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The Effects of the Extended Time on Jordanian Students' Comprehension of English Texts

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of the extended time on Jordanian students' comprehension of English texts. The population of this study represented (1000) tenth-grade male and female students at public schools in Ma'an Directorate of Education. The sample consisted of (100) students chosen randomly from six public schools in Ma'an Directorate of Education. Fifty of them were female and fifty were male students. The subjects' reading comprehension was measured using four reading texts that were selected for this purpose. Two of the texts reflected the subjects' native culture and religion (Islamic religion and Arabic culture), while the other two texts reflected a foreign culture and a different religion (Christian religion and American culture). The researcher conducted interviews with eight English teachers to talk about the difficulties of reading comprehension. T-Test of Independent Samples was used to analyze the data statistically. The findings of the study showed that students' performance on reading comprehension tests was significantly affected at level ($\alpha < 0.05$) due to the extended time of the test. The researcher recommended that teachers should help the students activate their prior knowledge about the reading topic before reading. Moreover, the researcher encouraged students to enrich their knowledge through the internet. More studies are recommended to investigate the effect of the extended time and other variables such as courses of English language which include ready answers on reading comprehension using more texts.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Extended Time: (the period that is indicated by the researcher for conducting reading comprehension exams. It is about sixty minutes), limited time: (the period of each lesson as indicated by the Ministry of Education for the Upper Basic Stages (Grades 7-10). It is about forty-five minutes).

Introduction

"The English language national team in Jordan" indicate specific objectives that tenth graders are expected to achieve in reading skill. These objectives are:

1. Read and comprehend different types of texts including technical ones at a reasonable speed.
2. Ask appropriate Wh-questions about the texts and answer them.
3. Identify the main ideas.
4. Tell the gist and theme.

5. Extract skillfully specific information from linear and non-linear texts such as directories, brochures, catalogues or instruction leaflets.
6. Develop skills of inferring meaning of vocabulary from context.
7. Distinguish facts, fallacies, opinions, attitudes and implications.
8. Trace the development of the line of thought and understand interrelations between ideas forwarded by investing syntactic knowledge.
9. Utilize the internet to look for information related to their study needs and personal interests.
10. Compare and contrast different views presented in two texts or more.
11. Analyze a text by identifying the strategies employed in the text as contrasts, analogies, idiomatic expressions and so forth.
12. Use skillfully monolingual and bilingual dictionaries (Tweissi et al., 2002, p. 13)

The researcher conducted a pre-test to ensure the equivalence of the two groups (female group and male group). The subjects were asked to answer six parts of questions about "Basketball" and "Table Tennis" which were chosen randomly from Petra (6) for the tenth grade (Harrison et al., 1994, p. 95).
The researcher also interviewed eight English language teachers chosen randomly from different public schools in Ma'an Directorate of Education. They talked about the difficulties that face tenth graders in reading comprehension and gave some suggestions for improving students' performance in reading comprehension. The researcher found that there is a gap between the objectives of reading skill and tenth-grade students' performance on reading comprehension test. The results of the pre-test and the interviews have also shown that the teachers were not satisfied with students' performance on reading comprehension exams as shown by their grades in the pre-test, English language, and in reading comprehension (Table 1).

The grades were obtained from the official records of the academic year 2004/2005.
The English language teachers of tenth-grade were not satisfied with their students performance on reading comprehension and they mentioned that their students face some difficulties that are summarized below:

1. Some texts are unfamiliar for the students because they reflect foreign cultures. Al-Khuli (1989, p. 74) mentions that "the foreign culture is usually unfamiliar to most learners, its abundance in a reading text may hinder grasping of meaning."
2. Some texts contain a large number of new and difficult words.
3. Scientific texts form a big difficulty for the students because they include technical words that have one specific meaning.
4. Students depend on ready answers that are available in English language courses and they do not give themselves opportunities to read carefully and answer questions.
5. Students lack vocabulary when they asked to express the ideas of the text and summarize what they have read in their own words.
6. Time is not enough for students to read the text and answer the questions, particularly, when texts are long.
7. Students can not understand what is needed from the questions.
8. The size of the font is sometimes small and hurts students' eyes during reading and

answering questions. Day (1994, p. 23) mentions that "the font should be clear and attractive to aid readers in the decoding process."

