



## La enseñanza de la lectura a los estudiantes árabes de ESL: una revisión teórica

### Teaching *reading* to ESL Arab learners: A theoretical review

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#### RESUMEN.

El presente documento revisa el estado de la capacidad de comprensión de lectura entre los estudiantes de EFL en Jordania y Arabia Saudita. Hay varios factores que contribuyen a las habilidades lingüísticas deficientes entre los alumnos, según lo informado por varias agencias, así como el Ministerio de Educación. Aquí se intenta proponer un método situacional como una herramienta eficaz para mejorar la experiencia de aprendizaje de los alumnos. Tanto los países, como las otras naciones árabes, han gastado notablemente en la dirección de crear su propia fuerza laboral para que sean autosuficientes, pero el resultado deseado aún está lejos. Este documento permitirá a los investigadores tener una idea de la situación actual y trabajar por el refuerzo de dicho modelo para hacer que el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de EFL sea más gratificante.

#### PALABRAS CLAVE.

Modelo situacional, Jordania, habilidades de lectura, Arabia Saudita, teorías.

#### ABSTRACT.

The present paper reviews the status of reading comprehension skill among the learners of EFL in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. There are various factors contribute to the poor language skills among the learners, as reported by various agencies as well as the Ministry of Education. It is an attempt here to propose *Situational Method* as an effective tool to enhance the learning experience of the learners. Both the countries, including the other Arab nations have spent remarkably very well in the direction of creating their own workforce to become self reliant but the desired outcome is still a way far. This paper will enable the researchers to have an idea of the current situation and work for the reinforcement of such model to make the EFL teaching-learning process more rewarding.

#### KEY WORDS.

Situational model, Jordan, reading skill, Saudi Arabia, theories.





## 1. Introduction.

A reader uses various cues when encounter an unfamiliar text. Knowledge of words and knowledge about the world play significant roles in determining the level of comprehension Word based or lexical knowledge and the world based, or situational knowledge are believed to play distinct, yet complementary roles in successful comprehension of connected text (Keenan, et al., 1990; Matsuki, et al., 2011). Situation based or world based knowledge also facilitates text comprehension as the reader uses knowledge about the context described in the text to draw inferences that goes beyond the information explicitly available in the text (Matsuki et al., 2011; Vu, et al., 2003). Of course, the world knowledge is based on the world a reader has been exposed to. In Kintsch' *Construction Integration Model* (1988, 1991), comprehension of most connected texts requires the reader to construct a meaningful representation that goes beyond the individual words. As per this model, skilled comprehenders construct a dynamic and vibrant model of a text by integrating the information available in the text based on his prior knowledge, a process that depends on the reader's knowledge of the situations described in the text as well as his or her working memory capacity and ability to flexibly and rapidly update the situational model in response to the incoming text. However, no study has yet addressed the effects of questioning on situational model in reading comprehension of the Arab ESL learners and the nature of inferences made of the texts describing local context and global contexts. Therefore, the present paper aims to explore the situation of teaching reading in ESL to Arab learners and the need for situational models to be incorporated in the curriculum.

A variety of factors have been linked to reading comprehension, including age, content/domain knowledge, inferencing skills, working memory, vocabulary, and strategy use (Cain, et al., 2004; Chambers Cantrell, et al., 2010; Gregory & Cahill, 2010; McNamara, 2001; Ouellette, 2006). For the present study, the two variables of interest are those reported by Keenan (1990) to serve as a gateway to inference activation: word-based knowledge and situation-based knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge can be conceptualized in terms of breadth, (number of words that a learners has, at least some superficial knowledge about) and depth, which includes how much knowledge one has of a given word, including the word's pronunciation and spelling, morphological and syntactic properties, and knowledge of how and when to use that word (Hatami & Tavakoli, 2012). Ouellette (2006) investigated the impact of vocabulary knowledge on the reading comprehension skills of 9- and 10-year-old children and reported that vocabulary breadth predicted word decoding skills while vocabulary depth predicted comprehension. Rupley and Nichols (2005) distinguished between definitional and contextual knowledge of words. It is therefore not surprising that adults (Calvo, 2005) and children (Cain, et al., 2004; Rupley & Nichols, 2005) who have strong vocabulary skills are more likely to be proficient inference-makers and comprehenders than age-matched readers with poor vocabulary knowledge.

Hidi (2001) found that students' increased recognition, comprehension, and recall capacity are determined by their topics or situational interests. Flowerday, Schraw, and Stevens (2004) identified differences and similarities between the importance of topic interest (about what they have prior background) and situational interest (informational text) and the mix of both result positively. Reading can be fun when comprehension takes place, as decoding of the





words to filter out the messages makes the task boring. Good readers associate with the content, considering what will occur next, making inquiries concerning the main characters etc.

The type of texts or its genre can influence reading comprehension in both narrative (e.g. stories) and expository (e.g. science) texts (Leon, et al., 2004). Narrative texts usually make connections between the facts and reflect reasons, the protagonist's actions, and the events based on real life situations whereas the expository texts intends to search for the universal facts with context bound technical uses of the terms as scientific explanations are often causal (Ohlsson, 2002). Causality is followed as a principle to know what, how, why and when about the events. Most of the studies in the last three decades do suggest that causality play a pivotal role in narrative comprehension (Graesser, Swamer, Baggett, & Sell, 1996). Recent researches have also shown that marking causality during the reading process can be the most effective factor and the readers construct a situational model based on the text and availability of causal information. (Leon, 2004).

English language learners face a lot of difficulties due to the inadequate infrastructure, ineffective programs to meet the demands of the students (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012). In the US, the growing population of learners for whom English is not the primary language at home, pose a great challenge for the policy makers (Aud, 2011). Even though such learners educated in the US schooling system for 7 years or more yet require additional language support as they are often found to be proficient oral conversationalists; but lack advanced learning skills needed to keep pace with their monolingual peers in the middle schools (Menken et al., 2012; Olsen, 2010).

In Arab world, mostly the students spend around two-third of their day in homes. Arab Human Development Agency (2003) reported that upbringing styles in the Arab world is mostly overprotective and authoritative which hinder them from developing various skills such as decision making, critical thinking skills etc. Students in such background are not able to inculcate independent ability to think critically and learn the art of innovations. Moreover, they speak mostly Arabic in their monolingual set up which results in less exposure to develop the language skills in English (Smadi, 2013; Malkawi, 2014). Various studies suggest that there is L1 interferences in the English as foreign language learning; this could be seen in the variation in reading curricula and instruction. Due to the boost of non Arabic speaking from the Asian countries and sudden evolve of economy and its industrial base has forced the locals to swiftly incline towards English as mode of communication. In response to the develop their own work force, Jordan's Public Education Development Project (2008), providing high quality teaching and administrative staff, resources and tools to schools but the result is far from the expected outcome. Al Moghrabi (2013) found that reading strategies among the learners in Saudi Arabia is higher than in Arabic than English. The same strategies used in English comprehension activity result in challenges for the learners.

Difference in Arabic language and orthography is quite prominent so it has attracted lot of research into L1 and L2 language acquisition and reading fluency in the Arab world (Mahfoudhi, Everatt, and Elbeheri, 2011). Oral language plays a significant role learning to read as across literate societies and cultures it has been observed that development of reading is directly proportionate to the development of oral language (Perfetti & Dunlap, 2008).





