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# **The Effect of the Reader-Response Approach on Enhancing English Reading Comprehension Skills of Secondary Stage Students**

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## **The Effect of the Reader-Response Approach on Enhancing English Reading Comprehension Skills of Secondary Stage Students**

### **Abstract**

The present study aimed at exploring the effect of using the reader-response approach on enhancing some English reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students. The quasi-experimental one group pre/post testing design was adopted. Thirty second-year secondary stage students were randomly selected to serve as the single group of study. Data were gathered through the two equivalent forms of the English Reading Comprehension Test. Moreover, a scoring rubric was designed to assess the subjective response-constructed items in the ERCT. Data gathered were statistically analyzed quantitatively. Descriptive statistics and paired samples t-test were used for data analysis. The effect size of using the reader-response approach (independent variable) on English reading comprehension skills (dependent variable) of the study group was also measured. Findings of the study indicated that the reader-response approach had such a positive impact on enhancing the study group's English reading comprehension skills; namely, making predictions, making inferences, asking questions and making connections. In light of these findings, the study concluded that the reader-response approach can be effectively used for teaching reading literary texts to secondary stage students. Consequently, it recommended the implementation of the reader-response approach in EFL classes to gain the benefits of using such student-centered instructional approach in teaching reading literary texts.

**Keywords:** The Reader-Response Approach, English Reading Comprehension

## أثر مدخل استجابة القارئ في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي للغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية

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المستخلص :

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تقصي أثر توظيف مدخل استجابة القارئ في تنمية بعض مهارات الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية (تنبؤ، استدلال، طرح أسئلة، وبناء وصلات) لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي ذا المجموعة الواحدة مع قياس قبلي-بعدي. تألفت عينة الدراسة من ثلاثين طالبة حيث مثلن مجموعة الدراسة. جُمعت البيانات باستخدام نسختين متكافئتين من اختبار الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية، وتم تحليلها إحصائيًا بصورة كمية من خلال الإحصاءات الوصفية واختبار "ت" للعينات المترابطة، كما تم حساب حجم الأثر لمتغير مدخل استجابة القارئ (المتغير المستقل) على الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية (المتغير التابع) لدى المجموعة. وأظهرت النتائج أن مدخل استجابة القارئ كان له أثر ملحوظ وإيجابي في تحسين مهارات الفهم القرائي لدى الطلاب. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج، خلصت الدراسة إلى أن مدخل استجابة القارئ يمكن أن يُوظف بفاعلية في تدريس النصوص الأدبية لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية. كما أوصت بضرورة دمج مدخل استجابة القارئ في تدريس الأدب في بيئات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : مدخل استجابة القارئ، مهارات الفهم القرائي للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

## Introduction

Reading is the main source of gaining knowledge. It is one of the most crucial language skills. Such a vital skill as reading is of key importance to the success of the learning process. Of all language skills, reading is the most essential for promoting self-learning, academic achievement, professional success and personal development. Not only reading is the key to enhance the academic achievement in general, but it is also the skill that particularly contributes to the learning and mastery of the other principal language skills, i.e. listening, speaking and writing.

Reading is primarily a demanding information processing skill that entails a vital interaction between the reader and the text for meaning to be constructed (Akarsu & Harputlu, 2014; Goldman, 2024). Along the same line, Grabe & Stoller (2020) argue that reading is a complex cognitive notion including a combination of various intertwined processes and having numerous purposes and distinctive types. Despite the intricacy of such a multi-component construct as reading, it has two core aspects; mechanical form-focused decoding and dynamic meaning-focused comprehension (Kilpatrick, 2015; Nunan, 2003; Oakhill et al., 2015; Seidenberg, 2017). According to Nunan (2003), mechanical decoding covers the recognition of word sounds, phonetics and spellings, whereas comprehension is the recognition of the messages or information in the text. As for the latter, the goal of reading is comprehension.

Reading efficiently in English as a foreign language (EFL) is such a challenging skill that many students need to enhance. In such contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, students do not have genuine opportunities for communication in the target language beyond their classrooms. In other words, English is only used for academic purposes and is institutionally taught inside classrooms. In such a context of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), the complexity of such a multi-faceted, complex

concept as reading increases (Grabe & Yamashita, 2022; Koda & Miller, 2022; Nation & Macalister, 2021; Winke & Brunfaut, 2021). Likewise, Brich (2014) asserts that reading in a foreign language implies the difference in certain linguistic and cultural aspects which may hinder the success of the reading process.

