School of Education and Lifelong Learning

Title: FL/SL Reading Comprehension Knowledge and Attitudes of Post-graduate

Students at the University of Exeter, UK

Author: Abdelhamid Mohamed Abdelhamid Ahmed

Job: Assistant Lecturer at the Curriculum & Instruction Dept.,

Faculty of Education, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt.

Currently a PhD Student at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning,

University of Exeter, UK

Publication Date: June, 2007

Word Count: 4600 words

FL/SL Reading Comprehension Knowledge and Attitudes of Post-graduate

Students at the University of Exeter, UK

Abstract

Background

There is limited research on the FL/SL reading comprehension of Non-native speakers of English at the post-graduate level at university.

Aims

This study investigated the knowledge of and the attitude towards FL/SL reading comprehension through (1) the effect of (a) post-graduate specialization, and (b) nationality, (2) the correlation between the FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization.

Sample

A convenience sample of 30 post-graduate students at the University of Exeter participated in this study. All the respondents were speakers of English as a foreign/second language.

Method

The data collection method was the questionnaire which consisted of demographic data, a reading comprehension test, and an attitude scale.

Results

(1) There was no significant difference in scores for TESOL and Non-TESOL students in their knowledge of FL/SL reading comprehension, (2) There was a significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of TESOL and Non-TESOL students, (3) there was not a significant difference in the reading comprehension knowledge scores for the Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups, (4) , there is a significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups, and (5) there was a medium correlation between the FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post-graduate specialization.

Conclusion

These findings indicated that post-graduate specialization was not a decisive factor in FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge in contrast to reading comprehension attitudes. Being a Middle Eastern or not didn't make any difference in the knowledge of FL/SL reading comprehension at the post-graduate level. However, nationality affected the attitude towards FL/SL reading comprehension at the post-graduate level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is essential for everybody's daily and academic life. Consequently, (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002) admit that comprehension instruction is effective in empowering students to make meaning of different types of texts. Despite the emphasis on mastering all the different language skills and teaching them as an interwoven tapestry as Oxford (2001) pinpointed, the ESL/EFL reading comprehension skills of many post-graduate non-native speakers of English were neglected.

1.1 Background

The idea of the study arose from the researcher's awareness that some post-graduate non-native speakers of English find it difficult to comprehend a reading text. As a researcher, when I started the MSc modules in 2006/2007, I noticed that some of my classmates at the School of Education, University of Exeter, don't fully comprehend what they read**.** Besides, there is a limited amount of empirical research dealing with FL/SL reading comprehension at the university level. El-Koumy, (1996), Song (1997) & Nodoushan (2003). Thus, the problem of the present study is represented in investigating the FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge and attitudes of thirty post-graduate non-native speakers of English at the University of Exeter, UK.

Many post-graduate non-native speakers of English are poor comprehenders of English written texts for the following reasons. First, FL/SL students start to study English in most countries at the age of 12. Second, English is taught as only one language course among many other courses. Third, English is not the medium of instruction in any of the other courses. Moreover, English is marginalized at the university level. In addition, lecturers teach for the final exams purpose. Finally, students who study English as a foreign or a second language are not in the habit of reading in English.

1.2 Literature Review

Due to the significance of FL/SL reading comprehension in the teaching/learning process, many previous studies have tackled it and proved its complexity and difficulty to master even at the university level. Some of these studies dealt with the effect of text-related issues on the students' reading comprehension such as Peretz and Shoham (1990), Nodoushan (2003), Parvaz (2006). Other studies explored the effect of some instructional methods and techniques on developing the FL/SL reading comprehension of university students such as El-Koumy, (1996), Song (1997) and El-Koumy and (1999).

In parallel with that, Sugirin (1999), Chi (1999) & (2002) conducted studies that dealt with university students' comprehension of texts and short stories written in English. On a psychological level, Hilden & Pressley (2007) conducted a qualitative, multiple case study, to explore the challenges and successes teachers encounter while participating in a professional development program Finally, the effect of field of specialization on the reading comprehension of university students was tackled by Nodoushan (2005)**.**

1.3 Significance of the study

To reiterate, this literature review made clear the following points: (1) a need for research on FL/SL reading comprehension at the university level; (2) a need for exploring ESL/EFL students' attitudes towards their reading comprehension.

1.4 Aims of the study

Taking these needs into consideration, this study attempted to (1) investigate the effect of (a) post-graduate specialization (TESOL & Non-TESOL) and (b) nationality (Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern students) on the knowledge of and the attitude towards FL/SL reading comprehension. (2) find out the correlation between the post graduate specialization and the attitude toward FL/SL reading comprehension. From the above mentioned aims, the current study was considered an expansion to the literature in field of FL/SL reading comprehension at the university level.

2. Hypotheses of the study

The current study attempted to verify the following hypotheses:

1- *The effect of specialization (TESOL & Non TESOL) on postgraduate students' FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge.*

H_1- There will be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%).

H_0 . There will not be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%).

Independent Variable	Post-graduate specialization (TESOL & Non TESOL students).
Dependent Variable	Reading comprehension knowledge
Statistical Test Used	Independent Sample T-Test
Direction of the hypothesis	Non-directional hypothesis as it does not specify the direction of the difference.

