they were proficient enough to scan or

skim text and they identified problems with lack of vocabulary and struggled with long, difficult words and decoding issues.

Students said they re-read and used translation dictionaries to improve their understanding. Sometimes they asked friends or the lecturer for help. However several said that lecturers needed to be more approachable. Most understood they needed to read more, more vocabulary, better knowledge of spelling and access to English speakers.

Many identified social issues related to poor reading skills. Several claimed to be too busy helping their families and socializing, though this was made worse by the lack of libraries and reading spaces.

5.3.4 Lecturer interviews

In addition to the interviews, TAPs and RVRs completed with students, and as outlined in Chapter 4.7.3.4, six lecturers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. As with the student interview, lecturer responses were coded according to protocols outlined in Chapter 4.8.3 and the findings are presented below. In the following section, numbers in brackets represent the number of the six lecturers who made the response. The results from the six sections are as follows:

19) Table 5.9: Sections of the lecturer interview

Section	Title
1	Access to reading
2	Teaching reading
3	Cues to reading comprehension
4	The reading process
5	Student's recurrent reading behaviours
6	Factors affecting reading challenges

In the information presented below, I use direct quotes in two different ways, either to illustrate examples of dominant themes, or to provide examples of unique responses. The results from the six interview sections are as follows:

5.3.4.1 Access to reading

In the first section of the interview, lecturers were asked whether their students had access to libraries in the university and the English Departments at the three universities, and whether they encouraged their students to borrow books

from either library or assigned them reading. They were also asked whether towns have libraries or public spaces for reading and whether students received encouragement from others than themselves in read in English

All lecturers said that none of the three universities had a library; nor did the English departments. Not only did they say that were there no reading resources within the universities, but that even textbooks had to be personally and individually obtained by the students from towns some distance from the city.

"When students want to buy even textbooks we have to gather the student's name and buy the books from other cities which are far away from here" (Lr2).

The absence of libraries meant that they could not encourage borrowing books or reading material from within their institutions and departments, although Lr2 said that he encouraged the borrowing of books '*... to a certain level*' and was not certain whether students follow his advice. The other five lecturers expressed regret about the absence of libraries and Lr1 commented that he hoped that this would not always be the case.

"No, unfortunately. It is a new university, only five years old and I hope there will be a library in the new buildings which will be built soon".

Lr3 added that:

"... reading comprehension would be improved if there was a library from which students could borrow books. There is a necessity to make access available to various books because we are very limited to the course material, as we don't have a library in the university".

However one lecturer said that he believed that even if resources were available within the university, students did not have time to read beyond the core material required for the course in order to complete homework and prepare for examinations. Lr3 commented:

"... students are not capable of finishing the minimum course requirements. There are certain core texts which must be read to keep the student on track and I do not want to put more of a load onto them".

Other lecturers (e.g., Lr2) took up a similar negative theme, saying they did not think students would read more if resources were available, because of the poor standard of their reading:

"...because of the low standard of the students in English language in general and reading comprehension in particular, I only assign simple English reading to a minimum degree ...".

Others (e.g., Lr1) attributed non-reading to poor reading habits:

"... students hardly read because they haven't developed the habit of reading in their formative years".

One lecturer also said he believed that *"... students prefer to read on the Internet"*.

Three lecturers said that they did not assign reading beyond curriculum requirements and course materials because students would not be able to cope with it because of their poor reading standard. They also said that they believed that students lacked time and read only for exams. The other three said that they assigned minimal reading, and sometimes from the Internet. Only two said they encouraged their students to read and even then *"not much"* and most said that they do not believe that there was any additional encouragement from outside the course for students to read in English, e.g. parents, friends and society.

Of the three cities in the research, lecturers said that two have public libraries. However they said that they do not encourage students to go there. They also said that any public reading spaces contained only magazines in Arabic.

5.3.4.2 Teaching reading

In the second section of the interview, the six lecturers were asked their opinions on the standard of English reading teaching in Saudi schools prior to university level, about their perspective on the teaching of English reading in the university and whether they assess their students' reading levels.

Five lecturers said that they believed the English reading teaching in intermediate and secondary schools was unsatisfactory, of a poor standard and ineffectual. Lr3 added that it *"lacked seriousness"* and Lr1 that *"... it is not of the standard we are aiming for."* Lr2 added that *"... reading is a problematic skill for Arabs"*.

All lecturers said that they believed students learned English letters in school by name rather than phonically. They said they saw this as a problem because students could not sound words out properly in order to recognise the sound and therefore the word's meaning. For example Lr 3 said,

"Mostly in schools they teach letters by saying them alphabetically in a loud voice and this is a big mistake. If they would teach them phonically, students would be able to read smoothly and without hesitation".

He added that this made it difficult for students to decode and pronounce phonemes correctly.

Two of the lecturers said they believed that phonic reading was taught at the university. However the other four said that if it was, then the level was still unsatisfactory. A number of reasons were put forward to explain this, including the following:

- teaching reading strategies would interfere with other teaching on the course,
- the student reading standard is so low that it is ineffective to teach reading,
- student absence is high – more than half the class are absent at any one time so that lessons would lack continuity, and
- they are not themselves specialists in teaching reading and therefore lack the required expertise and knowledge to teach reading strategies.

Lr4 said:

"Teaching reading is assigned to linguistics lecturers who are not specialized in teaching reading. This is because we don't have enough lecturers."

Lecturers were uncertain about whether final stable syllables such as '-tion' (pronounced '-shon'), '-cial' (pronounced '-shul'), '-cious' (pronounced '-shus') and '-ique' (pronounced '-eek') were taught at the university. Some said they did not know, while others said that they did not teach it and one (Lr4) said that any that were taught, would only be the most common ones, such as '-tion'.

Most (4) lecturers stated that English reading teaching in the university was unsatisfactory and Lr4 said this was because they (the lecturers) were not reading teaching specialists, but three said poor student reading is due to poor attendance.. Lecturers 1, 4, and 6 said

"Most of the class are absent".

Three lecturers added that, because it was not of the standard they expected, poor student reading slowed their teaching process

Half the lecturers said they did not know whether stable syllabic patterns were taught at the university, although Lr6 was clear that they were not. Two disagreed and said there were courses on phonetics and linguistics in the university. Five lecturers said they did not assess student reading levels, but Lr1 said that he did but only 'sometimes'.

These findings suggest a poor relationship between student's reading ability and the level of reading material assigned. This makes it unlikely that many will understand what they have read.

5.3.4.3 Cues to reading

In the third section, lecturers were asked about the role of punctuation, phonics and spelling as facilitators of reading comprehension. They were also asked about their students' awareness of the importance of these to English reading comprehension.

a. Punctuation

Four lecturers said their students did not appear to understand punctuation and paid it no attention. Lr3 said he believed this was because it had not been taught properly in previous schools. The two lecturers who said their students were aware of punctuation, said they believed it was only "of very few" [punctuation markers] and that students seemed to struggle with it.

Lr2 commented that these problems could be due to differences between the location of punctuation marks in Arabic and English punctuation which could cause confusion for Arabic students learning English.

"Arabic doesn't have full-stops after each short sentence but only after long sentences or paragraphs. We use commas regularly and they seem to take the place of full-stops in Arabic. So I think the students apply the same strategy in reading English and apply the full-stop expecting it to be a comma."

His implication is that students do not expect to see full-stops as often as they appear in English text and therefore do not notice them.

b. Phonics

All lecturers agreed that it was important for students to be aware of, know and understand English phonic patterns and four emphasised this by saying it was 'vital' in facilitating correct decoding and comprehension. Two said that phonological awareness would help their student's decoding and understanding of what they read in English. As Lr1 expressed it:

"It will help with pronouncing the word correctly and help understanding the word and then the text as whole. Teachers often miss seeing the connection between the two."

Lr2 added that such phonological awareness should be taught from an early stage, i.e., from the beginning of learning English in schools at intermediate and secondary school levels.

c. Spelling

All lecturers said that spelling was important and two specified that this was because it helped with decoding and reading comprehension. Five agreed that spelling is an important aid in decoding, word knowledge and comprehension. However, lecturers were divided on whether it was taught at the university, two saying that it was not, three that it was (though Lr6 added "*only the plurals*", and one said he did not know. Four lecturers said their students English spelling was very weak. And Lr2 explained the reason.

"They are not good at spelling because English spelling, unlike Arabic spelling, does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them."

Despite these challenges, Lr1 said that most students indicated that they wanted to learn how to spell in English.

5.3.4.4 Reading process

In the fourth section lecturers were asked about cues, techniques and strategies they believed their students used in order to facilitate comprehension. They were also asked how they assessed the level of their students' reading comprehension, about the reading challenges their students seemed to face, and about what they believed would help their students to become better readers and understand more of what they read.

a. Cues, techniques and strategies

All lecturers said that they believed their students prepared for reading. Four lecturers said they believed they did so by familiarising themselves with the text, two that they seemed to explore the topic and two that they seemed to familiarise themselves with new and long words. All lecturers said their students appeared to employ reading techniques and they identified a range they used. These included talking to each other, talking to the teacher, guessing, translating text, finger pointing, trying to derive meaning from context or correct decoding. With regard to cues, techniques and strategies, lecturers generally stated that, in their experience, students were minimally aware of reading cues and Lr6 described this as "*only to a certain degree*." Four lecturers described their student's awareness as limited to title/topic sentences at the beginning of a text and summary/conclusion sentences at the end and added

that they needed more awareness. Lr6 added that they knew the importance of 'examples and quotations'.

One lecturer commented that he believed students would benefit from scanning the text in advance, although all six lecturers agreed that students generally familiarise themselves with the topic before beginning. Lecturers identified a number of preparation techniques which they believed would facilitate comprehension. These included building on background knowledge and cognitive abilities, being made aware of reading strategies prior to reading and working in pairs.

Lecturers identified a number of challenges students appeared to encounter when reading new text. These included new words (4 lecturers), long words (2 lecturers) decoding (2 lecturers) and concepts (1 lecturer). Lr4 reported that they appeared to have problems with summarizing and Lr2 with understanding the overall meaning of the text. Two lecturers said that, in their experience, students did not understand the text as a whole and treated every word and sentence as if all were equally important and contributed equally to the overall meaning of the text. Although they all said that students seemed to use techniques to facilitate understanding, they described traditional methods such as talking to each other, asking the lecturer or translating into Arabic. However, they all said they had observed students using a range of consolidation techniques such as re-reading, note-making (summarizing) and further discussion which, from informal observation, students undertook.

b. Assessment

All of the six lecturers in the sample claimed to know whether their students had understood a text. Several said they know this from informal techniques such as reading facial expressions and 'checking' as they moved around the classroom. However, two lecturers (i.e., Lr2 and Lr6) said they found out by questioning students on comprehension and Lr2 identified challenges they experienced such as "*retrieving information from the text*" and "*understanding the overall meaning of the text*". Lr6 said he knew when his students did not understand because they interrupted with questions.

c. Becoming better readers

All lecturers described plans to help students read better and identified a wide range of ways in which students could become better readers, although no two

agreed on a single method. Some suggestions focused on text, for example, that it should be more "*authentic*". Although lecturers did not explain precisely what they meant by this word, given my understanding of the use of this term in the Arabic EFL context, I have interpreted this to mean 'appropriate to the student's reading level and relevant to their cultural context'. They also said that it needed to be more interesting and other suggestions (by two lecturers) included the need for more re-reading and more discussion of ideas and concepts. Other suggestions (advocated by two lecturers) centred on classroom activities and techniques such as brainstorming and explanation and the use of pictures as cues, together with focusing on difficult words and punctuation, building on background knowledge and abilities. Lr1 suggested more knowledge of reading strategies and Lr3 suggested that silent reading might be more productive.

However one lecturer (Lr5) commented on what he perceived as a lack of student effort when it came to improving their English reading comprehension and some suggestions focused on changing student behaviours, such as reading more (practice), and two lecturers who suggested more reading for pleasure and enjoyment. Lr5 said that students needed to put more effort into reading.

5.3.4.5 Recurrent reading behaviours

In the fifth section, lecturers were asked about their perceptions of their students' habitual patterns of reading behaviour - for example, whether they skipped or skimmed over text and what they did when they encountered a difficult word.

Five of the six lecturers said they had occasionally or often observed their students re-reading aloud words or phrases. However two believed that it was unproductive for students to re-read because they were not able to self-correct in doing so.

"Some of them re-read but most are not able to correct themselves because they read without understanding." (Lr4)

Two lecturers said their students did not re-read, or that if they did, it would be futile as they were not capable of self-correction. Two others said that their students scan and skim text.

When it came to difficult words, three of the six lecturers said that they regularly observed students using dictionaries to translate and understand what

they are reading. However Lr1 and Lr2 described more than one student behaviour for dealing with difficult words, e.g., guessing and asking the teacher or other students. Four of the six lecturers said that students seemed to derive meaning from the context of the sentence or the story. Lr3 said his students were too embarrassed to say they were experiencing challenges.

Lecturers were divided on whether and why students skipped parts of a text. On the one hand, three of the six said that students appeared to skip text, but they gave opposing reasons. Lr2 said this was because

"... [some] parts of the text ... are superfluous; unnecessary to the general meaning ..."

On the other hand Lr1 said that students seemed to skip words which they found too difficult, e.g., long, difficult words, and Lr3 said they skipped words which are difficult to decode and pronounce. The remaining three lecturers said that students did not seem to skip text because they were not sufficiently sophisticated to be able to differentiate between important and unimportant information. For example, Lr5 said that students:

"... don't differentiate between the details and the main ideas in the text".

As a result, the lecturers said that their students read all the text in order not to miss any important information.

All lecturers said students seem to read some parts of text faster than others; most that they skipped text which contained short, familiar words which were easy to read.

5.3.4.6 Factors affecting reading difficulty

In the final section, lecturers were asked what, in their opinion, made English reading difficult for their students and what could be done to improve their student's English reading comprehension.

a. What makes English reading difficult for students

Lecturers described a wide range of challenges, from lack of background knowledge to vocabulary, training, morphology, syntax and decoding, which they believed were encountered by their students when reading English text. These challenges were of four types – Linguistics, Topic, Education and Culture.

Linguistics

One lecturer said that he believed that the differences between Arabic and English (Latin) script and the opaque grapheme/phoneme correspondence of

English made it difficult for Arabic students to understand English text well. As Lr2 commented:

"This could be because Arabic ... uses a completely differ from the Latin script used in English. Unlike Arabic spelling, English spelling does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them".

Topic

Lecturers said they believed students are not generally interested in the topics they are given to read about. Lr1 said that *"topics which are not appealing or interesting for the students"* is a factor in reading comprehension challenges and Lr2 said *"Teachers usually do not take into consideration the learners' needs and interest while choosing a text"*.

Education

Five lecturers attributed their students' perceived shortcomings to gaps in their previous English reading education, such as lack of knowledge of syntax/morphology etc. As Lr1 stated:

"... lack of training in employing top-down and interactions strategies, lack of instruction and lack of awareness of the complexity of reading process itself ... poverty of strategies training, lexical challenges, lack of background knowledge".

Lr3 also stated:

"... lack of reading techniques from the secondary and primary levels...they don't know most of the basics of morphology, syntax and phonics".

Culture

Four lecturers mentioned cultural elements which make English reading difficult for their students. Despite coming from Arabic cultures, three Arab lecturers (Lr1, Lr2 and Lr3) talked about internal, personal factors derived from the surrounding culture, such as lack of interest, effort and patience. For example, Lr2 said:

"Some Arab learners are lazy. Speaking is so much easier for them than reading because they practice it without much effort. But they view the reading and writing skills as skills which need a lot of effort to be practiced and controlled".

Others (Lr1 and Lr6) described external, cultural factors such as busy social lives and the lack of a reading culture in Saudi Arabia. Lr6 commented that:

"If they don't have back ground...or idea about the text then they face difficulty...cultural, social differences in text".

Lr1 also added that:

"The main factor is the lack of developing the reading habit during formative years".

Together these factors did not promote English reading comprehension.

b. What could be done to improve English reading comprehension

Lecturers made a wide range of suggestions for helping their students understand English text better. These suggestions were of four types – Behaviour, Text, Knowledge and Resources.

Behaviour

Five lecturers commented that, in their opinion, their students needed to be more motivated and to read more and for pleasure, rather than simply in order to pass examinations. As Lr6 stated:

"Motivation...they don't even read in their mother tongue...passivity is a problem here".

Text

Three lecturers said that reading comprehension could be improved by their students reading different texts. They said that reading comprehension could be improved through the use of more interesting "authentic" texts, appropriate for the type, level and culture of the students reading them, and that they needed to be used more authentically in the classroom. As Lr2 stated:

"One of the factors is choosing a text or designing tasks to be used in the reading class. Teachers usually do not take into consideration the learners' needs and interest while choosing a text. They choose artificial specially-written type, not authentic texts. Moreover, they use the texts as linguistic objects rather than skill teaching texts. This makes the students motivation very low. As a matter of fact, the texts are supposed to be used as both text as a linguistic object and text as a vehicle for information".

Knowledge

Four lecturers also said more background knowledge was needed because if reading were less difficult, their students would read more. Two said that they believed this could be accomplished by teaching reading strategies, phonological awareness, knowledge of grammar and expanding their vocabularies. For example, Lr5 said:

"Teaching phonics could facilitate their ability to pronounce words correctly and this, in turn, could facilitate good reading and improve comprehension".

Lr3 advocated more reading practice.

Resources

Two lecturers said that more and different resources were needed. These lecturers said that they believed students would benefit from access to more

books, including those which help with the learning of reading such as audio books. Lecturers also said they believed their students would benefit from access to native English speakers. As Lr3 suggested,

"... practice reading guided by the sound of native speakers, for example using audio books".

5.3.4.7 Summary of findings from the lecturer interviews

To summarise, lecturers generally agreed that access for students to English reading resources is poor, both within the university and beyond. However, they also agreed that students did not seem to have the time or ability to read much beyond the course materials.

Lecturers also agreed that they believed the teaching of English prior to university level to be of a very poor standard which did not prepare students adequately for the degree programme. However, they also generally agreed that they did not have the time or expertise to teach English reading modules specifically within the structure of the degree.

They agreed that punctuation, phonic knowledge and spelling are all important prerequisites to reading comprehension. However, they also agreed that it needed to be learned from an early stage of English acquisition.

Lecturers generally agreed that students did not appear to have much awareness of cues, techniques and strategies which would improve their reading comprehension and they identified a number of ways in which this could be improved. They also agreed that students seemed to read faster text which is simple and with which they are familiar. However, they were divided on the benefits of using techniques such as re-reading or skipping unimportant details. Most agreed that their students are not sufficiently competent to benefit from these reading habits.

Finally, lecturers readily identified a wide range of both challenges encountered by their students and ways in which their reading comprehension could be improved. They said that students' challenges centered on motivational issues and lack of knowledge. Improvements they suggested were mainly about better resources and better learning behaviour.

Overall, the lecturer's comments show that they do not take personal responsibility for their student's understanding of English text that they read. Rather, they attribute student comprehension failures to poor early education in how to read English, poor resources, limitations imposed by the teaching

programme and materials, lack of training in the teaching of English reading, and the failure of the students themselves to read sufficiently in English.

Part II: The answer to research questions

5.4 Answering the research questions

In Part I above, I presented the findings from each data set separately. In this second part I will present the data synthesized from the data sets as they relate to the research questions. The relationship between data sets and research questions is summarised in the following table.

20) Table 5.10: The relationship between research questions and data sets

No	The research question	Data set within which question is answered	Forms of evidence	Examples of questions and responses from each data set
1	What are the reading processes of Saudi Arabian university EFL students when reading English text and answering English comprehension questions and what factors influence these processes?	TAP	Spontaneous comments while reading	(TAP comment) – confusing words with similar spellings and sound (TAP behaviour) - separating syllables leading to two separate meanings (TAP behaviour) – challenges with decoding
		RVR	Reading behaviours, Responses to RVR questions	(RVR) – Why do you sometimes pause between words? (RVR) – substituting non-words for words (RVR) – mispronouncing vowels and compound vowels
		Student interview	Responses to interview questions <i>(What did they do and why did they say they did it?)</i>	(SI, Q.2) - How often do you read English text and for how long? (SI, Q.13) - At your previous school did you learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?
2	What are the Saudi Arabian EFL students' perspectives on their English reading comprehension challenges and to what factors do they ascribe them?	TAP	Spontaneous comments while reading	(TAP comment) – Similar spelling is confusing
		RVR	Reading behaviours, Responses to RVR questions	(RVR) – Why are you struggling with certain words? (RVR) - Do you understand the different meanings of words you just substituted with another words? (RVR) - What are the biggest challenges you face when reading English text?
		Student interview	Responses to interview questions <i>(How do they 'see' their comprehension challenges and why they experience them?)</i>	(SI, Q.29) - What are the most difficult aspects of reading English text for you? (SI, Q.37) – What factors make English reading difficult for you?
3	What are the EFL lecturers' perspectives on their EFL students' English reading comprehension challenges and are these perspectives consistent with their students' perspectives?	Lecturer interview	Responses to interview questions	Lrl. Q.10) - Do your students understand the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension? (Lrl. Q.16) - Are your students aware of cues about what to expect from an English text? (Lrl. Q.20) - What are the most difficult aspects of reading English for your students?

Each of the research questions of the current study will be addressed using data from the data sets identified in Table 5.10 above.

5.5 Research question 1

What are the reading processes of Saudi Arabian university EFL students when reading English text and answering English comprehension questions, and what factors influence these processes?

Evidence for answering the first research question about reading processes used by Saudi EFL students, and factors which affect them, are to be found in all of the student data sets.

5.5.1 Reading processes

As outlined in Chapters 3.1, reading is a complex interactive process with which students can experience much difficulty and socio-cultural processes which form part of reading comprehension. Cognitive processes include any mental activity which translates text into meaning and may include language, memory, sensory perception and motivation (Woolley, 2008). Socio-cultural processes are the impact of social and cultural understanding on the derivation of meaning. They may be embedded in the text by the writer and require knowledge by the reader. Reading processes are interactive; an integration of many aspects including features of the text, what the writer brings to the writing, characteristics of the reader and the social and cultural tools which the reader brings to the reading. As Carrell (1984) states, “comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background and the text” (p.33). It is not a moment in time, but a process of on-going meaning-making from initial reading (Roebuck, 1998) which can be the cause of many comprehension challenges (Maria, 1990; Pearson & Fielding, 1991) especially in the EFL context where the reader brings the meaning of their own society and culture to the reading of a different culture with which s/he is not familiar.

5.5.2 The use of reading strategies

Reading strategies are processes whereby readers solve problems, generally due to insufficiency on their part, which they encounter while reading a text. They can address the whole text, or part of it and have been found to facilitate comprehension (Ibrahim, 2008).

Students in this study said they had been taught few readings strategies and only recently. They engaged in almost no preparation techniques such as reading titles, looking at photos etc. Instead they said they launched directly into reading and, because they felt unprepared, they became anxious and easily confused about what they were reading and that these mental states further interfered with their reading comprehension.

They also said they employed few reading strategies while they were reading. They could identify keys words (words which they identified as often repeated) and sentences (introductory and conclusive sentences), but did not use them effectively to help them understand. Their three main strategies were the simple *repetition* of words, and parts of words in an attempt at correct decoding and word recognition. This strategy was successful two-thirds of the time but even when they pronounced correctly repeating or stopped repeating, it is not clear that they had understood what they had read. They tried to make up for their lack of knowledge by *guessing* the meanings of words they did not understand. This strategy was not very successful (less than 10% of the time). The third and most widely used strategy was a dictionary for *translation*.

When they had finished reading, only half of the sample said they consolidated their reading in order to reinforce their comprehension.

5.5.3 Punctuation

Reading aloud gave me insights into the process of reading and the challenge to automaticity of punctuation. Students paid very little attention to punctuation, mainly because they had little knowledge of punctuation marks and what they meant in English writing. This lack of knowledge lead to errors, such as when a full-stop was ignored so that two ideas which formed parts of two different sentences were incorrectly linked together. When rules of capitalization were not understood, students did not recognise names; when questions and quotation marks were ignored, they did not understand that questions had been posed or quotes inserted.

5.5.4 Fluency

Fluency is a major theme which emerged from the findings. It is the ability to read with ease and speed (see Chapter 3.5.1) and according to Wolf & Katzir-Cohen (2001) consists of two components – accuracy and automaticity. When automaticity increases, more effort can be directed toward comprehension (Perfetti et al, 2005). According to Gabb (2000), the main challenges in developing fluency are limited vocabulary and lack of background (schematic) knowledge. (See Chapter 3.5.2) This occurs especially when the reader and the writer of a text do not share the same language. EFL fluency is therefore more difficult to attain because linguistic processes are less automatic (see Chapter 3.5.1).

Students experienced a great deal of difficulty when encountering new, long and difficult words. They read slowly and hesitantly, with many pauses both between and within words. This is an indicator of poor fluency and consisted of two primary elements:

a. Decoding

Poor decoding was a major reading challenges. Students in this study struggled with many vowel sounds (especially NA - Non-Acrophonic vowels), compound vowels, and some consonants (such as 'p'). They often broke down words into component syllables and pronounced them separately in an effort to understand them. However this caused the words to lose integrity (as when the decoding of one syllable effected the decoding of another). They did not know how to decode and pronounce final stable syllabic patterns, nor how to recognise silent letters. Because of this they mispronounced letters, syllables and therefore, wrongly decoded entire words and did not understand them. Although they continued to read, they often appeared to be merely making sounds with few or no meanings connected to them.

Incorrect decoding lead to the substitution of one English word for another or to a nonsense word, though students were not always aware of this. Parts of words were also omitted, added and changed. This led to changes in tense, quantities, possessives and other grammatical errors. Words were also left out entirely and sometimes whole lines were skipped. As a result, it is likely that entire sentences and sections texts were not understood.

b. Confusion of similar words

Students often appeared to confuse words which were similar. This was probably because they paid most attention to the beginnings of words and failed to discriminate between the word segments which followed. It could be also because they were not competent spellers in English and so did not know what 'patterns' to expect in English words. The overall reading process was so difficult that students sometimes gave up and continued reading passively, without interest or understanding.

5.5.5 Factors affecting students' reading processes

The factors which affect the reading process fall broadly into two types – those which are internal to the reader, (e.g., cognitive factors) and those which are external to the reader (i.e., the social context). Chapter 3.9 outlines a number of such factors, supported by the findings of researchers such as Mebarki (2011) and Pathan & Al-Dersi (2013). They include fluency (including coherency and decoding), prior knowledge (including lexical knowledge and comprehension), topic interest, reading experience (including habits and practice), EFL strategies used by the reader (including the use of punctuation), the adequacy of teaching strategies used by the teacher, and aspects of text structure (including its culture, type and features).

Six themes were identified which affected student reading comprehension: Resources, Reading experience, Teaching, The cultural context, Lack of Prior Knowledge and Lack of interest.

5.5.5.1 Resources

Al-Nafisah & Al Shorman (2011) found that rare visits to libraries, the inability to get books quickly, the unavailability of reading materials and the difficulty of reading materials provided by English departments were major obstacles to the development of reading skills in Saudi EFL students.

Students in this study had very little access to English reading in their home, schools, public libraries, universities and English departments. This is partly due to the lack of Saudi reading culture (see below), and partly to a lack of resources in their universities, all of which had been founded within the preceding five years and were in temporary accommodation.

5.5.5.2 Reading experience

According to Merrill (1991) experience enables the construction of knowledge and is a key component of learning (see Chapter 3.12). According to constructivist theory, such experience enables processes of assimilation and accommodation which lead to learning. Therefore, the more reading experience a student has, the more they expose themselves to words, phrases, sentence structures, etc. and create opportunities to acquire greater literacy and comprehension. L1 experience is easily gained from the surrounding reading environment. However, EFL experience may be more limited, particularly in the Arab world which is both more geographically and culturally distant from English linguistic environments and resources.

The students in this study had very little experience of reading English and most of their experience was of reading aloud. Awareness of their poor reading skills, combined with the element of 'public performance' when reading aloud, made them anxious and this anxiety exacerbated their challenges. They also had little experience of English-speakers. This lack of experience led to lack of familiarity with English text structure and constitutes a major component of slow reading and more reading would improve fluency and therefore comprehension (see Section 5.5.3).

5.5.5.3 Teaching

According to Grabe & Stoller (2011) most student knowledge of L2 comes from classroom instruction and instructional tasks (see Chapter 3.5.5). However, the quality of this instruction will depend on the expertise of the teachers, their linguistic knowledge and their knowledge of processing strategies (Birch, 2002)

All students in this study agreed that the teaching of English reading in schools was unsatisfactory and that this failed them from the very beginning of their learning. It was delivered by poorly-qualified teachers and consisted only of traditional teaching methods reciting words aloud repeatedly. Students were also dissatisfied with the teaching of English reading in the university saying that similar methods were used.

Students described their lecturers as limited in proficiency, unavailable and disinterested, and said they did not assess reading levels or assign reading. They described them as incompetent readers themselves and lacking specialist expertise in the teaching of English reading. As foreigners (with a range of English 'accents'), they were difficult for students to understand. For

these reasons, the syllabus had been reduced and students said that it did not prepare them to teach the subject themselves.

5.5.5.4 The cultural context

According to the sociocultural perspective, the social culture of the learner shapes their approach to language, and their individual development cannot be understood without the cultural context within which it is embedded (see Chapter 3.13). Bruner (1975) claimed that social values, including past and current knowledge, shape the learner's constructs and their approach to new ideas or concepts. According to socio-cultural theory, social and cultural beliefs, attitudes, and personal history affect the behaviour of the society's members (see Chapter 3.13) and Vygotsky said that every function of a child's development is first social (interpsychological) and then personal (intrapsychological) (see Chapter 3.13). Culture is shown in patterns of social obligation and in how time is spent.

a. Saudi culture

As discussed above, Saudi culture also does not prioritise reading or English reading in educational or private establishments (see Section above). Also in Saudi culture, for religious reasons, women are not permitted to go out unless accompanied by a male. This puts pressure on Saudi males, both to obtain goods required for the household, and to escort female family members whenever they leave the house.

The vast majority of students had no reading or English-reading role models, either in their homes or public places. Also, the students in this study were young males so that a significant proportion of their time would be required to escort mothers, sisters, aunties and female cousins. Family responsibilities were cited as a reason they were too busy to read English text.

b. Saudi socialising

There is a strong tradition in Saudi society of regular, mutual invitation to gatherings at the houses of extended families and within neighbourhoods. These gatherings include coffee, small meals, dinners and banquets. A typical weekly pattern might include three coffee invitations, two dinners and a banquet once every two weeks so that people are either attending or hosting a social occasion almost every day. Saudi students also socialize amongst themselves

to prevent social isolation. These social obligations also limited opportunities to read English text.

