



Full Length Research Paper

# Improving reading skills through self-directed strategy among EFL students in Jordan

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This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of self-directed learning strategy on improving the reading skills among EFL students in Jordan. It also aims at investigating the effect of students' gender and class on their performance. To achieve the purpose of the study, pre/post T test were constructed to measure students' level in English reading skill. The sample of the study consisted of seventh and eighth grade students at Marj Al Hamam basic school for girls and Marj Al Hamam Secondary school for boys whom were (86) students, (41) male and (45) female students during the second semester 2015-2016 and was distributed into four sections, which were selected purposefully two female sections and two male sections. The findings of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the post-test of English reading skill between the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group which were trained to use self-directed strategy in their learning, and there was no statistically significant difference in the students' achievement in reading due to gender or to the interaction between gender and group.

**Keywords:** Self-directed Strategy, Reading Skill, Students' Achievement

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is a process shaped partly by the text, partly by the reader's background, and partly by the situation the reading occurs in. Reading an academic text does not simply involve finding information on the text itself. Rather, it is a process of working with the text. When reading an academic text, the reader recreates the meaning of the text, together with the author. In other words, readers negotiate the meaning with the author by applying their prior knowledge to it. But this process is only possible if the reader uses a series of categories of analysis, some of which are specific to each academic discipline. (Hermida, 2009)

Self-directed learning strategy is considered one of the important areas of adult education to combine in the last seven years, and also it has been used in wide way in the 1970, the understood of self-directed learning was

exemplified of historical figures such as, Socrates, Alexander the Great, Caesar, and Descartes, an important American, Benjamin Franklin, was a prodigious example of directed learning, and he is sometimes considered to be one of the originators of adult education in the united States. The self directed learning is comparatively a modern topic of research (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1982).

Torres Gonzalez & Montalvo (2004) points out that self-directed learning is the integration of skill with will. The self-organized learner knows how to learn, be self-driven, knows his potential and limits. Based on this knowledge, he organizes and controls learning processes, mission objectives, and builds them contextually to improve performance and skills during practice (Al Sayed, 2009)

Too many concepts have been written over the last years in an effort to understand more about the self-directed learning. Many things including self-education,

self-directed learning, and self-regulated learning have been used in literature to deal with self-directed learning and also there are many models developed to offer framework of self-directed learning. Some definitions and representative models are presented and try to understand this concept of learning (Long, 2000).

The idea of self-directed learning is in line with the requirements of modern education imposed by cognitive changes, in which human development is linked to the ability to access knowledge independently, to interact with it, to critique it, and to use it to solve current and future problems (Shehata, 2004).

The internal factors represented by readiness, desire and ability are the basic components of self-directed learning, which the individual draws and draws from his own desire and his inner conviction to develop his preparations, abilities and capabilities, in order to achieve his personality development and integration, and successful interaction with his society (Gabayn, 2001)

Self-learning in its cognitive framework extends to the practice of the individual outside the educational institutions through independent work, through the basic mediator of self-learning, which is independent study of what is written in various fields of science, art, literature, politics and others (Jammel, 2000)

Victori and Lockhart, (2000) claims that one of the introductions of any self directed program must be enforce students' metacognition to produce them for approaching their own learning. Every program should involve cyclic diagnosis of learner's beliefs about language learning styles. Learning needs and objectives in order to endow the learners with criteria for take optimum strategies and activities for their individual program. This purpose was to high light the unifying role of metacognition in all levels of learner.

With Self-directed learning in one case, he or she is able to success in a new area, orientation, support and guidance may all be require in the first stages of a learning project, and provides one example of this in his work focus on developing self-directed learning in homeless adults. For perhaps the first time in their lives, these groups recognize themselves and others as learning resources and learned through the practice of interpersonal behaviors and skills such as giving and taking feedback, and also self-directed learning is based on the autonomous, independent individual who chooses to undertake learning for personal growth, (Kerka, 1999). Skimming and scanning reading were two different strategies for speed reading, each of them used for different aims, and they were not meant to be used all the time. They were at the fast end of the speed reading range, while studying is at the slow end (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2009).

Also reading skill is measured by three kinds of recall scored, recall scored for common ideas of a text. Reading skills usually refers to the amount of understood readers have when they read the text, that is it represents

how well readers understanding the implicit and explicit meaning of the contents when they read the texts, (Sung –Hyun, 2003).