2- *The effect of specialization (TESOL & Non TESOL) on post graduate students' FL/SL reading comprehension attitude*

H_2 . There will be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%).

H_0 There will not be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%).

Independent Variable	Post-graduate specialization (TESOL & Non TESOL students).
Dependent Variable	Reading comprehension attitude
Statistical Test Used	Mann-Whitney U Test
Direction of the hypothesis	Non-directional hypothesis as it does not specify the direction of the difference.

3- *The effect of nationality (Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern) on post graduate students' FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge.*

H_3 – There will be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%)

H_0 . There will not be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%)

Independent Variable	Nationality (Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students).
Dependent Variable	Reading comprehension knowledge
Statistical Test Used	Independent Sample T-Test

Direction of the hypothesis	Non-directional hypothesis as it does not specify the direction of the difference.

4- *The effect of nationality (Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern) on post graduate students' FL/SL reading comprehension attitude.*

H_4 - There will be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%)

H_0 - There will not be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%).

Independent Variable	Nationality (Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students).
Dependent Variable	Reading comprehension attitude
Statistical Test Used	Mann-Whitney U Test
Direction of the hypothesis	Non-directional hypothesis as it does not specify the direction of the difference.

5- *The correlation between post graduate specialization (TESOL & Non-TESOL)and FL/SL reading comprehension.*

H_5 - There will be a statistical significant relationship between FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL)

H_0 - There will not be a statistical significant relationship between FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL)

Independent Variable	Post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL)
Dependent Variable	Reading comprehension attitude
Statistical Test Used	Spearman's Rank Order Correlation
Direction of the hypothesis	Non-directional hypothesis as it does not specify the direction of the correlation.

3. The Method

3.1 Instrument

The data collection method used in this study was the questionnaire. It was comprised of three parts (see appendix 1). Part (I) dealt with the demographic data of the respondents of the study. This included: age, nationality, course of study and specialization. In this part, respondents were asked to underline the most appropriate answer from the multiple choice items. Part (II) was a reading comprehension test that

measured the respondents' knowledge of reading comprehension. This test was constructed by the researcher based on a reading text. It consisted of a reading text followed by eight multiple choice comprehension questions to measure different reading comprehension skills. Part (III) was an attitude scale that was meant to measure the respondents' sentiments and feelings towards FL/SL reading comprehension. It is a 5 point Likert Scale consisting of fifteen statements to which the respondents should respond with what they think is the most appropriate answer. Each statement was valued in a range of 1 to 5, where (1) stands for "never", (2) stands for "rarely", (3) stands for "sometimes", (4) stands for "very often" and (5) stands for "always".

The questionnaire of the present study was a close-ended one. It consisted of closed questions that prescribed the range of responses from which the respondents may choose. "In general, the closed questions whether they were multiple choice questions or rating scales are quick to complete and straightforward to code (e.g. computer analysis), and don't discriminate unduly on the basis of how articulate the respondents are." (Wilson & McLean, 1994:21)

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy used in this study was one of the non-probability samples. In other words, my research used a convenience sample. The reasons why a convenience sample was selected for my study were as follow: it was the only available sample within the time frame of this small scale enquiry, it was far less complicated, easy to set up, was considerably less expensive and proved adequate where I didn't intend to generalize the findings beyond the sample in question.

The subjects were selected according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility (Silverman, 2001). That is to say, they were participating in a post-graduate degree at the University of Exeter. The sample of the study was heterogeneous; a mixture of both male and female students of different nationalities. They shared some common characteristics as their ages ranged from late twenties to late forties, they were speakers of English as a foreign/second language, and they were doing a post-graduate degree at the University of Exeter, either MSc or PhD. The subjects of the study differed in some the specialization, origin, nationality and specialization.

3.3 Operational definitions of the study variables

The study variables are operationally defined as follow. Reading comprehension knowledge was operationalized as the students' ability to give the correct answer to eight multiple choice reading comprehension questions that are based on a reading comprehension text. As for the attitude scale, it was

operationalized as the self-report of attitude shown on a five point Likert Scale that is composed of fifteen statements.

3.3.1 Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the questionnaire indicates how free it is from random errors. The type of reliability used in this study was the internal consistency. That is the degree to which the items that made up the questionnaire are all measuring the same underlying attribute. Cronbach co-efficient alpha was used to indicate the reliability of the reading comprehension questionnaire. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha for a test containing non-dichotomously marked questions was used.

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.54	8

The reliability for the reading comprehension test was (0.54). This shows that the reading comprehension test is below (0.07), which means that it was not highly reliable. The reason why this result might have been obtained was that the test questions were easier than expected to most of the respondents. In other words, the respondents didn't have difficulty answering the test questions.

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.689	15

Alpha Cronbach's reliability for the attitude scale was (0.68) which clarifies that the attitude scale is reliable because it is approximately equal to (0.7).