Students in this study said they lacked time to read because of social obligations they were required to fulfil. This lack of time spent reading can only inhibit knowledge, familiarity, fluency and comprehension. (see Section 5.3.3.1).

5.5.5.5 Lack of prior knowledge

Prior knowledge is also a major theme which emerged from the findings. It is what the reader brings with him or her to the reading of a text and can include background information about the content and topic (see Chapter 3.5.2) as well prior exposure. Prior knowledge helps the reader create expectations of the text and enables them to make predictions and test their hypotheses to confirm or correct their predictions (Goodman, 1988) (see Chapter 3.3). Poor reading comprehension is related to both undeveloped oral language and word-reading skills, and to insufficient relevant background and cultural knowledge (August & Shanahan, 2006). (see Chapter 3.5.2).

The findings showed that students lacked three types of knowledge which affected their comprehension: Vocabulary, Text structure and Text culture.

a. Vocabulary

Students said they lacked English vocabulary and identified many words in the text which they could not understand. This meant that they could not anticipate the content of their reading, which would have made it more fluent and increased comprehension. They were also seemed unable to integrate what they had read into an overall text meaning.

b. Awareness of text structure

This is one of the abilities that a reader brings with them to the reading of a text. Text varies in type (e.g., narrative, expository, etc.) and understanding its purpose gives the reader a 'plan of action' by helping them to locate important information. Some understanding of text organization in L2 is necessary for reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, see Chapter 3.5.3). It decreases cognitive load while reading, freeing up capacity to process other elements such as word-meanings and the sequencing of events.

Lack of reading experience (mentioned above) could mean that students lacked awareness of text structure. If they had been exposed to more, and a

greater variety of, English text types, they may have been able to identify the elements of structure which would enable them to develop plans for reading for greater comprehension. Without it, cognitive capacity seemed to become overloaded and the students, who lacked an overall framework, became lost in small and decontextualised linguistic tasks.

Text culture

Learning another language partly involves learning the cultural worldview of its speakers. Reading is not only a linguistic activity but a social and cultural process where the foreign author of a text conveys his/her cultural knowledge to the L2 reader. Where the social opportunity to understand and acquire that world view is lacking, reading comprehension is likely to suffer (see Chapter 3.13). In the EFL context, the culture of origin will shape aspects of English language learning.. August & Shanahan (2006) state that poor reading comprehension is partly related to insufficient relevant background knowledge (see Chapter 3.5.2). Shen (2001) notes that EFL readers face new or different cultural notions embedded in English text which lead to problems with comprehension, and Gabb (2000) states that unfamiliar cultural content can interfere with both self-esteem and the motivation to read and improve reading skills in EFL learners.

The American text used in this study probably presented a number of cultural barriers to comprehension – place names, activities (e.g., baking contests and walking clubs) and concepts (e.g., female lawyers, demonstrations and freedom of speech). It seemed that students in this study lacked background knowledge about text context. Where they did not understand content, they appeared to use their own limited experience to answer the comprehension questions, for the most part incorrectly.

5.5.5.6 Lack of interest

Researchers have found that interest in the reading topic is a key feature of reading comprehension. It is a powerful psychological motivator (Edgier, 1999 in Chapter 3.5.6) and lack of willingness to read makes reading instruction less effective (Huang, 2005, 2006, see Chapter 3.13.5) Although engaging student's interest is a key feature in promoting reading for pleasure (Robb & Susser, 1990), it is often overlooked as an important predictor of academic success (Grabe & Stoller, 2011 in Chapter 3.13.5).

Students in this study realised interest was key to their motivation and comprehension. However, lack of resources, and therefore of choice, meant they were not interested in the English texts they read. They became bored and unenthusiastic about reading English and read only compulsory text in order to pass exams. Some read English exclusively in media other than printed books (e.g., on the internet or in shopping catalogues).

5.6 Research question 2

What are the Saudi Arabian EFL students' perspectives on their English reading comprehension challenges, and to what factors do they ascribe them?

Evidence for answering the second research question about reading comprehension challenges experienced by Saudi EFL students, and the reasons for them, are again to be found in all the student data sets.

5.6.1 Reading comprehension challenges

Reading comprehension challenges stem from interactions between individual readers and the texts they read. They can arise from every feature of a language, including orthography, phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax and semantics. In EFL environments, they can also stem from the relationships between these features in the reader's first and second languages. For example, English script is read from left to right, whereas Arabic read from right to left and grammar is differently constructed in each language. Grabe & Stoller (2011) argued that poor grammatical understanding presents reading comprehension challenges and Haynes & Baker (1993) attributed them to lack of vocabulary.

Mourtaga (2006) identified four types of reading comprehension challenges: firstly, misunderstanding of the reading process; secondly, insufficient linguistic competence and reading practice; thirdly, interference between L1 and L2; and finally, the opaqueness of the relationship between spelling and sound in English. Alsamadani (2011) identified prior knowledge (schemata), enthusiasm for reading, time spent reading, the purpose of reading, and vocabulary size affected comprehension. Cain & Oakhill (1999) said that they stemmed from a focus is more on word-reading accuracy over comprehension-monitoring strategy (see Chapter 3.5.4) and Macaro & Erler (2008) found that they reduced with training in reading strategy training.

The second research question seeks to understand how students perceive and experience their reading comprehension challenges. The themes which have emerged from what students say about these challenges are consistent with the reading processes which emerged in the data answering the first research question. This consistency between responses shows that students have a great deal of insight into their reading comprehension problems.

5.6.2 Student perceptions of their reading comprehension challenges

Students perceived their reading comprehension challenges to fall into a number of areas. Firstly, they realised that they struggled to understand words which were new to them and with words which contained similar initial sounds and spellings. Secondly, they struggled with long words, such as those containing multiple vowels and syllables. Thirdly, they were aware that they read slowly, and that they tried desperately to pronounce the words they encountered correctly, in the hope that they would recognise and understand them. Fourthly, they were also aware of their poor decoding, which they related to their poor English spelling and their confusion of words which looked similar. Finally, some realised that they struggled with English punctuation, while others ignored or did not understand it.

Students knew that they were not interested in what they were reading and that their boredom was one of the factors which made reading an effort. However, their poor reading skills, which necessitated the constant use of a translation dictionary, induced a number of other negative mental states such as anxiety and frustration, which further reduced their motivation to read English.

5.6.3 Students ascriptions for their reading comprehension challenges

During the interview, students were asked a number of questions about the reasons for their reading comprehension challenges. Several themes emerged from their answers. These included: Lack of practice, Lack of resources, Poor teaching and Negative emotional states, and Saudi culture.

a. Lack of practice

Students readily admitted that they did not read sufficient English text to become good readers and that their poor reading comprehension was due to this. They also readily acknowledged that this situation could be remedied by more reading practice. However some said they needed extrinsic rewards (such

as competitions with prizes) to motivate them to do so. These comments made it clear that they did not find English reading intrinsically motivating.

b. Lack of resources

Students also attributed their poor comprehension to a lack of reading resources; of books, libraries, English television, Internet access and language laboratories. They said that they were not exposed to sufficient English in any form (e.g., oral, written, face-to-face) and that more exposure, including access to native English-speakers and travel to English-speaking countries, would improve their English skills and reading comprehension.

c. Poor teaching

Students ascribed much of their poor reading comprehension to poor teaching at both school and university level. They described 'old-fashioned' or 'traditional' teaching methods used by teachers who lacked proficiency and were largely disinterested in the learning outcomes of their students. Several suggested that a specific reading comprehension programme within the structure of the degree was needed in order to improve their comprehension.

d. Emotional states

Students said that their reading comprehension challenges were compounded by negative emotional states which they experienced as they read. These included frustration, anxiety, shame and embarrassment which stemmed from their poor performance.

e. Saudi culture

Finally, students attributed their poor reading comprehension to an unsupportive surrounding culture, and in particular to its demanding social programme which limited the time they had available to practice English reading.

5.7 Research question 3

What are the EFL lecturers' perspectives on their EFL students' English reading comprehension challenges and are these perspectives consistent with their students' perspectives?

Evidence for answering the third research question came from information provided during the lecturer interview. The information provided by

lecturers about access to reading generally agreed with that provided by students. For example, they agreed that students had few Saudi reading role models and had not developed the habit of reading. They also agreed that public libraries were under-used and that the universities and English Departments in which the research took place did not have libraries. However they believed that, because of their poor reading skills, students would not use libraries anyway. Despite this skepticism, they believed better access to resources would improve their student's reading.

Lecturers also agreed with students about the poor standard of English reading teaching in Saudi schools (and possibly at the university) but saw this as an Arab-world issue. They also realised that students lacked background knowledge, such as reading strategies and phonological awareness, which would help them rely less on translation dictionaries. They said students needed better background knowledge and more reading experience in order to become better readers.

They agreed with their students that the English text they read needed to be more interesting. However they also said that they lacked the time and expertise to teach English reading effectively. They also mentioned lack of student effort, describing students as lazy and often absent. They had low expectations of their students and knew they did not read beyond curriculum requirements.

5.8 Conclusion to chapter 5

It is evident from their responses, that Saudi EFL students engaged in a number of reading processes when reading English text. Firstly, they used a number of arbitrary and relatively unsuccessful reading processes because they said they had not been taught reading strategies in schools or at the university. Secondly, they did not effectively use punctuation marks to facilitate their comprehension because of orthographic differences between English and Arabic and the failure of educational establishments to teach English punctuation. Thirdly, their reading lacked fluency because they said they had not been taught English phonics, particularly where the Arabic phonemic range lacks the English sound, and had been taught the English alphabet by name instead of sound. They also said they had not been taught the decoding of final stable syllables, nor the principle of silent letters. Because they said they also lacked training in word

recognition, phonological segmentation and English spelling, they confused words which were spelt similarly. This lack of fluency limited their comprehension.

Saudi culture does not generally promote reading and the lack of availability of reading resources, together with the a general societal failure to prioritise reading in home, school and social environments means students are impoverished in their reading generally. A degree of cultural isolation due to Saudi immigration policies, together with patterns of social obligations, also means that students have few opportunities to encounter English and English speakers and little time to read English text. This could have lead to a lack of English reading exposure and experience. There is a widespread lack of emphasis on quality teaching of English reading in Saudi schools and at the universities and old-fashioned teaching methods which enforce reading aloud in class mean students develop anxiety around exposing their reading weaknesses in front of a group. Classroom time constraints also mean students have little opportunity to do so. Their anxiety could be due to a lack of the prior knowledge (e.g., of vocabulary, text structure and text culture) which would enable confidence and comprehension and their negative mental and motivational states may have been worsened by a lack of interest in the text they are given (largely expository as opposed to narrative).

It is also apparent that Saudi EFL students have clear perspectives on their reading comprehension challenges and what causes them. They know they read slowly and struggle with decoding and pronouncing and recognising words, and that these may lead to poor reading comprehension. They ascribe their challenges to aspects of their unsupportive culture which limits both resources and time, and to poor teaching methods which use uninteresting texts and induce counter-productive emotional states, exacerbating their reading comprehension problems.

As professionals recruited from abroad to teach in Saudi Arabia, it is not surprising that some lecturers took a broader view on their students reading comprehension challenges than the students did themselves. Despite this, they agreed with their students on most aspects of their experience, such as poor school teaching of English reading, the lack of resources and social support, and the influence of a demanding Saudi social culture. Their experience and expertise enabled them to comment with greater articulacy and more incisively

than their students, so that whereas students talked about 'boring texts' and 'poor teaching methods', lecturers talked about the texts being used as 'linguistic objects' rather than authentic texts. However they disagreed about student characteristics, and said that absence and lack of effort and commitment, could have contributed to their students poor reading comprehension.

The evidence provided by students and lecturers in this study, using a range of data collection methods, suggest a number of things with regard to the reading processes and reading comprehension challenges of Saudi EFL students. Some confirm the findings of earlier studies in the field, such as the effect of a lack of exposure to L2 texts and culture, and the importance of reading resources. However others have not been anticipated in the literature, for example the effects of a demanding social life and the impact of teaching the English alphabet by name rather than phonically. Both student and lecturer participants in this study readily suggested solutions to their reading problem and measures needed in order to improve their reading comprehension.

The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss and interpret the findings of the current study as presented in Chapter 5. I will begin by discussing what the findings show about reading processes used by the participants and the factors which they have said influence these processes. I will then discuss the findings with regard to reading comprehension challenges faced by the student sample, and the factors which students and lecturers have said influence these challenges. I will then bring together the themes which were identified from the reading processes and comprehension challenges in order to understand how they may impact on each other. The findings will be considered in the light of their relationship to the theoretical background and the body of literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

6.2. Reading comprehension standard

Before interpreting and discussing the reading processes and challenges participants faced in reading comprehension, I should highlight the likely level of their reading comprehension. This was illustrated in the questions which followed their reading of the TAP text and showed that reading comprehension tended to be poor, as discussed in Chapter 5, and by the information presented in Tables 3 and 3a. Given this, and the normal requirements of classroom practice mentioned in chapter two, I decided to focus on reading aloud as a protocol to explore reading comprehension challenges.

Other possible reasons for the comprehension failures which emerged from the data will be discussed below. However, one could relate to the sociocultural context of the study. As outlined in Chapter 5.2, those questions which may require cultural knowledge (which the participants lacked) were amongst the poorest answered. This might indicate the importance of sociocultural context to reading comprehension.

6.2.1 Reading processes used by Saudi Arabian EFL university students

The reading comprehension failures identified in the above findings were manifested in the student participants' reading aloud processes. One of these processes that emerged from the data related to the use of **reading strategies** (see 5.5.2). This suggests that the student participants were not familiar with

reading strategies which could be undertaken prior to reading in order to help them understand the text. This contrasts with the findings of Alsamadani (2009) who found that Saudi EFL students are aware of English reading strategies.

By far the most commonly used strategy demonstrated during the TAP reading was *repetition* (of part-words, words, phrases etc.). The high level of repetition used could therefore act as an indicator to the very low level of comprehension by students. To the best of my knowledge, this indication of comprehension failure through repetition has not been mentioned in the literature and is both novel and key to the understanding of EFL reading processes. Almost two thirds of repetitions led to *self-correction* of decoding, but that repetition resulting in correct decoding did not always equate to comprehension. These findings suggest that students did not know how to decode many of the words they read and that this could have interfered with their comprehension. "With the limited experiences of the target language, [learners]... may make mistakes" (Norris, 1983: 34), (see Chapter 5.7 above).

There is no demonstrable connection between correct decoding and understanding. The evidence demonstrating the poor comprehension scores of these readers suggests that even when they are reading with correct decoding, they do not necessarily understand the content of what they are reading. The poor level of EFL reading appeared to result from a reading aloud process which was repeated for every individual word encountered, and particularly with those words which were unfamiliar to the reader.

The process appears to function in the way in which the reader focuses on the decoding of a single word, and secondly attempts to translate it into their first language in order to understand it. This diversion could have two effects: Firstly it interrupts the flow of understanding and adds to the cognitive load of reading in English. Secondly, incorrect translation leads to the attribution/guessing of incorrect meaning, and outcomes such as word substitution and confusion of words which are similar, (see Chapter 5.5.2).

This could divert a reader's understanding away from the actual meaning of the text and result in a negative impact on their comprehension, e.g., when 'mall' was replaced by 'mile'. This suggests that students are trying to understand by guessing but that this does not support their efforts at comprehension. Laufer (1997) describes guessing as a strategy of desperation

which may or may not result in comprehension. The current findings demonstrate that much of the time, it does not. I believe this is because of the readers' very small vocabularies which are due to a lack of exposure to reading English and to teaching methods used by Saudi teachers. This was made clear when students were unable to understand words in context.

I feel that the current study sheds some light on the roles of repetition and self-correction as reading processes, together with their impact on EFL reading comprehension, which have tended to be overlooked in previous EFL studies

Another reading process observed was the failure of readers to attend to **punctuation**. The students paid little attention to punctuation, which could be attributed either to a failure to notice them or in readers being too focused on word recognition to pay them attention, (see Chapter 5.5.3).

Pathan & Al-Dersi (2013) identified problems with punctuation as a contributor to reading comprehension failures in Libyan undergraduate EFL students and the findings of the current study support their finding. Punctuation is a basic component of text and EFL learners should know how to use it from reading in their first language. However, it seemed that the students in this study either read little in their mother tongue, or had not been taught punctuation in previous schools.

A third range of reading processes related wrong decoding. Many components of English phoneme/grapheme, including vowels, consonants and complex syllables such as double, single and compound vowels and final stable syllables, were incorrectly decoded and mispronounced during reading. This could be a major factor in the multiple repetitions of words and their components, and could indicate that students lacked knowledge of English phoneme grapheme relationships and the ability to decode the relationship between English orthography and phonology. Students attributed this lack to the poor teaching of English phonology (see Section 6.2.3 below) and to differences between Arabic and English phonology (see Section 6.2.3 below). Mourtaga (2004) found these differences interfere with the reader's ability to adapt to reading, and this study supports his findings.

The students showed many vowels were wrongly coded and mispronounced where the name of a letter, particularly a vowel, had been substituted for the phoneme and they attributed this to having first been taught the letters of the English alphabet by name rather than sound. The problems

learners of English encounter in the distinction between the long and short vowel sounds in words such as 'hit' and 'heat' have been identified by Norrish (1983) as a significant factor because their importance in English is more marked than it is within other languages. This suggests that the teaching of the English alphabet by letter name could impact on EFL phonic awareness and influence the EFL reading process. This has not previously been investigated in the L2 context and the findings of the current study suggest that such teaching should be delayed until English phonic awareness is firmly established through the teaching of the alphabet phonically.

Wrong decoding and wrong decoding is linked to the reading aloud process of **substitution** and also to the addition and omission of consonants and syllables, (see Chapter 5.5.2 and 5.5.4). This suggests that students are not looking at the word unit as a whole but are processing its parts separately. Their lack of awareness of doing so, illustrates that they are confused by similar linguistic patterns and are not engaging in the key reading skill of monitoring their comprehension as they read. This process was not an anticipated finding of the study and, in my opinion, needs to be further investigated to determine its impact on reading comprehension.

Another reading process related to **slow reading**, (see Chapter 5.5.3 and 5.5.4). This could be attributed to a number of factors: One possibility is that the readers found reading difficult as they did not often read in English and that therefore the whole process was unfamiliar. Another was that much of the material was new to them and they had not encountered many of the words before. This supposition is supported by Norrish (1983) who postulates that when readers are given contextualized new vocabulary at key junctures that acts in an effective way to support and consolidate learning.

Both reading speed and comprehension could be improved by assessment of reading levels and the selection of texts at appropriate reading levels.

6.2.2 Reading comprehension challenges

The reading aloud processes engaged in by Saudi EFL students revealed that they faced a number of reading comprehension challenges.

One source of comprehension difficulty was the constant struggle with the identification, decoding and meanings of **particular words**. **New** words

were the commonest problem identified in this study. The students clearly identified the link between the struggle with new words and failure of overall reading comprehension. This suggests that a larger vocabulary would remedy many reading comprehension problems. Since the novelty of many words was also linked to lack of EFL cultural concepts, it also suggests that readers need to be made more familiar with EFL cultural concepts before reading EFL text.

Another major difficulty was with words which were **similar**, particularly those which began with the same letters or word structures. They also substituted words with which they were familiar, for words they did not recognise (see Chapter 5.5.4). As discussed above, these substitutions could have caused their overall understanding of the text to suffer. This suggests that better word recognition and morphological awareness would reduce confusion and improve reading comprehension. Behaviours exhibited while reading for the TAP also showed that students struggled with **long** words, particularly those with compound vowels, (see Chapter 5.5.4). This suggests that greater knowledge of English phoneme grapheme relationships would reduce struggles with the decoding of long and difficult words and improve reading comprehension.

Another source of reading comprehension challenges, identified above, was **pace and continuity of reading**, (see slow reading, above). The slowness of the reading appeared to impact on both concentration and the capacity of their working memory to recall what they had just read and integrate it into larger units of meaning, as contained, for examples, in phrases and sentences as pointed out in Chapter 3.5.1.

A further reading comprehension difficulty is related to problems with **decoding**. These problems were identified as a barrier to comprehension. The struggles with word decoding were also identified as a major challenge to comprehension as mentioned above.

A smaller reading comprehension difficulty related to **punctuation**. As discussed above, when students focused their attention on pronouncing words correctly and trying to derive their meaning, the correct use of punctuation was overlooked. Without these indicators, the purpose of words in a text is susceptible to misinterpretation and miscomprehension.

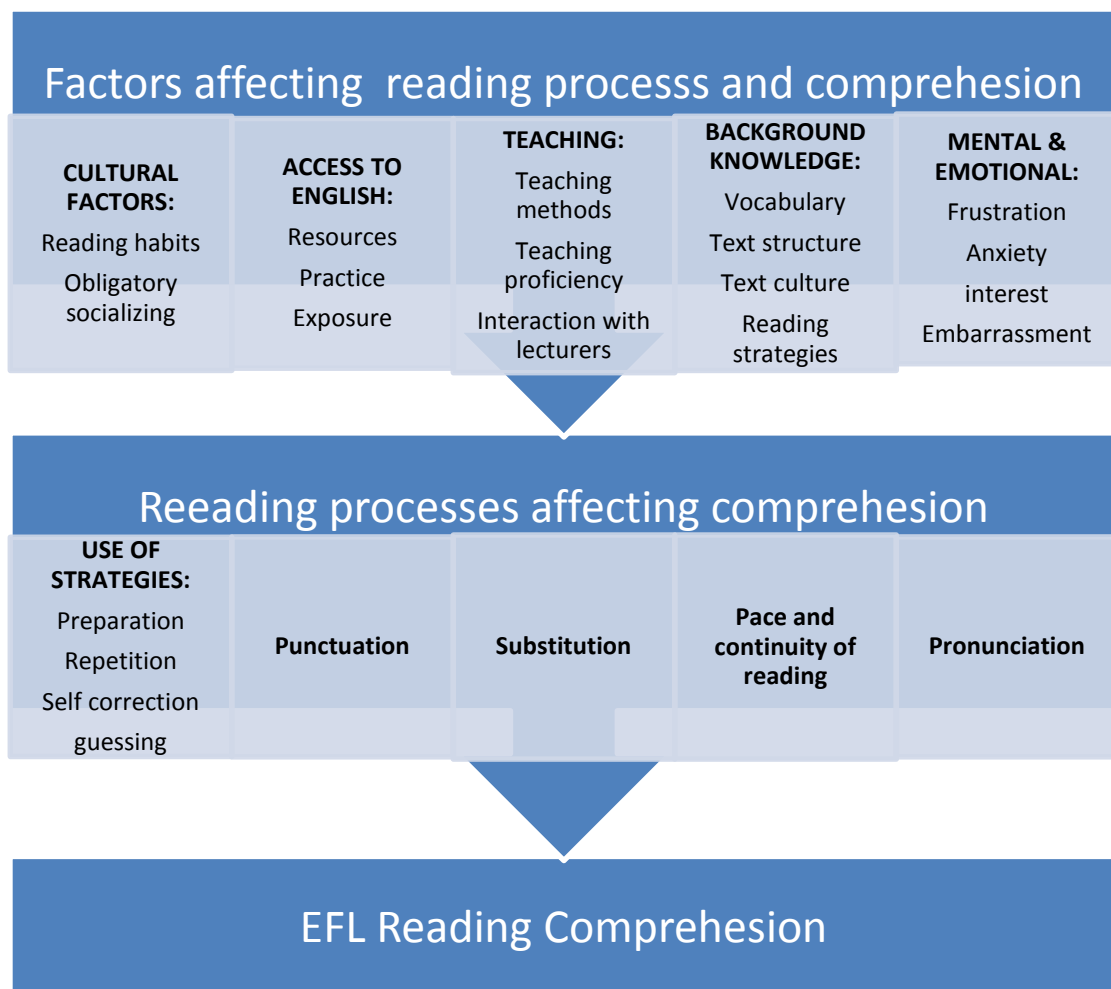
A major reading comprehension difficulty related to **mental and emotional states** while reading, (see Chapter 5.5.2 and 5.6.2). Feelings of

anxiety or embarrassment overshadowed their effort to understand what they were reading particularly when, aware of their deficiencies, they were asked to read aloud. Frustration at their lack of understanding and boredom due to lack of interest in the topics they were reading, reduced their motivation to read in English and the amount of time they spent doing so.

6.3 Factors and reading processes affecting comprehension

The interpretive process yielded a number of factors which appear to have influenced the reading processes and comprehension challenges of the sample. These have been grouped into five themes: Culture, Teaching, Resources, Prior knowledge and Mental states (see Figure 1 below). There is no linear order to these themes but they are inter-linked as they collectively and variously impact on EFL reading processes and comprehension.

21) Figure 6.1: Factors and reading processes affecting comprehension of Saudi EFL students



6.3.1 Cultural factors

Participants ascribed the reasons for some of their incomprehension to cultural factors. These were an unsupportive surrounding culture, and the demanding social programme expected of members of its society. I believe the first has its origin in the historical background of reading in Arabic culture (see Chapter 2.6) and the second in the nature of Saudi social dynamics.

6.3.1.1 Saudi culture

The findings of the current study showed that participants attributed their attitudes toward reading and to reading English text, to the Saudi cultural norm of reading mainly in Arabic and for religious purposes. Participants revealed there was no habit of reading at all levels of Saudi society from the family unit where they did not see their parents reading and were not read to as children, to the universities and their departments where there were no libraries for students to borrow books or specifically English literature. Neither families nor schools emphasised the importance of reading for pleasure and there were no role models for reading in public. Participants in this study were influenced by these cultural values in that they saw reading as a chore rather than a pleasure, even in their own language.

The findings also showed that there are few opportunities for Saudi citizens to be exposed to spoken English. This is because, as outlined in Chapter 2.2.3, the nation of Saudi Arabia is not 'open' to the outside world. Although there is a large ex-patriot community, its members are not integrated into Saudi society. There is no 'tourist' industry to attract English-speaking as the lingua franca. Instead, visitors to the kingdom are mainly Arabic speakers who have come to perform Islamic pilgrimages. As a result, apart from a few English television programmes and films, Saudis seldom hear the English spoken word or read it in text. Gorsuch & Taguchi (2008) found that, in comparison to L1 readers, EFL readers are disadvantaged by limited exposure to English and this must be amplified in the case of Saudi Arabia which is much less open to English influences than many other EFL learning contexts. Lack of exposure to spoken English inhibits phonological development and lack of exposure to English text in non-academic settings limits the development of reading fluency. This is consistent with the findings of the current study where phonological development was poor and English resources very limited. Grabe

& Stoller (2011) describe rapid, automatic word recognition as fundamental to fluency and reading comprehension, and participants in this study clearly demonstrated reading behaviours, such as slow, confusing processing of words, which are the opposite of fluent reading. The poor comprehension findings are consistent with Grabe & Stoller's assertion.

Another reason may lie in mixed attitudes held by Saudi people toward the learning of English. The very limited nature of English resources and exposure reported by participants may lie in what Alfahadi (2012) identified as, on the one hand, the recognised need to learn the international lingua franca, and on the other, the potentially detrimental effects on Saudi identity and culture of assimilating English values through exposure and reading. The conflict between these two perspectives may have contributed to both the lack of resources and lack of exposure to English identified by participants in the current study.

6.3.1.2 Saudi social demands

The cities in which this research was undertaken are not large and therefore have a very homogeneous culture based on rural social practices. Saudi culture, and particularly rural communities, strongly promote the importance of social connections and a great deal of time is spent fulfilling family and social obligations. Participants in this study showed how they had been influenced by these values in their description of being handicapped in the time available to read English, both by others' expectations, and by their own expectations of themselves as members of Saudi society. Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman (2012) mentioned time constraints as a factor inhibiting reading comprehension, but the current study is the first to specifically identify the problem of social obligations as a limitation on time available for reading.

6.3.2 Teaching

The second theme to emerge was the participants' dissatisfaction with the teaching of English reading in Saudi Arabian schools and universities. Their assertions of poor teaching were supported by their inability to employ reading strategies, their poor decoding, and their failure to attend to punctuation. Once again, I believe this has its roots in traditional teaching methods. Arabic religious reading was taught audio-linguistically and students learned by

memorization and public repeated recitation and I believe that elements of this practice have been carried over into the teaching of English reading in Saudi educational establishments where the same teaching methods have been described by participants in the current study. However, they do not suit the teaching of English reading, partly because the opaque grapheme/phoneme correspondence of English requires more lateral thinking than recitation and memorization permit, and partly because English is phonemically far more complex than Arabic, with silent letters, multiple vowel sounds etc. To compensate for these differences, Birch (2002) said that EFL teachers must know how expert readers read in English and understand how to effectively transfer L1 processing strategies into L2.

The participants in this study, both students and lecturers, described the teaching of English reading as unsatisfactory from the very beginning of their learning. This echoes the findings of some previous studies (Asher, 1993; Macdonald, 1993; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Chaudron, 1988; Wong-Fillmore, 1985; Ellis, 1984; Krashen, 1993), which concluded that simulating an L2 environment is an important aspect of effective language teaching, especially in a foreign context where the learner seldom encounters English outside the EFL classroom. One reason for their dissatisfaction, provided by both students and lecturers, was that there was a shortage of qualified EFL reading teachers, as outlined in Section 2.3.3.5. Alfahadi (2012) said that Saudi teachers also struggled to reconcile Islamic values, local social and religious norms, government policy and expectations and the values and beliefs of English cultures in the textbooks they are required to use. The teacher stands at a crossroads between their own Islamic values, local religious and social norms, governmental policy and expectations, and the values and beliefs of the global language they are teaching. According to Holliday, (2011) there is a need to develop lessons which promote greater intercultural awareness and lack of L2 cultural awareness was cited as a reason for reading comprehension failure in the current study.

As example of the effect of teaching method made evident in the current study is that according to all of the participants in the study, Saudi school teachers taught English alphabet letters by name first, rather than sound. The effect of this was made clear in many of their incorrect decoding problems, where vowels, were pronounced as their letter name, rather than phonically

(see Table 5.5 in Chapter 5.3.1.2.c). As a result, participants could not effectively sound out words or understand their meaning and became confused. Grabe & Stoller's (2011) found out that L2 students cannot match sounded-out words to words that they know, but their study did not reveal the reasons for this struggle, as the current study does. This topic needs more focus on phonological decoding as Stanovich & Stanovich (1999) stated that sound phonological decoding skills support fluent reading and Jannuzi (1998) also asserted that lack of native competence in EFL students can be addressed by the teaching of phonemic awareness and all of the student participants in the current study suggested training in phonological awareness as an important way of improving English reading and comprehension. Although several studies have investigated the teaching of the English alphabetic phonically or by name, to the best of my knowledge, no previous study in the EFL field has specifically investigated the effect of teaching English letters by name before teaching them phonically. This finding has implications for the way in which the reading of English is taught at beginner levels.