Being a very rich source of authentic, interesting and linguistically appropriate texts, literature plays an important role in teaching languages, specifically foreign languages. Since language and literature are so inseparable that they are described to be two sides of a coin, literature has become a basic component of the foreign language curriculum and a significant tool in English language education (Abubaker et al., 2025). The benefits of incorporating literature into the EFL curriculum are further extended. For instance, literature is a good source of authentic language use (Bruzzano, 2021). Additionally, Lynch-Brown et al. (2022) report that, it is through literature that students are led to personal fulfillment and academic gains.

Nevertheless, the ability to appropriately comprehend EFL literary texts requires that the reader does possess a sufficient number of reading skills, among which reading comprehension is probably the most significant. Reading comprehension is the core of the reading process because the goal of any written language is the communication of messages (Duffy, 2009; Nafa, 2022; Snowling et al., 2022)). Similarly, reading is centrally a comprehension process (Grabe, 2009; Roe et al, 2019). That is, reading is all about meaning. Being the basis of all reading processes, comprehension is urgently needed in all subjects throughout all school grades, particularly advanced ones. Accordingly, it is ultimately necessary for students to comprehend well enough to achieve their purposes, meet school expectations and process new knowledge (Hampton & Resnick, 2008).

Since advanced graders are expected to read a wide range of text types including literary and expository texts, reading comprehension becomes much more critical for them. Accordingly, reading comprehension is strongly stressed as one of the objectives of teaching English as a foreign language for the Egyptian secondary stage students. In this context, ElAraby et al. (2012) assert that the EFL curriculum at the secondary level aims at enabling students to read a range of fiction and non-fiction texts and to understand the ideas and information they convey. Likewise, Varita (2017) illustrates that in accordance with the Standard English Competency requirements for secondary schools, students are expected to enhance their ability to comprehend functional texts such as narratives, discussions and explanations in day-to-day life contexts to gain knowledge.

Though comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, many students experience problems comprehending texts, specifically literary texts. Reading comprehension becomes much more challenging for students when the text is not written in their mother tongue. In this regard, Muyskens (1983) argues that teaching literature, especially a foreign one, is a complicated task which counts on such factors as the teacher's knowledge, students' level of literary sophistication and their range of linguistic fluency. In the same context, Celce-Murcia (2001) points out that second/foreign language readers generally have weaker linguistic skills than do first language readers. They may also have some difficulties recognizing the ways in which texts are organized and information is presented. Such problems in handling the code (vocabulary and grammar) can be obstacles in the comprehension process.

Apart from the linguistic aspects that may hinder comprehension, there are other factors which may cause problems with comprehending literary texts too. Such comprehension problems that EFL students encounter may be twofold; that is, they are on the part of both teachers and students.

On the one hand, many teachers find it easier to directly impart their knowledge of the literary text to students, depriving them of being critical readers who actively participate in the learning process and neglecting the role that students' background knowledge and experiences can play in the comprehension process. In this respect, Woodruff & Griffin (2017) argue that EFL students are often immersed in their teachers' interpretation of literary texts simply because they are familiar with the text and feel comfortable expressing their thoughts rather than allowing students to interpret it incorrectly. Furthermore, many EFL teachers focus on linguistic skills rather than literary skills, i.e. vocabulary and structure are stressed over the literary textual structure and other literary aspects. In the same context, Zahoor & Janjua (2013) state that some EFL teachers use traditional teaching strategies in which they make students read aloud chunks of the text in class turn by turn, providing them with the meaning of difficult words and strange expressions only for the purpose of answering the questions at the end of the literary text. Therefore, most students do not get the theme or the underlying message of the text, and they cannot identify the structure of the literary text as well. Harvey & Daniel (2015) assert that for a long time, comprehension was not taught, it was merely improperly tested by getting students to answer literal comprehension questions at the end of the text, which does not guarantee understanding.