3.3.2 Validity of the Instrument

To check the validity of the reading comprehension test, content validity was used by administering the reading comprehension test to two experts in the field of TESOL/TEFL. These experts checked the test and agreed that it had a valid content. In other words, the test measured the reading comprehension skills that were supposed to be measured. As for the attitude scale, I used a previously validated and published reading comprehension attitude scale which saved time and resources. It was published in *The Reading Matrix*, Vol.2, No.3, September 2002. It was entitled "Practising College Reading Strategies", by Ana Paula Cabral.

3.3.2.1 Threats to internal Validity:

In terms of the present study, there is a number of threats that might have affected the internal validity of the study.

(1) The reading comprehension test that is statistically unreliable might have introduced serious errors into the study results.

(2) The sampling strategy used constituted some sort of threat to the validity of the study. As Cohen et al. (2000, p.103) stated that "the convenience sample doesn't represent any group apart from itself; it doesn't seek to generalize about the wider population….. The parameters of generalizability in this type of sample are negligible."

(3) Instrument reactivity: the effects that the instrument of the study exerted on the respondents in the study.

3.3.3 Procedures

Data was collected at the second semester of 2007. The procedures for this study went as follow. First, students were asked via e-mails to voluntarily participate in my small scale enquiry. Second, those who accepted to participate were sent the reading comprehension test and the attitude scale. Third, the subjects of my study were informed of the purpose, aim and what they are required to do as mentioned in the introductory part of the questionnaire, see appendix (1).

4. Results of the study

To verify the study hypotheses, the researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics. Having collected the required data, I analyzed them statistically using SPSS as follow. First, I coded the data and put them into an SPSS file. Second, I started to do different statistical procedures. For example, I used Cronbach's Alpha for the reliability of both the reading comprehension test and attitude scale. In addition, a number of statistical tests were used in my study: independent sample t-test, Mann-Whitney U Test, and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation.

Prior to deciding which test is used to answer which question or hypothesis, a normality test was used to specify the type of data. "Normal is used to describe a symmetrical, bell shaped curve, which has the greatest frequency of scores in the middle, with smaller frequencies towards the extremes". (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2000, p.52). As for the current study, the normality test resulted in the following.

Normality Test for Reading comprehension knowledge

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov(a)			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
ktotal	.266	30	.000	.816	30	.000

a Lilliefors Significance Correction

The table above shows the results of the normality test for the Reading comprehension knowledge. If the normality test result is 0.05 or less, we call the data normal, but if the result is more than 0.05, we call the data not normal (Field, 2000). Checking the significance of the normality test results with both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (0.000) and Shapiro-Wilk (0.000) tests, they were less than 0.05. This means that the data is normal. Therefore, independent sample t-tests was used with this type of data.

Normality Test for Reading comprehension attitude

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov(a)			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Attitude total	.117	30	.200(*)	.953	30	.201

The table above shows the results of the normality test for the Reading comprehension attitude. Checking the significance of the normality test results with both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (.200) and Shapiro-Wilk (.201) tests, were higher than 0.05. This means that the data is not normal. Therefore, Mann-Whitney U Test, and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation were used with this type of data.

4.1 Statistical Analysis
4.1.1 Verifying the hypotheses
Hypothesis One

H_{01} - There won't be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%).

According to the normality test result for the reading comprehension knowledge, the data was normal. Therefore, the independent sample t-test was used with H_{01} to compare the mean scores on reading comprehension knowledge, for two different groups of subjects; TESOL and Non-TESOL students.

## Reading comprehension knowledge and TESOL & Non-TESOL students

Group Statistics

	Specialization	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ktot	Non-Tesol	18	7.2222	.94281	.22222

10

| | | | | | 12 | 7.0000 | .85280 | .24618 |
| al | Tesol | | | | | | | |

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
ktotal	Equal variances assumed	.361	.553	.656	28	.517	.22222	.33858	-.47133	.91578
	Equal variances not assumed			.670	25.342	.509	.22222	.33165	-.46035	.90479

11
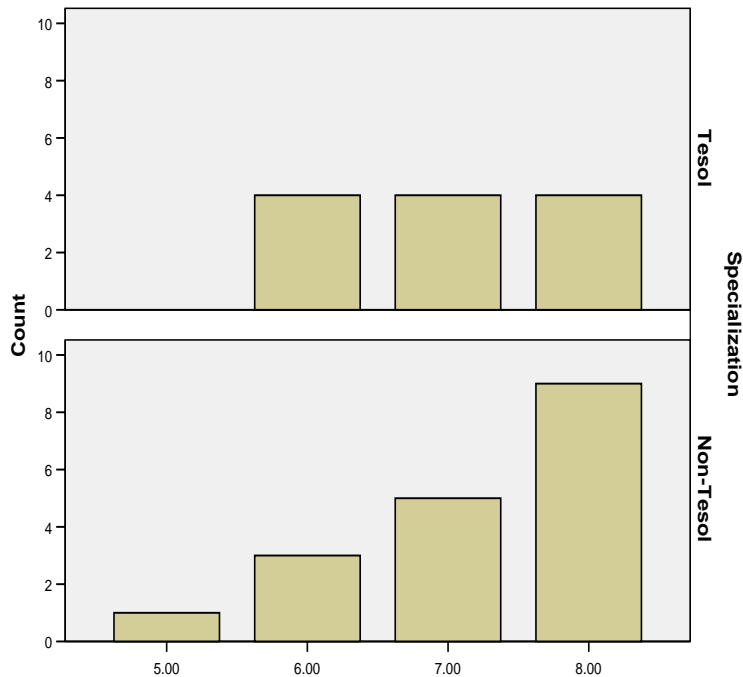
The above table indicates that the significance value .553 is > .05, which means that the variance of scores for the two groups (TESOL and Non-TESOL) is the same. That's why equal variances assumed was used. The sig. (2-tailed) value is .517. As this value is above the required cut-off of .05, we conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension knowledge scores for the TESOL and the Non-TESOL groups.