According to the student participants in this study, the ineffective teaching of English phonology in schools was not remedied at the universities. Their lecturers came from a range of Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking and non-English cultures, some with accents that the students struggled to understand. Student participants described their lecturers' teaching styles as neither friendly nor interactive and described their traditional approach of focusing on the reading of facts rather than engaging in a meaningful interaction with their students. Mantero (2006) found that this method did not facilitate reading comprehension and could be a contributing factor to the poor reading comprehension of participants in the current study. Being asked to read aloud in class was described by participants as contributing to a range of negative mental states which interfered with comprehension (see Section 6.3.5 below)

As Huang (2006) reported, a reluctance to read makes reading instruction less effective. In the current study, this reluctance was made worse by the unfamiliarity and complexity of the reading material in the course textbook. Such complexity was a feature limiting reading comprehension which was also identified by Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman (2011).

6.3.3 Access to English

The third theme to emerge was that of a lack of access to English which inhibited reading comprehension. Because of the poor reading culture mentioned earlier, Saudi society does not prioritise access to reading and reading resources. This was made evident in this study when both student and lecturer participants described the limited nature of libraries in domestic, public and educational establishments. This lends weight to Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman (2011) findings that a lack of family interest in reading, lack of and under-use of libraries and the unavailability of reading materials were obstacles to reading efforts. The evidence from the current study also highlighted that even the compulsory English course textbooks were not available locally, it adds weight to the above research finding by discovering that, libraries are not only under-used, but in many cases are missing altogether, including in institutes of higher education. This is the first study to expose the impact of the lack of L2 resources on English reading development in Saudi Arabia, particularly in relation to the universities in which the current study was undertaken.

This lack of resources is linked to the cultural factors mentioned above, relating to lack of exposure to English and lack of opportunities to practice English reading (see Section 6.3.1). Lack of exposure to the second language has been identified as a major reason for failure to read efficiently. As Grabe & Stoller (2011) said, L2 readers need countless hours of exposure to print if they are to develop automaticity in reading. Such exposure is unlikely to happen within the Saudi context which is why travelling to English-speaking countries was suggested by participants as one way of gaining such access. Despite this, economic, cultural and policy factors, such as cost, the fear of foreign cultures undermining Saudi cultural values and altering emigrant behaviour, and restrictions on emigration visas, work against this being a realistic option.

6.3.4 Prior knowledge

In addition to the cultural, teaching and access themes above, the fourth theme to emerge was a lack of prior knowledge of both context and linguistics, which failed to prepare students for reading English text effectively. Their reading experience of English was minimal. Such lack of silent reading practice must impact on reading comprehension as the students spent little time reading English, and only read the textbook in order to pass examinations. This was

partly attributed to several factors which have been discussed above. For example, students read little because of lack of access to resources and the challenges they experienced when reading English. They also read little because of personal factors such as laziness, and to social factors which will be discussed below.

This was evidenced in their reading processes which identified a number of ways in which readers lacked the necessary skills and information to facilitate comprehension and participants in this study attributed some of their reading comprehension challenges to a range of deficits in background knowledge about how to read English. The reasons for these deficits lie in components of other themes, such as cultural factors, teaching methods and access issues which have been addressed above.

The strongest of these was lack of vocabulary with many words being new or unfamiliar. Students did not approach their reading task with sufficient lexical knowledge to understand what they were reading. Lack of vocabulary contributed to participants' struggles with the constantly unfamiliar elements of the text they encountered. This lack of vocabulary underpins the reasons for students utilizing the reading processes described above, such as guessing and faulty substitution. According to Grabe & Stoller (2011), without the necessary linguistic resources and sufficient practice at reading English text, EFL learners revert to a slow, mechanical translation process or past personal experience in order to understand what they are reading. However, in both cases, "successful reading comprehension is not likely to occur." (p.24). This was appeared in the current study where reading was slow and students clearly reverted to personal experience when answering some of the comprehension questions. Their cognitive capacity seemed to be over-loaded by the struggle with trying to identify individual word meanings, and that lacking an overall framework into which to place components, they became lost in small and de-contextualised linguistic tasks. This cognitive over-loading has been mentioned previously in the literature (See Chapter 3.5.2). Students appeared to have lacked knowledge of *L2 text culture* and their reading illustrated problems relating to concepts (such as demonstrations), place and person names and gender roles which were unfamiliar to them.

Much research in the literature review has shown lexical knowledge to be an essential ingredient of L2 reading success, and it was clearly a major

contributing factor to incomprehension in the current study. Ibrahim (2008) revealed inadequate vocabulary to be the most significant difficulty for Egyptian EFL readers, and this was also the case in the current study. However, it has gone further by providing more detailed evidence of the components of words with which readers struggle EFL in their effort to understand what they read. Cain, Oakhill & Bryant, 2000 and Cain & Oakhill 2006) found the teaching of lower lexical skills facilitated reading comprehension by enabling more resources to be devoted to higher level comprehension processes and participants in the current study demonstrated a focus on lower lexical skills, such as correct decoding and individual word recognition, which they acknowledged interfered with their reading comprehension.

A lack of knowledge of components of text structure was also a major deficiency made evident in this study and participants attributed it to the failure of Saudi instructors to teach English punctuation and text structure. The importance of text structure knowledge has been demonstrated in a number of studies. For example, McCardle, Chabra & Kapinus (2008) found that knowledge about text genre and structure enables readers to better organization information they encounter. Urquhart & Weir (1998), Alderson (1993), Van Gelderen et al., (2004) and Kelley & Clausen-Grace, (2010), Kaivanpanah & Alavi (2008) Hay et al (2005), and Paribakht (2004) all provided persuasive evidence that grammatical knowledge correlates highly with reading comprehension and Jeon (2011) and Hanley, Tzeng & Haung (1999), found the same for morphological knowledge. Lacking such knowledge, student readers are uncertain about how to identify key features of English text which would guide their understanding. Although both student and lecturer participants in the current study claimed to have such knowledge, the student reading processes clearly demonstrated that they did not. Without such guidelines, the cognitive load of reading is increased and this is likely to affect the reader's overall mental state. The findings in the current study to do with negative mental states confirm the importance of the contribution of such knowledge.

The reading processes and comprehension challenges of student participants in the current study revealed a failure to use reading strategies which participants attributed to poor instruction. Several studies (e.g., Abdellah, 2012; Hsu, 2012; Alsamadani, 2009; Cain & Oakhill, 1999; Amer, 1994), have linked knowledge of reading strategies to reading comprehension. Without

these strategies, readers struggle to resolve challenges encountered in new material. This was one of the largest problems faced by Saudi EFL students during the reading process.

As outlined above, Saudi EFL readers also lack background cultural knowledge relating to the English texts they read, and lack familiarity with concepts stemming from English-speaking cultures. As McDonough (1995) stated, the L2 origins of EFL text, contain cultural assumptions which can lead to misunderstanding and poor comprehension and Ibrahim (ibid) also identified lack of cultural knowledge as a major factor limiting reading comprehension. The findings of the current study support those of Johnson (1982), Gabb (2000), Mehrpour & Rahimi (2010) and August & Shanaham (2006), all of whom found that prior cultural experience impacted positively on reading comprehension. Although Akbulut (2008) says that weakness in one area can be compensated for by strength in another, this suggests that Saudi EFL teachers would need to compensate for lack of L2 cultural knowledge with the development in their students of extensive L2 linguistic skills, and this is not the case.

6.3.5 Mental and emotional states

The fifth theme to emerge was that of the mental and emotional states experienced by Saudi EFL readers as they read, and which interfered with their reading comprehension. As Grabe & Stoller (2011) have said, despite being known to be important predictors of L1 academic success, these states are often ignored in discussions of L2 reading comprehension.

The evidence from this study showed that the mental and emotional states of L2 readers continue to be overlooked. Firstly with regard to interest in reading topic, participants said they were not interested in the expository texts they were given to read and found them too difficult. This will have included the TAP text which was extracted from their course textbook. The combination of difficulty and disinterest is supported by several studies of EFL reading (e.g., Best et al., 2008; Diakidoy, et al., 2004). In the current study, participants described the disinterest as demotivating, and this finding supports research by others such as Lin (2002) and Segler, Pain, & Sorace (2002), and Al-Nafisah & Al-Shorman (2011) all of whom found that disinterest caused a negative attitude towards the reading of English text. This lack of interest could have affected their reading processes, and this has a significant implication on the importance

of silent reading and of selecting appropriate topics for inclusion in EFL reading texts.

In the current study, incomprehension led to constant interruption of the reading flow, either because of the necessity to consult translation dictionaries, or because of hesitant and slow reading with many pauses. These constant interruptions led to frustration and the desire to stop reading altogether. Laufer & Hil (2000) found that frequent pausing and interruption resulted in poor flow and comprehension and the current study also showed that slow, hesitant reading interfered with comprehension. The teaching practice of requiring students to read aloud in class, together with the reader's personal awareness of their reading incompetency, generated anxiety and embarrassment as readers anticipated and then met with failure. Norrish (1983) points out that many learners of foreign languages are often worried about looking foolish when trying to speak in the newly acquired language and as a result of this are hesitant to utilize their new language skills. Norrish identifies this fear as a key inhibitor for students in any formal learning situations.

Incorrect decoding of the word leads to the students reading a different word or a non-word. The wrong word choice could inhibit comprehension and could contribute to confusion and all of these mental and emotional states worsened participants' reading comprehension challenges. Grabe & Stoller (ibid) pointed out these states have been overlooked in the research and this is supported by research findings which have demonstrated that alternative teaching methods, such as learning in pairs or small groups, have a positive impact on L2/EFL acquisition (Anton, Dica-milla, & Lantoi-f, 2003; Donato & McCormick, 1994). These findings of these studies could be incorporated into Saudi teaching practice with positive effects on reading processes and comprehension.

6.4 The research findings in the light of the sociocultural framework

According to the sociocultural perspective which informed the current study (see Section 3.13), the way a person thinks and behaves originates in the relationships between members of their society (Vygotsky, 1978). Culture precedes society which in turn precedes the experience of the individual so that a personal characteristic such as reading comprehension is, in fact, grounded in everyday lives and school lessons (Street, 1994).

In the context of this study, this perspective suggests that Saudi cultural factors, such as beliefs about good and bad, right and wrong, ways of thinking, practices, habits, perceptions and behaviours, including the dynamics of the Saudi family and classroom, will shape the reading experience of the participants in this study as members of Saudi society. The influence of Saudi culture and social relations on Saudi education, community and family systems, and the influence of these on Saudi students and members was made evident in this study as outlined below.

6.4.1 Saudi English education and sociocultural theory

The Saudi education system is underpinned by Saudi cultural values relating to education and how it should be conducted (see Chapter 2.3.2). These are reflected in the findings of this study where a culture which has been described as failing to prioritise reading, did not enact a social policy which provided adequate reading resources and sufficient opportunities for EFL students to be learn and be exposed to English. As a result, participants in this study, as members of that society, said that they did not prioritise reading in their lives, and in particular, the reading of English. As products of this education system, they claim they were not taught how to read English text well. As the findings of the current study show, participants lacked sufficient background knowledge to become competent readers, and built up negative mental and emotional responses to reading English. All of these educational factors contributed to their poor English reading comprehension.

6.4.1.1 Saudi classroom practice and sociocultural theory

Saudi culture holds specific ideas about teaching methods based on historical Arab methods of Kottab teaching (see Section 6.3.2) which stresses repetition and rote learning and the information provided by both lecturer and student participants in this study suggested that Saudi teachers continued to utilise traditional teaching methods and that they lacked diverse and differentiated teaching strategies so that the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners can be accommodated into the teaching process. This is demonstrated by the both lecturers and students agreeing that individual reading levels are not assessed, nor reading material of an appropriate level assigned to individual readers. Furthermore, students also said that teachers did not encourage

questioning and failed to engage their students' curiosity and intrinsic motivation to read in English. As a result, participants in this study, as products of these teaching methods, attempted but largely failed to learn how to read and understand English text. This is supported by the research findings of Ahmed, (2011) and Mourtaga (2004). Rather than engaging creatively and critically with reading materials, students in the current study said that they were encouraged to learn through a process of repetition and memorization which Cochran (1986) and Dhillon, Fahmy & Salehi-Isfahani, (2008) have shown to be ineffective.

6.4.1.2 Instructor/student relations and sociocultural theory

Participants in this study described a "big gap" between themselves and their lecturers and said that they lacked opportunities to engage with their teachers in an individual, participative and constructive way. They said that their input and suggestions were not welcomed or acted on by the university hierarchy, and that they were unable to engage with teachers in a meaningful dialogue about the English text they read. Saudi culture advocates an authoritarian social structure which is reflected in an authoritarian classroom dynamic between teachers and their students (Ahmed, 2011: Mourtaga, 2004). These dynamics between teacher and student suppress any wider or deeper attempt by students to engage with their reading in a meaningful way so that both their effort and their understanding remain at a superficial level. Student participants related that lecturer approachability was one factor which could improve their reading processes and comprehension

6.4.2 Community and family relations and sociocultural theory

As male members of Saudi society, the student participants in this study demonstrated the extent to which they had internalized this social pattern. According to Yamani (2000), the Saudi family has traditionally been the main institution for socializing Saudi citizens. However, in the age of globalization, it is also the site of conflict between the need for modernization and the upholding of traditional values. Several participants in the study described their parents' uneducated, but Saudi parents want their children to gain the benefits of an education which many of them did not have, although they do not support aspects of that education which challenge social orthodoxy (see Section 6.3.1). The Saudi family system is also underpinned by Saudi cultural values relating to

gender relations, family obligations and the nature and importance of social relations. For example, males are responsible for all aspects of household maintenance which involve obtaining resources from the world outside the home. Children are required to obey their parents in every respect and individuals, families and neighbourhoods are tied together in tight patterns of mutual obligation. These obligations are both imposed on and internalized by individuals members of the society so that they spend large amounts of time simply maintaining a social position.

They described the invasive effects of their society's demands. However, it must be noted that their lecturers did not entirely agree with their reasoning and instead attributed some of their reading limitations to laziness, poor motivation and attendance. This suggests that students may be using social obligations as an excuse for failing to read more. This was supported by Braine (2005), who said that one reason of the low proficiency of Saudi EFL is an outcome of poor student attitudes and motivation.

6.5 Conclusion

The behaviours and comments which form the findings of the current study demonstrate that EFL students engage in a number of reading processes which are revealed in a number of different data collection methods. These processes included reading strategies such as repetition, word substitution and guessing, the failure to prepare for reading or to attend to punctuation, struggles with decoding and speed of reading. Together these sources enable the researcher to discover links between the processes and factors which influence them but which are beyond the vision of the research participants.

The reading processes were linked to reading comprehension challenges. Students struggled with words which were new to them, including those which carried cultural concepts with which they were unfamiliar. They also struggled with long words and with words made difficult by single, compound, and double vowels, which they could not integrate into fluent, flowing meaning and could not recognise words which they struggled to pronounce. They also developed negative mental and emotional states which further hindered their motivation and comprehension.

It was found that participants attributed these reading processes and challenges to the influence of a number of factors which formed the

components of five themes. The first theme lay in aspects of Saudi and Arabic culture and social organization. The second theme related to teaching methods used in Saudi schools and universities. The third theme related to issues around access to English and to English reading resources. The fourth theme consisted of a number of limitations on background knowledge, and the fifth theme was made up of mental and emotional states which readers experienced in relation to reading English. Components of these five themes interacted on each other and on the reading processes and challenges in multivariate and complex ways.

Some of these findings are supported by a number of studies both in the Arab EFL setting and by EFL theory in the wider international context. Some, (e.g., opportunities to practice English reading) are features of general EFL teaching and learning, while others (e.g., authoritative teaching methods) are more typical of Arabic EFL contexts, and some (e.g., lack of reading resources in newly-established universities) to the Saudi situation in particular.

The current study has clearly linked sociocultural theory to the field of EFL teaching and learning, and demonstrated clear links between the Arabic/Saudi culture, the social institutions it has generated, and its individual members; of citizens, teachers and students both inside and outside the classroom.

Saudi values, such as those regarding authoritarian social structures and gender relations, have been shown to influence both the educational (non-interactive traditional teaching methods) and family (male responsibility) systems. Participants have provided clear statements of how these values and social practices have shaped their behaviour and thinking patterns as learning experiences and outcomes.

It has also demonstrated the value of qualitative research methods, such as interviews and the TAP and RVR, and of triangulation in gathering first-hand and trustworthy data. In particular it has demonstrated both the merits of the TAP, such as its self-reflecting nature, and its limitations, such as the self-censorship of participants. It has also demonstrated the value of the interpretivist approach to analysing data. As the first study of this type, to the best of my knowledge, it has broken new ground in the Saudi EFL context.

Chapter 7: Contributions, Implications and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will outline the contribution the findings of the current study make to the body of academic research in the theoretical fields of the interpretive approach and qualitative research methods, sociocultural theory, and to the pedagogical field of EFL reading comprehension. I will consider both theoretical and pedagogical implications and use these implications as the basis for forming recommendations for both international EFL teaching practice including that of the Arab World, and for policy-makers in Saudi Arabia. Finally I will consider what these findings suggest for future studies and reflect on the research process as a whole.

7.2 Contributions of the current study

The current study forms part of the body of EFL literature, and in particular its findings contribute to the understanding of EFL reading comprehension challenges while students read aloud and to the teaching and learning of EFL reading. This contribution is on both a theoretical and a practical level. As a study grounded in sociocultural theory it contributes to the strengthening of that theory. Its use of the interpretive stance, qualitative data collection methods, and in particular the TAP and RVR, contributes to the trustworthiness of these approaches and research methods. As a study of Saudi EFL reading with reflections on Saudi teaching processes, it has particular implications for the way English reading is taught and learnt in both Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations.

The findings of this study contribute to the body of EFL research on a number of levels. The first contribution relates to sociocultural theory in the EFL context. The second contribution relates to the use of interpretive/qualitative research and in particular the use of the TAP and RVR. The third contribution relates to the context of EFL teaching practice in the international context.

7.2.1 Contributions of the research findings to sociocultural theory

As a study grounded in sociocultural theory, the findings of this research demonstrate that social and cultural forces act on Saudi EFL students, and are

linked to a number of challenges with regard to their comprehension of English text.

Their learning to read English takes place in the broad context of a culture with a teaching tradition of rote-teaching, in the political context of a closed nation-state with little access to English and in the religious context of a strong Islamic tradition, cautious about external influences. Participants identified all of these forces in their responses when they spoke about classroom teaching methods and lack of access to English, both in terms of resources and native speakers. The study was sited in conservative, rural communities where the influence of these cultural values is amplified and family values and social organization are strong forces shaping individual behaviour and thinking. Participants repeatedly identified family and social obligations as a major limitation to the time available to read English text.

These behaviours and thought patterns have been internalised by the participants in this study who are both required to, and naturally, prioritise the maintenance of their own and their family's social position, over study and reading English. This was evident in the way they described their obedience to family and fear of social isolation.

These cultural and social forces also combine to create a cultural distance between English texts and their Saudi EFL readers. Saudi EFL teachers are themselves the product of the same social and cultural forces as their students and because of this, fail to close this gap by effective teaching.

Application of sociocultural theory to the research context suggests that the learning experiences of Saudi EFL students are largely the outcome of Saudi social and cultural influences which shape their development within their families, schools and nation. The findings of the current study are largely in alignment with sociocultural theory as social and cultural forces have been shown to precede personal development, in this case the reading of English, and to shape the way it progresses.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the reading aloud processes and comprehension challenges of EFL learner readers are highly dependent on social and cultural contexts. To the extent that EFL learners share social and cultural factors, (e.g., language, religion, geographical location) findings from a study of EFL reading undertaken in one social and cultural context could be useful in understanding it in another. However, the cognitive processes which

underpin the learning of English as a foreign language will only be shared to a limited extent by different EFL learners, and the reading processes and challenges of different EFL learner readers need to be considered in the light of the influences of their own social and cultural contexts.

7.2.2 Contributions to qualitative research methods and the TAP

As stated in Chapter 4, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study in Saudi Arabia to use the lens of sociocultural theory with an interpretive research stance and also to use the triangulated TAP/RVR and interview, in order to explore reading aloud processes and comprehension challenges.

Both the method used to collect the data in this study and the way in which that data was analysed were qualitative in nature. The semi-structured interviews, together with the TAP and RVR, brought together different types of verbal responses, which enabled participants to speak fully and express their feelings, ideas and perspectives in their own voices and using their own words. It also enabled the researcher to question flexibly and deeply any aspects of their responses which appeared worthy of further exploration. This triangulation enabled the data sets to overlap and strengthen each other and provided an enriched understanding of reading comprehension challenges. It enabled the researcher to constantly revisit the data throughout the interpretive process and to gain fresh insights and deeper understanding with every cross-consideration of responses. This interpretivist/qualitative approach has not been used much in Saudi and Arab context where quantitative and mixed methods have dominated research enquiries. This study contributes to the international body of research by expanding the use of an approach and by bringing a unique combination of data collection methods to research in the region.

The TAP and the RVR proved to be an excellent way of extracting data of interest. Its focus on actual reading, as opposed to the reporting of it, provided first-hand information, and the RVR was a valuable elaborative addition, enabling clarification and the removal of ambiguity from the data. It has also contributed to a better understanding of the method through the following insight. When participants are required to focus on challenges and think aloud about them whilst reading out loud, they can perceive them as personal inadequacies and become embarrassed about exposing them. This can cause them to become reluctant to think aloud about them. In the current

study, participants thought aloud less and less as the TAP proceeded, despite repeated encouragement by the researcher to continue. This could be a limitation of the current use of the TAP, and I would encourage future researchers to further explore its use, but would suggest that they build stronger relationships with participants and train them more extensively before the data collection, in order to gain consistently rich data.

7.2.3 Contributions to the EFL teaching and learning of reading

This study is part of a body of literature which theorises and researches, seeking to optimise the teaching and learning of reading in the EFL context. It is also one of many studies on EFL reading in the Arab world, and specifically one of a number of pieces of research undertaken in Saudi Arabia in order to improve the learning and teaching of English in Saudi schools and universities. The findings of this study therefore contribute to the teaching and learning of reading on each of these levels.

7.2.3.1 International EFL teaching and learning of reading

The body of international EFL research contains many studies which advocate that lack of phonic awareness is a major inhibitor of reading ability and comprehension. Learners from language groups which are phonemically and orthographically dissimilar to English have been demonstrated to struggle enormously with the correct decoding and comprehension of English words in text (Wang, Koda & Perfetti (2003). The current study has shown that teaching the English alphabet by name before sound may contribute to reading comprehension challenges experienced by EFL readers. It has also shown that access to resources and exposure to English and English-speakers is a major issue for EFL readers in foreign contexts. Participants suggested that electronic audio-resources, libraries and access to native speakers were an important part of developing both English fluency and comprehension through practice and exposure to first language users.

Many of the reading challenges experienced by Saudi EFL students were attributed by them to poor teaching. While there is nothing new about this, in conjunction with prior research findings on teaching methods in the Arab world, the current study suggests that teaching methods based on recitation and repetition are not appropriate to the effective teaching of English reading.

Teaching methods such as forcing students to read aloud in front of a whole class have been shown to induce mental states and emotions which do not produce effective reading comprehension and this finding has value for the international field of EFL. Reading challenges were also attributed to teachers and lecturers who lacked proficiency, suggesting that effective teaching of EFL reading depends on properly qualified teachers.

7.2.3.2 Arab EFL teaching and learning of reading

A number of EFL issues relate specifically to the teaching of Arab students and this study has shown that orthographic and phonological differences between Arabic and English must be addressed in order for students to understand the English they read (Abdulmalik, 1983).

These differences between Arabic and English orthographic and phonological systems, as well as punctuation structures and culture, were identified as possible reasons for the misidentification of words, wrong decoding, the overlooking of punctuation and failure to understand text culture. EFL teachers of Arabic L1 students need to provide them with a good understanding of the opaque relationship between English graphemes and phonemes. They also need to overtly teach irregularities in English reading, such as silent letters, the decoding of the double vowels and compound vowels and consonants, particularly those which are not part of the Arabic phonological repertoire. They also need to teach text structure and punctuation, in order for students to understand the purpose of elements of text they read. Arabic culture differs markedly from the cultures of the English-speaking countries in which EFL text originates. EFL teachers in the Arab world need to provide students with L2 cultural awareness so that they can understand the concepts they read about in English text or with texts containing content with which Arab students are familiar.

This is not a new finding, but the current study supports the body of literature about the importance of these linguistic features (see Chapter 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.5.7) and has implications for the future teaching of EFL reading in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

7.2.3.3 Saudi Arabian EFL teaching and learning of reading

This research was undertaken as part of a group of studies funded in order to improve EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. Its particular focus was to study the reading processes and comprehension challenges of EFL university students. The findings of the current study identified a number of factors which inhibit reading comprehension in the Saudi EFL context. Data from participants in this study, identified five themes covering factors which influence reading comprehension. These were poor teaching in schools and universities, poor access to resources and exposure to English, a lack of cultural support for English reading together with social practices which limit time available for learning, a lack of background knowledge ranging from lack of vocabulary, punctuation, etc... to lack of understanding of the text culture, and negative mental states induced by awareness of their poor reading skills and comprehension (see Figure 1).

These findings constitute a major contribution to the understanding of current shortcomings in the present Saudi EFL system and have implications for how these can be improved through specific recommendations (see Section 6.7 below).

7.3 Implications and recommendations

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part I will outline the implications which the findings of this study have for the theory which underpins the EFL teaching of reading, and in the second I will make specific recommendations for improving the teaching of English reading in international contexts, but also particularly in Saudi schools and universities in order to improve reading comprehension in Saudi EFL students.

7.3.1 Theoretical implications – policy and teaching

This study has brought new insights into the reading aloud processes used by EFL learners and the reading comprehension challenges encountered by them. Recognition of the processes and identification of the reasons for the challenges faced by Saudi University EFL students has provided insights into how social and cultural forces could affect reading comprehension in a broader range of EFL learners. This has implications for the teaching and learning of EFL reading, not only in Saudi and Arabic contexts, but also in any context

where aspects of local social forces, cultural pressures and orthographic differences can interfere with the acquisition of good EFL reading skills.

7.3.2 Pedagogical implications and recommendations

The current study has shown that there could be a gap between the goals of teaching English reading in Saudi public schools and the reading levels achieved by Saudi students. A stated goal of the Ministry of Education is to enable students to acquire the linguistic competence required in different professions (see Chapter 2.4.2) and many universities are adopting English as the language of instruction. However the scores of these students on the comprehension questions demonstrated a possibility of that these students are not capable of understanding a text set for second-year undergraduate learning. These findings show that students are reaching EFL studies at university level unprepared for the standard of reading that will be expected of them. Unless this situation is rectified, it has the potential to become a self-perpetuating cycle where students who struggle enormously with reading comprehension, first graduate and then pass their own processes and challenges on to the student they will teach. Any insights gained from the findings of the current study may have the potential to improve the teaching and learning of EFL reading in both schools and universities in Saudi Arabia but also beyond. The findings of the current study could serve as a reference point for future EFL curriculum design in educational institutions where English reading is taught, and could help curriculum planners develop new and more effective approaches to the teaching and learning of English reading. This could ameliorate existing problems with Saudi reading processes and comprehension challenges, and make the learning of English reading in Saudi schools and universities more progressive and holistic. These improvements may also have the potential to enhance the academic achievement of students on courses other than EFL, such as university majors in subjects where English is the medium of instruction. Its findings to do with the impact of social and cultural forces on reading development also have the potential to contribute to a change in the reading habits of Saudi students in Arabic as well as English. Such changes could help Saudi universities become better placed to keep pace with developments in the global community, and contribute to the country's developmental plans of improving national human resources.

In this section I will make a number of recommendations below for changes to the teaching of English and English reading in order to improve on this performance.

7.3.2.1 Educational policy

The first set of recommendations relate to policy changes which can only be implemented at national and governmental level.

- The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that they recruit EFL teachers who are trained in both English and in teaching methods so that they are properly qualified to teach EFL.
- The Ministries of Education and Higher Education need to put in place a programme of continuing professional development for all EFL teachers and lecturers so they can keep pace with developments in the global environment with regard to the teaching of EFL reading and make use of these advances in their classroom practice.
- The Ministry of Education and the Universities must provide effective and appropriate English textbooks at all levels of reading from basic to advanced. Primary school English texts should be based on local cultural content during the first years of learning English so that students can focus on linguistic elements (such as punctuation, phonics etc.) and avoid cultural differences which interfere with learning. English cultural elements should be introduced gradually over subsequent years to give learners the opportunity to raise their international cultural awareness and develop L2 text culture knowledge.
- The Ministry of Education and the universities need to put in place the resources to support EFL teachers in the classroom. They should make provision for well-stocked libraries, including books in English and internet access to global English teaching resources. Since it is difficult to bring English native speakers to Saudi Arabia, students must also be given access to English audio-reading in order to develop the phonemic facility which promotes effective decoding.
- The Ministry of Education and the Universities need to encourage reading clubs throughout the Saudi education system in order to promote

reading and the silent reading of English text in order to improve reading comprehension.

- The Ministry of Education and the Universities need to put in place a system of extra-curricular clubs where students are encouraged to spend their free time on activities which widen their background knowledge and support their learning (not just of English) in the classroom.
- The Ministries of Education and Higher Education need to properly prepare students for the EFL undergraduate degree and maintain the standard of the degree, by raising the level of applicants to the degree to IELTS Level 5 prior to enrolment. This will enable the students to cope better with English course materials.
- In addition to the current foundation year, the Ministry of Higher Education should incorporate a specific English foundation year into the structure of the English degree. This first year would focus on the English language skills of speaking, listening, writing and reading. Increasingly complex and long texts should be introduced gradually over the following three years with poetry and literary criticism limited to the final year. The programme should also contain a specific reading programme and be supported by an extra-curricular English club with both aloud/silent reading.
- Awareness needs to be raised in Saudi society about the negative effects on educational outcomes of socializing on weekday evenings. Students should be encouraged to limit socializing to weekends and their families encouraged to exempt them from social obligations on weekdays. Students, including EFL students, should be taught to recognise the importance of learning outside of the classroom and to prioritise study during their free time, cutting back on the amount of time spent socializing.