On the other hand, many EFL students read literary texts word by word, neglecting the message the author tries to convey and the unity of the literary text. They also tend to translate word for word by using a dictionary or asking the teacher, which extremely distracts them from the essence of reading the literary text. Additionally, Sinambela & Saragih (2018) point out that most EFL secondary stage students struggle with understanding what they read. When the teacher gives them a reading comprehension assignment, they do not read the text but directly go to the questions at the end of that text, then answer the question by matching the

questions with sentences within the text. Consequently, the lack of literary reading comprehension skills discourages EFL students from reading literary texts and causes them to lose interest in reading such pieces of literature.

Since good instruction is the most powerful means of promoting the development of proficient readers, preventing reading comprehension problems (Snow, 2002), EFL teachers should use suitable and interesting teaching strategies for the purpose of helping students comprehend literary texts properly. Among the approaches that significantly help EFL teachers teach reading, particularly literary texts, efficiently is the Reader-Response Approach. As its name suggests, the Reader-Response Approach devotes considerable attention to the act of reading itself, particularly in terms of the many different ways in which readers respond to literary texts (Davis & Womack, 2002).

In this context, Cooney (1999) points out that reading and responding to literature should be recognized as an art providing major means of personal creativity, satisfaction and pleasure, hence students should be encouraged to respond to their reading, explain and justify their responses to texts in more formal ways, both orally and in writing. Notably, the Reader-Response Approach supports activities which encourage students to draw on their personal experiences, opinions, and feelings in their interpretation of literature. Accordingly, it does not only focus on what learners understand, but also on how they feel (Connell, 2008). As Larson (2009) confirms, one central principle to the Reader-Response theory is the interaction of the reader and the text as each reader breathes life into the text through personal meaning-making and prior experiences. That's why all readers have individualized reading experiences.

Not only does the Reader-Response Approach stimulate reading instruction, but it also raises students' interest in reading

because the focus is equally balanced between the reader and the text, rather than the text as a self-contained object (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). Moreover, it gives students the opportunity to think critically and thoughtfully about literary texts, which helps them become critical readers and thinkers who are not simply directed towards thinking about texts in some way or another. Accordingly, teachers become facilitators and consultants rather than mere lecturers.

Furthermore, one of the most significant features of the Reader-Response Approach is that it values students' role in the meaning construction process, rather than being passive recipients. Reader-Response is therefore perceived as being reader-oriented or student-centered rather than text-oriented. In the same context, Van (2009) argues that each text may be interpreted differently because each student has distinctive feelings and experiences, and hence the Reader-Response Approach accepts different interpretations of the text so long as there is a textual proof supporting them. Accordingly, teachers should accept multiple interpretations of the text rather than one correct interpretation.

Many studies considered the Reader-Response Approach to be powerful in teaching the distinctive reading skills. For instance, findings of the study conducted by Granger et al. (2007) revealed that using reader response journals followed by classroom discussions promoted students' reading comprehension skill and their attitudes towards reading. Another study carried out by Youssef (2021) indicated that the Reader Response Approach significantly enhanced the participants' English reading comprehension skill.

Based on the previous discussion, it can be inferred that reading comprehension is problematic for EFL students. Moreover, the Reader-Response Approach might be an effective approach of teaching reading literary texts and might assist in enhancing

students' reading comprehension. The present study attempted to investigate the effect of the reader-response approach on enhancing reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The present study is an attempt to investigate the following problem: The majority of second-year secondary stage students lack some reading comprehension skills.

## **Question of the Study**

The study attempted to answer this question:

What is the effect of using the reader-response approach on enhancing some English reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students?

## **Aim of the Study**

This study aimed to explore the effect of using the reader-response approach on enhancing English reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study can be significant for the following reasons:

1. The study might help enhance some English reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students.
2. To the researcher's knowledge, the scarcity of research addressing the approaches for teaching literature in the Egyptian context of TEFL enhances the significance of the study.
3. Not only might the study provide EFL teachers with such an effective approach for teaching literature, but it might also help

EFL students learn a variety of reader-oriented techniques for promoting their reading skills.

4. The study might direct the attention of EFL course designers to the importance of incorporating such interactive approaches for teaching literature as Reader-Response, which may in turn motivate students to appreciate such a kind of literary reading.
5. The study might draw the attention of researchers to the inevitability of adopting such student-centred approaches for teaching the different principal language skills; that is, listening, reading speaking and writing.