### **Significance of the Study**

The effect of self-directed learning strategy in improve reading skill assumes a full range of activities for improving all aspects of reading skill including a focus on integrated for basic skill. Reading skills are important aspects of student language development. The present study may give students more motivation than regular instruction. It may help teachers know their students' individual needs, decide students' progress, and also encourage greater interaction between teachers and students. This study may help teachers during class sessions by minimizing their role in classrooms because students will depend on themselves, even they do mistakes, and students will study independently.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Reading is considered a very complicated psycholinguistic operation. The interactive role of the reader during this operation is to comprehend and get meaning from written symbols, it is one among complex operations and something taken very much for granted in our society, many strategies have been used to teach this skill, among them is self directed strategy. The researchers in this study tried to investigate the effectiveness of using this strategy on teaching reading skill for EFL students.

### **Questions of the Study**

The researcher tried to answer the following question:

1. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to the teaching strategy they are exposed to ( self-directed learning, traditional way)?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to their class (seventh grade, eighth grade)?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to their gender (male, female)?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to the interaction between group and gender?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of self directed learning strategy on improving the reading skill among EFL students in Jordan. It also aims at investigating the effect of students' gender and class on their performance.

## Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to all seventh and eighth grade male and female students at Marj Al Hamam basic school for girls and Marj Al Hamam Secondary school for boys at Wadi El Sir Directorate of Education.

## Definition of Terms

**Self-directed learning:** Martiz and Manz, (1991). Defined self-directed learning as learning that involves the learner taking primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating learning as well as accepting responsibility for one's thoughts and actions as a learner.

**Reading skill:** Reading can be defined as an interactive process, the reader and the text, and interacts dynamically with the text as he or she tries to elicit the meaning and where various types of knowledge are being used. Reading skills is enabling the reader to turn writing into meaning and achieve the goals of independence comprehension.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While the study of Suwwat (2013) revealed that the effectiveness of a strategy is based on self-directed learning and self-organization of university students. The results showed the effectiveness of self-structured learning in improving content skills, words and language, writing traditions, planning, organization and self-monitoring.

Wichadee (2007) Try to investigate this issue by means of providing a learning contract which required learners to take the responsibility of their own learning, and developing self directed learning instructional model in order to improve reading skill of understanding students. He found that the learning contract and his self directed learning model helped students significantly improve their reading skill ability. Learning contract is analogous to in both models; students are embroiled in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. These studies, then suggest that there is a direct relationship between self directed learning strategy and reading skills and improve the reading skill.

Phongnapharuk (2007) claims that the study involved the use of applied meta cognitive strategies via call to develop English reading and writing ability. The participants were 25 students who registered in the first semester of an English reading and writing course. phongnapharuk suggested that there is a significant correlation between meta cognition, as one of the important elements of self-directed learning strategy in model, and students and English reading skill ability and also developing student's reading skill in English. The

result of the study showed that there was a significant improvement in oral language reading fluency and self-directed learning in the treatment group.

Riley (2006) investigated the effect of directed reading thinking activity on low reading achievement first grade students. The study results indicated the possibility of correcting most of the errors made by students while reading when they use directed reading thinking activity. The study emphasized the importance of using directed reading thinking activity to increase achievement and promote thinking among low achievers.

Reio and Davis (2005) this study investigated the age and gender differences in self directed learning strategy readiness on a sample of 530 participants. The found that the age had statistically significant relationship with self directed learning readiness and ethnicity. Based on the result obtained a significant age gender interaction demonstrated that in comparison with younger males, the younger females indicated higher levels of self directed learning readiness. The finding of the study also suggested that the age 14-20 years old females had significantly higher self directed learning reading skills scores compared to males.

Dougherty Stahl (2004) explored the effects of three instructional strategies, the directed reading thinking activity on the reading comprehension and science content acquisition of novice readers. The participants were 31 second graders with an instructional reading level that was approaching grade level. Each of 4 groups received each treatment. Results indicated that the directed reading thinking activity yielded statistically significant effects on fluency as measured by a timed maze task and effects on reading comprehension and science content acquisition. The components of directed reading thinking activity, generating and justifying predictions, verifying predictions after reading, engaging students in a social context around a text, seemed to provide the necessary scaffolding for facilitating the reading comprehension and science content acquisition among novice readers.