Calculating the effect size

Effect size statistics provide an indication of the magnitude of the differences between the two groups. Eta Squared is used. Eta Squared can range from 0 to 1 and represents the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent (group) variable.
Eta Squared formula =

(t)²

(t)² + (N1+N2 -2)

(.656)²
-----------------------   = 0.015 (rounded)
(.656)² + (18+12 -2)

Referring to Cohen (1988) for interpreting this value (0.01) = small effect, (0.06) = moderate effect, (0.140 = large effect. So, we can see that the effect size of 0.15 is very small. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted, whereas the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two

There won't be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate TESOL students & Non TESOL students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%).

According to the normality test result for the reading comprehension attitude, the data was not normal. Therefore, Mann-Whitney Test was used with H_{02} to test the differences between the TESOL and Non-TESOL groups on the reading comprehension attitude. This test is the non-parametric alternative to the t-test for independent sample. Instead of comparing means of the two groups, as in the case of the t-test, the Mann-Whitney U Test actually compares medians. It converts the scores on the continuous variable to ranks, across the two groups. It then evaluated whether the ranks for the two groups differ significantly.
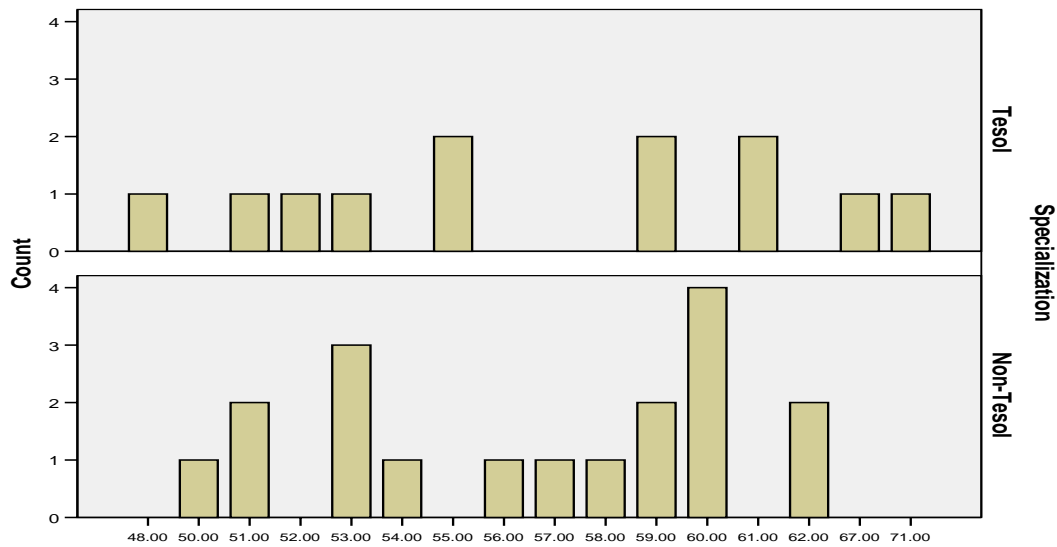
Mann-Whitney U Test

Ranks

	Specialization	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Attitude total	Non-Tesol	18	15.19	273.50
	Tesol	12	15.96	191.50
	Total	30		

Test Statistics (b)

	Attitude total
Mann-Whitney U	102.500
Wilcoxon W	273.500
Z	-.234
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.815
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.819(a)

a Not corrected for ties.

b Grouping Variable: Specialization

The Z value is (.234) with a significant level of p= .815. The probability value (p)is larger than 0.05 , so the result is significant. There is a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of TESOL and Non-TESOL Groups. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, whereas the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Three

H_{03} There won't be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge at (0.05%)

According to the normality test result for the reading comprehension knowledge, the data was normal. Therefore, the independent sample t-test was used with H_{03} to compare the mean scores on reading comprehension knowledge, for the Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students.