In Jordan the textbooks used for the reading comprehension activities need reform to best suit the needs of the students. The structures of the texts need to vary, and proper strategies need to be followed to achieve the desired goal rather than focus on assessment as a tool to address enhance comprehension skills. Among many other factors responsible for poor outcome in terms of reading skills among the high school goers in Jordan, no availability of speed reading exercises in the English language textbooks and lack of training of the teachers to implement effectively such strategies are the major reasons for poor performance of the learners (Abdelrahman & Bsharah, 2014).

### **1.1 Background of the present study.**

The situational model or mental model of discourse is what we bring into our long-term memory (LTM, hereafter). Cognitively speaking, learning occurs when students make connections between new information and their prior knowledge. Normally, the information used in working memory (WM) is not retained after reading unless it is integrated and stored in LTM (Van den Broek, et al., 2005; Kintsch, 1998; Cromley, et al., 2010; Kendeou, Smith, & O' Brien, 2013). Because no amount of writing can describe every single detail in a situation, readers need to draw inferences by using their LTM to fill in the gaps. The question then becomes a matter of how we can help L2 readers integrate text information with their prior knowledge and skills that they possess in L1 (Keenan, et al., 2008). Whether L1 inferential ability positively transfers to L2 has not been addressed in previous research on reading comprehension in L2, especially with the Arab ELL.

Several theorists claim L1 skills transfer to L2 in general. Krashen (1981) views L1 influence as a strategy that learners can build on to acquire L2. Cummins (2000) has expanded this theory to include the idea that L1 literacy skills transfer to literacy in L2 to form the foundation of ELL students' academic success. Greater comprehension skills in L1 also transfer to processing information in L2 reading regardless of the linguistic differences between the two languages. However, very few researchers apply the concept of situation models to the commonality between L1 and L2 reading. Thus, it is reasonable to apply earlier findings on situation models to observing how ELL students develop their abilities to draw inferences while reading. The readers were able to retrieve their memory of the prior text and the thoughts they had associated with the text (Pike, et al., 2010). This causal relationship between questioning and memory during reading has been confirmed by many other researchers as well (Kuperberg, et al., 2011). Effectiveness of such strategy has never been tested among the Arab ESL learners who have a different worldview and cultural specifics to shape their understanding.

McNeil (2011) considered another variable i.e. self-questioning. He found that there was an overwhelmingly strong relationship between use of self questioning and reading comprehension, but not background knowledge. This is a need to look into the effect of self questioning and monitoring in filling out the gaps due to lack of domain knowledge.

In Jordan, even though English is introduced at the early stage in the schools, unlike Saudi Arabia where English is introduced at a later stage only as a subject, most of the first year under graduate students are unable to score well and poorly perform in standardized tests like IELTS, TOEFL (Alhabahba, 2016). The recent results of the high school examination in



English have showed that only 18% of the total test takers have passed in Arts where the result was just 15% in 2014 (Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, 2015b). Ministry of Education (2014) evaluated the basic language skills in Arabic and English among the first to third graders. The results were shocking that 22% students were not even able to read in Arabic and English. Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) ranks Middle East and North African students' skills in English Language lower than 70 countries around the globe (Education First English Proficiency Index, 2014).

Considering the complexity of text comprehension process, readers are expected to go beyond the text-base level of representation. Use of appropriate situation model enables the learner to comprehend the deeper level of the text. Top-down and bottom-up model of text comprehension are equally important to have a better understanding of the text. By incorporating cognitive strategy such as questioning and explaining text, students can construct their situational models to infer all the aspects of the text. Very little have been done to apply situation model in L2 reading among the Arab ESL learners, especially the strategy to use questioning as a tool to enhance learners' comprehension skills.

### 1.2 Significance of the present study.

The native and non native speakers of the target language follow the same process while generating the situational models, regardless of the differences between L1 and L2. Most of the earlier researches suggested that how schematic knowledge played an effective role (Carrell, 1983) but the recent researches have indicated that the learners must have at least intermediate level language proficiency (in the language of the text) to be able to use the same in improving reading comprehension (McNeil, 2011). This is consistent with the linguistic threshold hypothesis and the findings of Carrell (1983). This was further supported by the similar claims made by other researches in their EFL studies (Usó Juan, et al 2006). Proficiency in L2 is more necessary than the other factors to see improvement in better L2 reading than the domain or prior knowledge background in their L1.

Word based and world based knowledge play distinct roles in the reading task, yet they complement each other in reading comprehension task as well (Matsuki, et al., 2011). Word based knowledge is mostly observed at the orthographical, phonological & semantic level (Holderbaum & Fumagalli de Salles, 2011) whereas the world based knowledge is mostly observed at the world experience of the reader. In the subject and action verb relationship e.g. 'the cat meowed' (*highly predictable*) and 'the cat sneezed'.

Both word and world based knowledge have been considerably enhanced readers' comprehension skills of the adult learners (Matsuki, 2011) but very less is explored in case of school students, especially the Arab L2 learners where mostly the learners are limited to very specific domains of language use which is quite clear from the status English language education in Jordan. As it was reviewed from the available resources that inference making skill is very helpful in L2 learning (Zwann & Rapp, 2006), the two views on inference processing; strategic processing and automatic activation are found to be useful in inference generation in reading activity under situational model (Zwaan & Rapp, et. al, 2006).

Apart from these two factors, the third factor/variable which McNeil (2010) found to be equally crucial was *self-questioning*. According to his study, the university L2 students who had





completed three out of six of an intensive English language program were found to be benefitted by the self-questioning strategy and the study concluded that conscious effort of questioning can substitute the lacking of background or domain knowledge. This seems to be not an effective and crucial factor in the case of high school EFL learners as the intermediate level proficiency would not be expected to be possessed by the learners. Moreover this study proposes that the future research projects should be undertaken to assess the effectiveness of questioning in the school students who are exposed to English language at a very later stage (especially in public schools, though they are exposed to English at early stage in private schools only) and don't get enough space and time to experience and explore the domains of language use in a monolingual society.

### 1.3 Situational model.

The practical goal of language learning processes is to enable the learners to use it. That is, to know what real life situations each particular form of the target language corresponds to. A real life situation is not the linguistic data but the people, objects and events which determine the modes of communication. There is a sizeable debate among the linguists and the psychologists concerning the nature of language. In 1930s, learning a language was all about accurate translation of the readings, but 1950s witnessed a change in the focus where it intended simple ability in auditory comprehension and spoken production. Even the change impacted the whole language learning process was visualized, as there was a change in notions about acquire, teach and learn a language.

The main focus of a situational syllabus is on the use of language in context. There has to be different syllabus for different learners, based on one's need. Therefore, in situational method of learning, the physical context, the channel (spoken or written), language productivity (productive or receptive), number and the nature of learners, types of activity or tasks are the elements of importance while designing the syllabus and selection of materials. These should be aligned with the broad objectives of the course as well.