9. Grammatical structures are difficult and hinder understanding of the text.

The study focused on the most recurrent difficulties that are mentioned by teachers as well as by the students. These difficulties are related to the time (limited and extended). The limited time is the period of each lesson as indicated by the Ministry of Education. It is about forty-five minutes. The extended time is the period that is indicated by the researcher for conducting reading comprehension exams. It is about sixty minutes with fifteen minutes extra time.

Furthermore, the purpose of the study is to:
1. Show that there is a relationship between length of the time given for a test and the degree of comprehension.

To achieve our goals, we attempt to answer the following question: 1. Is there a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension at level ($\alpha < 0.05$) attributed to the extended time of the test?

This study is important is important for the following reasons:
1. Educators can benefit from the results of the study to design training- programmes for teachers to help them improve their methods of teaching reading comprehension and use the effective ways and activities for activating students' knowledge about the content of the text.
2. The study provides curriculum designers and teachers with some insights for selecting various texts on the basis of content, religion, culture, and length.
3. This study provides teachers with some guidelines when they design their reading comprehension exams. Teachers should take in their consideration the individual differences, length of the text, the number of the questions when they specify the time of their exams.

Literature Review

The Effects of Time on Reading Comprehension

Time is a crucial factor for reading. It is important for the teachers as well as for the students. The teachers need time to introduce the reading texts and the students need time to read and answer the questions. Pearson and Fielding (1994, pp. 62-66) observe,

> Time is important for reading. The first benefit of time for reading is the sheer opportunity to orchestrate the skills and strategies that are important to proficient reading including comprehension. As in sports and music, practice makes perfect in reading, too. Second, reading results in the acquisition of new knowledge, which in turn, fuels the comprehension process. The more one already knows, the more one comprehends, and the more one comprehends, the more one learns new knowledge to enable comprehension of an even greater and broader array of topics and texts.

Murray (1987); Halla (1988) looked at the effects of the extended time on subjects' scores in spatial and GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) tests. The subjects were asked to complete

the spatial test and GRE under timed and untimed testing conditions. They found that extra time significantly benefited all students in GRE, but that the students with learning disabilities whose IQS (Intelligence Quotient Scores) were below 117 scored significantly lower on the timed test than students without disabilities. Regarding spatial tests, the results revealed that the subjects without learning disabilities and average achievement performed better in the untimed condition than the subjects with learning disabilities and low achievement.

Harker and Feldt (1993, pp. 309-320)) investigated the effects of the two testing conditions : (a) a standardized administration with time limits and (b) an audiotape administration with no time limits on the subjects' performance on four reading subtests. They found that poor readers benefited more from audiotapes than good readers and they concluded that extended time was a secondary accommodation attributable to the time needed to administer the audiotapes. Extended time thus improved students' performance indirectly via the primary accommodation of audiotape administration.

Gran and Milyo (1999) re-examined whether extended time could improve the performance of students without learning disabilities. The subjects were administered a test in an economics course. The control group were allowed (20) minutes to complete their exam, while the treatment group were permitted (25) minutes. Results of this study supported the contention that extended time could significantly improved the performance of students without learning disabilities. It was found that students who received 25% more time to work on their exam scored about thirteen percentage points higher than students without extended time, after controlling for other measures of subject mastery.

The previous studies of time represented the positive role of extended time on the subjects' scores in different courses including reading comprehension. The following studies, in turn, reflect the insignificant role of extended time on reading comprehension scores:

Runyan (1991); Alster (1997) investigated the effects of extended time on reading comprehension and algebra scores for university students with and without learning disabilities. They found that the normally achieving students performed significantly better than students with learning disabilities under timed condition, but when students with learning disabilities were given extra time their performance improved. The results indicated that the normally achieving students did not perform significantly better with extra time and the scores of the students with learning disabilities under extended-time conditions did not differ significantly from the timed or extended-time scores of the students without learning disabilities.