### **Hypothesis of the Study**

Depending on the study question, the following hypothesis was formulated:

There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre and post administration of the English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT), favoring the post administration.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The present study was delimited to the following:

1. A group of second-year female students, learning English as foreign language, enrolled at Fatma Al-Zahraa Secondary School for Girls at Qena.
2. The Reader-Response Approach for teaching literature as an independent variable.
3. English Reading comprehension skill as a dependant variable.
4. Short stories as a literary genre. Such a literary genre was selected for a number of reasons. Short stories are practical since their length is adequate and can be entirely covered in one or two class sessions. Not only are short stories not complicated for

students to work with on their own, but they also include a variety of choices for different interests and tastes. Furthermore, they can be used with all levels and all ages. Similarly, short stories can, if selected and used properly, provide quality text content which will effectively enhance English language teaching courses (Murdoch, 2002; Sigona, 2022). "Short Stories for High School" (n.d.) recommends such a valuable collection of short stories for secondary stage students based on their literary significance to deepen students' appreciation for the short story genre. Seven short stories, *Three Questions* by Leo Tolstoy, *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros, *The Whale Sound* by Roger Dean Kiser, *The Comeback* by Chris Rose, *The Veldt* by Ray Bradbury, *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant and *Elephants, Bananas and Aunt Ethel* by Chris Rose, were adopted and submitted to a panel of jury members to examine their content and judge their validity in terms of their content, difficulty, length and number.

## **Methodology and Procedures**

### **Participants of the Study**

Thirty second-year secondary stage female students, learning English as a foreign language, enrolled at Fatma Al-Zahraa Secondary School for Girls at Qena were randomly selected to serve as the single group of the study. They have studied English for ten years. The average chronological age of the participants was (16.80).

In the Egyptian context of TEFL, teaching reading comprehension of literary texts has long been a part of the secondary stage English syllabus. Secondary stage students served as the population from which the participants were selected since they were expected to have cognitive aptitude and emotional readiness enabling them to experience the variables of the study.

Furthermore, developing reading comprehension and higher-order thinking skills utterly aligns with the objectives of teaching English in such an educational stage. In this respect, the National Curriculum Framework for English as a Foreign Language reports that the EFL curriculum at the secondary level aims at enabling students to read a range of fiction and non-fiction texts and to understand the ideas and information they convey; additionally, it “encourages learners to read, respond and appreciate literature” (El-Araby et al., 2012, p. 9). In the same context, the Egyptian English syllabus for second-year secondary school aims at testing students’ understanding of plot, incidents and characters and covering a variety of reading skills including making inferences and predictions together with evaluation (Smith & Pugliese, 2020).

## **Design of the Study**

Since it is rather challenging to control the intervening, overlapping variables affecting human beings, the study adopted the quasi-experimental one group pre/post testing design. According to Seliger & Shohamy (2015), "The design is efficient because it controls a number of extraneous variables which can affect the homogeneity of subjects when more than one group is involved. To some degree, the design also controls for attrition or loss of subjects. Since the same group is used for both pre/post testing, it does not need to be matched to another group" (p. 178). Moreover, Seliger & Shohamy elaborate that adopting this design in a foreign language context is more appropriate than doing so in a second language context since the participants are not likely to be exposed to any linguistic variables other than the variable under investigation.

To conduct the experiment of the study, thirty second-year secondary stage students, studying at the same class, were randomly selected to serve as the single group of study. The study group was first pre-tested, then given the treatment (the Reader-Response

Based Program), and finally post-tested. The impact of the treatment was judged by measuring the difference between the pre and post testing scores of the study group.

## Instrument of the Study

For data to be collected, English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT) was developed and used by the researcher.