The theory backing up the Situational Approach includes the following principles:

- language learning is a process of habit formation so as to deal with situations at ease
- mistakes should be avoided, as they make bad habits which would reflect in actual performance
- spoken language are learned first and then the written form
- analogy is better than analysis in terms of language learning strategy
- word meanings should be learned only in a linguistic and cultural context

The situation model demonstrates that the meaning of a text is not only the summative understanding of explicit meaning of the content. Utilizing a successive and iterative process, readers try to build on the idea about the topic with what are learning in order to create a more holistic and complex representation of the content. Reading comprehension is not only enhanced in this process but also update readers' general knowledge about the topic as well. Situation models have been studied broadly in the reading of narrative texts and from this perspective these texts can be characterized to a set of conceptual dimensions or event indexes (Kintsch and van Dijk, 1983). In the last two decades, discourse psychologists have





dealt a lot in the area of 'situation model', i.e. mental model of what the text is about. In most of the researches on narrative production and comprehension, five event indexes are commonly discussed: time, space, causation, motivation, and protagonist. Over the years of experience, these situations change into "schema" to have an abstract idea of a particular event. Schema is a term used in psychology and cognitive science, which describes a systematic pattern of thought and behavior. Language comprehension is based largely on the background knowledge of the readers (Carrell, 1983). There is no meaning in the text itself but the background knowledge is required to extract the meaning of the text.

The construction of "situation models" happens over time to further update the schemata stored in the long term memory. It means this model incorporates the images of three different types: when the reader reads the text, he/she develops an instant representation of text (the situation model), then the retrieval of already developed representation in the long term memory, and the long term memory information is updated with the new information. (Zwann & Radvansky, 1998). The situation model processing is based on knowledge-based inference generation (explanation based and elaboration based). This process is based on the relations among the constituents wherein a good reader wants to achieve local and universal coherence when they understand a text. For example, connectives such as: *before*, *after*, *during* and *then* signify temporality; *because* and *so* signify causality; *in order to*, *for*, *the purpose of* signify intentionality; *but*, *however*, *on the other hand* signify opposition; *therefore*, *thus* signify logical implication and so on.

There have been serious efforts by the discourse psychologists to understand how the readers construct 'situation models' i.e. mental models of what the text is about. For example, the situation model of a story would consist of characters performing in pursuit of their goals, events as hurdles in goal achievement, conflict between characters, emotional/social setting so on and so forth. There is a good number of literature supporting situation model construction and inference generation: The constructionist theory (Graesser, Singer, and Trabasso, 1994), the construction integration model (Kintsch 1998), the structure building framework (Gernsbacher 1990), the event indexing model (Zwaan, Langston, and Graesser 1995, Zwaan and Radvansky 1998), the resonance model (Myers and O'Brien 1998), the schema model (Graesser, Kessler 1998) etc.

Broughton et al (1981) proposed three major stages to text comprehension. First, the learners recognize the letters; second the learners relate them to the linguistic elements and then correlate the words and phrases to the meaning construction. Higher order cognitive skills expect the learners to explain and skim both the content and structure of the text. In Kesler (2010) Block, Mc Keown and Beck talked about the actions teachers need to take in order to enhance learners' higher order skills in reading tasks. A strategic reader would firstly decide on the purpose of the text and then further decide on its type. Then he decides on the features of the text i.e. he locates the topic sentence and then its supporting details toward a conclusion. While reading the text, he tries to analyze the authors' purpose of the text.

In a continuous process the reader skims (to read a text quickly to get an overall idea of the text), scans (to read in order to extract important/specific information) and analyzes through the text and make predictions of the next events based on the prior knowledge and previous background of the text. For that reason, a reader needs to be trained to categorize, to order





and to ascertain the whole-part relationships. They should be in position to compare, contrast, summarize, hypothesize, infer, conclude and determine cause-effect relationships. Bang, Muaka, Bernhardt, and Kamil (2003) found that the reading teachers pay very little attention to the way readers perceive comprehension and they are failed to implement desired procedures in the class. They often don't pay much attention to this activity; rather they focus more in the follow up activities. In other words, the reading teachers focus more on the reading product, not the reading process. Both are equally important (Konare, 1994).

In second language learning, reading is primarily viewed as a decoding process (Carell cited in Norris, 1994). Alyousef (2005) addressed reading as an 'interactive process between the text and the reader. Therefore, it is quite obvious that teachers need not only be aware of the strategies of teaching reading but also the linguistic, cultural, background knowledge. He argues that the readers interact dynamically with the text while eliciting the meaning wherein various kinds of knowledge is being used. Therefore, the readers should be familiar with the structural, cultural, vocabulary, formal discourse synthesis and so on. David (1999) rightly pointed out that the cultural knowledge gap between the target and mother tongue affects the readers' comprehension skill.

Later Comber and Nixon (2011) used the term critical reading comprehension for the texts related to political and social significance for the communities. Kesler (2010) and Wooly (2011) stressed the benefits of word contextualization to enhance readers' vocabulary. According to them, text comprehension involves understanding, gaining meaning and interpretation of the text. It depends on a variety of factors such as readers' related, text related, and situation related. Thus situational approach to language learning might be an old approach, but is quite relevant in the modern times and is used in many ways in communicative method, audio-visual, direct method etc. It is often said that it is not easy to visualize all the possible social contexts for the learners in target language so the situational approach to language teaching is quite un-feasible. At the same time it is also obvious that situational method is quite successful in teaching reading task.

## 2. Meta-cognitive view on reading.

According to Block (1992), there is now no more debate on "whether reading is a bottom-up, language-based process or a top-down, knowledge-based process." It is also universally accepted that the background knowledge does have influence on readers during the learning process. Research has gone even further to define the control executed by readers on their trial to understand a text. This control is what Block has referred to as meta-cognition.

In the context of reading, meta-cognition involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Strategic readers do not only sample the text, but also make hypotheses, confirm or reject them, and make new hypotheses while reading. There are three major stages during the reading process i.e. before reading, while reading, and after reading, in which are readers are actively involved in. In the first stage, the readers identify the purpose of reading, the form or the type of the text. In the second stage, they think about the general features of the form or the type of the text—such as trying to locate a topic sentence and follow supporting details toward a conclusion, make continuous predictions about what will occur next based on





information obtained earlier or prior knowledge. Finally, in the last stage, they attempt to form a summary, conclude, or make inference of what was read.

### **2.1 Do reading theories and meta-cognitive theory support Situational model?**

Previous research on text comprehension has proved that the readers make use of their world knowledge to create mental model in order to have clear understanding of the text they are reading (Kintsch, 2007; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998; Zwaan & Rapp, 2006). And creating this kind of mental model requires integration of the meaning units represented in the text and the prior world knowledge of the context (Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998; Zwaan & Rapp, 2006). Trabasso and Maglino (1996) proved that think-aloud method is quite successful in making a difference in young readers' reading comprehension skills when the learners pay attention to each sentence what they referred to, and the interconnectedness of sentences in the text. By asking the why and how or in other words questioning play a significant role in knowing the text. For example, knowing why/how of certain event in a story prompts the reader to retrieve the info from their background knowledge and the thought they had associated with the text.

Various studies have proved that there is a causal relationship between memory representations and questioning during the reading process (Cain & Oakhill, 2007). The following example illustrates how knowledge structure is created:

- a. Three turtles rested on a floating log, and a fish swam beneath them.
- b. Three turtles rested beside a floating log, and a fish swam beneath them.