Huesman and Frisbie (2000) examined the effects of extended time on ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) reading comprehension scores of disabled and nondisabled six-grade students. The subjects took the test under two different conditions: a standard time (20 minutes) and (b) an extended time condition (additional blocks of 20 minutes until they completed the test). The researcher found that students with disabilities made significantly larger test gains than students without disabilities in the extended time condition as compared with the standard time condition. Students with disabilities used an average of (16) additional minutes to complete the test in the extended time condition whereas students without disabilities used an average of (7) additional minutes. Therefore, most students with or without disabilities, finished the test within the first (20) minute block of extended time.

Marquart in her paper (2000) investigated the effects of a commonly used testing accommodation, extended time, on the performance of students with and without identified disabilities. The subjects took two short standardized mathematics tests under two testing conditions which were the standard condition (20minutes) and the extended time condition

(40 minutes). Outcomes indicated that although there were no significant differences between any of the two groups in the amount of change in their performance between the standard and extended time conditions, the subjects reacted more positively on the testing when given extended time rather than the standard time to complete it. The results of this study supported the results of Munger and Loyd (1991) who concluded that the performance of the subjects with and without learning disabilities in language and Math tests was not differentially affected when extended time was provided.

Finally, Brooks, Case, and Young (2003) referred to Harcourt's study (2002) that was designed to determine if administering Stanford 10 (A programme that includes ten subtests in reading comprehension, spelling, social science, and so forth) under both timed and untimed conditions would affect test results differentially. The approximately (360,000) students in the Stanford 10 standardization sample were tested under untimed conditions. The results showed that for Reading Comprehension and Mathematics Problem Solving subtests for grades 1 through 8 and grade 10, there was no consistent increase or decrease in mean raw scores for nondisabled students receiving from none to (25) minutes of additional time. There was also no consistent advantage gained by allowing what might be considered an excessive amount of additional time. The results indicated that there were no differences in the performance of non-disabled students under timed and untimed conditions on Stanford 10.

Briefly, some studies supported the significant role of the extended time on reading comprehension scores while others didn't support the significant role of time on reading comprehension scores.

This study was different from other studies in the following aspects:

1. Most of the previous studies were conducted In Non-Muslim countries while this study was conducted in Jordan, particularly, at public schools in Ma'an Directorate of Education.
2. The previous studies conducted with heterogeneous population while this study was conducted with homogeneous population. The population of this study represented tenth-grade students who were between sixteen and seventeen years of age. They were Arab-Muslims studying English at public schools in Ma'an Directorate of Education using the same text book (Petra 6)
3. Most studies used one or two texts while this study was conducted using four reading texts which reflected Islamic-Arabic culture as well as Christian- American culture. Four reading texts help the researcher validate the results of the study more accurately than previous studies which used one or two texts only.

Methodology

Population of the Study

The population sample of the study consisted of 100 tenth-grade male and female students in Ma'an Directorate of Education. Distributed evenly based on gender. The subjects are Arab Muslims between 16 and 17 years of age.

Sample of the Study

We used the random sample procedure in choosing the schools in which the study was conducted. In each of the schools the class was the unit of selection. At some of the schools which contained several tenth-grade sections, we chose the sections randomly. Table (1) shows schools from which subjects were selected.

Table (1)
Distribution of the sample on the basis of sex and number of the students at each school

School	*Sex*	
	Male	*Female*
Basta School	*16*	------
Ayl Basic School	*11*	------
Rashid Secondary School	*9*	------
Al-Fardakh Secondary School	*14*	------
El-Esskan School	------	*25*
Ma'an Secondary School	------	*25*
Total	*50*	*50*

Reading Material

The reading material used to achieve the objectives of this study consisted of:

1. Four Reading Texts: the texts used were chosen on the basis of the religion and culture. Two of them (Text A1and Text A2) reflect the Islamic religion and the Arabic culture. The other two texts (Text B1 and Text B2) embody the Christian religion and the American culture. Text A1 "Here Comes Al-Amin- The Trustworthy" is a 446 word story; Text B1 "Compassionate-Helping the Hurting", is a 522 word text; Text A2 "ʿIkrimaʿs Secret" is a 745 word story; Text B2 "The Baker's Dozen: The Saint Nicholas Tale" is an 821word text.