7.3.2.2 Educational practice

The second set of recommendations relate to changes in educational classroom practice. Several form part of teacher training which government departments are responsible for. Others relate to changes on the part of individual teachers who are already in teaching posts.

Teacher training

- The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that as part of their training programme, EFL teachers are trained to teach both the elements of English text (e.g., punctuation, decoding, grapheme/phoneme correspondence, etc.) and in how to effectively teach silent reading strategies as aids to reading comprehension.
- The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that teachers and lecturers are trained in how to teach creatively and interactively so that students feel able to explore their reading resources and question in order to fill gaps in their skills and knowledge. This requires teachers and lecturers to be more accessible and less authoritative in the English classroom to bridge the current wide gap between teachers and students.
- The Ministry of Education needs to ensure that primary school teachers are trained to teach the letters of the English alphabet phonically first, and only later (perhaps a year later) by name. This would enhance phonic awareness and prevent confusion of the sounds of English letters in words.

Teaching method

- Learner readers seem to be anxious when asked to read aloud as they know they are poor readers. Embarrassment could worsen their performance and cause increasing negativity on subsequent occasions. As a result their focus is on verbalising rather than understanding. Instead of requiring students to read aloud, EFL teachers should use techniques such as silent reading well-planned and supervised pair work, small group work and peer teaching in order to promote creativity, scaffold confidence, promote positive attitudes towards reading English and facilitate comprehension.
- EFL teachers and lecturers should assess student reading levels and assign texts for reading of an appropriate level according to an individualized reading plan so that students are not demoralized and demotivated by demands which are beyond their capabilities.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

In addition to providing a range of interesting findings and generating a list of recommendations, this study paves the way for further investigations to be

undertaken. Some are related to the methodology and methods employed in the current study and others to potential related and relevant areas.

As described above in Section 7.2.2, despite reassurance and prompting from the researcher, during the TAP data collection many students became hesitant to express their thoughts aloud as they became embarrassed by more of their errors being made evident. This study could be repeated with a longer preparation period for student participants during which they receive more training and practice in the TAP method so that they are more comfortable with it during the final data collection. The researcher could also spend more time establishing a relationship with students so that during the TAP and interview they feel freer to express themselves and their ideas. They could also be given the audio-recorder and the opportunity to collect the data themselves, without the researcher being present or they could use thinking aloud with silent reading rather than thinking aloud with reading aloud (see Section 6.6.1.2 above).

A major finding of this study was that EFL students struggled with decoding and comprehension which may be the outcome of having been taught the English alphabet by name first rather than sound. Therefore a recommendation of this study is that English letters first be taught phonically and then a year later by name. To investigate the impact of the order of letter/sound teaching, a longitudinal study could be set up in which two groups of students are taught, one in each way first, and subsequently followed up with measures of reading proficiency and comprehension, in order to determine the extent to which it is advantageous to delay teaching letter names (see Section 6.6.1.3 above).

Another finding was that social obligations limit the amount of time available for students to practice reading English text and that this compromised their comprehension. A further study could investigate the extent to which this socializing affects educational outcomes for Saudi students.

Some of the resource issues mentioned in this study are the result of the universities being recently-founded and both lecturer and student participants expressed the hope that the resource situation was a short-term problem which would be resolved as the universities consolidated. It would be interesting to replicate this study, for example in ten years' time, in order to find out whether the same reading comprehension problems are occurring for Saudi EFL students.

The findings of this study showed that learners experienced a range of negative emotional states in response to being forced to read English aloud in front their class, and a recommendation of this study was that this practice be replaced by pair and small-group work in order to increase confidence and reduce negative attitudes to reading English. A study could be conducted to evaluate the effect of pair and small-group work on reader confidence and attitudes to reading English in Saudi Arabia.

Another finding was that the English reading levels of participants in the current study had not been assessed. It is therefore likely that the English text they read is not suited to their individual levels of competence and a recommendation of this study was that reading levels should be assessed and appropriate reading material given to students in an individualized reading plan. A study could be conducted in which the reading fluency and comprehension of students with individualized reading plans are compared with those taught by the current system in Saudi schools and universities.

7.5 Reflections

The completion of this PhD has been a long journey. At the outset I was enthusiastic and inspired to fulfil my dream of completing a doctoral thesis, and of being part of the international research community. Its completion has given me the chance to participate in improving the education system of my country, and in so doing, establish myself as a true citizen of Saudi Arabia. I have been able to study and demonstrate how the weaknesses and strengths of our culture and education system could be harnessed to lead the kingdom and our society into the increasingly interactive 21st century world, while at the same time maintaining our independence and integrity. Research, such as mine, opens the door for Saudi participation in the global community and I am proud to be able to contribute in this way.

On an academic level, attending seminars, lectures, workshops and conferences, and completing assignments has enabled me to join the research community in the United Kingdom and beyond, and to thereby develop a much wider and deeper understanding of ontologies and epistemologies of a range of paradigms. My change in stance from a quantitative and scientific researcher to a more flexible and open-minded student of human behaviour and processes,

as offered by the interpretive approach, has been eye-opening and transformative.

On a professional level I have had the opportunity to meet and interact with specialists in the field and to benefit from their knowledge and expertise. I have also learned a number of skills related to academic presentation and communication and how to write critically and academically in my own voice. I have become acquainted with a wide range of online and library resources and how to search and use them effectively. I have learned a wide range of teaching methods and styles which will enhance my future practice as an EFL instructor. I have also learned about the complexities of interpretive/qualitative data collection and analysis, and developed practical skills such as transcription and translation, how to make Powerpoint presentations and present visual information, which I hope to be able to employ again in the future.

On a personal level I have had an outstanding opportunity to develop my own English language skills and insights into many aspects of English-speaking cultures. The research and dissertation process has helped me to become better at time management and meet deadlines. On a humorous note, I have learned how to drive on the left hand side of the road and to eat fish and chips. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to study in the United Kingdom.

7.6 Conclusions

The findings of the current study have contributed both to the international body of EFL literature on reading processes, challenges and comprehension and to the understanding of Arab and Saudi research. On a theoretical level, it has demonstrated the relevance of sociocultural theory to study in the field of EFL, and strengthened the body of research which uses qualitative research methods. In particular it has furthered the use of the TAP and RVR in EFL research and identified research issues going forward.

The current study has also contributed to the EFL pedagogy, suggesting teaching and learning practices which could serve to reduce faulty reading processes and comprehension challenges of future EFL reading learners. In particular it addresses issues to do with Arabic and Saudi teaching and learning methods in order to promote better reading by members of Arab societies.

The research findings have formed the basis of a number of policy and practice recommendations with the specific goal of improving the teaching of

EFL reading in Saudi Arabia, particularly with regard to the training of EFL teachers and the way they teach English.

As with most research, the findings of the current study have raised as many questions as they have answered and a number of potential studies could be undertaken, both to improve on the research methodology and to investigate more deeply factors which have emerged from the evidence collected here, particularly those which are new to the body of literature, such as the best way to teach the English alphabet to L2 learners, or the effect of teaching methods on reading comprehension. The thesis concludes with reflections on the research journey and a summary of findings in relation to the stated aims and research questions of the study.

The aim of this study was to explore the reading processes used by and the reading comprehension challenges faced by Saudi Arabian EFL students, and the factors which contribute to these challenges, from both the perspectives of the readers themselves, and those of their lecturers. Participants in this study have reported that a combination of Saudi culture and the teaching and resourcing of English in Saudi Arabia has contributed to their lack of essential knowledge and experience when approaching the reading of English text. As a result they engage in poor English reading processes and experience many problems with English reading comprehension.

The question arises: How aware is the Saudi educational system of the reading comprehension challenges that EFL university students face? Currently no practical steps are being taken to overcome them. Given that these students are the future teachers of English in Saudi Arabia, I believe that it is essential to find solutions to these challenges, and look forward to seeing their achievements in developing education in the country.

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Appendix 1

Pilot TAP text



Comet Halley was first seen in 240 BCE. The next sighting will be in 2061.

Vocabulary Check

Look at the words below. Put a check mark next to the ones that you know. Talk with your class about the words you don't know. Write the new words you learn in your Vocabulary Log.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> appreciation | <input type="checkbox"/> dinosaurs | <input type="checkbox"/> primitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> asteroid | <input type="checkbox"/> emperor | <input type="checkbox"/> reflects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> binoculars | <input type="checkbox"/> horizon | <input type="checkbox"/> snowballs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> comet | <input type="checkbox"/> leftover | <input type="checkbox"/> tidal waves |
| <input type="checkbox"/> diameter | <input type="checkbox"/> origins | <input type="checkbox"/> wipe out |

Read

Reading 3: Comet Hale-Bopp

- 1 Just above the **horizon**, a ball of light left a trail of stardust¹ in the evening sky. **Comet Hale-Bopp**, brighter than most of the stars, was a beautiful sight. It was 1997, and people had not seen this comet for 4,210 years.
- 2 Comet Hale-Bopp, one of the brightest comets of this century, brought crowds to telescopes and **binoculars**. It also brought people out to their back yards, parks, and roofs. If only

for a few weeks, the comet put excitement back into the night sky for people of the modern world.

- 3 "I saw it for the first time last night. I got so excited I made my son come into the back yard to see it," said Felix Nash of Springfield. "This comet really is amazing."
- 4 Comets are made of dust, rock, and ice. These "space **snowballs**" float in the solar

¹Stardust is the pieces of stars left in the sky.

system away from the sun. Sometimes gravity from a star pushes a comet towards earth, but we really only see a few comets from earth. At the edge of the solar system, there is a place called the Oort Cloud. Scientists think there could be more than 100 billion comets in the Oort cloud.

- 5 Scientists don't really know how comets started, but they have two theories. Some think that they were formed when the solar system began billions of years ago. They think comets are **leftover** rock, dust, and ice. Others think that comets were pulled together by the sun's gravity a long time ago.
- 6 Hale-Bopp was the most watched comet since the 1910 appearance of Halley's Comet. Hale-Bopp, in fact, was one of the 32 great comets of the past 1,000 years, according to astronomers.
- 7 Throughout history, human beings have viewed comets with fear. One comet caused the ancient Roman **emperor** Nero to murder his mother, brother, and two wives. In 1910, Halley's Comet terrified millions of people as newspapers said that it might **wipe out** life on Earth.
- 8 In modern times, people watched Hale-Bopp with simple **appreciation**. "You can look

up at this comet and wonder what Nero thought, or what **primitive** people thought thousands of years ago," said Frank Thompson, an astronomer. "Today, we can just watch the beauty."

- 9 When you see a comet, you're seeing more than a temporary light show. You're also seeing a bit of the origins of our solar system and, perhaps, of life itself. You also may be looking at a cosmic relative of a comet that may have hit the Earth 65 million years ago. Many astronomers think such a comet may have set the world's forests on fire, caused **tidal waves**, darkened the skies, and killed off the **dinosaurs**. Scientists now generally agree that a disaster like this occurred, although they aren't sure whether it was a comet or an **asteroid**. Asteroids are pieces of rock or metal that come from a different part of the solar system.
- 10 Hale-Bopp was so bright because of its size. Astronomers estimate it had a 25-mile **diameter**—about 10 times larger than the average comet. The bigger the snowball, the more light it **reflects**. No comet in recorded history has been that bright. In ancient times, such brightness frightened people. We are fortunate today that we can just watch.

After You Read

1. What is a comet?
2. What is important about Hale-Bopp?
3. Before 1997, when was the last time it was seen?
4. What are comets made of?
5. How did people behave when they saw comets in the past?
6. What is the Oort Cloud?
7. Where do comets come from?
8. What do some astronomers think happened as a result of a comet hitting the earth 65 million years ago?
9. How big was Hale-Bopp?
10. Why was Hale-Bopp so bright?

Appendix 2

Research Text

Malls: Public Places or Private Businesses?



Three young men were arrested at an Iowa shopping mall. They didn't steal anything. Their crime: handing out information about sweatshops, places that use workers illegally. The shopping center says it doesn't allow demonstrations. That's why they were arrested.

Many people were upset about the arrests. They say the shopping mall is trying to stop freedom of speech.

The mall owner says the protesters were on private property. Free speech doesn't apply there. The security guards asked the protestors to leave. Two of them did, but they were arrested anyway. So was a third man who refused to leave.

If he had pleaded guilty in court, he probably would have gotten a very light punishment. Instead, he decided to hire a lawyer to help fight for free speech in the mall.

His lawyer represents him for free. She wants the charge dismissed. She says that the arrest violated the man's right of free speech under the Iowa constitution.

As part of their argument, they hope to show that shopping malls are not private places. They say they are now places where people come together for social contact.

When malls came into the suburbs a few decades ago, many downtown shopping centers closed. This ended the social activities that happened there. Those social activities moved to shopping malls.

"Malls do more than give people a place to shop," says Professor Mills of a local university. "There are baking contests, walking clubs, flower shows and even charity fundraisers. They've become a new place of public gatherings."

Six other states, including California, Colorado, Oregon and New Jersey, say people have a right to hand out leaflets in malls. Last year a judge said that Minnesota's Mall of America, the largest mall in the U.S., is a public space. This is because millions of dollars from government programs helped build it.

Iowa courts will be looking closely at the Des Moines mall and at other laws. They hope to answer the question: Is a mall a public or a private place?

Comprehension Questions

- 1- Why were three young men arrested at the mall?
- 2- What information were they giving people?
- 3- Why people were upset about their arrests?
- 4- What is freedom of speech?
- 5- Why does the mall say that freedom of speech does not apply there?
- 6- What might have happened if the men pleaded guilty?
- 7- Why do some people think malls are public places?
- 8- What activities do people take part in at malls?
- 9- Do you think malls should be considered private or public places? Why?

Guleff, V., Sokolik, M.E., & Lowther, C. (2005). *Tapestry, Reading 1*, Middle East Edition: Thomson Heinle.

NB. Words considered having different cultural concepts in the text (see Chapter 5.3.1.2.d.h)

Iowa, sweatshops, demonstrations, freedom of speech, property, lawyer, constitutions, right, violated, protesters, baking contests, waking clubs, flower shows, charity fundraisers, California, Colorado, Oregon, New Jersey, Minnesota, Des Moines.

Appendix 3

Student interview schedule (Arabic)

مقابلة الطلبة

السؤالان التاليان لتهيئة الطالب فقط وليست لجمع البيانات

- هل تسكن بالقرب من الجامعة؟
 - متى ينتهي يومك الدراسي غالبا في الجامعة؟
- مدى امكانية القراءة**
- 1- هل تجد وقت للقراءة باللغة الانجليزية؟
 - 2- هل تقرأ باللغة الانجليزية دائما؟ كم من الوقت تستغرق في القراءة؟
 - 3- هل اساتذتك يوجهونك الى كتب انجليزية معينة للقراءة؟
 - 4- ما هي أنواع الكتب أو المواضيع التي تقرأها؟
 - 5- هل المجتمع والأستاذة من حولك يشجعونك على القراءة؟
 - 6- هل الوالدان يقرؤون باستمرار؟
 - 7- هل لديك مكتبة في البيت؟
 - 8- هل في المحافظة مكتبة عامة؟
- تابع) هل المجتمع يقرأ في الاماكن العامة؟
- 9- هل توجد مكتبات في مدارسك السابقة؟
 - 10- هل يوجد مكتبة في جامعتك؟
- تابع) هل تستعير كتباً من المكتبة؟
- تابع) هل يوجد في قسم اللغة الانجليزي لديكم مكتبة؟
- تابع) هل تستعير كتب من مكتبة قسمك؟
- تابع) هل اساتذتك يشجعونك على استعارة الكتب من المكتبة؟
- تدريس القراءة**
- 11- ما انطباعك عن مدى مستوى وفعالية تدريس القراءة باللغة الانجليزية في مدارسك السابقة؟
 - 12- هل مدارسك السابقة تختار لكم كتب انجليزية معينة للقراءة؟
 - 13- هل تعلمت الاحرف الانجليزية باسمائها او باصواتها او بالاثنين معا؟
 - 14- بعض الكلمات الانجليزية متعددة المقاطع تحتوي على انماط صوتية منتظمة مثل
-tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in
ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in
crucial, -cious ("shus") هل تدريسك للصوتيات تضمن هذا النوع من الأنماط المنتظمة؟
 - 15- ما هو انطباعك عن اساليب وطرق تدريس مادة القراءة باللغة الانجليزية في جامعتك؟
 - 16- هل اساتذتك يقيمون مستواك في القراءة بالانجليزي من اجل اختيار كتب مناسبة لمستواك؟
- استدلالات على استيعاب القراءة**
- 17- ما هي استراتيجيات القراءة التي تعلمتها في الجامعة؟
 - 18- ماهي اهمية أدوات الترقيم في فهم النصوص الانجليزية؟
 - 19- هل تهتم بأدوات الترقيم أثناء القراءة الانجليزية؟
 - 20- هل في اعقادك ان معرفة الصوتيات وانماط اصوات الاحرف الانجليزية سيساهم في عملية فهم النص الانجليزي؟
 - 21- هل تعلمت قواعد الاملاء الإنجليزية في الجامعة؟
 - 22- هل انت تعتبر نفسك جيد في الاملاء الانجليزي؟
 - 23- هل تعتقد ان تعلم قواعد الاملاء الانجليزية له دور اساسي في استيعابك للقراءة؟
- عملية القراءة**
- 24- ما هو الغرض او الاسباب التي تدفعك لقراءة النصوص الانجليزية؟

- 25- هل تتمعن في التلميحات التي تنبئك بما سيحدث في محتوى القطعة الانجليزية المكتوبة؟
- 26- ماهي الاساليب والتكتيكات التي تنتهجها اثناء قرائتك للنصوص الانجليزية؟
- 27- كيف تعرف انك تفهم اثناء القراءة ؟
- 28- عندما تنتهي من قراءة القطعة, ماذا تعمل لتثبيت فهمك لما قرأته؟
- 29- ما هي العوامل الاكثر صعوبة التي قد تواجهك في قراءة النص الانجليزي؟
- 30- ما هي الامور التي يمكن ان تساعدك لتصبح قارئ جيد؟
- 31- ماهي الجمل المهمة في فقرة النص الانجليزي؟ ولماذا؟
- 32- ماهي الاستعدادات قبل القراءة التي يمكن ان تساعدك على الفهم بشكل أفضل؟
- الاساليب المنتهجة اثناء القراءة**
- 33- عندما تقرأ النصوص الانجليزية , هل تعيد قراءة الكلمات او العبارات مرة أخرى؟ ولماذا؟
- 34- ما ذا تفعل عند ما تواجه صعوبة في معرفة أو فهم الكلمة؟
- 35- هل هنالك أجزاء يمكن أن تهمل قراءتها في القطعة النصية الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟
- 36- هل هنالك نصوص يمكن أن تقرأها بسرعة عن غيرها في النصوص الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟
- العوامل التي تساهم في صعوبة القراءة**
- 37- ماهي العوامل التي تجعل قراءة النصوص الانجليزية صعبة بالنسبة لك؟
- 38- ما هي العوامل التي يمكن أن تساعدك في القراءة الانجليزية بشكل افضل؟
- 39- كيف يمكن ان تنمي قدراتك على استيعاب النصوص الانجليزية؟
- 40- هل تعتقد بان مادة واحدة للقراءة قد تفي بالغرض في خطة البكالوريوس ليصبح الطالب قادرا على القراءة والاستيعاب للنصوص الانجليزية؟

Appendix 4

Student Interview Schedule (English)

Warm-up questions (not for data collection)

- How far do you live from the university?
- What time does your school day finish?

Access to reading

1. Do you have time to read English text?
2. How often do you read English text? And for how long?
3. Do your lecturers assign English books for you to read?
4. What type of English texts do you read?
5. Does anyone other than your lecturers encourage you to read in English?
6. Do you often see your parents reading?
7. Do you have a library at home?
8. Does your town have a public library?
Supplementary question (a) – Do people read in public spaces in your town?
9. Did your primary/secondary schools have libraries?
10. Does your University have a library?
Supplementary question (a) – Do you borrow English books from the University library?
Supplementary question (b) - Does your English Department have a library?
Supplementary question (c) - Do you borrow English books from the English Department library?
Supplementary question d - Do your lecturers encourage you to borrow English books from libraries?

Teaching reading

11. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your previous schools?
12. Did your previous schools assign particular books for you to read?
13. At your previous schools did you learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically or both?
14. Many polysyllabic words contain final stable syllabic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?
15. What do you think of the teaching of English reading and of English reading at your university?
16. Do your lecturers assess your reading level before assigning you English text for you to read?
17. What English reading strategies have you learned at university?

Cues to reading comprehension

18. What is the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?

19. How much attention do you pay to punctuation when reading English?
20. Do you think knowing English phonics and phonic patterns improves reading English comprehension?
21. Have you been taught the rules of English spelling?
22. Do you think you are good at English spelling?
23. Do you think knowing how to spell English correctly improves reading comprehension?

The reading process

24. What are your reasons for reading English text?
25. Where do you look for cues about what to expect from an English text?
26. What techniques do you use during your reading of English text?
27. How can you tell if you are understanding English text while you reading it?
28. When you have finished reading English text, what do you do to consolidate your understanding?
29. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English text for you?
30. What would help you become a better English reader?
31. Which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? And why?
32. What preparation do you do before reading English text in order to optimise your understanding of what you read?

Recurrent reading behaviours

33. When reading English text, do you re-read sentences? If so, why do you do so?
34. What do you do if you encounter an English word you have difficulty understanding?
35. Do you skip over parts of an English text as you read? If so, why do you do this?
36. Do you read some parts of English text faster than others? If so, why?

Factors affecting reading challenges

37. What factors make English reading difficult for you?
38. What factors help you read English well?
39. How could your English reading comprehension be further developed?
40. Do you think the current single textbook taught across two reading modules of the Bachelor's degree in English is sufficient training to become a good English reader?

Appendix 5

Interview Schedule Lecturer

Access to reading

1. Do you assign English books for your students to read?
2. Does anyone encourage your students to read in English?
3. Does your town have a public library?
Supplementary question (a) - Are places assigned for reading in the public area in your town?
4. Does your University have a library?
Supplementary question (a) – Do your students borrow English books from the University library?
Supplementary question (b) - Does your English Department have a library?
Supplementary question (c) - Do your students borrow English books from the English Department library?
Supplementary question (d) - Do you encourage your students to borrow English books from libraries?

Teaching reading

5. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your students' previous schools?
6. At their previous schools, did your students learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?
7. Many polysyllabic words contain final stable syllabic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?
8. What do you think of English reading teaching in your university?
9. Do you assess your students' reading level before assigning them English text to read?

Cues to reading comprehension

10. Do your students understand the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?
11. Do your students pay attention to the punctuation when reading English?
12. Do you think knowing English phonics and phonic patterns improves English reading comprehension?
13. Do your students learn English spelling rules at the university?
14. Do you think your students are good at spelling?
15. Do you think understanding spelling has a major role to play in English reading comprehension?

Student's reading process

16. Are your students aware of cues about what to expect from an English text?
17. What techniques do your students use during their reading of English text?
18. How can they tell if your students are understanding while they read?
19. When they have finished reading English text, what do they do to consolidate their understanding?
20. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English for your students?

21. What would help them become better English readers?
22. Do they know which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? What do they tell them about this?
23. Before starting to read English text, what do your students do in order to optimize their understanding of what they read?
24. What kinds of plans help them read English better?

Students' recurrent reading behaviours

25. Do your students ever re-read sentences? If so, why do they do so?
26. What do your students do if they encounter an English word they have difficulty understanding?
27. Do your students skip over parts of an English text as they read? If so, why do they do this?
28. Do they read some parts of English text faster than other? If so, why?

Factors affecting students' reading challenge

29. What factors make English reading difficult for your students?
30. What factors help your students read English well?

Appendix 6: a

Letter of consent from the Saudi Cultural Bureau



رقم الهوية الوطنية : 1044015715

رقم الملف : S2719

المحترم
سعادة المشرف على فرع جامعة الطائف برنية
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

تفيد الملحقية الثقافية السعودية في بريطانيا وايرلندا بأن الطالب / محمد عائض
عبدالله السبيعي مُبتعث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي لدراسة مرحلة الدكتوراه
في مجال اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة أكستر في بريطانيا، اعتباراً من
1428/06/05 هـ ولا زال على رأس بعثته التي ستنتهي بتاريخ
1433/06/17 هـ.

نأمل تسهيل إجراءات بحثه وتزويده بموافقتكم حيث سيقوم برحلة علمية الى
المملكة لإكمال إجراءات بحثه لدرجة الدكتوراه (استكشاف التحديات
والعوامل التي تحد من استيعاب النصوص الانجليزية التي تواجه طلبة اللغة
الانجليزية في الجامعات السعودية).

وتقبلوا أوفر التحيات والتقدير،،،

الملحق الثقافي في بريطانيا وايرلندا


أ.د.غازي بن عبد الواحد المكي

630 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RY Tel: +44 (0) 20 3249 7000 Fax: +44 (0) 20 3249 7001 E-mail: sacbuk@uksacb.org

الرقم : التاريخ : الموافق : للمرفقات :

www.uksacb.org

Appendix 6: b

Letter of consent from the Saudi Cultural Bureau



رقم الهوية الوطنية : 1044015715

رقم الملف : S2719

معالي مدير جامعة المجمعة
المحترم
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

تفيد الملحقية الثقافية السعودية في بريطانيا وايرلندا بأن الطالب / محمد عائض
عبدالله السبيعي مُبتعث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي لدراسة مرحلة الدكتوراه
في مجال اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة أكستر في بريطانيا، اعتباراً من
1428/06/05 هـ ولا زال على رأس بعثته التي ستنتهي بتاريخ
1433/06/17 هـ.

نأمل تسهيل إجراءات بحثه وتزويده بموافقتكم حيث سيقوم برحلة علمية الى
المملكة لإكمال إجراءات بحثه لدرجة الدكتوراه (استكشاف التحديات
والعوامل التي تحد من استيعاب النصوص الانجليزية التي تواجه طلبة اللغة
الانجليزية في الجامعات السعودية).

وتقبلوا أوفر التحيات والتقدير،،،

الملحق الثقافي في بريطانيا وايرلندا


أ.د.غازي بن عبد الواحد المكي

630 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RY Tel: +44 (0) 20 3249 7000 Fax: +44 (0) 20 3249 7001 E-mail: sacbuk@uksacb.org

الرقم : التاريخ : الموافق : للرفقات :

www.uksacb.org

Appendix 6: c

Letter of consent from the Saudi Cultural Bureau



رقم الهوية الوطنية : 1044015715

رقم الملف : S2719

المحترم

معالي مدير جامعة شقراء
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

تفيد الملحقية الثقافية السعودية في بريطانيا وايرلندا بأن الطالب / محمد عائض
عبدالله السبيعي مُبتعث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي لدراسة مرحلة الدكتوراه
في مجال اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة أكستر في بريطانيا، اعتباراً من
1428/06/05 هـ ولا زال على رأس بعثته التي ستنتهي بتاريخ
1433/06/17 هـ.

نأمل تسهيل إجراءات بحثه وتزويده بموافقتكم حيث سيقوم برحلة علمية الى
المملكة لإكمال اجراءات بحثه لدرجة الدكتوراه (استكشاف التحديات
والعوامل التي تحد من استيعاب النصوص الانجليزية التي تواجه طلبة اللغة
الانجليزية في الجامعات السعودية) .

وتقبلوا أوفر التحيات والتقدير،،،

الملحق الثقافي في بريطانيا وايرلندا

أ.د. غازي بن عبد الواحد المكي

630 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RY Tel: +44 (0) 20 3249 7000 Fax: +44 (0) 20 3249 7001 E-mail: sacbuk@uksacb.org

الرقم : التاريخ : الموافق : المرفقات :

www.uksacb.org

Appendix 7: a

Letters of consent from the universities

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الرقم: ٣٥٥
التاريخ: ١٤٢٢/١/٤٤
المرفقات: يرون
الموضوع:

جامعة الطائف
TAIF UNIVERSITY
١٤٢٤ هـ - ٢٠٠٢ م

الجمهورية العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة الطائف
فرع الجامعة برنية

سعادة / الملحق الثقافي للمملكة العربية السعودية في بريطانيا وايرلندا سلمه الله
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد ، ، ،

إشارة إلى خطاب سعادتك رقم (بدون) وتاريخ (بدون) بشأن تسهيل إجراءات
بحث الطالب / محمد عائض عبد الله السبيعي ، المبتعث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي
لدراسة مرحلة الدكتوراة في مجال اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة أكستري في بريطانيا .
نفيدكم بأنه لا مانع لدينا من تطبيق بحثه في فرع الجامعة برنية .
هذا والله الموفق ، ، ،

المشرف العام على فرع الجامعة برنية
عميد كلية العلوم والآداب
د. محمد بن صوال الراجحي البقمي

Appendix 7: b

Letters of consent from the universities

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Higher Education
Majmaah University
Deanship of Scientific Research



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة المجمعة
عمادة البحث العلمي

حفظه الله

سعادة .. عميد كلية التربية بالمجمعة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته... وبعد

إشارة إلى خطاب سعادة وكيل الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي رقم (١/٥٧٤/و) وتاريخ ١٤٣٣/٣/١هـ، بشأن طلب تسهيل إجراءات البحث الميداني للطلاب المبتعث/ محمد عايض السبيعي، والذي سوف يجرى على طلاب قسم اللغة الانجليزية في الكلية.

وتقبلوا خالص تحياتي وتقديري...

عميد البحث العلمي المكلف

د. إبراهيم بن علي اللحيدان

المشروعات:-----

التاريخ: ١٤٣٣ / ٥ / ٨ هـ

الرقم: ٧٧ / ٨٩

المملكة العربية السعودية - ص.ب : ٦٦ المجموعة : ١١٩٥٢ هاتف : ٤٣٢١٧١٣ - فاكس : ٤٣٢٣١٥٦
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - P.O. Box 66 Almajmaa : 11952 - Tel: 06 4321713 - Fax : 06 4323156

Email: d.s.a.r@mu.edu.sa

www.mu.edu.sa

Appendix 7: c

Letters of consent from the universities

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Ministry of Higher Education
Shaqra University



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة شقراء

الرقم : ٥٣ / ٧٥٧٥ التاريخ : ١٤٣٧ / ٥ / ١٤ المرفقات :

سلمه الله

سعادة عميد كلية التربية بشقراء

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

اشارة الى خطاب سعادة الملحق الثقافي في بريطانيا وايرلندا الموجه لمعالي مدير جامعة شقراء (المرفق) بشأن حاجة الطالب / محمد السبيعي -المبتعث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي- للقيام برحلة علمية لإكمال متطلبات بحثه المعنون ب (استكشاف التحديات والعوامل التي تحد من استيعاب النصوص الانجليزية التي تواجه طلبة اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات السعودية) ، وطلب سعاداته تسهيل مهمة الطالب ، وتوجيه معالي المدير تسهيل إجراءات بحثه.