(Bransford, Barclay, & Franks, 1972 in Carroll, 2008, p. 172)

It is quite obvious from the above examples that sentence (a) is more comprehensible than the sentence (b) because the mental representations of the situation shows the special relationship of the elements (e.g. log, fish, turtle) discussed in the sentence. To develop a coherent understanding of the text in L2, one must apply his/her world knowledge to get the sense of the propositions so as to avoid any ambiguity as well. A similar example provided by Zwaan and Radvansky (1998) illustrate how grammatical knowledge is not enough or play not very significant role in developing a coherent understanding in a discourse:

“Lamar Alenxander was behind in the polls. However, the former Tennessee governor remained optimistic. He considered it likely that a moderate candidate with new ideas would win the Republican nomination” (p. 163)

In the above text, ‘he’ in the third sentence refers to Lamar Alexander. However lamar Alexander in first sentence, the former governor of Tennessee in second sentence and the moderate candidate with new ideas in the third sentence refer to the same person but to infer that one must know who Lamar Alexander is. Lamar Alexander is the former moderate Republican governor of Tennessee who contested for the post of President but to infer that one must have this background information which is not explicitly clear from the given text. Therefore, this missing background info would hinder the comprehension process as it creates ambiguity if the reader simply goes by the available textual information.





Thus, the learners establish connections between old and new info and draw inferences based on their situation models by answering why/how questions. However, teachers help them integrate the knowledge they have in their memory and the info available in the text. It is also proved that the learners with rich knowledge structures can predict and infer better what the text is about than the learners with limited knowledge (Garcia, Jimenez, & Pearson, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Greasser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994; McNamara, & Kintsch, 1996). Such knowledge structures are based on readers' experiential knowledge. In other words, familiarity with the theme or content prompts the automatic activation in working memory for successful comprehension of the text.

## 2.2 Role of Working Memory.

Undoubtedly, drawing inferences require sufficient amount of working memory to store info. Singer (1994) argued that higher working memory entails more bridging inferences to take place to process antecedent information. Bridging inferences, including anaphoric references, cataphoric reference, and pronominal reference, allow cohesion and reflect the role of working memory in discourse comprehension (Carroll, 2008). Elaborative inferences are another type wherein the readers elaborate their situation model of the text in a better way. And the readers with low working memory draw more specific elaborative inferences whereas readers with high working memory draw more general inferences and leave the final interpretation until the end of a paragraph. Therefore, working memory is limited to all learners regardless of their L1 due the linguistic gaps between L1 and L2 (e.g. vocabulary size; exposure to discourse; implicit knowledge in syntax, morphology, and phonology).

Our past experiences and background knowledge contribute significantly to the process of comprehension, some of which stored in the form of schemas. Bartlett (1932) defined schemas as 'an active organization of past experiences/reactions, which must always be operating in any well-adapted organic response'. It was also found that less known or familiar contexts are not easy to recall and quite challenging to relate it to (Kintsch and Greene, 1978). Such study suggests that story schema is culture specific. There are other studies which also support the claim that there is a direct relationship between cultural awareness and reading comprehension (Hara 2015; Li & Lai 2012; Hara & Tappe, 2016). All these studies indicated that culturally familiar of the texts help the learners better perform in the recall task than the same texts with culturally unrelated and unfamiliar names.

Most recent study indicated that pre-recorded audio recordings are found to be more effective in inference making than their corresponding wordless films. Children from the private English medium schools are found to be more able to draw inferences than the children of public schools where the medium of instruction is not English (Hara & Tappe, 2016). Furthermore, the students are found to be very active in transferring knowledge from variety of knowledge bases to draw inferences and they face difficulties when the content is deviated much from their own experiences. Hara and Tappe proposed that children's exposure to alternative narrative styles (e.g. folktales or old story telling methods), socio-economic background, socialization in terms of language are not fairly researched and needs further attention of the researchers involved in this area. They suspect that 'transferability' might be largely governed by language attitudes in inference making among the bilingual/multilingual





children in attaining language competence. The following are the major theories related to reading and advocate the situational basis of language learning:

### **2.3 Linguistic Threshold and Interdependence Hypotheses.**

The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH hereafter) was proposed by Clarke (1979) initially as "short-circuit hypothesis", and is as of late more generally alluded to as the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (Bernhardt and Kamil, 1991). As indicated by LTH, L2 students should first pick up a specific measure of control over L2, or as it were, cross a basic linguistic threshold, before applying their L1 reading aptitudes to L2 reading.

The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH from this point forward) contends that L1 linguistic awareness and aptitudes that a child possesses play an instrumental part in the improvement of corresponding aptitude in L2, with the suggestion that L1 ought to be sufficiently created preceding the broad presentation to L2. Once an arrangement of linguistic operations, for example, reading and writing is gained, similar operations will be accessible as required inside L2 settings. Basically, as to reading comprehension, L1 reading aptitudes can be reflected in L2 reading process and substantially helps the learning process.

Both have limitations as they operate differently in adults and children. LIH doesn't address and elaborates on the mechanisms how L1 skills are transferred to L2 learning skills. Moreover it doesn't explain in detail the difference in academic or developmental differences between the learners or in other words the differences at the individual level (August, 2006). It also suggests that poor L1 reading skill is directly proportionate to L2 reading skill (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). However, this approach suggests that L1 reading instruction should be reinforced among the children than the adults (August, 2006), because most of the studies do support this claim were carried out on the children who were in the developmental stages of both L1 and L2 literacy skills (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). After reaching the L2 threshold, L1 reading skill is found to be transferred to L2 which accelerates the learning of reading skill. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence is nowhere found to exhibit the threshold mark of L2 (August, 2006). Moreover, it seems to be irrelevant for the learners with low L1 proficiency or inadequate L1 knowledge (August, 2006).

### **2.4 The Event-Indexing Situation Model.**

The Event-Indexing Situation Model (EISM hereafter) is a cognitive model of online narrative comprehension. Cognitive psychologists define narrative comprehension as a situation model which is a combination of information as explicitly demonstrated in the story and the same as inferred by the reader (see McNamara and Magliano (2009). Among the various models, the EISM suggests that we tend to disintegrate narrative into events or the major events which are important for the narrative piece (Zwaan et al., 1995a). This process focus on verb phrases while reading a text and the character actions while watching a film (Zacks et al., 2009). Each event is indexed by the reader as per the following dimensions: time index; space index; protagonist index; causal index; intention. Zwaan and Radvansky (1998) discuss the interplay between the EISM and memory in the context of Ericsson and Kintsch's (1995) conceptualization of Short-Term Working Memory (STWM) and Long-Term Working Memory (LTWM).





In this framework events are the elements for the integration process to happen and each event is indexed on five dimensions; *time, space, causation, motivation/intentionality, and protagonist*. The following four processes are involved in the formation of situational model: *construction* (a situation read about), *updating* (integration of all the information based on linguistic cues), and *retrieval* (integration of information from long term and short term memory), *foregrounding* (use of short term memory to access information from long term memory to create the complete model) (Randy, 2012)

### 2.5 Construction-Integration Model.

Kintsch (1988, 1998, 2004) proposed construction-integration model (CIM) to elaborate the role of background knowledge in inference making process. This proposes and explores all the levels of mental representations in order to build a situational model. In this process the comprehender requires background knowledge from the long term memory to the working memory to construct sense of the propositions available and build a situation model. Rai et al (2011) stressed that the second or foreign language learners frequently use the available resources to decode the surface and text-base levels. Mostly in such cases the comprehenders draw their cues from their first language that somewhere hinders the process because of the fewer inferences drawn. Such situational model formation is not only hindered by the current knowledge but also by the pre-existing world knowledge. Such knowledge is stored in the form of schemas.