The four texts were chosen on the basis of theme, length and difficulty. The first two texts (Text A1and Text B1) deal with a similar theme. They reflect the noble character of the prophet Muhammad and Jesus. The other two texts reflect the noble values of different cultures. The four texts are comparable in difficulty. They were evaluated by a team consisting of two professors from Mut'ah University, and three tenth-grade English language teachers.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study included:

1. *Four Comprehension Tests: each test consisted of six parts; each part consisted of the following types of questions: information questions; True-False questions; filling the space where the subjects were asked to fill in the space according to the information offered in the text, The missing words were to be content or factual nature and not grammatical words because the purpose was to test understanding and not mastering grammar; multiple-choice questions; vocabulary questions; and pronominal references questions.*

The use of different types of questions instead of one type is due to several reasons. Firstly, these types of the questions correspond to the objectives of teaching reading skill in the tenth grade and they are similar to the questions and activities which are indicated in General Guidelines and Curricula for the Basic and Secondary Stages (Tweissi et al., 2002, pp. 13, 86) for the tenth grade. Secondly, Multiple-Choice tests exhibit almost complete marker reliability as well as being rapid often more core effective to mark than other forms of written test. However, they have some deficiencies as well.

2. *Interviews: eight English tenth grade teachers were chosen randomly. They talked about the difficulties that face tenth graders in reading comprehension and gave some suggestions for improving studentsʿ performance in reading comprehension.*

Validity of the Tests

To judge the validity of the research tests, the four reading texts with four tests were given to a committee of experts consisted of two professors from Mut'ah University, and three tenth-grade English language teachers. Their comments (addition, deletion, modification) were taken into consideration before the final version was produced.

Reliability of the Tests

We used the split-half method to establish the tests reliability; we considered parts (1, 2, 6) of each test as the first test and parts (3, 4, 5) as the second test. The correlation between the set of scores for each test was found using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The results of coefficients of each text are shown in Table (2)

Table (2)

The results of Pearson correlation coefficients of the pre-test and four reading comprehension tests

Test	*Correlation Coefficient*
"Here Comes Al-Amin- The Trustworthy"	*.70*
"Compassionate- Helping the Hurting"	*.82*
"Ikrima's Secret"	*.72*
"The Baker's Dozen: The Saint Nicholas Tale"	*.66*
Pre-test	*.63*

Correlation is significant at the level 0.01 level

Exam papers were corrected by three English language teachers to ensure the objectivity of marking process.

Procedures of the Study

We followed these steps in conducting this study:

1. *A pre-test was administered to ensure the equivalence of the two groups. The subjects were asked to answer six parts of questions about "Basketball" and "Ping Pong" which were chosen from Petra (6) for the tenth grade (Harrison et al., 1994, p. 95).*

The subjects of the sample were divided into two group; the subjects of each group were of similar level depending on the results of the pre-test and their grades in English in general and in reading comprehension in particular as shown in Table (3).

Table (3)

Mean scores of the male and female groups in the Pre-test, English language and reading comprehension

Students	*Number*	*English Language (100)*	*Reading Comprehension (40)*	*Pre-test (40)*
Male	*50*	*57.23*	*23.6*	*23.4*
Female	*50*	*63.37*	*23.05*	*24.1*

1. *After a week of the pre-test, the female subjects were tested in Text A1 for 60 minutes, and then they were tested in Text B1for 45 minutes.*
2. *The male group was given the same tests: Text A1 for 45minutes and Text B1 for 60.*

3. *A week later the female group was tested in Text A2 for 60 and Text B2 for 45 minutes.*
4. *The male group was given the same tests: Text A2 for 45 minutes and Text B2 for 60 minutes.*
5. *Eight English teachers of the tenth grade were interviewed to talk about difficulties of reading comprehension.*
6. *At the end, the exam papers were corrected by three English language teachers and scores were recorded accurately.*

The study included the following variables: firstly, the independent variable of this study was the time: (the limited time versus the extended time). The limited time is the period of each lesson as indicated by the Ministry of Education for the tenth grade. It is about forty-five minutes. The extended time is the period that is indicated by the researcher for conducting reading comprehension exams. It is about sixty minutes. ; secondly, The dependent variable was the performance of tenth-grade students on reading comprehension exams.