آمل من سعادتكم التكرم وتسهيل مهمة الطالب المذكور .

وتقبلوا وافر التحية والتقدير ،،،،،،

المشرف على عمادة البحث العلمي

د. محمد بن ابراهيم الفقيم

Appendix 8

Blank consent form (student)

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

1. I understand that there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.
2. I understand that have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me and any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
3. I understand that, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.
4. I understand that all information I give will be treated as confidential.
5. I understand that the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

.....

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 0559531000

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Mohammed Alsubaie

shmasi@hotmail.com

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 9

Blank consent form (lecturers)

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

6. I understand that there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation.
7. I understand that have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me and any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
8. I understand that, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form.
9. I understand that all information I give will be treated as confidential.
10. I understand that the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 0559531000

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Mohammed Alsubaie

shmasi@hotmail.com

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 10

Sample Student Interview: Student 2

Transcript keys

- The words in plain type are the question asked by the interviewer.
- *The words in italic are the participant's responses*

Emergent themes as the basis for a coding framework

Reading comprehension	Poor pronunciation Lack of word recognition Confusion
Access to English	Lack of resources Lack of practice Lack of exposure
Teaching	Poor teaching methods Lack of teaching proficiency Lack of interaction with teachers
Cultural factors	Saudi culture does not promote reading Lack of time due to obligatory socializing
Mental and emotional states	Frustration Anxiety Lack of interest Embarrassment
Background knowledge	Lack of vocabulary Lack of text structure Lack of text culture Lack of reading strategies Lack of punctuation

Warm-up questions (not for data collection)

- How far do you live from the university?
- What time does your school day finish?

Access to reading

1. Do you have time to read English text at university? And at home?
Sometimes. Because I feel it hard to understand. So I prefer to read Arabic as it is easy for me to understand.
2. How often do you read English text? And for how long?
Once a week or twice.
3. Do your lecturers assign English books for you to read?
No, at all.
4. What type of English texts do you read?

- I can't remember but general and very few to carry on reading English. I have no motivation to continue reading English as it is difficult.*
5. Does anyone other than your lecturers influence your English reading?
Not that much.
 6. Do you often see your parents reading?
No not often but if I asked them to buy a book they would buy it.
 7. Do you have a library at home?
Actually we only have few books and all are religious and Arabic.
 8. Does your town have a public library?
Unfortunately no, at all.
Supp. - Are places assigned for reading in the public area in your town?
There is no place at all. And I think people like me will not read in the waiting area. They will be busy in their mobile-phones all the time.
 9. Did your primary/secondary schools have libraries?
I went to different schools and sometimes there was a small library.
 10. Does your University have a library?
No they don't have. This would be great if they have one. Some of the textbooks we have to travel about 3 hours driving to buy them or ask our teachers to bring them from there if they are going to Taif city. It is hard to get our resources. No facilities in the university. The services in here is zero. We sometimes have to copy the papers from our friends to read subject. I think this is because it is a new university only five years old. I think they will build a new library in the future when they build a university building because this is a rented place.
Supp. – Do you borrow English books from the University library?
Supp. - Does your English Department have a library?
No unfortunately it doesn't have. The same problem we have here also.
Supp. - Do you borrow English books from the English Department library?
Supp. - Do your lecturers encourage you to borrow English books from libraries?
Never. And even the society, they did not encourage us to read. If someone saw you reading, they stare at me as am coming from different culture and community. If I say any English word they in the public, they gaze me as I have done something strange. I avoid practicing English in the society to avoid being embarrassed. I remember once, one in the community made a mistake to spell a word, and I could not able to correct him because of the disgrace – culture. I would be showing off. I could not read in the culture because of this reason. Our community is still need to be aware of the importance of reading and English.

Teaching reading

11. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your previous schools?
We got shocked when we reached the university because we cannot read at all in English. The teaching in previous schools has been changed since the final exam is changed from centralisation to be done in each school. The standard of teaching is below the average. Many of my colleagues in previous schools did not know the very simple grammar, for example the use of 'is' and 'are'. I find it very difficult to cope with reading in university as the English in the university is very high level than where we were. I struggled to understand what we learn and encountered with very stress and high pressure to carry on learning.
12. Did your previous schools assign particular books for you to read?
In the previous schools, they never assign any book to read even if there is a small library in the school. Only if the teacher is absent that day, then they take us to read in the library but this may happen three times a year. The role of the library is not activated at all.
13. At your previous school did you learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?

In the previous schools we had learned them alphabetically first but in the university we started learning them phonetically.

14. Most polysyllabic words contain very regular phonic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?

We have never learn such as these.

15. What do you think of the teaching of English reading and of English reading at your university?

To be honest we did not learn something worth of learning from reading subject. It is very little from the textbook and reduced to be no more than three subjects in the exam. Because teachers know it is difficult for us to finish the textbook.

16. Do your lecturers assess your reading level before assigning you English text to read?

They never did and even in the previous schools. Never happened.

17. What English reading strategies have you learned at university?

I cannot remember anything.

Cues to reading comprehension

18. What is the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?

It is important. For example, the question mark in the text is a clue that there is an answer after this.

19. How much attention do you pay to punctuation when reading English?

Yes I pay attention to this when I read.

20. Do you think knowing phonics and phonic patterns improves reading English comprehension?

I think if we have learned phonetically from the very first school would be easier for us to read phonetically.

21. Have you been taught the rules of English spelling?

We did not learn the spelling rules

22. Do you think you are good at English spelling?

I find challenges in spelling.

23. Do you think knowing how to spell English correctly improves reading comprehension?

I think it is important.

The reading process

24. What are your reasons for reading English text?

We study only to pass the exam and get marks but not to learn because I think there is no time to read extra for information or recreation as we are students. We photo-copy the sentence or text to pure it in the exam paper without understanding anything from the text. If you ask me after the exam I may not be able to answer any question in relation to the exam.

25. Where do you look for cues about what to expect from an English text?

Picture and title. We have learned this from studying the media subject not from reading English subject.

26. What techniques do you use during your reading of English text?

I try to know an unknown word from the context.

27. How can you tell if you are understanding English text while you reading it?

I imagine.

28. When you have finished reading English text, what do you do to consolidate your understanding?

I underline an unknown word. I try to extract from reading.

29. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English text for you?

Unknown words and long ones. The word that has many vowels I always struggle to pronounce and read it easily.

30. What would help you become a better English reader?

If I read a lot. I should read every day.

31. Which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? And why?

I don't know. Maybe the last sentence is a summary.

32. What preparation do you do before reading English text in order to optimise your understanding of what you read?

I look to the picture and title.

Reading regulations

33. When reading English text, do you re-read sentences? If so, why you do so?

I do sometimes if did not understand the meaning of the following sentence to clarify its meaning.

34. What do you do if you encounter an English word you have difficulty understanding?

I try to know it from the context, or from the dictionary later after reading. I have to read the text to understand this sentence. If asked the teacher sometimes they refuse to translate the hard words. Teachers claim that they are not a translation teachers.

35. Do you skip over parts of an English text as you read? If so, why do you do this?

Some of the less important sentences.

36. Do you read some parts of English text faster than others? If so, why?

The one I know I read faster than the new thing.

Factors affecting reading challenge

37. What factors make English reading difficult for you?

We face a culture and costumes challenges as our parents and community have many invitations during the week. They distract our reading and study. We sometimes have 2-3 invitations weekly. This waste our time but we cannot say anything against that as it is our culture. We as students also have to rent a lounge and share it at least three times a week to have fun in this pace and play 'Balot' or watch TV-sports. This may also act as time waste to read or learn.

38. What factors help you read English well?

I think if I will speak English with others will be helpful. I think if the community will change its culture towards reading, this will help.

39. How could your English reading comprehension be further developed?

I think listening and speaking could help.

40. Do you think the current single textbook taught across two reading modules of the Bachelor's degree in English is sufficient training to become a good English reader?

I think we need a more extensive course to overcome our challenges.

Appendix 11

Sample Lecturer Interview: Lecturer 2

Transcript keys

- The words in plain type are the question asked by the interviewer.
- *The words in italic are the participant's responses*

Access to reading

1. Do you assign English books for your students to read?
because of the low standard of the students in English language in general and reading comprehension in particular, I only assign simple English reading to a minimum degree
2. Does anyone encourage your students to read in English?
Yes, they do to certain extent.
3. Does your town have a public library?
No, we don't have a public library.
Supp - Are places assigned for reading in the public area in your town?
No. there isn't any public waiting area for reading.
4. Does your University have a library?
No, we don't have a college library so when students want to buy even textbooks we have to gather the student's name and buy the books from other cities which are far away from here
Supp. – Do your students borrow English books from the University library?
Supp. - Does your English Department have a library?
No, we don't have a department library.
Supp. - Do your students borrow English books from the English Department library?
Supp. - Do you encourage your students to borrow English books from libraries?
To a certain level, yes but I don't know they read it or not.

Teaching reading

5. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your students' previous schools?
It is of low standard and ineffectual since reading is a problematic skill for most Arabs.
6. At their previous schools, did your students learnt English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?
I think they learn it alphabetically which is enhancing the challenges of pronouncing the phoneme correctly when they read and they sometimes read the letter as its name and not the correct phoneme.
7. Most polysyllabic words contain very regular phonic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?
Yes, I think we do teach phonics instruction and there are many courses on phonetics in particular and linguistics in general.
8. What do you think of English reading teaching in your university?
Most ELT syllabuses used in the Arab Universities adopt the four reading approaches which are commonly referred to in the literature: Scanning, Skimming, Intensive reading, and Extensive reading. The courses seem to be designed to meet our target learners' reading needs; but as Stern says "It is all well in theory but it won't work in practice". In practice our target learners are not taught how to read, how to develop effective reading strategies ad skills.

9. Do you assess your students' reading level before assigning them English text to read?
I don't do this before.
- Cues to reading comprehension**
10. Do your students understand the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?
No, they don't due to lack of knowledge and understanding of punctuation.
11. Do your students pay attention to the punctuations when reading English?
I think it is very important and play a very decisive role in understanding reading comprehension. Arabic doesn't have full-stops after each sentence but only after long paragraphs. We use a commas regularly and they seem to take the place of full-stops in Arabic. So I think the students apply the same strategy in reading English and apply the full-stop expecting it to be a comma.
12. Do you think knowing phonics and phonic patterns improves English reading comprehension?
I think learning phonetics and phonic patterns is very vital and significant in understanding reading comprehension. Yes, I think learning phonics at early stages is preferable.
13. Do your students learn English spelling rules at the university?
Yes, they do.
14. Do you think your students are good at spelling?
No, they are not good at spelling because English spelling, unlike Arabic spelling, does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them.
15. Do you think spelling has a major role to play in English reading comprehension?
Yes I think so, because when students have a concrete and solid knowledge of spelling rules, they can understand reading comprehension much better.
- Student's reading process**
16. Are your students aware of cues about what to expect from an English text?
I think they need more awareness about this.
17. What techniques do your students use during their reading of English text?
If the text is interesting to them, they will interact with each other as well as with the teacher by asking certain questions related to the text.
18. How can they tell if your students are understanding while they read?
I look into their faces and ask them certain questions such as what do you expect to happen next in order to ensure that they understand the text and used it as a stimulus for production.
19. When they have finished reading English text, what do they do to consolidate their understanding?
If they understand the text under study, they will interact with the teacher as well as with each other by retrieving and applying the information they have gained from the text.
20. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English for your students?
I think the most difficult task for our student is to understand the overall meaning of the text under study and retrieve the information they have gained from the text.
21. What would help them become better English readers?
Choosing an authentic texts for teaching reading comprehension in the classroom is the most important factor for effective reading skills.
22. Do they know which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? What do they tell them about this?
Some of the students pay attention to the first sentence or two in a text to explore the topic. Some of the students focus upon the last sentence of a text in order to get the summary or the gist of a text.
23. Before starting to read English text, what do your students do in order to optimize their understanding of what they read?

The pre-reading stage is highly important stage and therefore, I prepare my students to undertake the following activities - exploring the topic, motivating students to read, and creating a purpose for reading.

24. What kinds of plans help them read English better?

As a teacher, I adopt many strategies for teaching reading which allow students to build on their already established cognitive abilities and background knowledge such as enjoyment, working in pairs or in group, thinking process, awareness of the purpose of their work. As a teacher, I'll try first to explore the topic and then motivate them to read and finally create a purpose for reading.

Students' reading regulation

25. Do your students ever re-read sentences? If so, why do they do so?

It depends upon the sort of text under study. They may use scanning to look for specific information or skimming to look for the gist ...etc. I think interest is a very important element in motivating students to read and re-read.

26. What do your students do if they encounter an English word they have difficulty understanding?

Students learn the concept of context in vocabulary learning. Emphasize the relationship of the word to the general context of the story or the more specific context of the sentence. If students fail to understand a whole sentence, the teacher should provide them with the practice of forming good sentences and identifying the parts of the sentences most important to the meaning.

27. Do your students skip over parts of an English text as they read? If so, why do they do this?

Sometimes students tend to skip some parts of the text which is superfluous; unnecessary to the general meaning of a text and uninterested to them.

28. Do they read some parts of English text faster than other? If so, why?

It depends upon the kind of text and reading they do, if they are scanning, they must be specific and look for specific information.

Factors affecting students' reading challenge

29. What factors make English reading difficult for your students?

Reading is a problematic skill for most Arabs. This could be because Arabic (our target learners' L1) uses a completely script different from the Latin script used by English. Unlike Arabic spelling, English spelling does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them. Some Arab learners are lazy. Speaking is so much easier for them than reading because they practice it without much effort. But they view the reading and writing skills as skills which need a lot of effort to be practiced and controlled.

30. What factors help your students read English well?

Our target learners are not taught how to read; how to develop effective reading strategies and skills. One of the factors is choosing a text or designing tasks to be used in the reading class. Teachers usually do not take into consideration the learners' needs and interest while choosing a text. They choose artificial specially-written type not authentic texts. Moreover, they used the texts as linguistic objects rather than skill teaching texts. This makes the students motivation very low. As a matter of fact, the texts are supposed to be used as both text as a linguistic object and text as a vehicle for information.

Appendix 12

Sample TAP coding: Student 2

Transcript keys

- The original words from the text are in **bold**.
- *The words in italic and highlighted in Yellow are a phonetic representation of the participant's reading*
- *(The italics in brackets and highlighted in red are where the student has spoken outside of the text).*
- Words written in turquoise are description of the language use
- [The words between brackets, highlighted in green and in font Bell MT are the researcher's explanations and include extra-linguistic phenomena]

Coding note

Some comments indicated more than one type of reading process. When this was the case, a single comment was allocated to more than one code. For example, the comment "this word is new to me" is coded only as "new word", whereas the comment "what does this word mean?" is coded twice, both as "new word" and "questioning word meaning".

TAP

Pre-reading strategies

Before reading, the participant did not look at the photo on the page of text and did not scan the text before reading. He did not appear to use any planning strategy prior to reading.

Malls: Public Places or Private Businesses?

Malls: bobic places our preevate ... What does this mean?.. preevate businesses.

The participant mispronounced "public" and re-read the word "private". He mispronounced it incorrectly twice, and asked me what it meant. He substituted 'b' for 'p'.

He struggled with recognizing the meaning of words because of mispronunciation. He read slowly, and paused slightly after each word. He seemed to be unaware of the function of punctuation and did not pay attention to the question mark. His voice tone also maintained the same pitch at the end of the sentence, instead of rising to indicate a question. He read without expression.

Three young men were arrested at an Iowa shopping mall.

Three young men, three young men, were arrested an Iowa, Iowa shopping mall, shopping mall.

The reader repeated two phrases in this sentence showing that he struggled to understand the meaning of what he had read. He also pronounced the lead consonant in "Iowa" incorrectly.

This shows unfamiliarity with the English alphabet and capitalization processes. He also demonstrated the inability to capitalize nouns as names and to distinguish between a lower case "l" and an upper case "I".

Commented [M1]: Mispronunciation of 'p'. Mispronunciation of 'u'. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M2]: Mispronunciation of 'o'. Substitution of word for word.

Commented [M3]: Mispronunciation of 'i'. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M4]: Think aloud - questioned aloud word meaning. New word.

Commented [M5]: Repetition of word. Mispronunciation of 'i'. Failure to self-correct.

Commented [M6]: Repetition of phrase.

Commented [M7]: Omission of word.

Commented [M8]: Mispronunciation of 'I'. Substitution of 'L' for 'I'. Capitalisation failure.

Commented [M9]: Repetition of word

Commented [M10]: Repetition of phrase

They didn't steal anything. Their crime: handing out information about sweatshops, places that use workers illegally.

They didn't still anything, their crime, (their crime, what does it mean): handing out information about sweatshops (sweatshops, what does it mean)(I know handing out information means "hand"), places that uses work, workers illegally.

He asked for the meaning of two words, misinterpreted the use of the noun "hand" and stumbled over reading "workers". His mispronunciation of "steal" changed the phonically to a different English word with no meaning in this context. He re-read words and phrases with a slight pause between most.

Although this sentence was generally pronounced well, the reader does not understand several words. He did not seem to recognize the function of punctuation and paid no attention to the semicolon or full-stops.

The shopping center says it doesn't allow demonstrations. That's why they were arrested.

The shopping center says it doesn't alloo demonstrations (what does demonstration mean), that is why they were arrested.

The participant pronounced most of these two sentences correctly. However in "allow" he replaced the "ow" with "oo", creating a meaningless word which he did not question. He did ask for the meaning of "demonstrations" and continued to pause slightly between words. The sound /p/ continued to be replaced by /b/.

Many people were upset about the arrests. They say the shopping mall is trying to stop freedom of speech.

Many people were opset upset about the arrests. (I don't understand, I know "many people"). They say the shopping mall is trying to stop freedom of speech. (he is speaking about freedom and speeches).

The reader stumbled over the reading of "upset" before getting it right. Read the letter 'u' by name not sound. He did not know the meaning of the phrase "upset about the arrests". He separated the two components of a phrase.

His comment at the end of the second sentence indicates that he has not synthesized the meaning of the phrase "freedom of speech" but treated the meaning of each word as separate to the other.

The mall owner says the protesters were on private property. Free speech doesn't apply there.

The mall owner says the protesters were on brevate property. (I don't understand property, it is new for me), Free speesh doesn't appli (what does apply mean?) there.

The same error was made with the pronunciation of "private" and the reader indicated that he did know the meaning of "property". He used the wrong vowel sound at the end of "apply" and failed to understand the word because of this.

However it was clear from his body language that he may have also failed to understand other words and felt embarrassed to ask for several meaning at once. Articulation of the final phoneme in "speech" indicates that he does not understand how to read /ch/. This

Commented [M11]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Substitution of word for word.

Commented [M12]: Ignored full stop.

Commented [M13]: Ignored colon.

Commented [M14]: Think aloud - questioned word meaning. New word.

Commented [M15]: Think aloud - questioned word meaning. New word.

Commented [M16]: Separation of compound phrase.

Commented [M17]: Conjugation error

Commented [M18]: Successful self-correction.

Commented [M19]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M20]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word. New word.

Commented [M21]: Ignored full stop.

Commented [M22]: Extended contraction.

Commented [M23]: Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M24]: Self-corrected pronunciation.

Commented [M25]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word. New word.

Commented [M26]: Think aloud - failure to understand phrase. Separation of compound phrase - syntax error.

Commented [M27]: Mispronunciation of word. Mispronunciation of vowel. Mispronunciation of consonant. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M28]: Think aloud - new word. Lack of word familiarity.

Commented [M29]: Mispronunciation of consonant.

Commented [M30]: Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M31]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word. New word.

does not, however mean that he does not understand its meaning as he did not request clarification. He continued to pause between words.

The security guards asked the protestors to leave. Two of them did, but they were arrested anyway. So was the third man who refused to leave.

The scorty, the scorty gwards asked the protestor to leave. (I don't understand this sentence and the meaning of "security", "guards", "protester" and "leave". I am not sure if it relates to live or not). Two of them, two of them did, but they were arrested any way. So was the third man who refused to leave. (I didn't understand the word "refused" but I understand that there are three men and there is some talk about the freedom of speech.) He struggled with "security" and said it twice, failing on both occasions to pronounce it correctly. The vowel sound in "guards" was lengthened from "gar" to "gwar". The reading speed was moderate but the participant pointed out that he did not understand most of the terms in this and subsequent sentences and asked for clarification of "security", "guards", "protester" and "leave". He misinterpreted the theme of the sentence, thinking it referred to a possible killing, having diverted the meaning from "fight" from later in the text. He says that he did not understand the word "refused" but he understood that there were three men and talk about freedom of speech.

He re-read phrases in an attempt to remove the ambiguity he faced.

If he had pleaded guilty in court, he probably would have gotten a very light punishment. Instead, he decided to hire a lawyer to help fight for free speech in the mall.

If he had pladed quality guylity in cowrt, he probably would have gotten a very light punishment (punishment mean "penalty"?)[I answered yes]. (I think they pay a fine for freedom, I just induced this). Inisted- inisted, he deside dess deceded to here a lawyer a lawyer to help fight for free speech in the mall. (I didn't understand "hire"). (I think lawyer mean "lower"). (I think this sentence means helping them for killing them for free speech).

He found it difficult to read the words "guilty", "court" and "pleaded", in addition to not knowing their meaning. He questioned the researcher on the meaning of "punishment" by translating it into Arabic and requesting whether it meant what he thought it did. Again he misunderstood the theme of the writing, believing that it said that the men were punished for their freedom by the payment of a fine. He says he didn't know the meaning of the word "hire" and misread "lawyer" as "lower" and "quality" as "guilty" indicating that he frequently mixes words with similar patterns.

This shows he put a lot of effort into trying to extract meaning from what he had read, however his efforts shifted the original meaning to an inaccurate interpretation. This must lead to a lot of comprehension challenges.

His lawyer represents him for free. She wants the charge dismissed. She says that the arrest violated the man's rights of free speech under the Iowa constitution.

His lawar re.. reprsnt him for free (I don't know represents). She wants the charge (what charge mean) dismissed (I do not know dismissed but I think this means they

Commented [M32]: Omission of vowel. Mispronunciation of vowel. Omission of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M33]: Incorrect repetition.

Commented [M34]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M35]: Omission of suffix.

Commented [M36]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word x4. New word x4. Substitution of word for word.

Commented [M37]: Repetition of phrase.

Commented [M38]: Separation of compound word.

Commented [M39]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word. New word. Think aloud - questioned meaning of sentence.

Commented [M40]: Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M41]: Mispronunciation of consonant. Insertion of vowel. Substitution word for word.

Commented [M42]: Insertion of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M43]: Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M44]: Think aloud - translation into Arabic.

Commented [M45]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of word. New word. Correct synonym. Think aloud - questioned meaning of sentence. Incorrect semantics (paying a fine for freedom).

Commented [M46]: Insertion of vowel. Repetition of word. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M47]: Omission of suffix.

Commented [M48]: Repetition of word. Omission of syllables. Failure to self-correct.

Commented [M49]: Failure to self-correct. Repetition of word. Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M50]: Substitution of word for word. Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M51]: Repetition of phrase.

Commented [M52]: Think aloud - questioned word-for-word meaning x2. New word x2. Incorrect semantics at word level. Incorrect semantics at sentence level

Commented [M53]: Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M54]: Repetition of word. Omission of vowel. Omission of suffix.

Commented [M55]: Semantic error at word level x2

missed them). She says that the arrest violated the man's rights of free speech under the Low/Lowa consstation. (I don't understand the final segment).

He said he did not know the meanings of "represents", "charge", "dismissed", and any of the final segment. He mispronounced and so could not understand "violated" and "constitution". He tried to make sense of "dismiss" by breaking it down into its component morphemes which did not succeed as a strategy. He repeated the former error with the name "Iowa" twice pointing that he didn't know its meaning.

The participant did not understand most of this extract and failed completely to understand the final segment. He showed that he was unable to identify its meaning from the context of its use. He did not seem to be aware that English names start with a capital letter.

As part of their argument, they hope to show that shopping malls are not private places. They say they are now places where people come together for social contact.

As part of their argument, they hope to show that shopping malls are not prevate (I don't know what "private" mean) places. They say they are now places where people come together for social contact. (I have no idea but I think people didn't come with them for social contact).

The participant repeated the mispronunciation of "private" together with the failure to understand it. However, this time, he said that he did not understand its meaning. Although he read the second sentence correctly he said that he did not understand it.

When malls came into the suburbs a few decades ago, many downtown shopping centers closed. This ended the social activities that happened there. Those social activities moved to shopping malls.

When malls came into the su...subyourbs (I do not know the meaning of suburbs) a few desades (what?) ago (it is difficult to understand this phrase), many downtown shopping centers closed. This ended the social activities that happened there. This..Those social activities moved to shopping malls.

The reader stumbled over pronunciation of the word "suburbs" and admitted to not knowing its meaning. He stumbled over but corrected his pronunciation of "those".

The reader showed both lack of vocabulary and lack of phoneme/grapheme correspondence in failing to pronounce either "suburbs" or "decades" correctly. In addition, he mentioned that he did not know the meaning of these words.

"Malls do more than give people a place to shop," says Professor Mills of a local university. "There are baking contests, walking clubs, flower shows and even charity fundraisers. They've become a new place of public gatherings."

"Malls do more than give people a place to shop," says Professor Miles... (I don't know) Mills. I am thinking about what has the professor said of a local university. "There are baking contests, walking clubs, (I think they mean walking social contact) flower shows and even cherity fouderssner (I don't know those two words "charity" and "fundraiser"). They've become a new place of public gatherings. (does this mean they should become a new place for people?). (I don't know what gatherings mean).

Commented [M56]: Semantic error at word level. Prefix failure.

Commented [M57]: Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M58]: Capitalisation error.

Commented [M59]: Unsuccessful repetition.

Commented [M60]: Omission of syllables. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M61]: Semantic error at phrase level.

Commented [M62]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M63]: Think aloud – new word.

Commented [M64]: Thinking aloud – failure to understand sentence.

Commented [M65]: Repetition of partial word. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M66]: Think aloud – new word..

Commented [M67]: Mispronunciation of consonant. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M68]: Think aloud - questioned meaning of unfamiliar word.

Commented [M69]: Think aloud –failure to understand phrase.

Commented [M70]: Successful self-correction

Commented [M71]: Think aloud – new word.

Commented [M72]: Capitalisation of names. Mispronunciation of vowel.

Commented [M73]: Think aloud – failure to understand sentence.

Commented [M74]: Think aloud – guessing meaning correctly.

Commented [M75]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M76]: Mispronunciation of vowel. Omission of consonant. Insertion of vowel. Omission of vowel. Mispronunciation of consonant. Substitution of non-word for word.

Commented [M77]: Think aloud –new words x2

Commented [M78]: Question. Semantic error at sentence level.

Commented [M79]: Think aloud – new word.

The reader did not understand that the capitalization of M in "Mills" indicated the name of a person and mispronounced the short "i" showing he did not understand the effect of a silent "e". The short "a" in "charity" is replaced with the sort "i", and the reader struggles to read "fundraiser", mispronouncing both halves of the word out into "found" and "reser". He also did not understand many words, including "contests", "charity", "fundraisers" and "gatherings". These failures led to complete misunderstanding of the final sentence.

The failure to understand vowel minimal pairs is part of a bigger problem amongst these students

Six other states, including California, Colorado, Oregon and New Jersey, say people have a right to hand out leaflets in malls. Last year a judge said that the Minnesota's Mall of America, the largest mall in the U.S., is a public space.

Six other states, including California, Colorado, Orejon and New Jersey (this are six states), say people have a right to hand out leaflets. I don't know what does leaflet mean) in malls. Last year a judge said judge said that the Minnesota's Minnesota Mall of America, the largest mall in the U.S.A, (A letter missed here) is a public space.

The participant mispronounced the 'g' in 'Oregon' which created the word "origin". He did not understand "leaflet". He repeated two words and struggled with "Minnesota", reading it twice, trying to articulate the word correctly in an effort to understand its meaning. He also inserted an "A" into "USA" which was not in the original reading and supported this with a clarifying statement that the letter was missing.

Mispronunciation of "Oregon" shows that the participant was not aware of how to pronounce and differentiate between the hard "g" sound as in "game", and the soft "j" sound as in "giraffe". This was made clear when he replaced the hard "g" in the word Oregon with the softer sound "j".

All of the above shows that the student focused on recognizing individual words in isolation, paying attention to these rather than to larger chunks of information such as phrases or sentences as a whole. His cognitive capacity was overloaded by struggling with the meaning of individual words which impacted on his flow of understanding of subsequent content and negatively affected his ability to synthesise the meaning of what he had read and his comprehension of the text as a whole.

Commented [M80]: Mispronunciation of consonant 'g'. Incorrect substitution of word for word.

Commented [M81]: Think aloud – guessing meaning of sentence correctly.

Commented [M82]: Think aloud – new word.

Commented [M83]: Repetition of phrase.

Commented [M84]: Incorrect repetition.

Commented [M85]: Corrected insertion of missing consonant.

Commented [M86]: Think aloud – correct meaning.

Totals for each type of TAP comment

Confused meaning of phrase	1
New word	17
Comment to self on lack of knowledge	7
Questioning aloud word meaning	14
Guessing meaning correctly	3
Failure to understand phrase	4
Failure to understand sentence	1
Guessing meaning of phrase/sentence incorrectly	1
Long words are difficult	1
Incorrect translation into Arabic	1

Totals for each type of reading behaviour

Strategies	Self-correction	Successful	3
		Unsuccessful	5
	Repeating	Partial word	2
		Word	4
		Phrase	5
		Failure to look at the photo	1
		Failure to scan the text	1
Punctuation	Ignoring punctuation	Question mark (2)	1
		Fullstop (29)	12
		Quotation (2)	2
		Comma (13)	7
		Colon (3)	2
	Capitalisation	3	
Phonetics	Mispronunciation	Vowel (excluding 'u')	6
		Combination (excluding double) (17)	10
		Omitted vowel/syllable	6
		Insert vowel	5
		Of 'u' alphabetically (6)	3
		Consonant	7
		Hard and soft consonants	1
		Insert consonant	1
		Pronounce silent consonant (8)	3
		Polysyllabic pronunciation (8)	4
		Separating syllables (13)	7
Lexical/semantics	Substitution of word for word	Word for word	8
		Non-word for word	18
Syntax	Changing tense and conjugation	Personal/impersonal	2
		Singular/plural	2
		Verb ending – subject match, etc...	2
	Separating compound phrase	3	
	Omitted	Word	2
Phrase	1		
Morphology	Suffixes/prefixes/affixes	Omitted suffix	3
		Extended contractions	1
		Omit prefix	1
Cultural knowledge		Knowledge	1

Appendix 14

Sample RVR coding: Student 2

Transcript keys

The words in ordinary type are the questions asked by the researcher.