## English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT)

The ERCT was developed to assess four English reading comprehension skills of second-year secondary stage students, namely making predictions, making inferences, asking questions and making connections. The ERCT included a reading comprehension passage adopted from an English short story; the study group was required to answer twelve test items based upon the literary passage; that is, three test items for each reading comprehension skill. The ERCT included five multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and seven subjective constructed-response short-answer test items. As for the subjective constructed-response test items, the study group was required to produce three meaningful sentences in response to each test item; this could include simple, compound and/or complex sentences. The inclusion of subjective constructed-response questions was quite necessary since such a type of questions, unlike objective questions, adequately fulfills the diversity of students' responses to questions and meets the possible numerous correct interpretations of the text rather than the one-correct answer notion, as long as the textual evidence is cited within the text. In this respect, Alvermann (2006) posits that one major limitation of multiple-choice items on reading tests as a measure of comprehension is that they are based on a simple model of understanding texts that ignores the complexities of a reader's purposeful transaction with a text.

Two parallel equivalent forms (Form A and Form B) were developed to serve as the ERCT. Each form of the ERCT had a different literary reading comprehension passage to ensure that it was unseen and unfamiliar to the study group. It was highly considered that both forms of the ERCT had the same number of questions, targeting the same reading comprehension skills in the same order and having the same level of difficulty. Almost the same words were used to construct the test items of both forms of the ERCT in order to guarantee optimal language concision and consistency. Though the reading comprehension passages were different in the two equivalent forms of the ERCT, they were written by the same author to guarantee that no difference in the writing style or use of language could be found. Clear guidelines for test taking were developed and clearly specified. This included instructions to examinees taking the test and time limits. At the beginning of the ERCT, instructions were provided for the examinees and written in English. Test instructions were concise, simple to comprehend and unambiguous.

## **Validity of the ERCT**

To determine the face and content validity of the ERCT, it was submitted to a panel of jury in the field of TEFL. The jury members were requested to examine the ERCT carefully regarding its clarity, adequacy and relevancy to the reading comprehension skills that were intended to be assessed. The jury members suggested no modifications for most of the items in the ERCT. Some jury members suggested rephrasing some items in order to be clearer. Additionally, three jury members suggested that for getting the full score of the subjective test items (6: 12), three meaningful sentences, rather than four, would be sufficient. In response to the jury members' remarks, the modifications were made and the final version of the ERCT was designed.

Moreover, validity could be accurately estimated by computing the square root of reliability coefficient as reported by Reynolds et al. (2021). Accordingly, intrinsic validity of the ERCT was measured using the following formula

$$\text{Intrinsic Validity} = \sqrt{\text{Reliability Coefficient}}$$

$$\text{Intrinsic Validity} = \sqrt{0.97} = 0.98$$

This result shows that the ERCT is highly valid.

## Reliability of the ERCT

To measure the reliability of the ERCT, alternate-form reliability was used. Two equivalent or parallel forms of the ERCT (Form A and Form B) were developed. The development of these alternate forms of the ERCT required that they be truly parallel in terms of content, difficulty, skills they were intended to assess and other relevant characteristics. The first form of the ERCT (Form A) was administered to a random sample of students ( $n = 10$ ); after a couple of weeks, the second form of the ERCT (Form B) was administered to the same sample of students. The correlation coefficient between the scores of the two assessments was computed. Results reported in table (1) below indicate that the mean scores of the two forms of the ERCT are (18.10) and (20.90) respectively. Furthermore, it is revealed that the correlation coefficient between Form A and Form B is (0.97). Based on the results, it turned out that the test is highly reliable.

**Table (1)**  
***The Correlation Coefficient between the Two Equivalent Parallel Forms (A & B) of the ERCT***

| ERCT          | M     | SD   | 'r'    |
|---------------|-------|------|--------|
| <b>Form A</b> | 18.10 | 2.99 | 0.97** |

|        |       |      |  |
|--------|-------|------|--|
| Form B | 20.90 | 3.21 |  |
|--------|-------|------|--|

\*\*p<0.01

## Item Difficulty Index of the ERCT

In order to verify that the ERCT items are neither too easy nor too difficult for the examinees, the study assessed the difficulty indices of the test items. Since the ERCT comprises both types of test items; i.e. objective (MCQs from 1 to 5) and subjective constructed-response items (from 6 to 12), discrimination index was computed using two different statistical treatments. On the one hand, the difficulty index of objective multiple-choice test items was measured by analyzing the responses to each test item via using the following formula reported by Reynolds et al. (2021):

P (Difficulty Index) =

Number of Examinees Correctly Answering the Item

Total Number of Examinees

On the other hand, the difficulty index of subjective constructed-response items that were scored using a scoring rubric and received scores between 0 and 3 depending on quality was calculated using the following formula given by Nitko (2001):

P (Difficulty Index) = Average Score on the Item

Range of Possible Scores

where the range of possible scores is calculated as the maximum possible score on the item minus the minimum possible score on the item.