Means, standard deviations, Pearson Correlation Coefficients and T-test of Independent Samples analysis were used to analyze the data.

Findings and Discussion

Is there a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension between the subjects who took 60-minute tests and the subjects who took 45-minute tests at level ($\alpha < 0.05$) due to the extended time?

The T-test was also used to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the performance of the male subjects tested on Text A1 for (45 minutes) and the performance of the female subjects tested on the same text for (60 minutes). See Table (4)

(Table 4)

Results of T-test of Independent Samples for differences between the male subjects and the female subjects on Text A1 during two different periods of time

Group	***No***	Test	***Time minutes***	Mean(40)	Standard Deviation	***t***	***df***	***Sig***
Female	50	Text	60	29.10	6.78	2.82	9	006
Male	50	A1	45	24.62	8.91			

* Significant at level ($\alpha < 0.01$)

It was noticed from Table (4) that ($t = 2.82$) and it was statistically significant at level ($\alpha < 0.01$). This means that there were statistically significant differences between the female subjects tested on Text A1 for (60 minutes) and the male subjects tested on the same text for(45 minutes). The difference between the mean scores of both groups (4.48) was for the benefit of the female group tested on Text A1 for (60 minutes).

Table (5) shows a comparison between the scores of the male group and the scores of the female group tested on Text B1 during two different periods of time.

Table (5)
Results of T-test of Independent Samples for differences between the male subjects and the female subjects on Text B1 during two different periods of time

Group	No	Test	Time	Mean(40)	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig
Female	50	Text	45	16.94	8.11	2.72*	98	008
Male	50	B1	60	21.58	8.91			

* Significant at level (α < 0.01)

According to Table (5), it was found that (t = 2.72) and it was statistically significant at level (α < 0.01). This indicates that there were statistically significant differences between scores of the female subjects on 45-minute test and the scores of the male subjects on 60-minute test. The mean scores of the male subjects (21.58) was higher than the mean scores of the female subjects (16.94). The difference was (4.64) for the benefit of the male subjects tested on Text B1 for (60 minutes).

The results related to the scores of the male subjects and the female subjects on Text A2 during two different periods of time are presented in Table (**6**)

Table (6)
Results of T-test of Independent Samples for differences between the male subjects and the female subjects on Text A2 during two different periods of time

Group	No	Test	Time	Mean(40)	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig
Female	50	Text	60	25.94	6.51	2.32*	98	.022
Male	50	A2	45	22.46	8.35			

*** Significant at level (α < 0.05)**

(Table 6) indicates that (t = 2.32) and it was statistically significant at level (α < 0.05). This means that there were statistically significant differences between scores of the female subjects tested on A2 for (60 minutes) and the scores of the male subjects tested on the same test for (45 minutes). The mean scores of both groups were calculated and it was found that the female group performed higher on 60-minute test (25.94) than did the male group on 45-minute test (22.46). The difference between two groups was (3.48) for the benefit of the female subjects tested on A2 for (60) minutes.

To find out if the differences between scores of the male subjects and the scores of the female subjects on Text B2 during two different periods of time were statistically significant, the t-test analysis was used as shown in Table (7).