The Construction-Integration Model is the foundation upon which a new cognitive architecture is being built. The Construction-Integration (CI) Model is an associative model of discourse comprehension where the comprehension process is intended to be highly automated, requiring little conscious control. In this model it is a two phase process. The first phase is that of a Construction phase. Here a crude mental representation of a text, in the form of an associative network, is constructed from both linguistic input and the comprehenders' own knowledge base in a simple, bottom-up, data driven manner. Since the mental representation is not refined at this stage, a second processing phase is necessary during which the associative network is fine tuned so that it becomes a coherent whole. This second phase is the Integration.

Relevant Models	Theoretical premise	Limitations
Linguistic Threshold and Interdependence Hypotheses	L1 learning skills are useful in L2 learning (LIH) After certain level of L1 reading aptitudes is achieved it can be reflected in L2 reading skills (LTH)	Doesn't explain the processes in children and adults
The Event-Indexing Situation Model	Integrated mental representation of a particular situation	It's a technique used in native texts but not in others
Construction Integration Model	Explain the importance background knowledge in inference making process	cues from their first language that somewhere hinders the process because of the fewer inferences drawn





It is quite clear from the above discussion that linguistic threshold and interdependence hypotheses provides a platform for the situational model to be implemented effectively in adults but there is no evidence of the same for school children with whom similar situation is expected at least at the high school level. The present study aims to explore all the possibilities wherein both high level as well as low level comprehenders are expected to be found in both private and public schools (as there is differences in their exposure to English language learning situations).

### 3. Literature review.

Teachers, knowingly or unknowingly, follow or use a theoretical model. In educational field, it refers to an explanation of well documented phenomenon related to teaching and/or learning. There are theories which explain motivation, learning, memory, intelligence and achievement, among other things. One theory addresses the difficulty in reading as a cognitive problem whereas other includes theories of motivation, language, behaviors and/or social differences address to the problem differently. So, the knowledge of theories is essential for optimal classroom instructions. When the teachers become aware of the theories from which their teaching practices spread out, their teaching skills are greatly benefitted. Likewise, when the teachers completely understand the theories from where they derive their instructional strategies, they can choose the best suited one for the learning situation, thus optimize their effectiveness of instructions. Though behaviorism dominated the educational system for 50 years and still has been playing a significant role in dealing with many learning difficulties, it ignores the genetic make-up or the cognitive bases of learning. Constructivists focused on the idea of marking the developmental factors while looking at the learning/reading difficulties. This requires long term training for the teachers that could not be feasible for the school budget to bear such trainings. Moreover, the teachers' have no room to customize the curriculum for each student. This approach eliminates standardized grading and testing which deviates from the established educational system, especially in Jordan. Later the focus of research was shifted to the external factors along with the cognitive bases of learning. Sociolinguistic Theory (Bernstein, 1972a, 1972b) and Socio-Cultural Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) proposed the dialectal, social, cultural, and historical factors to be accounted for dealing with the difficulties in language learning.

These approaches do suggest factors to be considered in addition to robust approach in a classroom setting but they can't be the sole method of content delivery. These can be suggestive measures for content development, improvising teaching style and designing supplementary learning aids. Most of the later theories such as Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997) focused on the other factors like learning takes place by observing the others as well. In monolingual countries where English is treated as foreign language and are not used in domains of normal life except the educational institutions where English is used as medium of instruction in specific disciplines only, it is practically impossible to use this perspective. The other factors like.

It can be observed that no single theory can capture the complexities of reading phenomenon. Perfetti (1985, 1987) proposed that reading comprehension is compromised when the decoding is poor. Decoding speed and reading comprehension correlate in child as well as





adult populace (Hess & Radtke, 1981; Jackson & McClelland, 1979). The ‘simple view of reading’ implies the interrelatedness of both the dimensions (decoding of printed words and linguistic comprehension). Thus, the ‘poor comprehenders’ will have difficulty either in decoding, linguistic comprehension or both. The simple model suggests that the poor comprehenders show linguistic comprehension deficits if they do not have decoding deficits. The relationship between reading and listening comprehension is close and as the children get older, the reading comprehension becomes more constrained by knowledge and understanding, rather than the basic word level decoding. In adult learners, reading and listening comprehension are strongly correlated (Bell & Perfetti, 1994).

The strong relationship between written and spoken language, evidences suggest that children with poor reading comprehension show poor listening comprehension as well. Proposed in 1980s, Communicative basis of language teaching is quite in vogue and dominates most of language curriculum in order to achieve language proficiency in a real life situation. This approach is quite successful for intermediate and advanced learners but not for beginners. It focuses on fluency but not accuracy.

There have been serious efforts by the discourse psychologists to understand how the readers construct ‘situation models’ i.e. mental models of what the text is about. For example, the situation model of a story would consist of characters performing in pursuit of their goals, events as hurdles in goal achievement, conflict between characters, emotional/social setting so on and so forth. There is a good number of literature supporting situation model construction and inference generation: The constructionist theory (Graesser, Singer, and Trabasso, 1994), the construction integration model (Kintsch 1998), the structure building framework (Gernsbacher 1997), the event indexing model (Zwaan, Langston, and Graesser 1995, Zwaan and Radvansky 1998), the resonance model (Myers and O’Brien 1998), the schema model (Graesser, Kessler 1998) etc. There is no consensus among the researchers in the field of psycholinguistics and discourses processing about the inferences readers make (Graesser, Singer & Trabasso 1994). The table below shows the most cited distinction of inferences:

**TABLE 1:** Distinctions between different types of inferences.

<b>Authors Identifying distinctions between types of inferences</b>		
McKoon and Ratcliff 1992	Automatic	Strategic
Graesser <i>et al.</i> 1994	On-line	Off-line
Graesser <i>et al.</i> 1994	Text-connecting	Knowledge-based
Graesser <i>et al.</i> 1994	Local	Global
Barnes <i>et al.</i> 1996; Calvo 2004	Coherence	Elaborative
Cain and Oakhill 1998	Text-connecting	Gap-filling
Bowyer-Crane and Snowling 2005	Coherence	Elaborative/knowledge-based
Cromley and Azevedo 2007	Anaphoric text-to-text	Background-to-text

Source: Kispal, A., 2008, *Effective teaching of inference skills for reading: Literature review*, viewed 20 December 2015, from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7918/1/DCSF-RR031.pdf>





After looking at all the categories it can be noticed that knowledge-based inferences operate over the general knowledge base of the comprehender thus use the long term memory representations. There are a number of models, tested and developed by the discourse psychologists in order to capture the processes comprehension takes place. Among them are the Structure-Building Framework (Gernbacher, 1990), the Collaborative Action-based Production System (CAPS) (Just and Carpenter, 1992), the Constructivists Model (Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994), the Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1998), the Event Indexing Model (Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998), the Landscape Model (Van den Broek, Virtue, Everson, Tzeng & Sung, 2002), and Embodiment Model (Glenbery & Graesser, 2008). Most of these models combine symbolic representations and statistical representations that suggest constraints at various levels.