The words in italic and brackets are the participants' responses.

You have just started reading. Did you understand what the text was about from the beginning?

(Well, I can't visualise the text from the beginning. I have to read it twice to familiarise myself with it)

Why did you stop there?

(I stop some times to try to get the word.

You sound as if you are struggling as you read. Why are you struggling?

I struggle to read it clearly, especially when the text is new to me. This text is new to me.)

What do you struggle with?

(They are difficult to pronounce and their meaning is hard to guess.)

Do you have problems with certain words?

(I don't know the words 'private' or 'protestors', but I guess 'protestors' is a religious word same as Catholic. Sometimes I mix up words with similar letters. I get stuck on new words and words which are hard to pronounce because they are long. The most challenge for me is recognising words with more than one vowel.)

Why did you repeat that word?

Sometimes I re-read the word twice, because it is the first time for me to see such a word or phrase, I try to understand it and pronounce it correctly.

There was a full-stop there in the text. Why didn't you stop at the end of the sentence?

I don't know, I thought I did. Maybe because I concentrate on the individual words.

What is the important word here?

Arrest

Why do you think 'arrest' is an important word?

I think it is an important word, because I came across this word several times in the text.

Sometimes you substitute one word for another, like 'mile', instead of 'mall'. Do you understand the different meanings of the words you substitute?

Sometimes I pronounce it like the absent word because I came across it before. This doesn't mean I know its meaning

Commented [M87]: Beginning reading

Commented [M88]: Slow hesitant reading

Commented [M89]: Slow hesitant reading

Commented [M90]: Reading challenge – new long words

Commented [M91]: Pronunciation problem

Commented [M92]: Comprehension problem

Commented [M93]: Reading challenge - confusion between similar words

Commented [M94]: Reading challenge – confusion between similar words

Commented [M95]: Reading challenge – new words

Commented [M96]: Pronunciation problem

Commented [M97]: Reading challenge – long words

Commented [M98]: Pronunciation problem - vowels

Commented [M99]: Reading strategy - repetition

Commented [M100]: Reading challenge – new word

Commented [M101]: Comprehension problem

Commented [M102]: Pronunciation problem

Commented [M103]: Reading strategy - punctuation

Commented [M104]: Slow, hesitant reading

Commented [M105]: Reading strategy- key word

Commented [M106]: Reading challenge – confusion of similar words

Commented [M107]: Comprehension problem

Appendix 15

Sample Student Interview Coded: Student 2

Transcript keys

- The words in plain type are the question asked by the interviewer.
- *The words in italic are the participant's responses*

Student coding framework

Section	Category	Sub-category
Access to reading	Types of reading	Sources other than books
	Reading resources	No libraries/no English books/reading laboratory/facilities/curriculum
		Books difficult to get
Teaching reading	Poor teaching	Poor textbook
		Poor foundation of learning
		Poor teaching methods (recitation, no practice, only grammar and translation)
		Lack of phonics (letters by name)
		Lack of teaching reading strategies
		Promoting reading
		No assessment of reading
		Disinterested/unapproachable lecturers
	Teacher training	Poor discipline of students
	Cues to reading	Punctuation
Phonics		L1/L2 linguistic differences
		Poor pronunciation
Spelling	Lack of phonic awareness	
Reading process	Assessment	Lack of awareness
	Preparation	Of reading level
	Cues/techniques/strategies	Picture/title/scanning/introduction
		Key words
		Topic sentences
	Consolidation	Scanning/skimming
	Becoming better readers	Texts
Teaching methods		
Student effort		
Recurrent reading behaviours	Re-reading	
	Translation dictionaries	
	Sounding out words	
	Guessing meaning from context	
	Questioning	Other students
		Teacher/asking for help
Skippping difficult sections	Details/text which is not understood	
Factors affecting reading comprehension challenges	L1/L2 linguistic differences	Orthography/punctuation/pronunciation
	Text	Topic/motivation/interest
	Background knowledge	Vocabulary (new words, long words)
		Text culture/structure
		Confusion – similar words, compound vowels
	Culture	Laziness/lack of effort/motivation
		Social responsibilities/over-socialising
		Lack of L2 cultural knowledge
		Reading habit/role models/practice
		Availability and use of resources
		Pressure to conform
	Resources	Books
	Mental/emotional states	Access to native speakers/exposure
Boredom, annoyance, frustration, anxiety, demotivated, demoralised, embarrassment, stress		

In the coding below, responses which have been coded as positive, negative or which indicate frequency do not provide qualitative data and have been

analysed in summative figures in Chapters 5 and 6.

Student interview responses

Access to reading

1. Do you have time to read English text?
Sometimes. Because I feel it hard to understand. So I prefer to read Arabic as it is easy for me to understand.
2. How often do you read English text? And for how long?
Once a week or twice.
3. Do your lecturers assign English books for you to read?
No, at all.
4. What type of English texts do you read?
I can't remember but general and very few to carry on reading English. I have no motivation to continue reading English as it is difficult.
5. Does anyone other than your lecturers encourage you to read English?
Not that much.
6. Do you often see your parents reading?
No not often but if I asked them to buy a book they would buy it.
7. Do you have a library at home?
Actually we only have few books and all are religious and Arabic.
8. Does your town have a public library?
Unfortunately no, at all.
- Supplementary question (a) – Do people read in public spaces in your town?
No, they do not. And I think people like me will not read in the waiting area. They will be busy in their mobile-phones all the time.
9. Did your primary/secondary schools have libraries?
I went to different schools and sometimes there was a small library.
10. Does your University have a library?
No they don't have. This would be great if they have one. Some of the textbooks we have to travel about 3 hours driving to buy them or ask our teachers to bring them from there if they are going to Taif city. It is hard to get our resources. No facilities in the university. The services in here is zero. We sometimes have to copy the papers from our friends to read subject. I think this is because it is a new university only five years old. I think they will build a new library in the future when they build a university building because this is a rented place.
- Supplementary question (a) – Do you borrow English books from the University library?
No. There is no library.
- Supplementary question (b) - Does your English Department have a library?
No unfortunately it doesn't have. The same problem we have here also.
- Supplementary question (c) - Do you borrow English books from the English Department library?
No. The same problem. There is no library.
- Supplementary question (d) - Do your lecturers encourage you to borrow English books from libraries?
Never. And even the society, they did not encourage us to read. If someone saw you reading, they stare at me as am coming from different culture and community. If I say any

Commented [M108]: Frequency of reading

Commented [M109]: Reading comprehension difficulty

Commented [M110]: Lack of effort

Commented [M111]: Frequency

Commented [M112]: Frequency

Commented [M113]: Lack of interest

Commented [M114]: Lack of interest

Commented [M115]: Frequency

Commented [M116]: Lack of motivation

Commented [M117]: Lack of effort and motivation

Commented [M118]: Frequency

Commented [M119]: Frequency

Commented [M120]: Supportive parents

Commented [M121]: Resources – no library

Commented [M122]: Culture - role model

Commented [M123]: Culture – reading habit

Commented [M124]: Culture – role models

Commented [M125]: Resources - library

Commented [M126]: Resources – no library

Commented [M127]: Resources – eagerness for

Commented [M128]: Resources – difficult to get

Commented [M129]: Resources – no facilities

Commented [M130]: Resources – eagerness for

Commented [M131]: Resources – no library

Commented [M132]: Resources – no library

Commented [M133]: Resources – no library

Commented [M134]: Not promoting reading

Commented [M135]: Culture – reading habits

Commented [M136]: Culture - conformity

English word they in the public, they gaze me as I have done something strange. I avoid practicing English in the society to avoid being embarrassed. I remember once, one in the community made a mistake to spell a word, and I could not able to correct him because of the disgrace – culture. I would be showing off. I could not read in the culture because of this reason. Our community is still need to be aware of the importance of reading and English.

Commented [M137]: Culture - conformity

Commented [M138]: Mental-emotional state

Commented [M139]: Culture - conformity

Commented [M140]: Culture - conformity

Commented [M141]: Culture – reading habit change

Teaching reading

11. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your previous schools?

We got shocked when we reached the university because we cannot read at all in English. The teaching in previous schools has been changed since the final exam is changed from centralisation to be done in each school. The standard of teaching is below the average. Many of my colleagues in previous schools did not know the very simple grammar, for example the use of 'is' and 'are'. I find it very difficult to cope with reading in university as the English in the university is very high level than where we were. I struggled to understand what we learn and encountered with very stress and high pressure to carry on learning.

Commented [M142]: Poor teaching

Commented [M143]: Lack of background knowledge - grammar

Commented [M144]: Poor foundation of learning

Commented [M145]: Poor foundation of learning

Commented [M146]: Mental-emotional state - stress

12. Did your previous schools assign particular books for you to read?

In the previous schools, they never assign any book to read even if there is a small library in the school. Only if the teacher is absent that day, then they take us to read in the library but this may happen three times a year. The role of the library is not activated at all.

Commented [M147]: Frequency

Commented [M148]: Frequency

Commented [M149]: Frequency

13. At your previous schools did you learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?

In the previous schools we had learned them alphabetically first but in the university we started learning them phonetically.

Commented [M150]: Culture – availability and use of resources

Commented [M151]: Lack of phonics

Commented [M152]: Phonetic learning

14. Most polysyllabic words contain final stable syllabic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?

We have never learn such as these.

Commented [M153]: Frequency

15. What do you think of the teaching of English reading and of English reading at your university?

To be honest we did not learn something worth of learning from reading subject. It is very little from the textbook and reduced to be no more than three subjects in the exam. Because teachers know it is difficult for us to finish the textbook.

Commented [M154]: Poor teaching

Commented [M155]: Difficult text, poor foundation of learning

16. Do your lecturers assess your reading level before assigning you English text for you to read?

They never did and even in the previous schools. Never happened.

Commented [M156]: Poor foundation of learning/curriculum

Commented [M157]: Poor foundation of learning

17. What English reading strategies have you learned at university?

I cannot remember anything.

Commented [M158]: Frequency

Commented [M159]: Lack of teaching reading strategies

Cues to reading comprehension

18. What is the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?

It is important. For example, the question mark in the text is a clue that there is an answer after this.

Commented [M160]: Positive response

Commented [M161]: Reading cue

19. How much attention do you pay to punctuation when reading English?

Yes I pay attention to this when I read.

Commented [M162]: Positive response

20. Do you think knowing English phonics and phonic patterns improves reading English comprehension?

I think if we have learned phonetically from the very first school would be easier for us to read phonetically.

Commented [M163]: Poor foundation of learning

21. Have you been taught the rules of English spelling?

We did not learn the spelling rules

Commented [M164]: Spelling - lack of awareness

22. Do you think you are good at English spelling?

I find challenges in spelling .

Commented [M165]: Spelling – lack of awareness

23. Do you think knowing how to spell English correctly improves reading comprehension?

I think it is important.

Commented [M166]: Positive response

The reading process

24. What are your reasons for reading English text?

We study only to pass the exam and get marks but not to learn because I think there is no time to read extra for information or recreation as we are students. We photo-copy the sentence or text to pure it in the exam paper without understanding anything from the text. If you ask me after the exam I may not be able to answer any question in relation to the exam.

Commented [M167]: Text - motivation

Commented [M168]: Lack of time

Commented [M169]: Reading comprehension failure

Commented [M170]: Reading process - preparation

25. Where do you look for cues about what to expect from an English text?

Picture and title. We have learned this from studying the media subject not from reading English subject.

Commented [M171]: Reading process - preparation

Commented [M172]: Poor foundation of learning

26. What techniques do you use during your reading of English text?

I try to know an unknown word from the context.

Commented [M173]: Guessing meaning from context

Commented [M174]: Guessing meaning

27. How can you tell if you are understanding English text while you reading it?

I imagine.

Commented [M175]: Consolidation

28. When you have finished reading English text, what do you do to consolidate your understanding?

I underline an unknown word. I try to extract from reading.

Commented [M176]: Guessing meaning

Commented [M177]: Lack of vocabulary – new words

Commented [M178]: Lack of vocabulary – long words

29. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English text for you?

Unknown words and long ones. The word that has many vowels I always struggle to pronounce and read it easily.

Commented [M179]: Confusion – compound vowels

Commented [M180]: Poor pronunciation

30. What would help you become a better English reader?

If I read a lot, I should read every day.

Commented [M181]: Culture – reading practice

Commented [M182]: Culture – reading practice

31. Which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? And why?

I don't know. Maybe the last sentence is a summary.

Commented [M183]: Lack of background knowledge – text structure

Commented [M184]: Lack of background knowledge – text structure

32. What preparation do you do before reading English text in order to optimise your understanding of what you read?

I look to the picture and title.

Commented [M185]: Preparation

Commented [M186]: Preparation

Reading regulations

33. When reading English text, do you re-read sentences? If so, why do you do so?

I do sometimes if did not understand the meaning of the following sentence to clarify its meaning.

Commented [M187]: Positive response

Commented [M188]: Recurrent reading behaviour - re-reading

34. What do you do if you encounter an English word you have difficulty understanding?

I try to know it from the context, or from the dictionary later after reading. I have to read the text to understand this sentence. If asked the teacher sometimes they refuse to

Commented [M189]: Guessing meaning from context

Commented [M190]: Reading behaviour - translation dictionaries

translate the hard words. Teachers claim that they are not a translation teachers.

35. Do you skip over parts of an English text as you read? If so, why do you do this?
Some of the less important sentences.

Commented [M191]: Asking teacher for help

36. Do you read some parts of English text faster than others? If so, why?
The one I know I read faster than the new thing.

Commented [M192]: Skipping - details

Commented [M193]: Speed reading – familiar text

Factors affecting reading challenge

37. What factors make English reading difficult for you?

We face a culture and customs challenges as our parents and community have many invitations during the week. They distract our reading and study. We sometimes have 2-3 invitations weekly. This waste our time but we cannot say anything against that as it is our culture. We as students also have to rent a lounge and share it at least three times a week to have fun in this place and play 'Balot' or watch TV-sports. This may also act as time waste to read or learn.

Commented [M194]: Culture

Commented [M195]: Social responsibilities

Commented [M196]: Over-socialising

Commented [M197]: Social responsibilities

Commented [M198]: Culture – pressure to conform

38. What factors help you read English well?

I think if I will speak English with others will be helpful. I think if the community will change its culture towards reading, this will help.

Commented [M199]: Resources – access to native speakers

39. How could your English reading comprehension be further developed?

I think listening and speaking could help.

Commented [M200]: Culture – reading habits

Commented [M201]: Resources – practice/exposure to English

40. Do you think the current single textbook taught across two reading modules of the Bachelor's degree in English is sufficient training to become a good English reader?

I think we need a more extensive course to overcome our challenges.

Commented [M202]: Resources – practice/exposure to English

Commented [M203]: Resources - curriculum

Appendix 16

Sample Lecturer Interview Coded: Lecturer 2

Transcript keys

The words in plain type are the question asked by the interviewer.

The words in italics are the participant's responses

Lecturer coding framework

Section	Category	Sub-category
Access to reading	Resources	
	Cultural issues	Over-socialising (time) Lack of public reading
Teaching reading	Teaching	Of phonics
		Of teaching reading strategies
		Promoting reading
	Teacher training	Lack of teacher proficiency
	Student absence	
Cues to reading	Punctuation	Lack of awareness L1/L2 linguistic differences
	Phonics	Poor pronunciation Lack of phonic awareness
	Spelling	Lack of awareness
Reading process	Assessment	Formal of reading level Informal of understanding
	Preparation	
	Cues/techniques/strategies	Key words
		Topic sentences
		Scanning/skimming
	Consolidation	
	Becoming better readers	Texts
Teaching methods		
Student effort		
Recurrent reading behaviours	Re-reading	
	Translation dictionaries	
	Guessing meaning from context	
	Questioning	Other students Teacher
	Skipping difficult sections	
Factors affecting reading comprehension challenges	L1/L2 linguistic differences	
	Text	Topic/motivation/interest
		Authentic
	Poor teaching	Lack of background knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, text structure, text culture, spelling etc...)
		Lack of phonetic awareness
	Culture	Laziness
		Busyness
		Lack of L2 cultural knowledge
		Reading habit/practice
Resources	Books	
	Access to native speakers/exposure	

Access to reading

1. Do you assign English books for your students to read?
Because of the low standard of the students in English language in general and reading comprehension in particular, I do assign to them certain books to read to a minimum degree.

Commented [M204]: Lack of background knowledge

Commented [M205]: Reading comprehension challenge

2. Does anyone encourage your students to read in English?
Yes, they do to certain extent.

Commented [M206]: Reading habit

3. Does your town have a public library?
No, we don't have a public library.

Commented [M207]: Lack of resources

Supplementary question (a) - Are places assigned for reading in the public area in your town?

No, there isn't any public waiting area for reading.

Commented [M208]: Unsupportive Saudi culture

4. Does your University have a library?

No, we don't have a college library so when the students want to buy any textbooks they have to gather the student's name and buy them from other cities which are far away from here.

Commented [M209]: Lack of resources

Commented [M210]: Lack of resources

Commented [M211]: Lack of resources

Supplementary question (a) - Do your students borrow English books from the University library?

Because there is no library students cannot borrow books.

Commented [M212]: Lack of resources

Supplementary question (b) - Does your English Department have a library?

No, we don't have a department library.

Commented [M213]: Lack of resources

Supplementary question (c) - Do your students borrow English books from the English Department library?

We have no Department Library so students cannot borrow books.

Commented [M214]: Lack of resources

Supplementary question (d) - Do you encourage your students to borrow English books from libraries?

To a certain level, yes but I don't know they read it or not.

Commented [M215]: Promoting reading

Commented [M216]: Promoting reading

Teaching reading

5. What do you think of the standard and effectiveness of the teaching of English reading in your students' previous schools?

It is of low standard and ineffectual since reading is a problematic skill for most Arabs.

Commented [M217]: Lack of background knowledge

6. At their previous schools, did your students learn English letters by name or by saying the sounds they represent phonically?

I think they learn it by name which is enhancing the challenges of pronouncing the phoneme correctly when they read and they sometimes read the letter as its name and not the correct phoneme.

Commented [M218]: Lack of reading comprehension

Commented [M219]: Lack of reading habit

Commented [M220]: Poor teaching of phonics

Commented [M221]: Poor pronunciation

7. Most polysyllabic words contain final stable syllabic patterns such as -tion ("shun") as in ignition, -tial ("shul") as in initial, -tious ("shus") as in ambitious, -ique ("eek" as in technique, -sque ("sk") as in mosque, -cial ("shul") as in crucial, -cious ("shus") as in suspicious, and -cion ("shun") as in "coercion." Does your university teach these patterns?

Yes, I think we do teach phonics instruction and there are many courses on phonetics in particular and linguistics in general.

Commented [M222]: Teaching of phonics

Commented [M223]: Teaching of phonics

8. What do you think of English reading teaching in your university?

Most ELT syllabuses used in the Arab Universities adopt the four reading approaches which are commonly referred to in the literature: Scanning, Skimming, Intensive reading, and Extensive reading. The courses seem to be designed to meet out target learners' reading needs; but as Stern says "It is all well in theory but it won't work in practice". In practice our target learners are not taught how to read, how to develop effective reading strategies and skills.

Commented [M224]: Teaching reading strategies: scan/skimming

Commented [M225]: Poor teaching

Commented [M226]: Teaching reading strategies

9. Do you assess your students' reading level before assigning them English text to read?
I don't do this before.

Commented [M227]: Assessment - formal

Cues to reading comprehension

10. Do your students understand the relevance of punctuation to English reading comprehension?

No, they don't due to lack of knowledge and understanding of punctuation.

Commented [M228]: Lack of awareness - punctuation

Commented [M229]: Lack of awareness - punctuation

11. Do your students pay attention to punctuation when reading English?

I think it is very important and play a very decisive role in understanding reading comprehension. Applying the punctuation of Arabic sometimes to be difficult for the students because Arabic doesn't have fullstops after each sentence but after long paragraph and the comma instead of fullstop so I think the students apply the same strategies in reading English and apply the fullstop expecting this as a comma.

Commented [M230]: Prioritising

Commented [M231]: Punctuation - L1/L2 differences

12. Do you think knowing English phonics and phonic patterns improves English reading comprehension?

I think learning phonetics and phonic patterns is very vital and significant in understanding reading comprehension. Yes, I think learning phonics at early stages is preferable.

Commented [M232]: Prioritising

Commented [M233]: Teaching of phonics

13. Do your students learn English spelling rules at the university?

Yes, they do.

Commented [M234]: Lack of background knowledge – spelling

14. Do you think your students are good at spelling?

No, they are not good at spelling because English spelling, unlike Arabic spelling, does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them.

Commented [M235]: Lack of background knowledge - spelling

Commented [M236]: Lack of phonic awareness

15. Do you think understanding spelling has a major role to play in English reading comprehension?

Yes I think so, because when students have a concrete and solid knowledge of spelling rules, they can understand reading comprehension much better.

Commented [M237]: Prioritising spelling

Commented [M238]: Reading comprehension

Student's reading process

16. Are your students aware of cues about what to expect from an English text?

I think they need more awareness about this.

Commented [M239]: Lack of background knowledge – text structure

17. What techniques do your students use during their reading of English text?

If the text is interesting to them, they will interact with each other as well as with the teacher by asking certain questions related to the text.

Commented [M240]: Reading behaviour – questioning each other

18. How can you tell if your students are understanding while they read?

I look into their faces and ask them certain questions such as what do you expect to happen next in order to ensure that they understand the text and used it as a stimulus for production.

Commented [M241]: Reading behaviour – questioning the teacher

Commented [M242]: Assessment - informal

Commented [M243]: Assessment - informal

19. When they have finished reading English text, what do they do to consolidate their understanding?

If they understand the text under study, they will interact with the teacher as well as with each other by retrieving and applying the information they have gained from the text.

Commented [M244]: Consolidation

Commented [M245]: Consolidation

Commented [M246]: Consolidation

20. What are the most difficult aspects of reading English for your students?

I think the most difficult task for our student is to understand the overall meaning of the text under study and retrieve the information they have gained from the text.

Commented [M247]: Comprehension

Commented [M248]: Comprehension

21. What would help them become better English readers?

Choosing an authentic texts for teaching reading comprehension in the classroom is the most important factor for effective reading skills.

Commented [M249]: Authentic text

22. Do they know which are the most important sentences in an English paragraph? What do they tell them about this?

Some of the students pay attention to the first sentence or two in a text to explore the topic. Some of the students focus upon the last sentence of a text in order to get the summary or the gist of a text.

Commented [M250]: Reading process – topic sentences

Commented [M251]: Reading process – topic sentences

23. Before starting to read English text, what do your students do in order to optimize their understanding of what they read?

The pre-reading stage is highly important stage and therefore, I prepare my students to undertake the following activities - exploring the topic, motivating students to read, and creating a purpose for reading.

Commented [M252]: Reading strategy – preparation

Commented [M253]: Text motivation

Commented [M254]: Text motivation

24. What kinds of plans help them read English better?

As a teacher, I adopt many strategies for teaching reading which allow students to build on their already established cognitive abilities and background knowledge such as enjoyment, working in pairs or in group, thinking process, awareness of the purpose of their work. As a teacher, I'll try first to explore the topic and then motivate them to read and finally create a purpose for reading.

Commented [M255]: Teaching method

Commented [M256]: Teaching method

Commented [M257]: Teaching method

Commented [M258]: Teaching method

Students' recurrent reading behaviours

25. Do your students ever re-read sentences? If so, why do they do so?

I sometimes do. It depends upon the sort of text under study. They may use scanning to look for specific information or skimming to look for the gist ...etc. I think interest is a very important element in motivating students to read and re-read.

Commented [M259]: Reading strategies - scanning

Commented [M260]: Reading strategies - skimming

Commented [M261]: Interest in text

26. What do your students do if they encounter an English word they have challenge understanding?

Students learn the concept of context in vocabulary learning. Emphasize the relationship of the word to the general context of the story or the more specific context of the sentence. If students fail to understand a whole sentence, the teacher should provide them with the practice of forming good sentences and identifying the parts of the sentences most important to the meaning.

Commented [M262]: Guessing meaning

Commented [M263]: Guessing meaning

Commented [M264]: Teaching sentence structure

27. Do your students skip over parts of an English text as they read? If so, why do they to this?

Sometimes students tend to skip some parts of the text which is superfluous, unnecessary to the general meaning of a text and uninterested to them.

Commented [M265]: Skimming

Commented [M266]: Interest in text

28. Do they read some parts of English text faster than other? If so, why?

It depends upon the kind of text and reading they do, if they are scanning, they must be specific and look for specific information.

Commented [M267]: Scanning

Factors affecting students' reading challenge

29. What factors make English reading difficult for your students?

Reading is a problematic skill for most Arabs. This could be because Arabic (our target learners' L1) uses a completely script different from the Latin script used by English. Unlike Arabic spelling, English spelling does not correspond to the sound system and as a result it is a problematic for them. Some Arab learners are lazy. Speaking is so much easier for them than reading because they practice it without much effort. But they view the reading and writing skills as skills which need a lot of effort to be practiced and controlled.

Commented [M268]: L1/L2 linguistic differences

Commented [M269]: Lack of phonetic awareness

Commented [M270]: Culture - lazy

Commented [M271]: Culture - lazy

30. What factors would help your students read English well?

Our target learners are not taught how to read; how to develop effective reading strategies and skills. One of the factors is choosing a text or designing tasks to be used in the reading class. Teachers usually do not take into consideration the learners' needs and interest while choosing a text. They choose artificial specially-written type not authentic texts. Moreover, they used the texts as linguistic objects rather than skill teaching texts. This makes the students motivation very low. As a matter of fact, the texts are supposed to be used as both text as a linguistic object and text as a vehicle for information.

