Dr. Abbas Deygan Darweesh
University Babylon/College of Education

١. Introduction

Reading is one of the four skills of English as a foreign language. Comprehension is the essence and the most important objective of teaching reading. English courses are selected mainly to suit the students' needs and levels in order to improve their ability in reading comprehension. In spite of the educational and functional support, there is an observable weakness in the reading comprehension skills on the part of the students who have studied English courses for at least eight years. Moreover, they are also exposed to another series of English courses, which generally aim at improving the students' ability of reading comprehension, but still they are poor readers and poor comprehenders The present study aims to investigate the effect of teaching the English course (١٠١) on improving the students' reading comprehension skills at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. It is hypothesized that There are no statistically significant differences in the reading comprehension skills, which may be attributed to teaching of the English course (١٠١), There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to university academic major(scientific and literary majors), There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to gender(males and females), There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to academic level(first and second year), There are no statistically significant differences in the students' achievement in reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to interaction among the three independent variables(major, gender and academic level).

٢. Review of Related Literature

Axiomatically, the purpose of reading is comprehension. The teachers of English must teach students how to comprehend difficult and varied texts. Efficient teachers should be competent and have clear minds and purpose to perform and fulfill the

objectives that help their students in building up a reading comprehension competency. To illustrate the purpose of reading, Martin (١٩٩١) shows that reading means connecting the ideas on the page to what you already know; and if you do not know any thing about a subject, then pouring words of a text in your mind is like pouring water into your hand. He adds that, reading comprehension requires motivation, mental frame, words for holding ideas, concentration and good study techniques. In the same area of interest, Al-Makhzoomy (١٩٨٦) conducted a study in Irbid Governorate to investigate the techniques used to enhance reading comprehension of secondary stage students. He found that the techniques used by secondary school teachers concentrate on teaching the meaning of words and the accuracy of pronunciation. Word knowledge has particular importance in literature societies. It contributes significantly to better achievement in the subjects of the school curriculum, as well as in formal and informal speaking and writing. Most people feel that there is a common sense relationship between vocabulary and comprehension. Messages are composed of ideas, and ideas are expressed in words. (Baker:١٩٩٥, Nage:١٩٨٨Regarding the ability of guessing the meaning of words, Thuss(١٩٩٩) argues that though readers have a wide and flexible vocabulary, they will encounter words which they do not know their meanings; this means that they should be able to guess the meaning of some words. Nuttall (١٩٨٧:٤) adds that the way we deal with a reading task is highly affected by our purpose in reading. She declares that the quick scanning of a page in the telephone directory to find a single name is different from careful attention we pay to each word in a legal document. Durkin (١٩٨٦) also says that a written text is a blueprint to which readers add the details. Comprehending requires constructing meaning. This can be accomplished by using the direct and indirect meanings of an author's words, plus what the reader knows. In addition, comprehension is an interactive process in which the reader's knowledge of the world interacts with the message conveyed directly and indirectly by the text. The

result is a fully developed communication between the author and the reader.

Hoge (١٩٨٦) shows that effective teaching and learning depend upon clarity of objectives. Accordingly, the first step in helping students overcome textbook reading problems is for teachers to determine what they want students to learn from a certain paragraph, page or a section of a textbook. A helpful procedure is to review the students' edition of the textbook before reading the teacher's guide. This helps a teacher to see the book as student sees it, and puts the teacher, not the guide book, in charge of what will be learned from the lesson. Stahl et al (١٩٩١) recommended that the learning specialist should view his/her mission as one of assisting students to become successful and independent learners. One key to moving beyond the basic skills approach to college reading instruction lies in their adopting an academic orientation as " Learning specialist " rather tan as " a remedial / developmental reading specialist ". They also state that one of the primary goals of the college learning specialist is to lead students to become self - motivated and self – directed users and later designers of efficient and effective strategies and tactics of learning.