Current models suggest that basic assumptions in discourse comprehension lets the readers generate two levels of the representations of the text: text base and situational model. The first one suggests the relationships among the words mentioned in the texts. In form of propositions and causal relations all the units contribute to the basic idea of the text. The second one is based on the information available in the text is greatly moderated by the world knowledge a reader has that helps in getting the intended meaning of the text. The readers finally construct a coherent understanding of the text; what the text is about. Now it's imperative that the representations cannot be occur without process – an important question that has engaged the researchers in the recent time in the field of research in reading. Kintsch and van Dijk (1978, 1998) explicated the fundamental assumption in the processing of information in memory that is common to all models which dominated the major researches in the last two decades. In this framework, the process is identified as a cyclic wherein the propositions are encoded and connected to other propositions in active memory based on the causal relations. A set of these preceding propositions prepares the background for the next cycle of input. Finally, all propositions contribute to the comprehensive discourse representations in the long term memory. This requires coherence among the information available in the text. This occur at two levels; local and global.

#### 4. Education in Jordan & Saudi Arabia.

According to 1964 Education Act of Jordan, the various sources that contributed to its nature were Jordan's historical advances (Islamic heritage, British and French influences and also the aspirations towards international standards and demand of modern world). Jordan's aspirations to be an active contributor to the international community, as a member of UN, compelled the country to adopt the changing needs of the world along with the preservation of their heritage. Article 4 of the 1964 Education Act proposed the development of basic skills in not only Arabic but also reading as a habit to increase knowledge. There was no focus as such was mention in foreign language education in the school as well as colleges (Salman, 1986). Salman (1986) identified that cramming by the students was the traditional learning method. There were no attempts made in the teaching methods to stimulate curiosity among the students to develop their creative and critical thinking, independence of learning or to take into account of their individual differences. This was the trend in the country for several decades, but this has changed in the recent years due to the exposure of professional training





of the teachers. An impressive change can be observed in the private schools and the private institutes but the major stakeholders in the rural areas are still devoid of significant changes in their teaching and learning styles.

In the 1980s, in order to address the structural problems in the workforce, Jordan implemented a lot of changes in the existing system. The country faced higher rates of unemployment among the youth, especially in the professions of engineering, teaching, medicine and skilled technical labor force. In 1987 the government introduced career guidance program in the secondary schools that could assess the status of unemployment in the country. UNESCO world data 2014 reported that Jordan's national education aims primarily at the inculcation of Islamic values, principles in the character and behavior of students. But the reported studies have proposed that the system has failed to meet the demand and expectations of the desired goals of modern education. Observers believe that the students trained in the Western and European students, either financed by their families or the Government of Jordan, tend to obtain prestigious positions on their return home. These students are found to be more eligible and competitive in the job market.

#### **4.1 Teaching of reading in ESL in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.**

Like reading in one's native language, reading in a foreign language helps us become more comfortable with the words and grammatical rules that enable us to express our own thoughts. Seeing the text of new words and concepts visually helps to reinforce our memory of them, while having the ability to stop, think, or look up words in a dictionary allows for more individualized pace of mental absorption. Language is a cognitive process by which we communicate our thoughts and feelings to others. Reading, writing, speaking and listening play crucial roles, and all four are interrelated and affect one another. There is a fundamental and reciprocal relationship among oral language (listening and speaking), written language, and reading. Initially, reading and writing are dependent on oral language skills. Eventually, reading and writing extend oral language. Young children use oral language skills to learn how to read. Older children use reading to broaden their learning.

Al-Qatawneh (2005) established that Jordanian EFL learners encounter severe difficulties in understanding facts and details expressed or implied in an English setting; they are incapable of apprehending the main ideas of given texts; and they could not replicate upon the author's purpose of writing. Alkhawaldeh (2011) explored the reading comprehension interests of 500 second secondary class students in English at Amman 2<sup>nd</sup> Directorate of Education. The results of his study showed that students were mostly concerned in assembling vocabulary items, while reading comprehension process takes place, in order to use them in speaking and writing. However, practices in Jordanian schools showed that most students' reading abilities are not good enough. For students, much of the reading will be to learn assigned material or accomplish school assignment. All students get information from materials they read and yet many of them do not read everything for the same reason or in the same way or at the same rate (Al Debes, 2005). Many researchers have been interested in doing research to investigate appropriate reading strategies to help students who have better understanding when they read in Jordan. Even then none of the studies tried situational model in enhancing reading skills among the learners. Inference making skills in L1 has an implication in L2





learning as well which would be an area of much interest for the stakeholder to assess how the learners construct models in understanding a text.

The English language curriculum of Jordan focuses on the development of the four language skills where the reading skill receives a clear and significant interest. Reading comprehension is sequentially represented in the various units of the curriculum. It is a regular practice that students take the reading comprehension first and then move on for further sections related to vocabulary, grammar and writing. This is commonly followed in secondary as well as the senior secondary EFL syllabi. Though the curriculum seeks to address learners reading skill enhancement in public schools, the real performance of the students in the final tests is very poor.

Jordan Ministry of Education (2002) observed the role of English education as an integral part of educational and economic development of Jordan. Therefore, in 1999, royal decree stressed on the teaching of English language right from the first grade in all public and private schools. Many international organizations have paid a great attention to understand the low achievement of school students such as, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Program for International Students Assessment (PISA). Reports of Mullis, Martin, Foy, and Arora (2012) reported that Jordanian students scored lower than the international students in reading, science and mathematics (PISA, 2012).

The recent results of the high school examination in English have showed that only 18% of the total test takers have passed in Arts where the result was just 15% in 2014. Ministry of Education evaluated the basic language skills in Arabic and English among the first to third graders. The results were shocking that 22% students were not even able to read in Arabic and English. Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) ranks Middle East and North African students' skills in English Language lower than 70 countries around the globe. As per the 2014 report, English proficiency level has been dropped by 2.66 points. IELTS 2013 - 14 test scores also present a very grim picture. Pearson's report (2013) on Business English Index shows that professionals in the Middle East companies poor business English competency (3.5 out of 10 points). In the current scenario, it is observed that the poor level of English proficiency leads to college drop outs in Jordan and low level of academic achievement in their formal education. IELTS test scores show that reading and listening skills are not improved but there is a significant increase in the number of private as well as public schools in Jordan over the last five years. It is quite obvious that the pedagogical modifications are required in order to achieve the desired goals.