Reading comprehension knowledge and Middle Eastern and Non- Middle Eastern

Group Statistics

	Nationality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ktotal	Middle Eastern	15	7.2000	.86189	.22254
	Non-Middle Eastern	15	7.0667	.96115	.24817

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Ktotal	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	.400	28	.692	.13333	.33333	-.54947	.81614
	Equal variances not assumed			.400	27.674	.692	.13333	.33333	-.54983	.81650
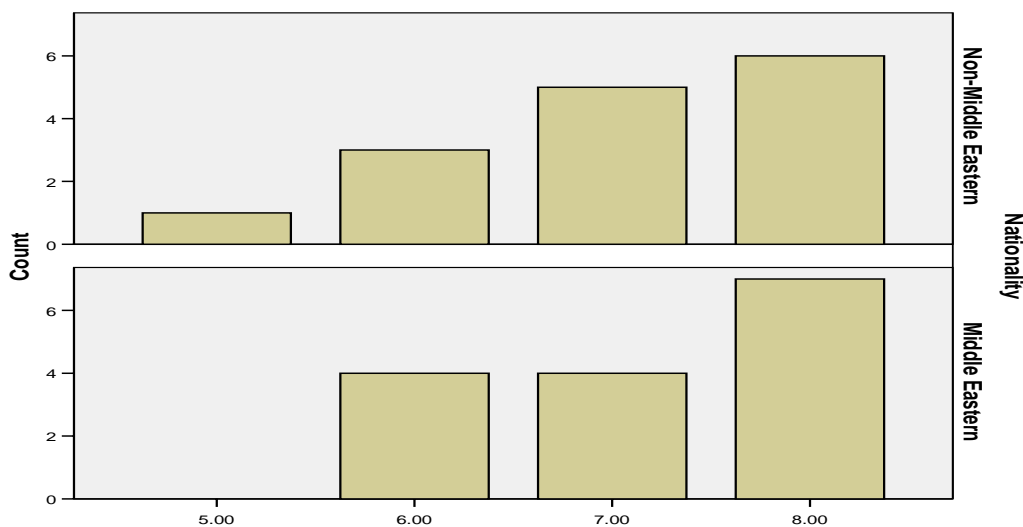
The above table indicates that the significance value 1.000 is > .05, which means that the variance of scores for the two groups (Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern students) is the same. That's why equal variances assumed was used. The sig. (2-tailed) value is .692. As this value is above the required cut-off of .05, we conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension knowledge scores for the Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups.

Calculating the effect size

Eta Squared formula =

$$\frac{(t)^2}{(t)^2 + (N1+N2-2)}$$

$$\frac{(.400)^2}{(.400)^2 + (15+15-2)} = 0.0056 \text{ (rounded)}$$

15

Referring to Cohen (1988) for interpreting this value (0.01) = small effect, (0.06) = moderate effect, (0.140 = large effect. So, we can see that the effect size of (0.0056) is very small. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted, whereas the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Four

H_{04} - There won't be a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of post graduate Middle Eastern and Non Middle Eastern students in their FL/SL reading comprehension attitude at (0.05%).

According to the normality test result for the reading comprehension attitude, the data was not normal. Therefore, Mann-Whitney Test was used with H_{04} to test the differences between Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups on the reading comprehension attitude. This test is the non-parametric alternative to the t-test for independent sample. Instead of comparing means of the two groups, as in the case of the t-test, the Mann-Whitney U Test actually compares medians. It converts the scores on the continuous variable to ranks, across the two groups. It then evaluated whether the ranks for the two groups differ significantly.

Reading comprehension Attitude and Middle Eastern / Non-Middle Eastern
Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	Nationality	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Attitude total	Middle Eastern	15	15.73	236.00
	Non-Middle Eastern	15	15.27	229.00
	Total	30		

Test Statistics(b)

|	Attitude total
Mann-Whitney U	109.000
Wilcoxon W	229.000
Z	-.146
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.884
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.902(a)

a Not corrected for ties.

16
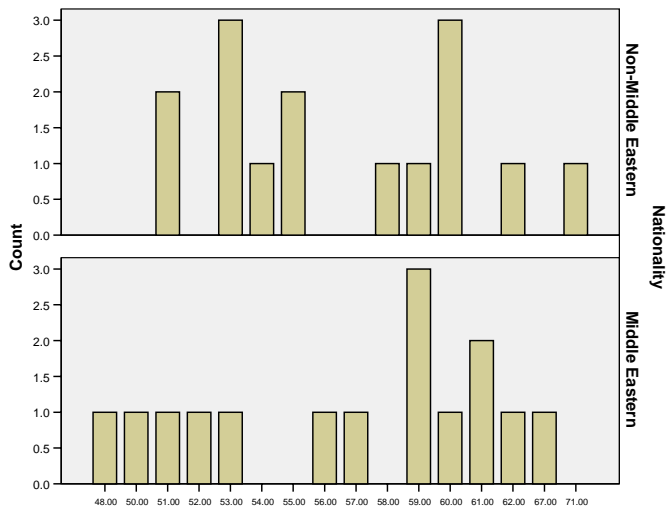
The Z value is (-.146) with a significant level of p = .884. The probability value (p) is larger than 0.05, so the result is significant. There is a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern Groups. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, whereas the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Five

H_{05} - There won't be a statistical significant relationship between FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL)

Nonparametric Correlations

			Attitude total	Specialization
Spearman's rho	Attitude total	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.043
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.820
		N	30	30
	Specialization	Correlation Coefficient	.043	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.820	.
		N	30	30