Rhine and Smith (2001) this study carried out an 18 month program that focused on the problem of the inappropriate of 539 primary grade students in reading skill. It was noticed that students at this stage showed low achievement while taking tests compared to their daily performance. The researchers used portfolios and checklist to assess the students. During the experiment, both traditional and performance tests were given and observed to show the different in students behavior during testing situations. in the performance based situation the teachers realized that the student's fluency sight word knowledge and comprehension improved, the researchers concluded that the students benefited from the authentic assessment strategies and had greater understanding of their own learning while learning reading skill.

## **DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Population of the study**

The population of the study consisted of all seventh and eighth grade students in Wadi el Sir Directorate of Education which they form about 1570 male and female students distributed in (13) schools during the academic year 2015/2016.

### **Sample of the study**

The sample of the study consisted of seventh and eighth grade students at Marj Al Hamam basic school for girls and Marj Al Hamam Secondary school for boys whom were (86) students, (41) male and (45) female students during the second semester 2015 -2016 and was distributed into four sections, which were selected purposefully two female sections and two male sections.

### **Design of the study**

The participants of the study were divided into two groups, experimental and control. The participants of the experimental group were instructed through using self-directed learning for (8) weeks, while the participants of the control group were instructed by using traditional way of teaching for the same period. A pre-test was given before teaching the seventh and eighth grades students using self-directed learning to both groups to make sure they are equivalent and the same test was administered as a post-test after training students on using self-directed learning strategy to learn reading skill to see whether this new strategy had any influence on the students' performance in reading skill.

### **Instrument of the study**

The researchers measured the effectiveness of using self-directed strategy for teaching English reading skill and its effect on the students' performance, and then the researcher designed a test based on the instructional material of seventh and eighth grade English text book Action Pack. Validity and reliability were ensured. Both groups; the experimental group as well the control group, were taught by their teachers. The students in both groups took a pre-test to determine their actual level before starting the experiment, then the researchers administered a post-test at the end of the experiment to assess students' performance in reading.

### **Reliability of the instrument**

To ensure the test reliability, the researcher followed test/retest technique. The researcher applied it to a pilot sample of (20) students who were excluded from the study with a two-week period between the test and the

re-test. The reliability of the test was calculated using correlation coefficient and it was 0.89 which is appropriate for conducting such a study.

### **Validity of the instrument**

The researcher designed an English Reading test taking into consideration the instructional material. The researcher validated the instrument by submitting it to a jury of three supervisors of English working at Wadi el Sir Directorate of Education, and two teachers of English. The researcher followed the recommendations of the referees and made amendments accordingly.

### **Instructional material**

The instructional material was seventh and eighth grade English book Action Pack, which includes several topics, but the researcher covered just some topics during the application period.

### **Procedures of the study**

The participants of the study were divided into two groups, experimental and control: The participants of the experimental group were instructed reading skill using self- directed strategy while learning English for (8) weeks, While the participants of the control group were taught English reading skill by their teachers using traditional way of teaching for the same period. The traditional instruction in this study was exercises and drills given by a teacher, use of textbooks and other materials, and a clear explanation to students of the topics of the book. The teacher reviewed some of the textbook topics.

### **Statistical Analyses**

To answer the study questions, descriptive methods (means and standard deviation) were used for pre and post tests for English reading skill test for both the experimental and control groups.

Differences statistical method (T-test) was used to make a comparison between the control and the experimental groups.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of self directed learning strategy on improving the reading skill among EFL students in Jordan. It also aims at investigating the effect of students' gender and class on their performance.

The researcher followed the equivalent pre /post test two group designs. Therefore, the means, standard deviations and Two-Way ANOVA analysis of variance

were used to analyze data. The results will be displayed based on the questions of the research.

To determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the groups, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. **Table 1** shows the results.

**Table 1:** Means and Standard Deviations of the Achievement of Groups on the Pretest.

	<b>GROUP</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Pre	Experimental	43	61.52	9.694	.945	91	.348
	Control	43	59.92	6.350			

**Table 1** indicates that the difference between the experimental group who were taught using self-directed strategy and control groups who were taught using the traditional way is not statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$ , the mean of the experimental group was (61.51) while the mean of the control group was (59.91) which are nearly the same. Thus, since the difference was not significant, the two groups were assumed equivalent and the sample was divided into two groups, an experimental and a

control group. The experimental group which was taught by using self-directed strategy consisted of (43) students while the control group consisted of (43) students also.