Comprehension is a composite process that starts with distinguishing the words by utilizing information outside the content, getting to word significance in setting, perceiving linguistic structures, drawing inductions, and self-checking to guarantee the content is well. When the text implies several meanings for a word in a sentence, the cerebrum needs to choose the one that fits well in the setting or context. How this happens is the subject of much research. The 'simple view of reading' identifies two dimensions to reading: word recognition and language comprehension (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading but it cannot be achieved unless recognition of the words is not carried out well. Since reading comprehension is an interactive process that involves a reader and a text, individual





readers bring in their variable skills and experiences to the interaction. These include their language skills, cognitive resources and world knowledge (Primary National Strategy, 2006). The socio-cultural and emotional context (child's home culture, previous experiences etc.) also play a significant role in this process. All the models related to comprehension expects the reader to have a mental representation of the text, which implies the integration of lexical features and the knowledge of the events to extract exact meaning conveyed in the text. (Garnham, 2001; Gernsbacher, 1990; Kintsch, 1998). Since the nature of reading comprehension is so complex that some individuals show difficulties in this area. Such difficulties can be observed in both developmental (e.g., Nation & Snowling, 1997; Oakhill, 1994) and college-level populaces (Gernbacher & Faust, 1991; Long, Seely, & Oppy, 1999). Even in the clinical disorder cases also reading difficulties have been observed. Thus, there is no dearth of evidences to prove reading difficulties among the normal and special cases. English language teaching/learning process involves the trainers/teachers and students/learners. Rixon (2013) submitted report on policy and practices of English education in primary schools worldwide, suggests that in Jordan, university graduates in English language & literature are hired as teachers in schools without having any formal training in language teaching as such. Most of the empirical/experimental studies focus on the improvement of reading skills of the students, but very few focus on the sources from where such activities are regulated or moderated in a teaching/learning process. Moreover there is a dearth of studies which focus on the teachers' perception, their aptitude and their awareness of the desired models of teaching reading comprehension which subsequently impact the learners' reading skills.

#### **4.2 Reading Comprehension among the High School students.**

Rothman and Holloran (2013) proposed that a Common Core State Standards (CCSS), either by the individual state or at the national level is required to improve the instruction quality in reading comprehension (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGAC] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). This has been a challenge in most of the schools in the USA. Recent studies (Alzubaidi, 2014; Malkawi, 2014; Jordanian Teachers' Syndicate, 2015) pointed out inadequacies in the teaching and learning practices in Jordan. Alzubaidi (2014) found that students, especially in Jordan, are exposed to mere explanations of English language structures and word meanings in L2 contexts without effective teaching strategies and clear instructions. This is not surprising as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2008) also observed in its initiative named *Discovery Schools* that the general nature of teaching practice was still teacher-centric, even after using technology in delivery of the content. Many other studies suggest that the L2 learners from economically disadvantaged sector or the students exposed to teacher-centric approach, struggle to develop their reading comprehension skills (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). There is a substantial body of research work conducted in the area of reading comprehension in both schools and tertiary education in the English-speaking countries but it's quite rare in non English speaking countries. Most of the recent studies are concerned with the motivational and other factors like effectiveness of various interventions programs on reading comprehension (Chen, Shih-Jay & Chu, 2014), but there are just a few studies conducted on





the meta-cognitive processes involved in the reading comprehension in Arab world, especially in Jordan.

In Arab world, reading has always been treated as an isolated skill which is less explored in terms of its relationship with other factors. There is a complete lack of coherence in the intervention programs for developing reading comprehension among the school students in Arab countries (Al Qataweh, 2007). For example, the students in Saudi Arabia don't know where to focus, speaking or reading and writing skills, when they get into preparatory year students after their schooling as expected outcomes of the school teaching is never found to be met among the students; though there are various factors responsible for this situation (Dhahir, 2016). The situation is quite alarming in the developed nations as well. Over 60% 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the U.S. fail to demonstrate reading proficiency on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2015). Heppt, Haag, Bohme and Stanat (2015) found that students from low income families appear to find multi-syllabic and compound words as the most disrupting factor in text comprehension.

#### **4.3 Status of English Education in Jordan & Saudi Arabia.**

The Ministry of Education, 2014 reported a significant increase in the number of schools and the registered students. Grades 1-10 are called as basic education stage which is imparted free of cost to all the registered students. The scores of 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> are calculated to determine the track of students for academic or vocational course in the later stages. The academic stream specifies the further advancement of the students in academic and research areas whereas vocational stream comprises of the professional courses which prepare the students for skilled jobs to create the manpower for the country as well as to enable them to work as qualified and skilled professionals abroad and in the neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar etc. Though the students mark their choices in their application forms but the final decision is made by the ministry as per their cumulative scores in all the three years.

For last four decades English Education in Jordan has been given a lot of importance along with Arabic. Yet, the level of English language proficiency demonstrated that the K-12 schools have deteriorated significantly. The results of high school examinations in English language have shown that only 18% passed in the Arts stream (Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, 2015b), which was reported to be just 15% in the same stream in 2014 (ibid). A similar trend was observed in the national level evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education, Jordan, of language skills in both Arabic and English of first, second and third graders. The results were very discouraging as only 22% students found to be able to read in both the languages and rest of the students found below the expected level in their language proficiencies.

The result of such study gets further validation when the International organisations like Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2014) have also supported the deteriorating trend of English education in Jordan (Alhabahba, 2016). Data of Test takers in 2012, 2013, & 2014 shows that none of average score in all the four language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) is anywhere close to the minimum expected score i.e. 6.5. Overall average score in all the three years was found to be 5.8 which is much lower than the expected level required for academic programmes or jobs as such i.e. 6.5. Jordan Times





(2015) reported that only 29.6% passed their academic stream in 2014 which is significantly lower than 57% in 2010. This dropout has not only worried the educators but also the quality of English learning. It also raises the gaps of various issues regarding the instructional strategies. Pearson English on Global Business English Index report (2011) also suggested that employees across Middle East companies ranked the lowest average (3.5 out of 10) in terms of business English competency. Bailey and Damerow (2014) appealed the educators to help the learners approach effective English learning in order to address this alarming situation and meet the desired needs. Freaht & Al Faoury (2015) raised the issue of unsatisfactory English Language learning among the school students which further culminates in major academic as well as professional failures among the students.

The World Bank report on the educational reform stated that Jordan is one of the countries to take the challenging task of introducing educational reform in the area of critical thinking, research and group learning. Based on the issues related to the language learning curricula, it was also realized that the other stakeholders, i.e. the teachers who are supposed to implement these changes are also required to be able to meet the challenges. Therefore, pre- and in-service teachers were recommended to be trained to meet the desired results as the qualifying examination held by the Ministry of Education for entry level teachers' jobs was very disappointing. Only 24.9% of the total graduate with English major applicants qualified the test (Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, 2015a). Subsequently, this has severe impact on the students enrolled in higher education. Teachers lack trainings and in the absence of national guidelines, competent teachers leave their jobs in order to avail better financial returns in the neighboring countries (Al Khatib 2008).

#### **4.4. Scope of English Education in Jordan & Saudi Arabia.**

Malkawi (2014) asserted that the low performance of school students in IELTS (2013-2014) and PISA (2012) was due to not only the pedagogical issues but also the teachers' aptitude. He further demanded for the role of teachers should not be limited to the classrooms, but they should also be partnered in the policy making. Rather looking at them as followers only, they need to be included as key policy makers because they are the real components who play the most significant part in teaching-learning process. They are the ones who mediate between the content and the learners. USAID (2008) reported that the teaching practice in most of the schools was teacher-centered whereas teachers were always considered as receivers of instructions rather than the key players in policy making job which de-motivated to play an active role in the classrooms. It proposed that in Arab context, context-specific programmes, inquiry based curricula need to be followed to expect the desired results.