17
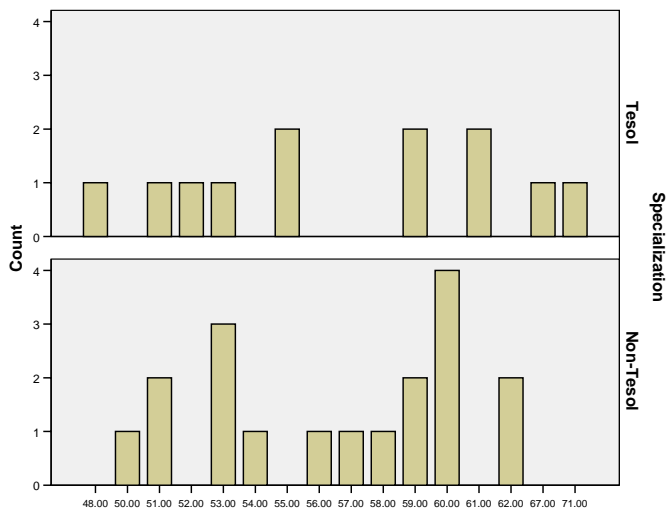
Spearman's Rank Order Correlation (rho) is used to calculate the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables. This is the non-parametric alternative to Pearson's product-moment correlation. This analysis explores the relationship between FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and Post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL). The two variables are FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and Post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL).

The output from Spearman Rank Order Correlation can be interpreted in the same way as the output obtained from Pearson product moment correlation. To consider the output of the size of the value of Pearson Correlation (r). This can range from – 1.00 to 1.00. This value will indicate the strength of the relationship between the two variables. A correlation of 0 indicates no relationships at all, a correlation of 1.0 indicates a perfect positive correlation, and a value of -1.0 indicates a perfect negative correlation.

According to the table above, the value of Pearson Correlation (r) is .043, which means that the correlation between the FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL) is medium. (See Cohen, 1988)

5. Discussion of the results:

The results of the current study contribute to an understanding of the FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge and attitudes. They highlight the crucial role that FL/SL reading comprehension plays at the post graduate level at university. The statistical analyses identified five hypotheses: two of these hypotheses are relevant to the effect of the post graduate specialization (TESOL & Non-TESOL) on the FL/SL reading comprehension knowledge and attitudes. The other two hypotheses are relevant to the effect of the post graduate nationality (Middle Eastern & Non-Middle Eastern) on the FL/SL reading

comprehension knowledge and attitudes. The last hypothesis is related to the correlation between the post graduate specialization (TESOL & Non-TESOL) on the FL/SL reading comprehension attitudes.

Analyses of these hypotheses made clear the following points. First, the independent sample t-test was conducted to compare reading comprehension knowledge scores for TESOL and Non-TESOL students. There was no significant difference in scores for TESOL and Non-TESOL students in their knowledge of FL/SL reading comprehension. There are some reasons behind this finding. First, the reading comprehension test was easy for most of the respondents. Second, All the British universities require all students to pass English Language Proficiency Test that most respondents have already passed. Reading comprehension is an important part of this test. Finally, instructional methods and techniques should be developed to enhance the FL/SL reading comprehension of university students as supported by El-Koumy, (1996), Song (1997) and El-Koumy and (1999) highlighted before.

Second, there was a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of TESOL and Non-TESOL Groups. The TESOL group students scored slightly higher in their attitude scale than the Non-TESOL group students because (1) they studied English for longer periods of time than the Non-TESOL group. (2) they have studied specific courses on how to teach FL/SL reading comprehension to speakers of other languages. (3) they had positive attitudes because they are graduates of the English department.

Third, there was not a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension knowledge scores for the Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups. This result is justified as both groups learnt English as a foreign or a second language. Also, the content of the reading text might have been familiar to both of them as a historical text. Besides, learners' exposure to English is limited basically because of the restricted need for L2 in daily life.

 Fourth, there is a statistically significant difference in the reading comprehension attitude scores of Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern groups. This is because of the good reading habits that the Non-middle Eastern used to made them better comprehenders than the Middle Eastern students.

Finally, the value of Pearson Correlation (r) is .043, which means that the correlation between the FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL) is medium. The reason for this medium correlation was that all the post graduate respondents of the study acquired a high level of English as a basic requirement to be admitted in any of the British universities. The effect of field of specialization on the reading comprehension of university students as Nodoushan (2005) mentioned was closely related to the reading comprehension attitudes.

19

The aims of the present study have been achieved as (1) the post-graduate specialization (TESOL & Non-TESOL) and the nationality (Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern students) have variously affected the knowledge of and the attitude towards FL/SL reading comprehension. (2) There was a medium correlation between the post graduate specialization and the attitude toward FL/SL reading comprehension.