**Results of the first question:** Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to the teaching strategy they are exposed to (self-directed learning, traditional way)? A post test was conducted and **Table 2** shows the results

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard Deviations of the performance of the Control and Experimental Groups on the Posttest

	<b>GROUP</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Post	Experimental	43	80.25	7.236	3.429	91	.001
	Control	43	72.82	12.971			

**Table 2** shows that there is a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha=0.05$  between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest in favor of the experimental group who were taught reading skill using self-directed strategy. This difference indicates that using the modern and best strategies for teaching English skills specially reading had a positive effect on students' achievement in the English exam. The mean score for the experimental group on the posttest was (80.24) while that of the control group was (72.81).

Standard deviation for the experimental group was 7.235 which was lower than the control group whose standard deviation was 12.970.

**Results of the second question:** Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to their class (seventh grade, eighth grade)? A post test was conducted and **Table 3** shows the results.

**Table 3:** Mean and Standard Deviations of the performance of the Control and Experimental Groups on the Posttest according to class variable

	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Post	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	39	73.24	11.984	-3.057	91	.003
	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	47	79.94	9.068			

**Table 3** shows that there is a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha=0.05$  between the achievement of the

experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest of English reading in favor of eighth grade group

who were taught English using self- directed strategy. This difference indicates that using the modern and best strategies for teaching English skills in general and reading in particular had a positive effect on students' achievement in the English exam. The mean score for the seventh grade group on the posttest was (73.23) while that of the eighth grade group was (79.93).

Standard deviation for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students was 11.983 which was higher than the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students whose standard deviation was 9.067.

**Results of the third question:** Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to their gender (male, female)? A post test was conducted and **Table 4** shows the results

**Table 4:** Mean and Standard Deviations of the performance of Groups on the Posttest according to gender variable

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post	Male	41	77.13	10.138	.543	91	.589
	Female	45	75.89	11.977	.547	91.412	.586

**Table 4** shows that there is a statistically significant difference at  $\alpha=0.05$  between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest of English in favor of male group who were taught English reading using self-directed strategy. This difference indicates that using the modern and best strategies for teaching English skills in general and reading in particular had a positive effect on students' achievement in the English exam. The mean score for the male group on the posttest was (77.13) while that of the female group was (75.89).

Standard deviation for the male students was 10.137 which is lower than female students whose standard deviation was 11.976.

**Results of the fourth question:** Are there any statistically significant differences in students' performance in English reading skill due to the interaction between group and gender? The researcher also conducted a two-way analysis of variance to analyze the posttest achievement scores of the two groups. **Table 5** shows the results.

**Table 5:** Summary of the Two-way Analysis of Variance of the Achievement of the control and the Experimental Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	1251.254	1	1251.254	11.265	.001
Gender	28.014	1	28.014	.252	.617
GROUP * GENDER	122.043	1	122.043	1.099	.297
Error	9996.367	90	111.071		
Corrected Total	11441.968	93			

**Table 5** shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group on the post test of English reading skill, the experimental group means were significantly better than that of the control group. However, the information indicates that there was no significant difference attributed to the interaction between the treatment and gender.

To conclude, the researcher believes that the difference in the students' performance in English reading skill was attributed to the using of self- directed strategy. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improve their skills in reading in English in a period of 8

weeks. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researcher reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to training the seventh and eighth grade students to use self-directed strategy to learn English.

As a result of this experience, the researcher concluded that students were more engaged in learning when they were taught by modern methods conducted by their teachers who are well trained.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as a treatment designed to improve the performance of students in schools, the students training on how to use self-directed for learning English reading skill in public schools in Wadi el Sir Directorate of education appears completely effective. While it is possible that the strategies offered to students in public schools may have other positive outcomes that are not captured in students test scores.

Self-directed strategy proves to have a strong effect on students learning in general and in training to learn English skills in particular.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

EFL students should be encouraged to use strategies like self-directed learning inside and outside classrooms, because different strategies can do, what teachers cannot, they can bring the real world into the classroom with regard to ELT. Strategies are powerful medium but they are not an end in themselves, and never replace the teacher. They are regarded as teaching aids and can add a further dimension because teaching is not mechanical process but it is a soul-to-soul-process.

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