According to Loxterman, Beck, and Mckeown (١٩٩٤), a strategy is an individual's approach to a task, including how a student thinks and acts when planning, executing, and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes. They declare that in recent years, reading researchers, in conjunction with cognitive theories, have come to believe that reading comprehension is influenced by understanding how readers construct a representation of incoming information. Thus, researchers have designed metacognitive inventions that help develop processing strategies to promote a student's active and thoughtful engagement with text material. To sum up, most researchers believe that it is very important for both, teachers and students, to determine a purpose behind the process of reading to achieve high comprehension level of the reading material and selecting reading materials depends on the students' need and adequacy. For teachers, it is helpful to state plans, strategies and goals before starting the reading process which help in monitoring the students' achievement and performance. Researchers also believe not only the teaching methods, the students' level and the teachers' adequacy are the causes behind the comprehension failure, but

the instructional material itself may or not play a role in improving the students' reading comprehension.

٣. Methodology

This study attempts to investigate the effect of teaching the English course (١٠١) on improving the students' reading comprehension abilities. The English course (١٠١) is a multi – skill course for upper- intermediate ESL/EFL students. It gives special emphasis at the university level vocabulary development, grammar revision and extension, pronunciation, writing, and reading skills development. Reading is considered an important goal in foreign language learning. Therefore, great care and attention should be given to the teaching of this skill. This care must be focused preliminary on the type of text. Most of the reading passages in the book are authentic and unsimplified. Texts have been chosen for their general interest and generative nature where students will feel motivated to read them.According to the university regulations, the students have to study this course in the first two years of their study. Therefore, there are two academic levels: Students who pass successfully thirty credit hours or less are considered as the First Level/١st year, and those who pass between thirty and sixty credit hours as second level/٢nd year. The population considered of students of three colleges – namely, the college of science, arts, and educational sciences.The aim of a text – based approach is to expose students to a wide range of language varieties, and to develop confidence by systematically giving practice in the main targeted sub – skills. To this end, students are asked to do tasks before they read in order to motivate them and to give them a purpose for reading. This may include the gist, specific details, and interpretation. Such "before reading tasks" may include prediction exercises, writing, questions they would like to answer, or simply discussion of the topic. The sequence of reading activities goes from global to intensive, and can be done in pairs or groups. Instructors o not have to use all the activities. They have the choice to select the activities they feel will be appropriate for their students. The activities that may motivate students and encourage the reading

habit must be applied and emphasized. According to Gower and Bell, there is no specific method for the teaching of reading which is appropriate for all students at all ages. Students vary in their response to different methods. Therefore, it is recommended that a combination of methods and/or the communicative approach can be use to maximize reading comprehension development. Yet the English course (١٠١) is mainly taught in terms of the communicative approach, and according to this approach, language is considered as a system of notions and functions. It emphasizes the importance of the student's ability to express meaning and convey messages in meaningful situation.

As mentioned above, the main aim of this course is to improve the students' reading skills which help to develop the order three skills: listening, speaking and writing. Thus, in order to fulfill the general aim of reading, there are a number of sub – skills that at the end of this course, students have to master. They are as follows:-

١- Extracting the general meaning or the gist of a reading passage by skimming through a text.

٢-Extracting specific information from a printed text by scanning it to find answers for specific questions.

٣- Inferring meaning of new vocabulary from context.

٤- Extracting the main and supporting ideas in a reading text.

٥- Inferring the meaning of a text by using contextual and grammatical clues.

٦- Inferring the attitude of the writer and reacting to it.

٧- Distinguishing between the different text types, i.e., descriptive, argumentative, narrative and expository.

٨- Expressing opinions about threading material either verbally or in writing.

٩- Using an English – English dictionary to look up the meaning of a word.

١٠- Eliciting some information by asking appropriate questions that are relevant to a certain event or occasion.

١١-Reading critically and developing an appreciation of function and style.

١٢-Identifying the main idea(s) and recognizing the relationship between the main idea and its expansion.