The difficulty index value is considered too difficult when it is less than 30%; whereas it is regarded too easy when it is higher

than 80% (Mitra et al., 2009). Results indicate that the item difficulty index of reading comprehension skills of the ERCT ranged between 33.33% to 60%.

## **Procedures of the Study**

To conduct the experiment of the study, thirty second-year secondary stage students were randomly selected to serve as the single group of study. In advance of the experiment, the participants were given the first form of the English Reading Comprehension Test as a pre testing. Plain and straightforward directions regarding participants` responses to the questionnaires were provided.

Then, the experiment of the study was carried out from the middle of March to the middle of May 2023. Time allocated for the experiment was seven weeks (three periods per week). Seven short stories were taught and read using the reader-response approach through different strategies and techniques.

While conducting the experiment, reader-response worksheets including activities and exercises were distributed to the participants. They were assigned to read the short stories individually at home in advance to the sessions. Besides, the participants were evaluated using two types of evaluation; summative evaluation by using the second form of the ERCT at the end of the experiment; and formative evaluation subsequent to the lesson. After the experiment, the study group was administered the second equivalent form of the ERCT as a post-test.

## **Results of the Study**

### **Testing the Hypothesis of the Study**

“There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre and post administration of

the English Reading Comprehension Test, favoring the post administration.”

To test this hypothesis, Paired Samples t-Test was used. The mean scores, standard deviations, t-value and t-significance of the scores of the English reading comprehension skills of the study group in the pre and post administration of the English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT) as well as the effect size of the reader-response approach on the overall English reading comprehension skills are reported in table (2) below.

**Table (2)**

***T-Test of the Overall Reading Comprehension Skills in the Pre and Post Administration of the ERCT***

| Variable                     | Administration | No | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Std. Deviation of the Pre-Post Tests Combined | ES | t-value | Sig (2-tailed) | Effect size dz |
|------------------------------|----------------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|----|---------|----------------|----------------|
| Reading Comprehension Skills | Post           | 30 | 24.57 | 2.35           | 1.94                                          | 29 | 39.65   | 0.000**        | 6.86           |
|                              | Pre            |    | 10.53 | 1.75           |                                               |    |         |                |                |

**\*\*p < 0.01**

Data displayed in table 2 showed that the mean scores of the overall English reading comprehension skills of the study group in the pre and post administration of the ERCT were 10.53 and 24.57 respectively. Thus the mean of gain scores was 14.04. The t-value was 39.65, which is significant at 0.01 level. To precisely measure the effect of using the Reader-Response Approach (the independent variable) on English reading comprehension skills of the study group (a dependent variable), the effect size, an index used to express the strength or magnitude of a difference between the two means of the pre and post administration of the ERCT, was measured using the following formula reported by Cohen (1965):