Commented [M272]: Resources

Commented [M273]: Interest in topic

Commented [M274]: Authentic texts

Commented [M275]: Authentic texts

Commented [M276]: Text motivation

Appendix 17

Raw Data Comprehension Questions

Coding Framework		C- Completely correct PC – Partially correct CC – Correct but contradictory V – lacking vocabulary knowledge M – misinterpreted word U – unrelated answer E – answer based on experience, not reading the text					Colour: Green – correct Pink – incorrect Yellow – no answer			
QUES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
STUD	Why were three young men arrested at the mall?	What information were they giving people?	Why people were upset about their arrests?	What is freedom of speech?	Why does the mall say that freedom of speech does not apply there?	What might have happened if the men pleaded guilty?	Why do some people think malls are public places?	What activities do people take part in at malls?	Do you think malls should be considered private or public places? Why?	
1	shipping...center U	people California and America U	meaning "upset" forgotten V				Public could mean gathering... V			
2		For freedom of speech M		So they do not miss it U	To give people a freedom of speech about what do they think U		I think people want freedom, not the rest place who not give freedom of speech M		Private PC	
3	I feel that I know the answer, but I don't know the word "arrest" V		because they have some problems in the mall C	it is a place where people feel free to go M	because the place is private or public PC	they steal in the shopping M	Because the palace contains of many people and the government has benefits, and there is no entering fees E	They go for shopping... E	From my point of view is to be private because it helped by the government C C	

4	because they want to free speech M	they want to give it a place U	meaning "upset" forgotten V	Private place.....? U	I don't know 'apply' V	pleaded guilty are difficult words V	because the government give the mall some money C		Public, because people who want to public are more than those who want it to be private. The judge said this himself... C
5	because they steal M	two were killed and one escaped M		"a freedom of speech in Arabic" and touring at malls C			may be cheaper U		private, because it is available all time and easy access E
6	I think they steal from shops M	I fully understand the question but, I think something related to the government or shopping M	I fully understand the question and the meaning of upset which annoyed... I think because they caught them PC	everyone could say what he likes C	because it is private places C	Guilty "In Arabic guilty"? V			private... because not good to make noise E
7	This... I cannot answer because I did not comprehend the text V	The information?... I just understood few things from the text V		I also can't answer this.....? V					
8	they think it is a public space or something like this M	they think it is public place so they can chat in M	maybe because they speak M	I also can't answer this.....? V	because it is a private place I think C		because there is a lot of people E	they were eating, shopping, walking, and hangout E	places, you can see people talk, not private E
9	I cannot answer because I do not understand the text V	I just understood a few things from the text V							
10	Don't know the meaning of 'arrest' so can't answer V		Does upset mean some in sitting manner? V	They want to speak in the mall V	I know what the question means, V			I understand your question – it means this V	I understand the questions but not the text V

	V		V	M	but I don't understand 'apply'			(correct translation to Arabic) but I can't answer V	V
11	They were arrested unfairly PC	I don't know	There was no valid reason PC	To speak without fear or problem C	Because it is for shopping, not other activities M		Because they do their activities in the mall C	Social activities C	Public because there are activities and social gatherings C
12	I don't know but the text is about the centre M								
13	Maybe they are asking about the shops M	They arrested him – they did not do anything M	The shopping mall stops freedom PC	To give people freedom of speech about what they think C	Not in public C	Get the court and go to jail PC		Do it in private places U	Between, if it is private it will miss the system..if public people will miss and count it as home E
14	I can't get the word arrest but I understood the rest of the question...I think they are making something interesting in the mall M								
15	I do not know the word 'arrest' V		I do not know the word 'upset' V	-dom, -dom - I don't know 'freedom' V					It is difficult
16	The word 'arrested' is new to me so I can't get it V			Maybe the ideas about shops M				Shopping E	Private because people help build it CC

Analysis of Comprehension Questions by category

Reasons:	C- Completely correct PC – Partially correct CC – Correct but contradictory V – lacking vocabulary knowledge M – misinterpreted word U – unrelated answer E – answer based on experience, not reading the text									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL
C			1	4	3		2	1	2	13
PC	1		3		1	1			1	7
CC									2	2
Total correct	0		4	4	4	1	2	1	5	22 (15.3%)
V	6	2	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	20
M	7	5	1	3	1	1	1			19
U	1	2		2	1		1	1		8
E							2	3	4	9
Total incorrect	14	9	5	6	4	3	5	5	5	56 (38.8%)
Unanswered	1	7	7	6	8	12	9	10	6	66 (45.8%)
Total – incorrect and unanswered	15	16	12	12	12	15	14	15	11	122 (84.7%)
										144

Analysis of comprehension questions by participant

Reasons	C- Completely correct PC – Partially correct CC – Correct but contradictory V – lacking knowledge of vocabulary M – misinterpreted word U – unrelated answer E – answer based on experience, not reading the text											
	C	PC	CC	Total correct	V	M	U	E	Total incorrect	Unanswered	Total incorrect and unanswered	TOTAL
1					2		2		4	5	9	9
2		1		1		2	2		4	4	8	9
3	1	1	1	3	1	2		2	5	1	6	9
4	2			2	3	1	2		6	1	7	9
5	1			1		2	1	1	4	4	8	9

6	2	1		3	1	2		1	4	2	6	9
7				2					2	7	9	9
8	1			1	3		3		6	2	8	9
9				2					2	7	9	9
10				5	1				6	3	9	9
11	4	2		6		1			1	2	3	9
12						1			1	8	9	9
13	2	2		4		2	1	1	4	1	5	9
14						1			1	8	9	9
15					3				3	6	9	9
16			1	1	1	1		1	3	5	8	9
Total	13	7	2	22	20	19	8	9	56	66	122	144

Appendix 18

Raw Data – TAP

TABLE A: PARTICIPANT THINK-ALOUD COMMENTS																					
COMMENTS	CATEGORY	TYPE	STUDENT NO.																Total	EXAMPLE	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16			
Extra-textual	Thinking aloud	Confused meaning of phrase		1	2														3	'freedom of speech ' freedom' and 'speeches'	
		New word	7	17	12		1	2	12	19	14	4		13		19	4	2	121	'argument' – this is a new word for me	
		Comment to self on lack of knowledge		7				3				17	16	14	12		9	8	4	90	'I don't know the meaning of this word' (arrested)
		Questioning aloud word meaning		14	2	3	4	1			4	4		4		2	4	1	43	'what does demonstration mean"	
		Guessing meaning correctly		3	1	4	10			1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	31	'New Jersey – this is a city name' 'punishment' is 'penalty'	
		Failure to understand phrase		4	1														5	'I don't understand the final segment'	
		Failure to understand sentence		1	1	1								2					5	'I don't understand this sentence'	
		Guessing meaning of word incorrectly	1		1	1		4	1		1	3		1					13	'I think 'mall' means 'mile', 'government' means 'corporation'.	
		Guessing meaning of phrase/sentence incorrectly		1	7	7	11	1						1		1	1	2	32	'Paying a fine for freedom' 'They were trying to stop freedom and speaking in amalls'	
		Expression of anxiety				1			5		1								7	'this is the first time I read a text'	
		Confusion of different words						2											2	Confusion of 'public', distance' and 'space'	
		Difficult to pronounce						1		1			4			2		1	9	'demo..nstratshon (demonstration) is difficult for me'	
		Long words are difficult		1					2	2	1								6	'long syllable words are difficult for me'	
		Hard to read/remember							3	1	7	1					3		15	'private', 'protestors' 'property' – these are hard to read'	
		Similar spelling is confusing							1		1								2	'private', 'protestors', 'property' – similar spelling hard to remember the meanings	
Incorrect translation into Arabic		1	6	1	1	6											15	'steal' means 'steal' in Arabic 'yashtaree' mixing between 'sale' and 'buy'			
																		399			

TABLE B: PARTICIPANT READING BEHAVIOURS

BEHAVIOUR	CATEGORY	TYPE	STUDENT NO.																EXAMPLE	
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		Total
Strategies	Self-correction	Successful	4	3	8	9	4	6	9	9	12	21	12	13	4	3	12	2	131	Work - workers
		Unsuccessful	7	5	2	2		13	10	3	9	13	2	4	1		5	2	78	Boblic ... buplic
	Repeating	Partial word	14	2	5	22	10	28	37	19	46	38	14	18	5	7	17	5	277	Re p ... represent
		Word	10	4	7	3	8	5	5	3		7	4	8	2	4	4	10	84	Arresetd ... arrested
		Phrase	1	5	3	1	2		1	3	1	10	3	1	3		3	1	38	Three young men. ... three young men
	Prediction	Difficulty of text			1														1	'I predict this text is semi-comprehensible'
	Identify key word				1				1										2	'the theme is about arrests because it is repeated several times'
	Preparation	Failure to read the title			1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	12	75% failure
		Failure to look at the photo	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16	100% failure
		Failure to scan the text	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16	100% failure
			20.3% of total																655	
Punctuation	Ignoring punctuation	Question mark (2)	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	19	Failed to raise pitch of voice
		Fullstop (29)	21	12	15	20	19	17	11	13	19	17	4	16	19	16	14	14	247	Failed to lower pitch of voice Miscomprehension - "two of them died and one escaped".
		Quotation (2)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	31	Failed to recognise quote marks as someone's words
		Comma (13)	10	7	9	8	7	5	6	8	9	6	3	8	6	5	6	6	109	Failed to pause briefly and raise pitch
		Colon (3)	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	33	Failed to pause slightly
	Capitalisation	2	3	3	4	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	2	3	4	3	3	44	'L' for 'I' in Iowa	
				15% of total																483
Phonetics	Mispronunciation	Vowel (excluding 'u')	48	6	6	10	17	24	25	18	30	13	10	19	3	11	9	7	246	Short/long confusion (eg, mall→male, Mills→ Miles)
		Combination (excluding double) (17)	12	10	5	6	7	11	10	6	11	6	3	7	5	7	4	3	113	Change vowel sound (eg, steal→still,) 'ea' in 'sweat, 'ai' in 'fundraisers',
		Omitted vowel/syllable	17	6	1	4	9	18	11	10	15	10	3	11	2	6	6	3	76	'gathrings' instead of 'gatherings'
		Insert vowel	5	5		1	3	5		3	6	1	1	2		1	1		34	'mean' instead of 'men'
		Of 'u' alphabetically (6)	5	3	2	4	4	5	5	4	4	3	1	3	2	4	3	2	54	'guilty', 'suburbs', 'upset', 'guards', 'argument'
		Consonant	53	7	3	11	8	42	36	18	50	17	8	18	5	13	21	6	316	P to b, 'ci' to 'k' in 'social' 'questshen'hope',
		Hard and soft consonants	5	1			1		1	1		1	1	2	1	2	2		18	G and j, ch and sh.

		Insert consonant	6	1	1	1	2	1		2	3	5	1	1	1	4	4	2	35	<i>i..lygl..i.llgly</i> instead of 'illegally'	
		Omit consonant	2				3	4		1	1	3		1		3	2	5	25		
		Pronounce silent consonant (8)	6	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3		3	4	3	6	2	53	'parts' instead of 'part' 't' in 'would' 'gh' in 'fight' 'l' in walk, d in judge	
		Added syllable								1	2	1		5	1	1	2	2	15		
		Polysyllabic pronunciation (8)	7	4	5	4	6	4	5	5	4	6	2	4	3	4	5	3	71	'ti' in'demonstration', 'ci' in 'social',	
		Separating syllables (13)	13	7	8	9	6	7	6	8	7	5	3	4	4	6	5	4	102		
		Mispronounce word				1	1					2	2	1	4		3	7	6	27	'there' 'three' constation/constitution
			36.8%																118		
			5																		
Lexical/semantics	Substitution of word for word	Word for word	32	8	21	34	18	46	26	14	9	8	6	7	6	12	6	6	227	'Our' for 'or' 'cream' for 'crime', leave for	
		Non-word for word	83	18	6	12	29	55	43	26	35	27	11	47	5	28	27	15	467	'Bobli' for 'public'	
			21.6% of total																694		
Syntax	Changing tense and conjugation	Personal/impersonal		2	1			1	1			1							6	'don't' to 'does'	
		Singular/plural		2				3	2	3	2			2					11	'protector' 'protectors'	
		Verb ending – subject match, etc...		2															2	'Use' to 'uses'	
		Change of tense	3					1	1	2	2				2				11	Didn't – don't	
	Separating compound phrase			3					1										4	'Handing' and ' out'	
	Omitted	Word	5	2			2	5	4	3	4	7			2		3	3	40	'At'	
		Phrase		1															1	'Their crime'	
	Skipped a line		2				1	2											5	Participant 1 – lines 10 and 12	
			2.5%																80		
Morphology	Suffixes/prefixes/affixes	Omitted suffix	15	3	1		2	4	4	5	9		1	3	3	3	5	4	62	's' on the end of a word - demonstrations	
		Extended contractions	1	1	1			1				1	1	1	3				11	'That is' – 'that's'	
		Insert word	2																2	'a court' instead of 'court'	
		Change suffix	1										1						2	's' instead of 'ed'	

		Omit prefix	4	1											1				1				7	'rest' instead of 'arrest', 'miss' instead of 'dismiss'
		Add prefix	1																				1	'aplay' instead of play
		Add suffix	2								4	3		1	2	1	1	1					15	?
			3.1%																			100		
Gave up			2						1		4	5		1									13	Stopped trying to say 'suburbs'
			0.4%																			13		
Cultural knowledge		Lack of				4																	4	State names – Des Moines
		Difference				4																	4	Said 'he' instead of 'she' – female lawyer
		Knowledge		1																			1	USA instead of US
			0.28%																			9		

Appendix 19 RAW DATA – RVR

Note: The use of colour in this table does not have any coding significance. It has been used only to differentiate easily between comments made by different students.

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES OF QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	13	16
Beginning reading	Why did you not read the title?			I thought there was no title	I did not notice it	I was thinking of reading the text and forgot about the title		Well, I did not see it	I just skipped it by mistake	I thought you want me to read from the first paragraph
	Why did you not look at the photo?			I jumped straight to reading	I thought <i>you</i> just want me to read	I forgot it also	I thought you want me to read directly	I glanced at the photo but did not understand it.	I did not focus on it	Because it is not clear
	Do you understand what the text is about from the moment you start reading? Do you lose concentration when you are reading?	I know the subject is shopping but I do not know why I cannot understand it	Well, I can't visualise the text from the beginning. I have to read it twice to familiarise myself with it.	I sometimes can get the text from the beginning of reading.	I get worried from the beginning because I am guessing and I don't know if I am correct or not. Some words have more than one meaning and I don't know which one is correct in this context. For example, the word "close" I know it means shut, but I say to myself it may have another meaning here. This uncertainty stops me understanding the text			I lost my focus because this is the first time I have read a text. In class we never read more than two lines. We panic if we have to read because we are not used to it. The lecturers never give us stories or books to read. They only ever gave us two stories in the whole curriculum and we just recited them in order to pass the exam.	Sometimes my thinking goes away for a few seconds and then comes back. I can't concentrate continuously when I am reading. For the first minute of reading I don't know what I am reading.	

Slow, hesitant reading	<p>Why are you reading slowly?</p> <p>Why are you not reading continuously?</p> <p>Why did you stop there?</p> <p>Why do you sometimes pause between words?</p>	<p>There are some words I do not understand. That is why I cannot read properly. Particularly, the ones I cannot pronounce correctly. For example; steal, mall, upset, arrest, and many others. I read word by word because some words are similar and I mix up the letters.</p>	<p>I stop some times to try to get the word. I struggle to read it clearly, especially when text is new to me. This text is new to me.</p>	<p>I stop sometimes when I am facing difficult and to understand a sentence. I stop a bit when words are unknown to me. I read word by word trying to comprehend the sentence. If I read faster I would not be able to articulate the ideas in the text</p>	<p>This hesitation acts as a barrier to comprehend the text</p>	<p>I always read English word by word to read correctly... and to understand unfamiliar words</p>		<p>Because I sometimes encounter difficult words or words which are new to me and I pause, trying to read them correctly and know their meanings.</p>	<p>I can't read English fast as it is new language to me. I am not a good reader, so i have to stop to recognise some words and understand their meanings.</p>
Reading challenges and difficult words	<p>Why are you struggling with some words? eg, 'upset', 'arrest', 'private', 'steal', 'sweatshops (5) lawyer (6) demonstrations (7)</p> <p>Do you have problems with certain words?</p> <p>What does 'upset' mean?</p> <p>What does 'mall' mean? (6)</p>	<p>I get stuck with pronouncing words which are new or long.</p>	<p>They are difficult to pronounce and their meaning is hard to guess.</p>	<p>I did not understand the word 'upset'. This is why I couldn't understand the text. I think 'arrest' is an important word, because I came across it several times in the text.</p>	<p>I don't know the word private ... the problem is that if the word has more than two vowels and this makes it difficult to read and understand. I sound it as 'brevate' because there is an 'a' following the 'v'. It is a new word so it is challenging to read. . I thought the word steal means <i>yeshteri</i> (Arabic for 'buy').</p>	<p>I am trying to get its meaning and I thought 'sweatshops' means 'switch' and 'keys'.</p>	<p>I am trying to get its meaning and I think 'private' means 'provide'</p> <p>I think 'mall' means 'distance'</p> <p><i>Moh:</i> but this is 'Mall' and you meant 'Mile'. they are different</p> <p>But they have similar shapes and letters and that's why I mixed them.</p>	<p>It (demonstrations) is a very long word and I am not familiar with it so it is hard to pronounce and understand. I think crime means cream</p> <p>There are some words I have never seen them</p>	<p>I don't know them. I think property means 'prepare'</p>

	'crime' (7) US (7) Property (16)				MOH: Did you mix it with the word sale? Yes, yes, because they have similar letters. 'Upset' means 'sit'					
	Which words are difficult for you? What are the greatest challenges you faced when reading the text?		I don't know the words 'private' or 'protestors', but I guess 'protestors' is a religious word same as Catholic. Sometimes I mix up words with similar letters. I get stuck on new words and words which are hard to pronounce because they are long. The most difficulty for me is recognising words with more than one vowel.	There are some words I don't know, 'arrests', 'violating', 'protestors', 'upset', 'freedom', 'protesters', 'protesters', 'private', 'property', 'apply', 'security', 'guards', 'pleaded', 'guilty', 'punishment', 'represents', 'dismissed', 'violated, Iowa, constitution'. (18 words)	'Arrested', 'steal', 'sweatshops', 'illegally', 'demonstration', 'upset', 'freedom', 'protesters', 'private', 'property', 'apply', 'security', 'guards', 'pleaded', 'guilty punishment, represents, dismissed, violated, Iowa, constitution, suburbs, baking, contests, charity fundraisers, leaflets. (27 words) They are either new or difficult to pronounce because they are so long and have many vowels.	Arrested, steal, sweatshops, illegally, demonstration, upset, protesters, private, property, apply, security, guards, pleaded, guilty punishment, represents, dismissed, violated, Iowa, constitution, suburbs, baking, contests, charity fundraisers, leaflets. (26 words)	I read the first letters in a word and if I think I have seen it before I think it is the same word. Sometimes I am wrong and it makes me face challenges in understanding text	Some words have similar spellings such as 'private', 'protestors' and 'property'. I feel they are the same.	There are some words that cause me a problem... if I understood them I would understand the text completely: "Lowa", 'handing' is 'crime'. I have come across the word 'demonstration' before but i can't remember what it means... also 'protesters', 'contests', 'leaflets', 'property' are new. These words cause me to think about them while I am reading and I lose my concentration. 'Suburb' is hard to sound out and I don't know what it means. Sometimes I change a word or replace it in the text while reading without meaning to because I have seen one like it and it comes to my mind. This text is easy and understandable but some words are	I came across some words that made it difficult to understand the text such as: 'demonstration', 'protesters', 'pleaded' 'constitution' 'professors' 'suburbs', 'charity' 'fundraisers'

									new. We don't read much. We don't read different things.	
Pronunciation	Why do you change the pronunciation in this way? Why do you pronounce 'p' as 'b'?	I don't know why I do			I have tried many times to correct myself but you know we don't have such sounds in Arabic	I don't know Moh: Do you know that 'ci' is pronounced as 'sh'?	I thought it is sokal... I don't know that 'ci' sound as 'sh'	I thought it is like this		I did not realise it should be 'sh' sound... I did not learn such pronunciation.
Strategies	Why did you repeat that word?		Sometimes I re-read the word twice, because it is the first time for me to see such a word or phrase, I try to understand it and pronounce it correctly.	I sometimes re-read the word or sentence to clarify its ambiguity				Just to correct myself and give it a guess.		I try to understand it because it is new to me and I don't know its meaning
	Why are you reading without paying attention to full-stops (5) Quotation marks (16)		I don't know. I thought I did. Maybe because I concentrate on the individual words.		I try to focus on the meanings of the difficult words.	(Laughing) I don't know, - maybe because they are smaller than words. This is dangerous...like if you drive a car you focus on cars, not bicycles. I am focusing on reading and pronouncing words and trying to guess their meanings and lose my attention to punctuation.		Emmm...I don't know them. Emmm ...maybe ...I have no clue...		I don't know Moh: What do they tell you? Emm... i don't know
	What do you think of the word 'Iowa'? Why did you sound 'I' as 'L'?					I don't know it... It starts with capital I - not l. Oh, I don't notice it. I have tried to guess it but I can't.	I did not recognise it as L because it is in the middle of the text. It should be at the beginning	It is Iowa Moh: Do you know it? No Moh: It starts with 'I' and not 'L' I did not notice it. Moh: Can you tell me what is it now? Sorry I don't know i		I thought fundraiser is a name... is it? Moh: But it does not start with capital letter. Oh. Yes, yes... it is not a

	Why did you ask if 'fundraiser' is a name? (16)						of the sentence.	Moh: It is a name and starts with capital 'F' Yes, yes,... I just realized".		name...I just realized
	Why is 'arrest' an important word?		I think it is an important word, because I came across this word several times in the text.							
Comprehension	What do you remember/ understand about the text? What is the text about in general?	I have forgotten most of the text but it is about shopping in America.				I think they are trying to stop freedom and speaking in malls... and they killed someone for speech. Moh: Why do you think of killing was there? Because of the word 'fight'		I don't know, but it contains lawyer and program and corporation.		
	Do you understand the different meanings of words you just substituted with another words (mall/mile, steal/still/sale, three/there	No, I don't.	Sometimes I pronounce it like the absent word because I came across it before. This doesn't mean I know its meaning			I think because they have similar shapes and letters.		They look quite similar and the substituted one is in my mind.	I forget both meanings.	Yes some of them.
	Do you think the lawyer is a judge? Do you understand the lawyer is female				ST: I thought it means judge because we don't have a lawyer in our culture. Moh: But we have them recently working in the court ST: I don't know, maybe something new to me. Oh, no no, I have not expected the lawyer to be female. It is not in my culture					

Appendix 20

Raw Data Student Interview

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
Access to reading	1		Never	Reasons for no time to read	No	10,12,16	More than half the sample (9) never read English outside of the classroom.
					Helping family working on the farm/taking family places	4, 5, 9, 15	
					No chance to practice – try to get English summer job	16	
					Problem with vocabulary	16	
					Frustrated by poor reading teaching at the University – need interactive teaching style and English native teachers	9, 12	Half of these (4) said it was because they were too busy helping their family, either on a farm or taking them places. I was busy with a job.
					I don't, even when lecturer asks. Only read to prepare for exams – no encouragement. Nobody reads. I don't want to stand out. There are no hard copy resources. I chat on the internet for information.		3 were too lazy or were sleeping in the afternoon.
					I have a job and no time	4, 5, 7, 10	5 mentioned issues to do with poor teaching, language skills etc...
					Sleep in the afternoon	11	
					Not interested/ lazy	6, 7, 9	7 read sometimes
			I don't	Reasons for not reading more	Hard to understand	2	4 of these acknowledge being too busy socialising to read more 2 admit they do not read enough 3 prefer to read in Arabic 1 learns English by watching TV 1 doesn't even read in Arabic
				Prefer to read Arabic	1, 2, 3		
				English reading is difficult	2, 13		
				Cannot be exempted for cultural reasons from regular social gatherings	5		
					Learn English by watching English TV programmes	6	Only 1 student reads often making time every day for reading.
					I am better at listening than reading	6	
					Don't even read in Arabic	6	
			Sometimes	Reasons for time to read	Sometimes	8	
					Little time to read – busy socialising with friends and social gatherings for relaxation	3, 4, 5, 7	
					Not as much as I should	14	
					Prefers to read in Arabic	1, 2	
					Not well organised enough	3	
			Often		I make time each day specifically for reading	10	

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	2		Once/twice a week	Frequency of reading text	One hour per week	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14	8 read 1 hour per week 1 of these reads on his phone 8 read very little 1 of these prefers reading with translation 1 of these watches TV 1 chats for an hour each day on the Internet Only 1 student – the one in question 1 above who makes time for reading every day, says he likes English books
			One hour per week		On my phone	6	
			Once a day		I like English books	10	
			One hour		One hour per day (chatting on internet)	8	
			Very little		Easier when there is an Arabic translation I watch TV	5, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16 7 12	
	3		Lecturers assign reading		Sometimes Only to pass the exam One lecturer did once	4 3, 5 11	Almost all students agree that lecturers do not assign reading. If any reading is assigned it relates to homework or exams. One student mentions occasional assignment reading. Another mentions informal reference to reading.
			Lecturers do not assign reading		But sometimes they assign for homework But say we can read a story	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 5 8	
	4		English texts I read	Types	Wikipedia	4	3 students do not read, 1 of them not even in Arabic. A further 8 cannot remember or cannot specify reading any English texts and 1 of these says it is difficult to read. Of the remaining 6 2 read Wikipedia, magazines, catalogues, etc... 1 reads new and culture 1 reads for assignments 1 reads short stories with CDs
					Magazines	4	
					Catalogues	5	
					Research for an assignment	6	
					Subjects I like – news, culture	10	
			Small stories /with CDs	11, 13			
			Can't remember		Very few – no specific type Difficult to read	2, 9, 14, 15 1, 3, 7 2	
	Don't read		Not even in Arabic	8, 12, 16			

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
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5		Others encourage me to read English	Sources of influence	Sometimes my uncle	1	The vast majority (14) students are not influenced by others to read in English 1 has a father who reads a lot 1 has an uncle
		Not much			2	
		Others do not encourage me to read English		No Not from society, community and friends. People do not read, even in Arabic. My father – he reads a lot and encourages me	8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13 11	
6		I see my parents reading		If I asked them to buy a book they would buy it My father reads a lot	2, 6 11	The vast majority of students (13) do not see their parents reading – 8 because their parents cannot read. 1 father (same as above) reads a lot. 2 sets of parents would buy a book for their child if requested
		I do not see my parents reading		No My parents are not well educated/do not know how to read	12, 13, 14, 15, 16 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10	
7		We have a home library		A small library All books are religious/social All books are in Arabic A big library But I don't read	2, 10 2, 5, 6, 9 2, 15 6, 11 16	Half of the sample have no library at home. Most home libraries are small or have only religious or Arabic books. 1 student did not read from it Only 2 students had big home libraries
		We have no home library			1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14	
8		There is a public library		But it is empty of people People who read in public are laughed at/embarrassed Dusty, hidden, unattractive Once a year I go there for a book day But I don't go there	7, 9, 10, 11, 12 7, 10 7 9, 10, 13 11 12, 14, 15, 16	Almost half of the sample said there was no public library in their town. Of those where there was a library, 5 said was not used and they did not go there because people who read in public are laughed at. 3 described it as unattractive
		There is no public library		No, unfortunately	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8	

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
		a	People read in public areas		But only religious books/magazines in Urdu	8, 11	<p>Most students (10) said there was no public reading area in their town. 2 said it contained only religious or Urdu books. 5 said people use public places to chat and use their mobile phones</p> <p>Several (7) said they would not read in public due to embarrassment. Student 2 said reading in public would be strange, disgraceful and pompous. The society needs to be aware of the importance of reading and of English.</p>
			People do not read in public areas		No	5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	
					Do not read in a waiting area, it would feel strange, like showing off	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	
					Busy on mobile phones	2, 4, 6, 7, 9	
					Reading is not encouraged	9	
					It is a student's responsibility but the university need to provide the basics	9	
					Nobody reads – chatting, games	11	
					It would be disgraceful, pompous	2	
					The society does not read	2	
					Community needs to be aware of reading and of English	2	
	9		Had a school library		Yes	11	<p>Most students said there previous schools had libraries. However, they are universally described in negative terms – dusty, closed, out of date, inactive, not used and small.</p> <p>They also mention reading was not encouraged and they were not familiarised with the library.</p>
					Dusty and closed, out of date, did not encouraged, familiarised, not used	1,5, 7, 10	
					Always closed	7, 8, 9	
					But I did not go there	12	
					Had no English books	13, 14, 15	
			Some schools had a library		A small library. But we did not visit regularly/but did not work well	2, 3, 4, 6, 16	
			Had no school library		A small library. But we did not visit regularly/but did not work well	2, 3, 4, 6, 16	

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	10		The university has no library		No It would be great if they had one We have to get textbooks from a long way away Our teachers have to help us There are no facilities/places here We have to photocopy papers Because this is a new university Because this is a rented space It will probably improve/is improving If I have free time at university I don't know where to go The university produced a magazine but it has stopped The country is rich but lack of resources makes it look poor	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 1, 2 2 2 2,5 1, 2 2 2 2,5 7 8 10, 12, 13, 14	The universities do not have libraries. A few students say this is because the university is new and in a rented building and they hope and wish for it to improve. 4 mention that makes the university look poor in a rich country It also does not have photocopying or other facilities. A few students mention that textbooks have to be obtained from a distance. 1 says that there is nowhere to go if you have spare time to read at university
		a	Books not borrowed from it			1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	So books cannot be borrowed from university libraries
		b	The English Department has no library		No Unfortunately The same problem as for the university There should be a department library We have asked for reading club without success Even if we had, it would not be promoted because of lack of care	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 1, 2, 4 2 1 5 5	The English Departments do not have libraries. 4 students regret this, saying there should be a library, they have asked unsuccessfully for a reading club 1 student believes that even if there was a library it would not be promoted because the university would not care.

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
		c	Books not borrowed from it		No	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	So it is impossible to borrow books from the English Departments
		d	Lecturers encourage book borrowing		Some do	11	Almost all the students (15) say lecturers do not encourage book borrowing.
			Lecturers do not encourage book borrowing		No	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	1 says borrowing is encouraged prior to an exam.
Teaching reading	11		Unsatisfactory teaching of English in schools	Reasons	No reading in English at all/only the teacher read Below average/ poor / not much Only reading aloud We did not know simple grammar Did not prepare us for university reading Has created stress learning English at university Has changed because of decentralised examinations Traditional – rote learning, without guidance/correction Read only Arabic in primary school but secondary teachers assumed we read English, we write but without understanding Only letters/copying word shapes Only learned grammar Teacher absent for one term Focus on reciting words, not understanding or intonation I graduated from high school but cannot write my name in English Poorly qualified teachers Lazy students	12, 13, 15 2, 3, 6, 10, 11 2, 3 2, 4 2 2 1, 3, 4, 5 4 6 6, 8 6 6 6,7 9 13, 14, 16 13	All students agree English teaching in schools was unsatisfactory. It was traditional teaching (5) Did not prepare for university (3) Consisted only of reading aloud/reciting words/rote learning Do not read in English Teachers were absent or poorly qualified (4) 1 student said he graduated from high school but could not write his name in English 1 student said the students were lazy

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
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12		Previous school did not assign reading		No Libraries are not active Only if the teacher is absent they took us to the library They don't have English books	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16 2 2 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	No students said their previous schools assigned reading. 5 said this was because there were no English books in the library
13		We learned English letters by name		We learned letters by name	1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 5	All students said they learned English letters alphabetically in school.
		We learned English letters by sound		We learned phonetically at university		
14		University taught polysyllabic patterns		Some/one of them – eg, 'tion'	3, 13, 15, 16 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 14	Most of the students said they did not learn polysyllabic patterns in the university. 4 said that they learned the basics 1 learned them from a private tutor 5 said they would make comprehension up to 25% easier.
		University did not teach final stable syllabic patterns		No Unfortunate because it would make comprehension easier Lecturers are frustrated by our inability to pronounce A private tutor taught me some If I knew them 25% of the word would be easier to pronounce		

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	15		English reading teaching is unsatisfactory	Reasons	Unsatisfied Lecturers just give a lecture and go We do not learn anything of value Teacher has reduced the syllabus because of our difficulties We are very weak from previous schools We are told about strategies but do not practice them Few lessons which I don't remember Some of the lecturers are not proficient readers or specialised reading teachers One good lecturer but he disappeared Chatty – not real teaching Old style teaching – just grammar and translation Lecturers only check attendance and talk a bit (unsatisfied facial expression without comment)	7, 8, 9, 10 10 2, 10, 15 2 4, 5, 11 5 6 3, 13 9 12 14, 16 9, 10 1	Most of the students say the teaching of English reading at the university is unsatisfactory. Some say the teaching is old-style, (2), chatty (1), that the lecturers are not proficient English readers (2) and that they just give lessons and go (1). They only check attendance and talk a bit(2). 1 says that the syllabus has been reduced by lecturers because of student's poor reading abilities. They say they do not learn anything of value (3) and do not remember lessons (1) or strategies (1). One good lecturer left (1) 3 say their poor standard is due to schools, not the universities
	16		Lecturers do not assess reading level		No Sometimes we read a few lines in class But they us reading homework But I am good There is no actual reading subject	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 5, 7 8 13	All students agree that lecturers do not assess reading levels.
	17		Reading strategies learned at university		Learned silent reading Learned some pronunciation Stopping at the full-stop	3, 4 4 8	Most students (11) say English reading strategies are not taught at the university or that they cannot remember any. 1 says this does not matter because he can remember words from context 3 students say they have learned silent reading, some pronunciation and punctuation.
			Reading strategies not learned at university		No Can't remember any Only topic sentence/theme The lecturer reads the text and we recite words But I can remember words from context	1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16 5, 14, 15 7 10 11	

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
Cues to reading comprehension	18		Punctuation is important	Reasons	It is important Question mark is a clue to look for an answer Only learned at university (eg.,full-stop) I know a few of them but don't use them For example, full-stop, comma I learned them by myself To help the reader/ hints about comprehension	1, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 2, 6 4 5, 6 7, 8 8 9, 10	All students say punctuation is important and that it helps the reader, giving hints about meaning. However a few (3) say they only know a few, such as full-stop and comma, and that they only learned them at university or by themselves.
	19		A lot of attention to punctuation	Reasons for	I pay attention to some Especially to full-stop and question marks	2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14 4, 10, 13	Most students (9) pay attention to punctuation, especially to full-stops and commas (3) However 1 does not recognise quotation marks And the rest (6) say they are too busy focusing on the meaning of words to notice punctuation, or that differences between English and Arabic make it difficult (1)
			No attention to punctuation	Reasons against	Too busy focusing on meaning of words and forget to notice Did not recognise quotation marks in text Do not pay attention There are so many commas and full-stops in English paragraphs compared to Arabic	1, 3, 5, 7, 15, 16 4 3, 6, 7 3	
20			Important to know phonics	Reasons	I think so It would be easier if we had learned it from first school Would make pronunciation better Would make comprehension easier From the beginning of learning to read/foundation Of course/necessary Reading would flow more easily	9, 10, 11, 15 2 1, 3 1 4, 14 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 16 3, 12	Students agree that knowing English phonics is important (10) and that it would make reading flow more easily (2), English pronunciation better (2) and comprehension easier (1) However 2 students say it needs to be taught from the beginning of learning to read English