In this course students should be trained to distinguish between types of reading based on their purpose, e.g. skimming for the main idea, scanning for a particular piece of information, or reading for detailed comprehension. They should be able to adjust their reading speed and strategies in order to suit their purpose. They should also be encouraged to guess, to solve ambiguity, to link ideas, to ignore unknown words, to resist focusing attention on isolated words, to stop and think, and to re-read and paraphrase. For the purpose of the present study, the researcher adopted the following reading comprehension skills:

١- Extracting the main idea(s).

٢- Guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words.

٣- Recognizing the writer's opinion or attitude.

٤- Answering related comprehension questions.

٥- Identifying the function of the textual linkers.

٦- Recognizing how the ideas are linked together.

٧- Following a sequence, e.g., events, instructions.

٨- Identifying the relation between the sentences and the text.

٩- Summarizing the main ideas.

It is worth mentioning that the researcher has focused on the above sub – skills because they have been allotted much interest in teaching this course.

٤- The Results

Regarding the results of this study, the null hypotheses of the study are:

١- There are no statistically significant differences in the reading

comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) in the students' pre and post achievements, which may be attributed to teaching of the English course (١٠١).

٢- There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to university academic major(scientific and literary majors).

٣- There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to gender (males and females).

٤- There are no statistically significant differences in the students' reading comprehension skills (٠,٠٥) on the post-test, which may be attributed to academic level (first and second year).

٥- There are no statistically significant differences in the students' achievement in reading comprehension skills, which may be attributed to interaction among the three independent variables (major, gender and academic level).

In order to investigate these hypotheses, the students were divided into eight groups. A pre-test was applied to all groups at the beginning of the summer session to find the students' level in reading comprehension before teaching English (١٠١).

After teaching this course, the same test was applied as a pot-test at the end of the session.To investigate the first hypothesis, a correlative samples t-test was used. The mean score of the post-test was (٤٧,٦٤), whereas, the mean score of the pre-test was (٣٧,٥٥). There was a statistically significant difference between the students' achievement in favour of the post-test. This was mainly attributed to the teaching of English (١٠١).The first null hypothesis was rejected at (٠,٠٥).To investigate the second

hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was used.

The mean score of the scientific majors was (٥٥,١١), whereas, the mean score of the literary majors was (٤١,٢٩). There was a statistically significant difference between the students' achievement in favour of the scientific majors. The second null hypothesis was rejected at (٠,٠٥).

To investigate the third hypothesis, independent samples t-test was used.

The mean score of the second academic level was (٥٣,٢٧), whereas, the mean score of the first academic level was (٤٦,١). There was a statistically significant difference between the students' achievement in favour of the second level. The third null hypothesis was rejected at (٠,٠٥).

To investigate the fourth hypothesis, independent samples t-test was used.

The mean score of male students was (٥٢,٢), whereas, the mean score of female students was (٤٥,٤٧). There was a statistically significant difference between the students' achievement in favour of male students. The fourth null hypothesis was rejected at (٠,٠٥).

The null hypothesis dealt with the interaction among the major, academic level, and gender on the students' reading comprehension achievement on the post-test. A univariate analysis of variance was used.

This hypothesis was not rejected at (٠,٠٥). So there was no interaction between the independent variables. To find out which skill was improved and which one decreased, the mean percentages and standard deviations were calculated for both pre and post-tests for each skill, as shown in the following table.