5.1 Limitations of the study

Although these findings constitute an important further step in the understanding of the FL/SL reading comprehension at the post graduate level at university, the results should be taken as tentative rather than definitive because of the current study's limitations. First, the study did not distinguish different types of reading attitudes, for example, study reading versus recreational reading. Learners might possess different attitudes toward different types of reading, and this is also an area for investigation. In relation to this point, we should also investigate the impact of different media (e.g., magazines, news articles, manuals).The second limitation concerns the generalizability of the results. The study was conducted on a convenience sample of 30 post graduate students who study English as a foreign or a second language. That's why the results couldn't be generalisable. In addition, the respondents' high scores on the reading comprehension test highlighted that a pilot study should have been undertaken. Finally, Different variables need to be included that may explain L2 reading attitudes (see, e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998). As discussed earlier, we need more data to examine this issue.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was considered an expansion to the literature on FL/SL reading comprehension at the post graduate level at university. This study was unique in having a blend of different specializations and nationalities. This study offered important pedagogical implications. First, TESOL students should be well prepared at the Faculties of Education to score significantly higher than the Non-TESOL students. Second, Non-TESOL students should be in the habit of reading in English as a foreign language because this affects their comprehension of English on the long run as post graduate students at an international university. Being a Middle Eastern or not didn't make any difference in the knowledge of FL/SL reading comprehension at the post graduate level. However, being a middle eastern or not affected the attitude towards FL/SL reading comprehension at the post graduate level. Finally, there was a medium correlation between the FL/SL reading comprehension attitude and post graduate specialization (TESOL and Non-TESOL). Teachers, therefore, need also to consider when and how learners' linguistic development affects learners' reading attitude.

Bibliography

Block, C., Gambrell, L., & Pressley, M. (2002*). Improving Comprehension Instruction: Rethinking Research, Theory and Classroom Practice.* 1st edition, Jossey-Bass education series, USA.

Cabral, A.P. (2002). Practising College Reading Strategies, ***The Reading Matrix***, (2), (3).

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cohen, L. et al (2000): *Research Methods in Education*, 5th Edition, Great Britain.

Day, R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

El-Koumy, A. (1996). Effects of Three Questioning Strategies on EFL Reading Comprehension. *ERIC* (ED411696).

El-Koumy, A. (1999). Effects of Three Semantic Mapping Strategies on EFL Students' Reading Comprehension. *ERIC,* (ED435193).

El-Koumy, A. (2000). Differences in FL Reading Comprehension among High-, Middle-, and Low-Ambiguity Tolerance Students. *ERIC.* (ED445534)

Field, A. (2002) Discovering Statistics Using SPSS for Windows. London, Sage.

Gravetter, F.J. & Wallnau, L.B. (2000). *Statistics for the behavioral sciences* (5th edn). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, p.52.

Hilden, K. R. & Pressley, M. (2007). Self-Regulation through Transactional Strategies Instruction, *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 23, 1, 51-75.

Nodoushan, M. A. (2003). Text Familiarity, Reading Tasks and ESP Test Performance. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 3, 1.

Nodoushan, M. A. (2005) Cognitive Style as A Factor Affecting Task Based Reading Comprehension Test Scores. *ERIC.* (ED491465)

Oxford, R. (2001). Integrated Skills in ESL/EFL Classroom, *ERIC*, University of
      Maryland. pp.2-4.

Pallant, J. (2005). *SPSS SURVIVAL MANUAL, Step by Step guide to data analysis using SPSS for Windows,.* 2nd edition, Open University Press.

Parvaz, M. H. (2006). How Does Text Cohesion Affect Reading Comprehension?
      Iranian Journal of Language Studies (IJLS), 1, 1.

Peretz, A. S. & Miriam, S. (1990). Does Topic Familiarity Affect Assessed
      Difficulty and Actual Performance on Reading Comprehension Tests in LSP?
      Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academic Committee for
      Research on Language Testing.

Silverman , D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text*
      and interaction . London : Sage.

Song, M. (1997). The Effect of Dialogue Journal Writing on Writing Quality,
      Reading Comprehension, and Writing Apprehension of EFL College Students.
      ERIC, (ED410766).

Sugirin (1999). Exploring the Comprehension Strategies of EFL Readers: A Multi-method Study. *Paper presented at an International Workshop on written Language processing at the University of New South Wales* (Sydney, Australia.)

Wilson, N. & McLean, S. (1994). Questionnaire Design: a practical Introduction. Newtown Abbey, Co.
      Antrim: University of Ulster Press, p. 21

Appendix (1)

Questionnaire

Introduction

This questionnaire is designed to be part of a small scale enquiry as a requirement of formative assignment (1) in an MSc Module called the Scientific Methodologies in Educational Research. The aim of this enquiry is to measure the knowledge of and attitudes towards the English language reading comprehension among a group of post graduate students (non-native speakers of English) at the School of Education, University of Exeter. I kindly request you to answer this questionnaire fully. All the answers you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

The researcher
Abdelhamid Mohamed Abdelhamid Ahmed
MPhil student, School of Education, University of Exeter.

Part I: Demographic Data

Please underline the most appropriate answer:

1- Age Group   a) 20-30   b) 30 - 40   c) 40 - 50

2- Nationality: a) Middle Eastern   b) Non – Middle Eastern

3- Course of Study: a) MSc.   b) PhD

4- Specialization: a) TESOL   b) Non-TESOL

Part II: Reading Comprehension Test

Please read the following reading text and answer the following comprehension questions by either underlining or putting a circle around the most appropriate answer. If you are not sure about the answer, make an educated guess.