$$M_{diff}$$

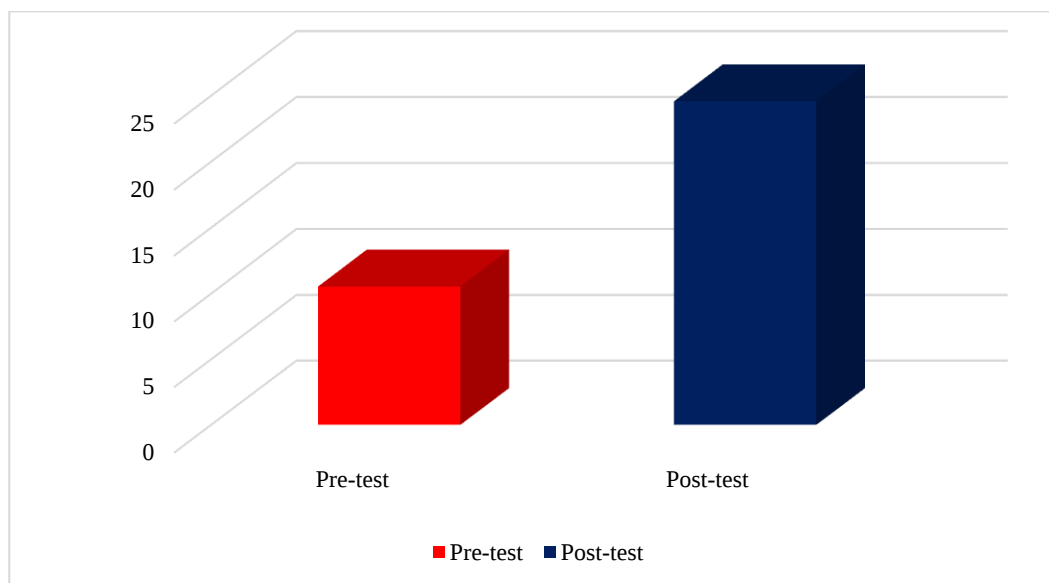
$$\text{Cohen's } d_z =$$

$$\sqrt{\frac{\sum (X_{diff} - M_{diff})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where  $d_z$  is the effect size of the paired samples,  $M_{diff}$  is the mean of the differences between the pre and post testing of the study group,  $X_{diff}$  is the difference between the scores of the pre and post testing of each participant, and  $n$  is the number of the participants. The effect size was 6.86. The effect size is described as small when it equals 0.2 or less than 0.5, medium when it equals 0.5 or less than 0.8 and large when it equals 0.8 or above (Ravid, 2020). Thus, the effect size was large. Analysis of data revealed a statistically significant difference at (.01) level between the mean scores of the English reading comprehension skills of the study group in the pre and post administration of the ERCT, in favor of the post-administration. Moreover, statistical results revealed that the independent variable (Reader-Response Approach) had a large effect on the dependent variable (English Reading Comprehension Skills). Figure (1) illustrates the results shown in table (2).

### Figure 1

*Mean Scores of the Reading Comprehension Skills of the Study Group in the Pre and Post Administration of the ERCT*



## Discussion and Interpretation of the Results

### The Reader-Response Approach and Reading Comprehension

As demonstrated by the findings, the study group made much progress in the post-administration of the English Reading Comprehension Test compared to the pre-administration. They revealed a notable improvement in respect to the four skills of the ERCT. Such a significant level of progress is likely to be due to the impact of the reader response-based program (RRBP). It was revealed that the RRA was effective in developing English reading comprehension of second-year secondary stage students. This finding aligns with what was documented by Granger et al. (2007), Al-Bulushi (2011), Youssef (2021) and Widayanti et al. (2025), who proved that the reader-response approach had such a positive effect on enhancing students' reading comprehension of English literary works.

Based on this finding, the RRBP was impactful on developing English reading comprehension of secondary stage students for a number of considerations. One potential explanation

of such a result can be attributed to the teaching approach used for teaching the assigned short stories; that is, the reader-response approach. It is the reader-response approach that perceives meaning-construction to be nothing other than a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). By actively taking part in constructing the meaning of literary texts, students were no longer passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they produced knowledge. Furthermore, the reader-response approach assumes that comprehending literary texts is utterly dependent upon the reader's personal, affective and intellectual engagement with the text. In other words, not only are students' efferent stances encouraged, but also their aesthetic stances are powerfully supported and stimulated. Accordingly, the participants were equipped with ample opportunities to personally interact with the literary texts. They were not given moulded patterns of meaning interpretations by the researcher. On the contrary, they were encouraged to integrate their background knowledge, thoughts, feelings, memories, associations and experience with the reading selections they read for meaning to be created. This possible interpretation is coherent with that of Chou (2011) who stressed the significance of reader response approach in promoting comprehension since it leads students to self-interpretation and telling the story from their viewpoints rather than relying solely on the teacher to offer an interpretation.

Another possible explanation for this finding is that the reader-response approach powerfully emphasizes the multiple interpretations of literary texts. As opposed to the notion of the one-correct interpretation of the literary text, the reader-response approach to teaching literature acknowledges the multiplicity of interpretations to the same literary text since each reader brings their unique experiences, feelings and viewpoints to the text. This is what makes reading meaningful to them. Accordingly, such diversity of interpretations urges students to creatively construct meaning and go beyond the surface literal level of understanding as

well. It is Rosenblatt (1978) who perceives meaning not to be fixed within the text. This finding goes in line with what was reported by Kinasih (2020) who affirmed that the reader-response approach enhances comprehension via equipping students with a sufficient space for acknowledging and appreciating their varied unique interpretations of literary works. By so doing, teachers no longer have the authority to direct students' thinking to a certain fixed meaning; instead, each interpretation is unique and valid as long as there is a supporting textual evidence behind it.