Table (١)

Skill, Mean Percentages and Standard Deviations on Both the Pre and Post Tests

Sub-Skill	Pre-test%	std	Post-test%	std

Skill ١	٤١,٢٩	٦,٥٧	٥٣,٥	٨,٩
Skill ٢	٣٤,٥	٦,٤	٤٣,٦	٩,٢٧
Skill ٣	٣٠,٢٧	٣,٠٩	٥٠,٧	٦,٨
Skill ٤	٥٠,٨٦	٩,٦٦	٤٨,٠	٩,٦
Skill ٥	٣٣,٠	٩,٢٩	٤٨,٣٥	٤,١
Skill ٦	٣٠,٣٦	٥,٩	٤٩,٤	٤,٩
Skill ٧	٣٨,٧٦	١٢	٥١,٨	٧
Skill ٨	٤٤,٣	١٠,٨	٤٨,٠	٨,٩
Skill ٩	٣٥,٩٧	٥,٩	٣٤,٥	١٠,٤
Average	٣٧,٧	٧,٧	٤٧,٥	٧,٧

Table (١) shows that seven out of nine skills improved differently. The other two skills decreased. The improved skills ranged regressively from higher to lower in the following sequence: skill (٣) was the first to improve, followed by sub-skills (٦), (٥), (٧), (١), (٢) and (٨). The other two skills that decreased were skill (٤) and (٩)

٥- Discussion of the Results

١- The results of the pre and post tests had been statistically analyzed using t-test. The analysis demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference (T=٨,٨٨) between the mean score of the students' achievement on the pre-test (٣٧,٥٥) and the mean score of the students' achievement on the post-test (٤٧,٤٦). The high mean score on the post-test was likely to be attributed to the factor of teaching English (١٠١).

The idea this study highlights is that employing different teaching strategies in the teaching environments will almostly enhance students' achievement in different

ways. A similar attitude is adopted by Johnson (١٩٨٢), Birkmire (١٩٨٥), Holmes (١٩٨٥), Barnett (١٩٨٨), and Dhaif (١٩٩٠). This study postulates that the underlying students' weakness in comprehension skills was due to many reasons. The results of this study agree with the outcomes of some similar studies like Costa et al (١٩٩١), Ross and Francine (٢٠٠٢), and Nassaji (٢٠٠٣).

٢- The researcher has realized that in order to improve students' comprehension skills, all the students' capabilities and aptitudes should be invoked. Moreover, determining the purpose of reading would facilitate the reading process, especially when the English (١٠١) is advisable to be taught by following different strategies which subsume stimulating the students' potential knowledge, and informing the students about the purpose of reading.

٣- The statistical analysis of the pre and post tests shows that the result could be classified into four categories:

I- ***Results related to major.*** Scientific stream graduates achieved better than graduates of literary stream. This difference could be attributed to the fact that students of a scientific background realize that the English language is crucial to their future study, because most of their syllabus will be totally written or taught in English. Meanwhile, students with a literary background generally do not have such motivation, since most of their future study is likely to be conducted in Arabic.

II- ***Results related to gender.*** Male students' achievement was better than females'. The largest group among the testees was proportioned by the first year female literary students whose achievement was very poor in comparison with other groups' achievement. This could have been a cause due to the whole achievement of the female students being lower than that of the male students.

III- ***Results related to academic level.*** It was found that the second year students show better competence than the first year students. That is, these non-English courses had tangible bearing on the second year students' disposition towards the English

language. This means that second year students took non-English courses including for example: geography, psychology, history . . . etc. Moreover, the instructors of some of these non-English courses sometimes asked their students to practice translation exercises; a point which could unconsciously enrich the students' competence in the foreign language. The three independent variables around which this study was centered were discovered to be not inter-related, as far as the achievement of the students was concerned.

IV- ***Results related to skills.*** Some skills have been improved, other retreated. Seven out of nine skills were enhanced after the pre-test. The first skill to develop is (Recognizing the writer's opinion or attitude). The second came the kill of (Recognizing how the ideas are linked together). Third, was the skill of (Identifying the function of the textual linkers). Fourth, came the skill of (Following a sequence, e.g. events, instructions). (Extracting the main ideas) was ranked as the fifth skill. The skill that came sixth was that of (Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words). The seventh skill was that of (Identifying the relation between sentences and the text). The eighth was the skill of (Answering related comprehension questions). Finally, (summarizing the main ideas) came to be the ninth skill. It is worth noting that the eighth and the ninth skills were the two skills that retreated. The researcher thinks that the development of some skills was due to the fact that the instructors paid much more attention to those developing skills at the expense of the receding ones.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Al Makhzoomy, K. (١٩٨٦) " Teaching Reading Comprehension to Secondary Students in Jordan. Suggestions for improvemrnt", Dirasat vol. XLL, No. ٦. University of Jordan, pp١٢-١٥.