The Mystery of the Maya

The Mayan Indians lived in Mexico for thousands of years before the Spanish arrived in the 1500s. The Maya were an intelligent, culturally rich people whose achievements were many. They had farms, beautiful palaces, and cities with many buildings. The Mayan people knew a lot about nature and the world around them. This knowledge helped them to live a better life than most people of that time, because they could use it to make their lives more comfortable and rewarding. Knowledge about tools and farming, for instance, made their work easier and more productive.

In ancient Mexico there were many small clearings in the forest. In each clearing was a village with fields of corn, beans, and other crops around it. To clear the land for farms, the Maya cut down trees with stone axes. They planted seeds by digging holes in the ground with pointed sticks. A farmer was able to grow crops that produced food for several people. But not every Maya had to be a farmer. Some were cloth makers, builders, or priests.

The Maya believed in many gods, including rain gods, sun gods, and corn gods. The people built large temples to honour the Mayan gods. Skilful workers built cities around these temples. It was

difficult for them to construct these cities, because they had no horses to carry the heavy stone they used to build with. Workers had to carry all of the building materials themselves. Today, many of these ancient Mayan cities and temples are still standing.

Although the cities that the Maya built were beautiful, and the people worked hard to build them, very few of the people lived in them. Usually, only the priests lived in the cities.

The other people lived in small villages in the forests. Their houses were much simpler than the elaborate structures in the cities. They lived in small huts with no windows. The walls were made of poles covered with dried mud, and the roof was made of grass or leaves. Most Maya lived a simple life close to nature.

Measuring time was important to the Maya, so they developed a system for measuring it accurately. Farmers needed to know when to plant and harvest their crops. Mayan priests made a system to keep track of time. They wrote numbers as dots (...) and bars (-). A dot was one and a bar was five.

The Mayan priests studied the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets. They made a calendar from what they learned. The year was divided into 18 months of 20 days each with five days left over. The Mayan calendar was far more accurate than the European calendars of the time.

Around the year 800, the Maya left their villages and beautiful cities, never to return. No one knows why this happened. They may have died from an infectious disease. They may have left because the soil could no longer grow crops. Archaeologists are still trying to find the lost secrets of the Maya. They are still one of our greatest mysteries.

Please read the following questions and then circle the most appropriate answer.

4-What is the main idea of this text?

a- The Mayan calendar was more accurate than the European calendar.
b- The Maya were excellent farmers.
c- The Maya were a culturally rich, advanced society.
d- The Mayan cities were difficult to build.

5- The Maya were an intelligent, culturally rich people whose **achievements** were many. The word achievements is a synonym for which of the following words.

   a- mistakes   b- successes   c- roads   d- skills

 6- The Maya lived in Mexico -----------------------------------

   a- only after the Spanish arrived.
   b- at the same time as the Spanish.
   c- only for a few years.
   d- thousands of years before the Spanish.

7- Many Mayan cities and temples are still standing today because -----------------
   a- they were so well built.
   b- they are not very old.
   c- they have been rebuilt.
   d- there is never any bad weather in Mexico.

8- The Mayan calendar is ------------------our current calendar
   a- the same as

24

b- different from
c- more accurate than
d- less accurate than

9- Most Maya lived ------------------
a- in beautiful cities.
b- in huts made of poles, mud, and leaves.
c- in caves.
d- in stone temples

10- The Mayan civilization was an intelligent and cultured one
a- true   b- false   c- not sure   d- don't know

11- Their houses were much simpler than the elaborate structures in the city.
What does *elaborate* mean?
a- small
b- plain
c- fancy
d- old

Part III: Attitude towards Reading Comprehension
The Reading/Comprehension Attitude Scale.

Please respond to the following statements by putting a tick (√) into the box that best expresses your feelings and sentiments about reading comprehension.

1= never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = very often; 5 = always

Items	Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1	I read for reasons related to my academic activities;					
2	I read as a hobby;					
3	I am able to concentrate while reading					
4	I understand the texts I read;					
5	I understand texts written in English;					
6	I use context to find out the meaning of a word/expression;					
7	I use dictionaries and encyclopedias;					
8	I assimilate the new vocabulary;					
9	When I don't understand an expression/sentence I read it again;					
10	I can find the key words of a text;					
11	I can point out the main ideas of a text;					
12	I can separate what is important in a text from what is not important;					
13	I solve my doubts/ exchange opinions with my teachers about /texts I read;					
14	I memorize contents through reading;					
15	I quote from the books I read;					

Thank you very much for spending your time to answer this questionnaire.

Appendix (2) Terminology used in this study

Post-graduate students – Students doing their Masters or PhD degrees.

NNS – Non-Native Speakers of English

FL – Foreign Language

SL – Second Language

TESOL Students – Students whose teaching English to speakers of Other Languages is their field of Specialization

Non-TESOL Students - Students who don't study English as their field of specialization.

Middle Eastern Students – Those students who come from the Middle East Countries

Non-Middle Eastern Students – Those students who come from any Non-English speaking countries that are not from the Middle East.