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	21		Been taught spelling		Yes But very short lesson But can't remember Very simple – basics eg, plurals Only to add s for a plural -ed for past tense Grammar only	11 10 11, 15, 16 12, 13, 14 1, 2, 3, 4 3 5	15 students say they have either not been taught English spelling, or only basics, such as adding an s for plurals. Only 1 student confidently said yes
			Not been taught spelling		No Can't spell dictated words, especially not vowels But they are necessary	3, 6, 7, 8, 9 7 8	
	22		Good at spelling	Reason for being good at spelling	Yes Moderate Maybe 60% Not as good as I want Only for the words I have studied in my course	8, 10 1, 12, 13, 16 4 5, 15 3	6 students do not feel good at English spelling. The other 10, have limited spelling (1) or are not satisfied (2).
			Not good at spelling	Reason for not being good at spelling	It is hard I have difficulties Vowels and silent letters are difficult to spell	11, 14 9 2, 7 6	
	23		Knowing how to spell improves reading comprehension	Reasons	Yes Facilitates recognition Speeds up reading I would like to learn to spell English properly	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 3 3 7	All students agree that knowing how to spell improves reading comprehension., partly by speeding it up and facilitating recognition (1)
	Reading process	24		Reasons for reading English text		To pass exams – rote learning	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
Not to really learn We are too busy If the lecturer asks me to read Interest – liking the topic						2 2 5 10	

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	25		I look for cues	Sources of cues	Picture Title Learnt from media studies, not English Context Introduction	2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 15 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16 2 1, 10 8, 16	Most students (11) use the title as a cue when reading. 6, mostly the same students (4/6) also look at pictures. 2 look at context and 2 at the introduction. 1 student learned this from Media Studies rather than English. 2 students do not know how to use cues.
			I don't look for cues	Reasons for not seeking cues	Does not know the cues	4, 7	
	26		I use reading techniques	Techniques used	Learn words from context/the unknown words Pronunciation focus Translation Prediction of coming text Re-reading I struggle with derivations of root words	2, 14 1 1 4, 7, 10 5, 16 8	10 re-read (2) look at context (2), translate (1) and try to predict coming text. 6 students do not use reading techniques. 2 of these students struggle with linking words and forming meaning from sentences.
			I don't use reading techniques	Reasons for not using techniques	I just read I focus on words and forget sentences and what I have just read I am not able to link the words together	3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15 9 12	
	27		I know if I am understanding English text	Way of knowing	If I understand the words/what I am reading I look words up in a dictionary	5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 5	This question was badly answered. Only 3 students clearly stated that they knew when they did not understand. 8 made tautologous responses. 6 mentioned reading techniques 2 mentioned cognitive factors – frustration and imagination.
			Not clear whether I understand English text		I imagine By punctuation I try to understand I become frustrated by not understanding and don't care any more From words which link meaning I re-read in order to understand	2 1 6 3, 7 7	
			I don't know if I am understanding English text	Reason for not knowing	I know I do not understand from the beginning New words are hard to understand	15, 16 9 4	

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
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28		I consolidate reading	Ways of consolidating	Underline/write an unknown/difficult word Look back at the main theme Try to phrase questions Identify key features of the text Write anything important/ the words I remember Translate difficult words Answer comprehension questions if there are any Re-reading	2, 10, 11 1 1 1 3, 4 6 9, 11 16	7 students do not consolidate their reading. Of the 9 who do, 4 focus on difficult words. 2 focus on key features and themes 2 focus on comprehension questions 1 re-reads
		I don't consolidate reading		No	5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15	
29		Most difficult aspects of reading English	Examples	Unknown words – distract from comprehension/forget Long words Many vowels Meaning of words Pronunciation of words Vowel pronunciation Compound letter/sounds Silent letters Tiring/boring Hesitation Always unfamiliar Scientific terminology Text comes from a different culture Reading aloud	2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 14 2, 10 1, 15, 16 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 16 3, 6, 14 6, 8 6 7 7 7 11 12 13	All students experience reading difficulties. 10 students describe long or difficult words as the main barrier to understanding 12 identify pronunciation issues such as compound letter sounds or silent letters 3 struggle with word meanings 1 student finds reading tiring and boring. 1 finds different cultural content a problem.

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	30		What would help to become a better English reader	Ways of improving	Reading a lot/practice Reading every day/regularly Listening to the media/audio books/watching TV Writing a lot Lost embarrassment of reading aloud Better foundation from the beginning Not feeling stupid/annoyed by using dictionary all the time Discipline/enforcement from the lecturer Avoiding social gatherings to have more time Increase vocabulary Learning derivations Better pronunciation Native speakers Go abroad Step-by-step from short stories Reading programme with contest Knowing words' meanings Spelling	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16 2, 13 1, 3, 6, 7, 16 1 4, 13 5, 9 5 7 7 8, 9, 10 8 8, 15, 16 9, 14 10 12 14 15, 16 15, 16	11 students say that reading more/every day/a lot would make them better readers. 1 says this should be enforced by the lecturer, and 1 that it could be motivated by competitions with prizes. 5 mention more exposure to English including access to native speakers (2) and going abroad (1) 6 mention better English knowledge such as vocabulary, derivations, spelling, etc... 2 mention losing embarrassment at incompetence 1 mentions avoiding social gatherings.
	31		I know important sentences		Maybe the last sentence The last sentence is summary/solutions/conclusion The first sentence is introduction, the focus. Topic Repeated sentences	2 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16 7	14 of the 16 students identify the first/topic sentences and the last/conclusion sentences as the most important in the text. Only 2 students thought all sentences were equally important
		I don't know important sentences	Examples	They are all the same	12, 15		
	32		I prepare for reading	Ways of preparing	I look at the picture I look at the title Avoid distractions Look at text generally/scan I read silently first	2 2, 4, 5, 16 1 5, 8, 14 13	Half the students look at the title (4) picture (1), scan (3), read silently (1) and avoid distractions (1)
			I don't prepare for reading	Reasons against		3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15	The other half the students said they did not engage in any preparation before reading.

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
Recurrent reading behaviours	33		I re-read sentences	Reasons for	To clarify/check/understand the meaning If I don't understand the meaning of the following sentence I separate syllables and re-read To correct pronunciation	1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 2, 4, 6, 11 7 15, 16	Almost all the students (14) re-read for better comprehension. 10 of these do so to check for understanding, particularly when they fail to understand the following sentence (4)
			I don't re-read sentences			3, 9	
	34		Encountering difficult words		Know it from context Look up in a translation dictionary afterwards Teachers refuse to translate Pronounce syllables separately Ask a friend Ask a teacher Look for cues (such as capital letter = name)	1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 2 4 3 3, 15 8	All students use a translation dictionary to look up words they don't understand. 9 look at context for cues to derive meaning. 2 rely on others (friends or teachers) 1 divides into syllables to sound it out
					I skip text	Reasons for	
	35		I don't skip text	Reasons against	I don't skip details because I don't know what to skip	1, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 9, 16	
			36		Read some parts faster	Reason for reading faster	Text/words are already familiar Simple/easy - words which are easy to spell

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
Factors affecting reading difficulty	37		Factors making English reading difficult		Busy social culture Waste time with other students and friends/cultural restriction Poor standard of English in Saudi Arabia Few opportunities to access English – film, road signs, Anxiety – don't want to make a mistake in front of others Frustrated by constantly looking up words in dictionary Lack of hard copy books/ no library Relying on online books with weak internet coverage Reading vowels properly Lost enthusiasm because of difficulty New words Long words Lecturer focuses on good readers and neglects poor readers Words which are not English originally Pronunciation Grammar – tenses Poor interaction between lecturers and students Poor teaching/lack of encouragement Frustration – lecturers frustrate learning Poor foundation – not taught properly from the beginning	2, 11 2, 3, 8, 11, 14 1 1 3,4 5 6, 11 6 6, 7 3 3, 9, 11 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16 7 8 10, 11, 16 10 11 12, 13 14 15	A number of themes emerged: Linguistic knowledge – new/long words, vowels, grammar, non-English words in the English language (8) Culture: busy socially, poor English in Saudi Arabia (6) Teaching – poor, lack of foundation, neglect of poor readers (6) Emotion – frustration/anxiety/motivation (4) Poor pronunciation (3) Resources – books/libraries/Internet (2)

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	38		Factors to help read English well		Changing the culture with regard to reading Overcoming anxiety and embarrassment Private tutor/expert reader Audio books Knowing the words/vocabulary Reading a lot/practice/speaking Book availability Educational channels on television Friendly, interactive teachers Better self-control	2 4 3, 5, 6 5 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 8 8 9 12, 16	A number of themes emerged: Practice – reading/speaking (13) Lexical knowledge (6) Teaching – friendly/private (4) Resources – Books/tv/internet (3) Self – control/anxiety (3) Change the culture (1)
	39		Comprehension can be developed	Ways to develop	Listening Speaking Discussions with lecturers about problems Reading books and magazines Private tutor Practising reading Improving vocabulary/phrases Interesting topics Going abroad to study in a society which supports reading Going to a different university in SA Stop spending so much time on social gatherings A special reading comprehension programme Reading with a good teacher	2 2 1 4 5 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16 6, 8, 10 7 7, 9, 10, 14 9 9 12,13 14	A number of themes emerged Practice reading (9) Teaching – tutor/good teacher/discussions/ reading comprehension programme (5) Moving – within SA/abroad (5) Linguistic knowledge – (5) Resources – books/magazines, interesting topics (2) Be less social - 1

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SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Student	Summary
	40		Single textbook is sufficient	Reasons for	The problem is not the textbook but our poor abilities	4, 11, 14	Most students (13) said the textbooks is not sufficient
			Single textbook is not sufficient	Reasons against	Not sufficient Needs to be more extensive Needs to be used for more than two terms Textbook needs to be easier because our standard is so low The curriculum is too hard I have learned nothing from the subject (reading) Need another subject called 'comprehension' We need reading, grammar, listening, speaking, not literature We need more activities in reading and speaking	6, 8 2 1 5, 15 6 7, 16 8, 9, 12 10, 13 3	Not learning from it – need a separate comprehension subject – (7) Textbook/curriculum too hard (4) Needs to be more extensive – (1) Three people said there was a problem, but it was their poor standard, not the textbook

Appendix 21
Raw Data Lecturer Interview

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
ACCESS TO READING	1		Don't assign reading	Reasons	Students can't cope with more than the core material	3	Almost all lecturers assign reading. However most assign minimal reading because students have a poor reading standard, don't have time and there are no library resources
			Do assign reading		Because reading standard is low	2	
			Because students have not developed a habit of reading	1			
			Because no libraries – not enough resources	4			
					To a minimum degree	1, 2, 3	
					Sometimes (from the internet)	5, 6	
	2		Encouragement to read	Explanation	Yes	2	Half the lecturers encourage reading, but students only read to pass the exam, and time and resources are a continued issue.
			No encouragement to read		Not much	1	
			Don't know		Students don't have time to read	1	
	3		There is a public library				The vast majority of towns do not have public libraries or public reading spaces.
			There is no public library			1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
		a	There are no public reading areas			1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
				Only for magazines which are not good for learning English	6		
4		There is no university library			No, unfortunately	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	None of the three universities has a library and even textbooks and resources have to be obtained from a long distance. Therefore students cannot borrow books to read.
					We have to get textbooks from a long way away	2	
	a	Students do not borrow books from it			We have to help our students get textbooks	2	
					We hope to have one soon	1	
	b	There is no English Department library				1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	There is no English Department library so students cannot borrow books
	c	Students do not borrow from it				1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
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		d	Encourages students to borrow books		To a certain level I don't know if they do or not	2 2	Teachers do not generally encourage students to borrow books because there are no libraries and students only have time for homework.	
			Does not encourage students to borrow books		No Students don't even have enough time for homework	2, 3, 4, 5, 6 1		
Teaching reading	5		Unsatisfactory teaching in schools	Reasons against	Low standard Ineffectual Reading is a problem for Arabs Lacks seriousness	1, 2, 3, 5 1, 2, 4 2 3	Almost all lecturers describe school English reading teaching as unsatisfactory.	
			Satisfactory teaching in schools	Reasons for	I don't know	6		
	6		English letters learned by name	Learning English letters	Enhances the difficulty of learning phonemes correctly They should learn vowel sounds Students sometimes read the letter as name instead of the phoneme	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 3 2, 6	All lecturers claim letter learning in school was by name rather than sound and this creates reading problems as students lack phonetic awareness.	
		7		We teach final stable syllable patterns		There are many courses on phonetics in particular and linguistics in general		2, 3
				We do not teach final stable syllable patterns				6
	8		English reading teaching in the university is satisfactory		Don't know Maybe of the basics	1, 5 4	Most lecturers either do not know whether final stable syllable patterns are taught in the university, or describe the teaching as basic or absent.	
			English reading teaching in the university is not satisfactory		I teach reading techniques (topic sentences, difficult words)	5 6		
					ELT courses teach reading strategies In practice students do not read well Students do not develop effective reading strategies This slows the teaching process Teaching is not to the standard we expect Student learning is not to the standard we expect Teachers are not specialists in teaching reading Most of the class are absent – come from far places Low level of reading in students	2 2, 3 1, 2, 3 3, 4 4 4 4 1, 4, 6 6		

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
	9		Reading is not assessed by lecturer			2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Lecturers seldom or never assess reading.

			Sometimes			1	
Cues to reading comprehension	10		Students understand the relevance of punctuation	Reasons for	Very few	4, 6	Lecturers generally comment that students do not understand punctuation.
			Students do not understand the relevance of punctuation	Reasons against	No They lack knowledge They are unfamiliar with quotation marks Cannot avoid ambiguity	3 2, 5 1 5	
	11		Students pay attention		Sometimes	4, 5	Lecturers say seldom or never pay attention to punctuation because it was not taught properly in previous schools and because of differences between Arabic and English script.
			Students do not pay attention		Not taught well in previous schools	3	
			Students struggle with punctuation		It is important Students struggle because Arabic punctuation is different	2 2	
			Don't know		I encourage them to	1, 6	
	12		Important to know phonics	Reasons for Reasons against	It is vital	2, 4, 5, 6	All lecturers agree phonics are very important in order to promote pronunciation and understanding. However it needs to be taught from an early stage in school.
					It would be best to learn it from an early stage It will help pronunciation It will help understanding Teachers often miss the connection between comprehension and phonics	2 1 1 1	
	13		Taught spelling at university		Only the plurals	2, 5 6	Half the lecturers teach spelling, but only at a very basic level, (e.g., plurals)
			Not taught spelling at university		It would be better if it was taught	3, 4	
			Don't know			1	
	14		Good at spelling	Reason for being good	Moderate	6	Almost all lecturers agree that students spelling is weak, partly because of the opaqueness of English grapheme/phoneme correspondence.
			Not good at spelling	Reason for not being good	No Unlike Arabic, English spelling does not correspond to the phonic system Very weak	3, 5 2 4	
Don't know			Most students want to learn		1		
SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
	15		Spelling is important to comprehension	Reasons for	Yes/ definitely Sound knowledge helps reading comprehension It helps knowledge of words and syllables It will help pronunciation	3, 4, 5, 6 2 1 1	Lecturers all agree that spelling is important to help with pronunciation and comprehension.
Reading process	16		Students are aware of cues		The topic sentence, title etc... To a certain degree	5 6	Lecturers state students are minimally aware of reading

		Students are not aware of cues		They need more awareness They should read in advance	2, 4 3	cues – limited to titles and topic sentences.
		Don't know		The should know title, pictures and vocabulary	1	
17		Students use reading techniques	Techniques used	If the text is interesting they will talk to each other about it If the text is interesting they will ask the teacher questions They use finger-pointing They try to derive meaning from context Guess They try to pronounce words correctly while reading They translate the text	2 1, 2 1 3 4 5 6	Lecturers agree that students use reading techniques, including talking to each other and the lecturer, using context and translation to drive meaning from text.
18		I know if the students understand	Way of knowing	I look into their faces I ask them questions about what they are reading Move around the classroom checking Students interrupt with questions	2,3 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 1, 3 6	All lecturers claim to know if students understand text, mainly by questioning.
19		Students consolidate learning	Ways of consolidating Reasons against	The interact with each other They interact with the teacher They retrieve and apply information from the text They ask about meanings of words They read again They make notes	2, 3 2, 3 2 1, 4 5 6	All lecturers agree that students consolidate learning by talking to each other and the lecturer, and by re-reading, making notes.

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
	20		Reading challenges	Examples	Understanding the overall meaning of the text Retrieving information from the text Words Long words New words Concepts Summarizing Difficult pronunciation	2 2 1 3, 6 3, 5, 6 1 4 5, 6	All lecturers agree that students experience reading challenges, especially with new or long words and difficult pronunciation.
	21		Ways of becoming better readers		Choosing authentic texts Brainstorming Re-reading Explaining difficult words Discussing ideas and concepts Hear more words while reading silently Pictures Reading with an expert reader Put in more effort in reading Reading texts which they find interesting	2 1 1 1 1 3 4 4 5 6	Lecturers suggest multiple ways of improving reading, from changing the text (more culturally appropriate, interesting), to using strategies such as discussing and re-reading. They also comment on lack of student effort.
	22		Students know about important sentences		Some attention to the first/topic sentence of a paragraph to explore the topic Some pay attention to the last sentence as a summary/conclusion Their skills are not very good Examples and quotations	1, 2, 6 2, 1, 6 1, 4 6	Most lecturers believe students know about important sentences in text, such as topic and conclusion sentences. However a few say students think all information is equally important.
			Students do not know about important sentences		Lack of understanding of whole text They think all information is equally important	3 5	
	23		Students prepare	Ways of preparing	Exploring the topic Motivation to read Creating a purpose for reading Familiarising with the text Focus on long words Focus on punctuation Familiarise with vocabulary/glossary	2, 6 2 2 1, 3, 4, 5 3 3 5	All lecturers agree that students prepare for reading, mainly by familiarising themselves with the text and the topic. Other techniques include focusing on difficult words and punctuation.

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
	24		Plans to read better	Types of plans	Building on established cognitive abilities Building on background knowledge/introducing the topic Building on enjoyment Working in pairs/groups Practice more Be aware of reading strategies Read for pleasure	2 2, 6 2 2 1, 5 4 5	All lecturers agree that students need to read better by practice, improving background knowledge, employing reading strategies and reading for pleasure.
Reading regulations	25		Students re-read	Reasons for	Yes It depends on the text Scanning for specific information Skimming for the gist Interest in the topic Seldom/sometimes Most do not self-correct because of lack of understanding	6 2 2 2 2 1, 2, 5 4	The vast majority of lecturers say that their students sometimes re-read sentences and words while reading text. However some believe this does not lead to self-correction.
			Students do not re-read	Reasons against	They have no self-correcting mechanism	3	
	26		Students do something to understand difficult words		Derive it from context of the story Derive from the context of the sentence Depends on knowledge of sentence structure Ask the teacher Guess Morphological analysis Use a dictionary/ translation	2 2, 3 2 1, 3 1 1 4, 5, 6	The vast majority of lecturers say that students work to understand difficult words by looking at context or using a dictionary to translate English words to Arabic.
			Students do nothing to understand difficult words		They are embarrassed to raise the subject	3	
	27		Students skip text	Reasons for	Parts which are superfluous to meaning Parts they are not interested in Long words Difficult words	2 2 1 1, 3	Half the lecturers say students skip text which they find difficult or uninteresting. The other half say they are not capable of identifying and skipping details.
			Students don't skip text	Reasons against	Skipping details is a high level skill they don't possess	4, 5, 6	

Cont'd ...

SECTION	QU	SUB QU	RESPONSE	SUB-CATEGORY	REASON	Lecturer	Comment
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	28		Read some parts faster	Reason for reading faster	Depends on the kind of text When they are scanning for specific information Short words Familiar words/knowledge	2 2 3 3, 4, 5, 6	Almost all of lecturers say students read faster when they are familiar with the words or topic or when text is simple.
			Don't know			1	
Factors affecting reading difficulty	29		Factors making English reading difficult		Arabic script is different to English script English spelling does not correspond to the sound system Some Arab learners are lazy, lack concentration Learning reading requires more effort than learning speaking Lack of habit of reading Lack of interest in the topic Difficult words Lack of training Impatience Lack of background knowledge – morphology, syntax, semantics Arabs do not have a culture of reading Arabs are not aware of the importance of English Pronunciation Lacking social/cultural background	2 2 2, 3 2 1 1 1, 4 1, 3 1 1, 3 1 1 5 6	Lecturers identify many factors which make reading difficult. Emergent themes are: Culture: Arabs do not read, are lazy, impatient, lack concentration and effort, and are unaware of the importance of English. Linguistics: different script and opaque grapheme/phoneme correspondence Topics: lack of interest Education: lack of training and knowledge
	30		Factors which help students read well		Choosing text which meets learners' needs Choosing text which students are interested in Using authentic texts Treat texts as linguistic objects not just teaching tools Improve motivation Practice Knowledge of reading strategies Listen to native speakers and audio books Access to a variety of books Previous schools teaching phonology well Good lexical knowledge Reading for pleasure Teaching phonics to facilitate comprehension Understanding grammar	2, 3 2, 6 2 2 2, 3, 6 1, 3 3 3, 4 3 3 4, 6 4 5 6	Lecturers identify many factors which could help students read well. They include: Text: interesting, authentic, appropriate Behaviour: practice, reading for pleasure Knowledge: of reading strategies, lexicon, phonology, grammar Resources: native speakers, audio books, books

Appendix 22 Ethical research form

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH
DISSERTATION/THESIS



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

DISSERTATION/THESIS

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Mohammed A. Alsubaie

Your student no: 570033167

Return address for this certificate: 79 Reddington Road, Plymouth, uk PL3 6PT

Degree/Programme of Study: PhD

Project Supervisor(s): Dr Susan Riley

Your email address: ma325@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07988870431

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Mohammed A. Alsubaie..........date: 13 Jan 2012

NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011

Certificate of ethical research approval DISSERTATION/THESIS

Your student no: 570033167

Title of your project:

An exploration of reading process and the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties among EFL Saudi Arabian university students

Brief description of your research project:

The study aims to explore the EFL reading process and the factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties among university students in Saudi Arabia. By different data collection methods, this will observe the way that university students learn reading comprehension in reading sessions and how they perceive their learning. In addition, a questionnaire and an interview will be used to explore students' perceptions in regards to the reading process and reading comprehension difficulties. Think-aloud protocol will be used to investigate students' reading process and to detect reading comprehension difficulties.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

The participants in the research are adult male university students in Saudi Arabia and the participants will be a sample of volunteers. They will be asked if they accept each individual data collection method before the process of doing so. The fieldwork will last for three months.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

- a) **informed consent:** Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document

The participants are adult male university students in Saudi Arabia and the consent form is attached. I have obtained the approval to conduct this study and do all the needed work from both the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and from the universities where the research will be conducted. In addition, a consent form will be given to each participant in which they will be informed in writing of their anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. In addition, the names of the universities where the study takes place will not be disclosed.

b) anonymity and confidentiality

I attended the Ethics Training for SSIS postgraduates in 19 January 2011. The session outlines general ethical principles, such as confidentiality, consent, anonymity and

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011

social justice. I came away with an excellent understanding of how to think about how to do my own research ethically. So participants' anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point is highlighted in the consent form which they will sign. In addition, the names of the universities where the study takes place will not be disclosed. Permission is already obtained from the organization regarding the observation and all different types of data tools. Participants also will be asked if they will accept the observation, think-aloud protocol and interview; they will be asked also about the best method they prefer and suits them to be contacted for interview and think-aloud protocol: face to face, by phone or by Skype messenger. I have chosen the three options to give my participants more freedom and relaxation when being interviewed or applying think-aloud protocol method. Some participants may prefer not to be interviewed face to face. These different ways may help to keep the participants away from harm or stress.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The research methods are: interview, questionnaire, observation and think-aloud protocol. A number of steps will be taken to ensure that no harm, detriment or unreasonable stress is placed upon the participants. After my participants agree and accept on the consent forms the observation, interview and think –aloud protocol will be applied. Questionnaires will then be distributed via the Internet or will be administered to them in the class sessions. In their answers, I will use pseudonyms; therefore, they will have more freedom to answer the questionnaire confidentially and without any stress. In addition, I will assign every participant a number to indicate his answer and no name or pseudonym would be used for analysing my data. I will start gathering data by the 1st of February 2012 and stay there for three months. As soon as I arrive there, I will distribute the questionnaire to the participants. In approximately two weeks' time, the questionnaires are expected to be handed in back. I will code them and transcribe them directly after receiving them. Then the observation will be carried out for another two weeks attending different reading sessions. After that, the interviews will be carried out with at least 15 students, which might last for four weeks, including their coding and transcriptions. Finally the think-aloud protocol will be conducted with 10 students to detect their comprehension difficulties in reading English text and again this might last for 4 weeks including their coding and transcription.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

Participants will be ensured that their answers will be dealt with anonymously by giving each participant an envelope with my address written on it to send it back directly to me, also they will have my email if they want to email it to me. Regarding the audio, participants will be promised that the information will be confidential and secured until the purpose of this study is achieved. Then this information will be destroyed.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

There are no exceptional factors in my view but if there are any that arise during the fieldwork then the researcher has the ability to deal with them.

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: 1st February 2012 **until:** 30th September 2012

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): S.M. Riley **date:** 13th January 2012

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: 2/1/12/21

Signed: Dr Salah Troudi, Salah Troudi **date:** 14/01/2012
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011

Appendix 23

Research timetable

The following table describes the research process of the study from the design and selection of materials through to their coding and analysis in order to be able to extract findings and answer the research questions.

Date	Action	Outcomes
SEP 2011	Selection of TAP texts for training and data collection. Drawing up of draft interview student and interview schedules.	Materials for TAP (see Appendices 1 and 2) Draft interview schedule
SEP 2011	Approached colleagues for comment on draft student and lecturer interview schedules	Amended and shortened both student and lecturer interview schedules
SEP 2011	Translated student interview into Arabic and approached colleagues for validation of translation.	Small amendments to students interview schedule (see Appendices 3 and 4)
NOV2011	Piloted student data collection tools with 2 EFL students in Saudi Arabia via Skype	Familiarisation with TAP and RVR strategies Student interview further shortened
NOV 2011	Piloted lecturer interview with 2 Saudi colleagues in the United Kingdom	Lecturer interview amended with omissions and additions
Dec 2011	Saudi Cultural Bureau in London, UK approached for permission for the research to be undertaken in Saudi universities.	Letter of consent from Saudi Cultural Bureau (see Appendix 6)
Dec 2011	Universities selected and university Principles contacted with request for participation of their staff and students in the research.	Letters of introduction and consent from the University Principles and the Heads of the English Departments (see Appendix 7)
FEB 2012	Meeting with Chairmen of English Department at TR university to obtain permissions from lecturers to take part in the study.	Letters of consent from 2 lecturers (see Appendix 9)
FEB 2012	Meeting with TR students to recruit volunteers to take part in the study.	6 students volunteered Consent forms obtained from each participating student (see Appendix 8)
FEB 2012	Trained TR students on use of TAP Student data collection from TR	6 completed TAPs (see Appendix 12), 3 completed RVRs (see also Appendix 14), and 6 completed student interviews (see Appendix 10)
FEB 2012	Lecturer data collection from TR	2 completed lecturer interviews (see Appendix 11)
MAR 2012	Meeting with Chairmen of English Department at MA university to obtain permissions from lecturers to take part in the study.	Letters of consent from 2 lecturers (see Appendix 9)
MAR 2012	Meeting with MA students to recruit volunteers to take part in the study.	5 students volunteered

		Consent forms obtained from each participating student (see Appendix 8)
MAR 2012	Trained MA students on use of TAP Student data collection from MA	5 completed TAPs (see Appendix 12), 3 completed RVRs (see also Appendix 14) and 5 completed student interviews (see Appendix 10)
MAR 2012	Lecturer data collection from MA	2 completed lecturer interviews (see Appendix 11)
APR 2012	Meeting with Chairmen of English Department at SH university to obtain permissions from lecturers to take part in the study.	Letters of consent from 2 lecturers (see Appendix 9)
APR 2012	Meeting with MA students to recruit volunteers to take part in the study.	5 students volunteered Consent forms obtained from each participating student (see Appendix 8)
APR 2012	Trained SH students on use of TAP Student data collection from SH	5 completed TAPs (see Appendix 12), 3 completed RVRs (see also Appendix 14), and 5 completed student interviews (see Appendix 10)
APR 2012	Lecturer data collection from SH	2 completed lecturer interviews (see Appendix 11)
MAY 2012 To AUG 2012	TAP, RVR and interview data transcribed	16 transcribed TAP protocols 9 transcribed RVR protocols 16 transcribed student interviews 6 transcribed lecturer interviews
SEP 2012	Transcripts of TAP, RVR and interview data sent to participants for cross-checking	All transcripts validated by participants
OCT 2012	Translation of student TAP and RVR data from Arabic into English	16 translated TAP protocols 9 translated RVR protocols 16 translated student interviews
NOV 2012	Iteration of the data and establishment of trial coding of data from three different participants in each of the data collection methods	Trial coding checked with supervisor
MAR 2013	Colleagues code extracts from each of the data collection methods to establish trustworthiness	Interim coding
APR 2013	Drawing up the coding framework for the TAP, RVR and interview and trial coding	Final coding checked with supervisor
JUN 2013	Data analysis	16 TAP protocols coded and enumerated (see Appendix 12) 9 RVR protocols coded and enumerated (see Appendix 14) 16 student interviews coded (see Appendix 15)

		6 lecturer interviews coded (see Appendix 16)
AUG 2013	Raw data tables constructed	Raw data table of comprehension questions (see Appendix 17) Raw data table of TAP comments (see Appendix 18) Raw data table of TAP reading behaviours (see also Appendix 18) Raw data table of RVR questions (see Appendix 19) Raw data table of student interviews (see Appendix 20) Raw data table of lecturer interviews (see Appendix 21)
SEP 2013	Summary data extracted and tabled for each data set	Findings of the study