Thuss, Arnoud (١٩٩٩) htt://www.hio. ft.hanze.nl/thar/reading . htm.

Baker, Scott K. (١٩٩٥) " Vocabulary Acquisition: Curricuar and Instruction Implications for Diverse Learners" Technical Report No. ١٤ Eugene, OR: *National Center Improve the Tools of Educators*. (ED٣٨٦٨٦١).

Barnett, M. (١٩٨٨). " Teaching Reading Strategies: How Methodology Affects Course Articulation." *Foreign Language Annual*. Vol.١,

April pp. ١٠٩-١١٥.

Birkmire, D. (١٩٨٥). " Text Processing: The Influence f Text Structure, Background Knowledge, and Purpose". *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. xx/٣, pp. ٣١٤-٣٢٦.

Costa,٠Melynda-Blaylock;Skeen,Janice-C. (١٩٩٩). "Increasing Reading Comprehension in the Middle School". *Masters Action Research Project*. Saint Xavier University and IRI/skylight.

Dhaif, H. (١٩٩٠). Reading Aloud for Comprehension: A Neglected Teaching Aid. Reading in a Foreign Language, vol. ٧(١), pp.٤٥٧-٤٦٤.

Durkin, Dolores. (١٩٨٦). "Reading Methodology Textbooks: Are they Helping Teachers Teach Comprehension?" *Reading Teacher*, vol. ٣٩, January pp. ٤١٠-٤١٧.

Gower, Roger; Bell. Jan. (١٩٩٢). *Upper Intermediate Matters*. Longman Group Limited, England.

Hoge. John, D. (١٩٨٦). *Improving the Use of Elementary Social Studies Textbooks.* Eric Digest No. ٣٣. ED٢٧٤٥٨٢.

Holmes, B. (١٩٨٥). " The Effect of Four Different Modes of Reading on Comprehension." Reading Research Quarterly. Vol. XX/٥,pp. ٥٧٥-٥٨٥.

Johnson, P. (١٩٨٢). "Effects on Reading Comprehension of Building Background Knowledge." TESOL Quarterly, vol.١٦,no.٤.pp.٥٠٣-٥١٥.

Loxterman, J.A, Beck, I. L. and Mckeown, M. G.(١٩٩٤) "The Effects of Thinking Aloud During Reading on Students' Comprehension of More or Less Coherent Text". *Reading Research Quarterly*. Vol.

٢٩ pp.٣٥٢-٣٦٧.

Martin, Donald.(١٩٩١). *How to be a Successful Student* .U.S.A.

Nagy, W.E. (١٩٨٨). "Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension". Newark, DE/Urbana. *International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English.* (ED٢٩٨٤٧١).

Nassaji, Hossein. (٢٠٠٣). "Higher-Level and Lower Level Text Processing Skills in Advanced ESL Reading Comprehension". *The Modern Language Journal*, vol.٨٧. issue ٢. pp. ٢٦١-٢٧٦.

Nuttall, C. (١٩٨٧). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language.* London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Ross, Falk and Francine, C. (٢٠٠٢). "Toward the New Literacy: Changes in College Students' Reading Comprehension Strategies Following Reading Comprehension Strategies Following Reaing/Writing Projects". *Journal of Adolescent and Adult-Literacy.* Vol. ٤٥, issue ٤ pp. (١١،٢٧٨).