Among the probable factors that could have contributed to improving the reading comprehension skill of the study group is that the RRBP comprised a wide scope of strategies such as reading logs, double-entry journals, event and emotion inference charts, hot seating, keeping a reader-response notebook, drawing scenes, participating in discussions through predicting, inferring, asking questions and making connections. Besides, the reader-response strategies entailed individual, pair and group work, which helped provide a conversational context that invited the participants to interact with one another and further extended their reading comprehension. These interactions let the participants express and support their viewpoints by eliciting elaboration. Such diversity of strategies and work patterns provided the participants with frequent opportunities to respond to texts in variant ways. Diverse responses motivate students to actively interact with the text, which empowers the understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings. Along the same line, Woodruff (2017), Youssef (2021) and Iskhak (2016) reported that students showed greater enthusiasm for reading and self-confidence in expressing themselves; they also developed deeper insights into the texts they read when they were given numerous and distinctive opportunities to involve in classroom activities and express themselves through a range of creative and reflective responses.

The present study utilized reader-response as an approach for teaching reading literature and enhancing some English reading comprehension skills, that is, making predictions, making inferences, asking questions and making connections. In light of the findings and the correspondent review of literature, it could be concluded that most of the studies that have implemented the reader-response approach to teaching literature had positive effects on enhancing the dependent variables they were meant to enhance. Findings of the present study are consistent with those noted in some other related studies; i.e. (Granger et al., 2007; Al-Bulushi, 2011; Chou, 2015; Abdulridha & Abdul Latiff, 2020; Hussein, 2021; Youssef, 2021; Widayanti et al., 2025). Thus, it can be stated that the reader-response approach had a positive effect on enhancing some reading comprehension skills of second-year secondary school students.

## **Summary of the Results**

Results of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. The experimental group' scores were better in post administration of the ERCT (t-value was 39.65) as compared to the pre administration due to the reader-response approach. Consequently, the hypothesis of the study was confirmed.
2. The reader-response approach had a large effect on English reading comprehension of the study group ( $d_z = 6.86$ ).

## **Conclusions**

In light of the results of the study, the following conclusions can be derived:

1. The reader-response approach is effective for teaching English reading comprehension skills.
2. Using the reader-response approach supplies students with a safe and motivating learning environment that welcomes their

interpretations of literary selections and values their viewpoints, emotions, memories and associations.

3. The reader-response strategies, activities and assignments equip students with ample opportunities to be actively engaged in their learning process, which fosters their self-esteem and independence.
4. The reader-response approach positively shifts the learning process from being teacher-centered to learner-oriented.
5. Not only does the reader-response approach help promote students' appreciation of literary reading, but it also develops a good number of self-instruction strategies.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations could be proposed:

1. It is the mission of EFL instructors and curriculum designers to be more acquainted with the reader-response approach and its different strategies and techniques.
2. Learners' thoughts, opinions, emotions and associations are to be taken into account in the teaching/learning process.
3. The Reader Response Approach should be adapted to accommodate diverse reading abilities and learning styles in the EFL setting.
4. The implementation of the reader-response approach should be extended to teach expository texts.
5. Learning environments should be safe enough for students to be able to think critically and creatively.
6. EFL teachers should make use of the merits of the reader-response approach and its distinctive strategies in reading literature.

## **Suggestions for Further Researches**

1. Further studies on the reader-response approach are needed to be carried out with EFL learners at different educational levels.
2. Further research is needed to be conducted to examine the impact of digital reader-response strategies on the different English language skills.
3. A study of the impact of reader-response versus digital reader-response strategies on developing the English reading skills is needed for investigation.
4. More research work can be carried out to investigate the impact of the reader-response approach on enhancing other language skills, i.e. listening, writing, and speaking and language areas, i.e. vocabulary and grammar.
5. Further research is needed to explore students' attitudes towards the reader-response approach.

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