Table (7)
Results of T-test of Independent Samples for differences between the male subjects and the female subjects on Text B2 during two different periods of time

Group	No	Test	Time	Mean(40)	Standard Deviation	t	df	Sig
Female	50	Text	45	18.52	8.64	3.15*	98	.002
Male	50	B2	60	23.34	6.48			

* Significant at level (α < 0.01)

It was noticed from Table (7) that (t = 3.15) and it was statistically significant at level significant at level (α < 0.01). This indicates that there were statistically significant differences between the scores of the male subjects tested on Text B2 for (60 minutes) and the scores of the female subjects tested on B2 for (45 minutes). The mean scores of the male group given (60 minutes) was higher than the mean scores of the female group given (45 minutes). The difference between the means scores of both groups was (4.82) for the benefit of the male subjects tested on B2 for (60 minutes).

The question of the study was "Is there a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension at level (α < 0.05) attributed to the extended time of the test?" The results of the study indicate that extended time (60 minutes) significantly affected the performance of the students on reading comprehension tests at level (α < 0.05). The subjects who were given (60 minutes) scored higher than the subjects given (45 minutes).

Table (4) and Table (6) reveal that the female subjects tested on TextA1 and Text A2 for (60) minutes scored significantly higher than the male subjects tested on the same texts for (45 minutes). The difference was statistically significant at level (α < 0.05). Table (5) and Table (7) in comparison indicate that the performance of the male subjects tested on Text B1 and Text B2 for (60 minutes) was higher than the performance of the female subjects tested on the same texts for (45 minutes). The difference was statistically significant at level (α < 0.01).

It was found that the subjects who took 60-minute tests performed significantly higher than the subjects tested on 45-minute tests. This can be explained by postulating that the extended time reduces the stress of the tests and it gives the subjects opportunities to utilize good test-taking strategies such as making sure that they answer every question, reread the text and questions, review difficult items, check their answers, and activate their background knowledge for the topic. Using such strategies may help the students perform better on reading comprehension tests than the students who were given a limited time.

This finding conforms with findings of Murray (1987); Halla (1988); Harker & Feldt (1983) which indicate that the extended time improved students' performance on GRE (Graduate Record Examination), spatial tests as well as reading tests. Gran and Milyo, (1999) refer to the effect of the extended time on the performance of the students on economics tests. They conclude that the students who received more time to work on their exam scored significantly higher than the students without extended time. They add that the students who did not perform well on a time constrained exam could improve their relative performance when time constraints are relaxed. This finding is inconsistent with the findings of Munger & Loyd (1991); Marquart (2000); Huesman & Frisbie (2000); Brooks, Case & Young, (2003) which demonstrate that the performance of the students was not significantly different when extended time was provided.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions for Future Research

We found that there is a gap between the objectives of reading skill and tenth-grade students' performance on reading comprehension tests depending on the following:

1. The results of the-tenth grade students in the pre-test conducted by the researcher.
2. The results of the tenth-grade students in English language in general and in reading comprehension in particular.
3. The interviews have shown that the tenth-grade teachers were not satisfied with their students' performance on reading comprehension exams.

There was a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension between the subjects who took 60-minute tests and the subjects who took 45-minute tests at level ($\alpha < 0.05$) due to the extended time.

In light of the findings of this study, we recommend the following:

1. The Ministry of Education and curriculum designers in particular should improve the type of the texts in (Petra 6). It is recommended to include more texts that reflect different aspects of the Islamic and Arabic culture in addition to the texts dealing with the local problems of the country such as shortage of water in Jordan.
2. The teachers should help their students activate their background knowledge for the topic using various activities.
3. The teachers should indicate the time of their reading comprehension exams on the basis of the individual differences, content, length of the text and the number of the questions.
4. The students should make use of the internet and other resources to increase their knowledge which in turn enables them to comprehend different topics and texts.
5. The call for Islamicization, Arabicization, and Jordanization of the cultural content of the English material.

Based on the results of this study, we suggest the following studies for future research:

1. Conducting similar studies to investigate the effect of the extended time on reading comprehension of the students from different academic stages using more reading texts.
2. Conducting other studies to investigate the effect of other variables such as ready courses of English language and the font on reading comprehension.
3. Conducting other studies to investigate the effect of the extended time on the results of the students on General Secondary Certificate Examination of English language and other subjects as well.

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