Stahl, Norman, A, et al. (١٩٩١). "Enhancing Students" Note Taking through Training and Evaluation". Journal of Reading. Vol.٣٤, (٨) pp.(٦١٤-٦٢٢)

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Al Makhzoomy, K. (١٩٨٦) " Teaching Reading Comprehension to Secondary Students in Jordan. Suggestions for improvemrnt", Dirasat vol. XLL, No. ٦. University of Jordan, pp١٢-١٥.

Thuss, Arnoud (١٩٩٩) htt://www.hio. ft.hanze.nl/thar/reading . htm.

Baker, Scott K. (١٩٩٥) " Vocabulary Acquisition: Curricuar and Instruction Implications for Diverse Learners" Technical Report No. ١٤ Eugene, OR: *National Center Improve the Tools of Educators*. (ED٣٨٦٨٦١).

Barnett, M. (١٩٨٨). " Teaching Reading Strategies: How Methodology Affects Course Articulation." *Foreign Language Annual.* Vol.١,

April pp. ١٠٩-١١٥.

Birkmire, D. (١٩٨٥). " Text Processing: The Influence f Text Structure, Background Knowledge, and Purpose". *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. xx/٣, pp. ٣١٤-٣٢٦.

Costa,٠Melynda-Blaylock;Skeen,Janice-C. (١٩٩٩). "Increasing Reading Comprehension in the Middle School". *Masters Action Research Project*. Saint Xavier University and IRI/skylight.

Dhaif, H. (١٩٩٠). Reading Aloud for Comprehension: A Neglected Teaching Aid. Reading in a Foreign Language, vol. ٧(١), pp.٤٥٧-٤٦٤.

Durkin, Dolores. (١٩٨٦). "Reading Methodology Textbooks: Are they Helping Teachers Teach Comprehension?" *Reading Teacher*, vol. ٣٩, January pp. ٤١٠-٤١٧.

Gower, Roger; Bell. Jan. (١٩٩٢). *Upper Intermediate Matters*. Longman Group Limited, England.

Hoge. John, D. (١٩٨٦). *Improving the Use of Elementary Social Studies Textbooks.* Eric Digest No. ٣٣. ED٢٧٤٥٨٢.

Holmes, B. (١٩٨٥). " The Effect of Four Different Modes of Reading on Comprehension." Reading Research Quarterly. Vol. XX/٥,pp. ٥٧٥-٥٨٥.

Johnson, P. (١٩٨٢). "Effects on Reading Comprehension of Building Background Knowledge." TESOL Quarterly, vol.١٦,no.٤.pp.٥٠٣-٥١٥.

Loxterman, J.A, Beck, I. L. and Mckeown, M. G.(١٩٩٤) "The Effects of Thinking Aloud During Reading on Students' Comprehension of More or Less Coherent Text". *Reading Research Quarterly*. Vol. ٢٩ pp.٣٥٢-٣٦٧.

Martin, Donald.(١٩٩١). *How to be a Successful Student* .U.S.A.

Nagy, W.E. (١٩٨٨). "Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension". Newark, DE/Urbana. *International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English.* (ED٢٩٨٤٧١).

Nassaji, Hossein. (٢٠٠٣). "Higher-Level and Lower Level Text Processing Skills in Advanced ESL Reading Comprehension". *The Modern Language Journal*, vol.٨٧. issue ٢. pp. ٢٦١-٢٧٦.

Nuttall, C. (١٩٨٧). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language.* London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Ross, Falk and Francine, C. (٢٠٠٢). "Toward the New Literacy: Changes in College Students' Reading Comprehension Strategies Following Reading Comprehension Strategies Following Reaing/Writing Projects". *Journal of Adolescent and Adult-Literacy.* Vol. ٤٥, issue ٤ pp. (١١،٢٧٨).

Stahl, Norman, A, et al. (١٩٩١). "Enhancing Students" Note Taking through Training and Evaluation". Journal of Reading. Vol.٣٤, (٨) pp.(٦١٤-٦٢٢).