Hamdan & Hatab (2009) observed that English language was a growing demand in the job market of not only Jordan but the whole world that has resulted in various perspectives to the English language education. It has not only created issues for the students but also the educational practices to meet the students' short-term as well as long-term requirements. It has created new demands for corporate or private as well as public sector jobs markets except the growing demand to learn this as a carrier of mobility in this shrinking world space. In the last two decades, many non- governmental organizations and big international corporate houses have entered Jordan job market which has increased the demand of English language





as being the sole language of communication. British Council (2015) has reported that there is a sudden increase in private schools' enrolment (8% in 2015 which was just 6% in 2008). The private schools are increasing at average 6% annually which is more than double than the public schools. There is a growing trend of students moving abroad for their higher education which requires the Arab students to have respectable score in standardized English language tests.

The major concerns British council (2015) indicated that teachers in Jordanian schools miss required skills, strategies and national guidelines on language teaching which may affect the learners' achievements. The belief to cover the book or to focus only to finish the content of the book has been a common belief among the teachers in the Arab world, which has really affected the English language teaching. However, this has led the students also to become exam oriented (Brombacher, Collins, Cummiskey, KochetKova, & mulcahy-Dunn, 2012). Emam (2014) emphasised that the text-driven instructions need immediate attention and accountable, effective learning reform is to be implemented in the teaching-learning process.

### **5. Reading as an essential element in EFL context.**

Reading habit is a pattern of study which has been realized by the students as important in order to attain understanding of the subjects as well as passing at examinations. Academic achievements mean how much the student has clarity of the concepts or the content studies at schools (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012). Palani (2012) said that educational success requires successful reading habit. Reading means identifying symbols and association of meaning among them and comprehension of it as a whole in a certain context. In comprehension a learner is required to know the meaning of symbols in context and in isolation. Reading was very much in vogue and used to be the integral part of educational system but now due to the advent of technology, it has taken a back seat for all (Bhan & Gupta, 2010; Singh, 2011). Parker (2014) reported that Stanford research had found high-quality English instruction improves significantly students' performances in other subjects. The researchers found that students of good language arts teachers scored higher than the students of good maths teachers. This study was carried out on the performances of 700,000 students in the New York City over a period of 8 years. Global Education Monitoring report (2016) voiced the same tone in its policy paper (24) how come the students learn if they don't understand.

This is exactly the situation is among the Jordanian students when they embark on their career path in higher education. When the background is not created well and they are not made prepared for the later advancement in their subjects wherein they get exposed fully to English as a medium of instruction, they fail to perform as expected. Curtain & Dahlberg (2004) found that teaching foreign language reinforces English Language content of other coursework. A study of Louisiana public schools revealed that children taking foreign language lessons did better in the English of Basic Skill Test than the ones who didn't (Dumas, 1999). Strong evidences support that foreign language learners outperform in the other core subjects on standardized tests (Armstrong & Rogers 1997; Saunders 1998; Masciantonio 1977; Rafferty 1986; Andrade 1989; Kretschmer & Kretschmer 1989). Language and reality are dynamically knotted and critical reading of a text helps in inferring the relationship between the text and the context. Reading shouldn't be mere an exercise, aimed at making the learners aware of





the presence of a text in front of them, scanned and spelled out mechanically. Rather it should be reading in a true sense where the learners connect the real world through the word-world. Learners should never be reduced to the grammatical rules and occurrence of prepositions after some verbs. On the contrary, it should raise curiosity among the learners to discover the dynamic life within the text and find out the fundamental significance governing the text. Studies conducted in various countries reveal that reading with comprehension is a problematic task for the learners (Porter 2010; Wessels 2007). Pretorious (2002) found ineffective reading strategies caused high failure rate in senior secondary school examination in South Africa. Such studies suggest that difficulty in understanding the examination question papers end up making wrong choices or unable to follow the complete instructions led to incorrect answers (Madikiza 2011; Cekiso et al, 2014). Cognitive approach sparked research in the area of attention, memory and has also deeper impact in the field of reading. The whole-language approach which was very popular in the United states in the 1908s and 1990s proposed that the children should be exposed to good literature and they should be encouraged to focus on the meaning rather than individual words. Several influential reports (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2000) reviewed the research on early reading and reading instruction and proposed that systematic phonics instruction helps the children so this should be included as an essential part of reading curriculum. Though the rules and its order and the exceptions found to be explored more into details but the children at the later stages should be exposed to extensive and intensive tasks of reading as this would further significantly boost their writing skills and improve their other language skills as well.

### **5.1 Reading in the context of Jordan & Saudi Arabia.**

Quality of education delivered at the school level defines the learners' further professional development (Hafen et al, 2014; Yashikawa & Kabay, 2015). The expenditures on scientific and vocational training courses for the professionals in the field of teaching by the Ministry of Education from 2012 through 2014 were .27% - .24% of the total budget (Ministry of Education, 2014). Reading has been acknowledged as one of the major challenges faced by the EFL learners in the Arab World. Asassfeh (2015) reported that the teachers involved in the teaching reading skills lack clear instructional strategies and appropriate materials. Teaching of this skill is mostly grammar based and instructions are teacher-centric wherein the learners play a passive role. Freahat and Al-Foury (2015) in his study found that there was a gap between reading lessons between high school (11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>) and university text books. High schools reaching activities were found to focus more on skimming, pre-reading activation and locating ideas whereas the university text books focused on identifying main ideas, writing and scanning. This has caused school students to develop negative attitudes towards learning English and unable to prepare them for the demanding university curriculum. Prior learning experience is considered to be very effective in acquiring new knowledge (Maier & Richter, 2014). Alhabahba (2016) rightly pointed out that immediate attention is required to upgrade the quality and appropriate standard of reading texts as well as the teachers' aptitude to deliver the desired outcome of the content. He further emphasized on the need of further research in reading, which is seriously lacking so as to guide the teachers to deliver the most effective methods and strategies to teach reading skills. Smadi (2013) questioned the current practices





of English language teaching in Jordanian schools. Not only this, it has become a lucrative business so as to cash people's anxiety and aspirations to learn English well to excel in their further academic as well as professional lives.

## 6. Conclusion.

According to the USA National Reading Panel's (2000) report advocates the five strategies (prediction, questioning, clarifying, imagining and summarization) to ensure good reading comprehension. These skills integrate both the linguistic skills and cognitive resources. The future studies would seek to see the role of elaborative inferences which incorporate the five specified five strategies to ensure good reading comprehension skill among the high school students in Jordan as well as Saudi Arabia. The broader analysis encourages exploring what would be the nature of inferences generation among the Arab learners in ELL context and what are the culture specific issue related to it. It would also be interesting to explore to what extent Arabic speaking ELL students' L2 proficiency a factor is contributing to their ability to make appropriate inferences. Can engaging ELL students in actively explaining target situation models (e.g., why and how a certain event occurred in the text as well as what the event caused) compensate for lack of linguistic competence in the L2 for Arab learners? This could of much interest in finding how much effective is it in meeting the desired objectives? Thus, the present review suggest to explore how effective is "situation model" in enhancing reading comprehension and how does it respond to teacher-student interactive context in the ESL teaching in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

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