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ما ورد فيه هذا العدد يعبر عن آراء الكتاب أنفسهم، ولا يعكس بالضرورة آراء هيئة التحرير.
The Effect of Using the Flipped Learning Strategy on Developing University Students’ Reading Comprehension in EFL and their Attitudes towards the Strategy

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Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL. The study also sought to reveal students’ attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy. The sample of the study comprised 72 students enrolled in 101 English Communication Skills course at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Amman. The students were assigned to two groups, experimental and control.

The tools of the study included a pre-post reading comprehension test and a scale to measure students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy.

The results of the study showed that the flipped classroom strategy had a positive effect on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL. The results indicated that there was a statistical difference at (α=0.05) between the two groups (control and experimental) in the post-reading comprehension test in favor of the experimental group. Furthermore, the results revealed that students of the experimental group showed positive attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy.

Keywords: flipped learning strategy, reading comprehension, EFL

الملخص

أهداف الدراسة الحالية إلى قياس أثر استخدام استراتيجية التعلم المعكس في تنمية مهارات الاستيعاب القرائي في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلبة جامعة العلوم الإسلامية العالمية. حيث كونت عينة الدراسة التي اختبرت عشوائياً من (72) طالبًا وطالبة يدرسون مادة مهارات الاتصال باللغة الإنجليزية (101) خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول من العام الجامعي 2017-2018. وقد تم توزيع الطلبة على شعبتين: تجريبية (37) طالبًا وطالبة، وضابطة (35) طالبًا وطالبة. وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة صمم البحث أدوات الدراسة المتمثلة في اختبار مهارات الاستيعاب القرائي المطبق قليلاً وبعضها على المجموعتين، ومقياس اتجاهات نحو

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1. Introduction and background:

For foreign language learners, reading is one of the most important skills to acquire. Reading helps learners of English as a Foreign / Second Language (EFL/ESL) build their vocabulary, leading them to endure learning and improvement in L2 learning skills (Carrell, 1989). Therefore, EFL reading research has long been interested in various aspects that affect reading comprehension. The main focus of the bulk of this research is to investigate strategies, techniques that contribute to effective reading and how teachers can incorporate these strategies and technique into reading instruction (Samadani, 2011). Anderson, et al (1985) explained that reading comprehension gained a new level of emphasis. It was called the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading.

Effective reading comprehension requires not only accurate reading skills but also automatic and fluent reading ability. Many struggling university level students have difficulty moving to a level of automaticity and fluency that allows them to comprehend what they are reading. The principle of reading comprehension is the cognitive tasks involved in reading as well as the various activities teachers use in teaching reading comprehension (Roeble & Shiue 2013).

The use of learning technologies, especially multimedia provides varied facilities for students’ learning that are not possible with other media. Pedagogical literature has proved that individuals have different learning styles. Flipped classroom is one of the new pedagogical approaches that aim to improve the level of the students in language skills.

The flipped learning means that activities that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom take place outside the classroom and vice versa. The flipped classroom environment ensures that students become more active participants compared with in the traditional classroom. (Uzunboylu & Karagozlu, 2015).

Garza (2014) noted that the flipped classroom is a teaching method that delivers the lecture content to the learners at home via electronic means and uses the class time for practical application activities.

The flipped learning strategy is based on assigning the students to learn a new material outside the classroom (usually online). The strategy moves activities that traditionally considered homework to be carried out in the classroom and encourages the students to work cooperatively via tech tools to study the material and hold online
According to Strohmyer (2015), applying flipped classroom strategy achieves many benefits. “These benefits include that flipped classroom: 1) guarantees for teacher making good use of classroom period; so, he/she makes use of time in guiding and helping, 2) enhances the critical thinking, self-learning, building experiences, communication skills, and cooperation among students, 3) provides a technique to evaluate the students’ understanding because tests and short tasks that students perform are indicators of weaknesses and strengths in their understanding of content”.

Research conducted in Jordan in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field in general and reading comprehension in particular showed that most students suffer from low reading comprehension because of several factors. Migdadi and Baniabdelahraman (2016) indicated that many Jordanian foreign language teachers are still using ineffective traditional methods in teaching reading comprehension. Students continue to suffer in their reading comprehension because most teachers themselves read, translate and even explain in their native language the reading text before asking students to answer the concluded questions. Weak students do not have the opportunity to read or even to participate because teachers do not use various reading comprehension strategies that meet the needs of the differences of all students.

It is also clearly observed that research conducted in Jordan to investigate the impact of the flipped learning strategy in EFL class is almost rare. Thus, this study comes to investigate the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL and to reveal the students’ attitudes towards the use of the strategy.

1.1. Reading Comprehension in EFL:

Reading comprehension is a key issue in the EFL learning process and should be emphasized at different levels of education. Al-Shawesh & Hussin (2015) indicated that reading is one of language learning skills which have a great significance for the role it plays in the second language acquisition process. Therefore, paying a great attention to its teaching and learning has to be the main objective of teachers and learners of any language.

Reading is a complex and purposeful sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning with text (Kucer, 2005).

Roebl & Shiue (2013) argued that reading comprehension is the ability to understand what we read where words have context and texts have meaning. They added that reading comprehension skills allow us to read proficiently, learn effectively and to conceptualize. These skills are, basically, based on earlier stages of reading development, including oral reading and reading fluency.
Reading comprehension involves abilities to recognize words rapidly and efficiently, develop and use a very large recognition vocabulary, process sentences in order to build comprehension, engage a range of strategic processes and underlying cognitive skills (e.g., setting goals, changing goals flexibly, monitoring comprehension), interpret meaning in relation to background knowledge, interpret and evaluate texts in line with reader goals and purposes, and process texts fluently over an extended period of time. These processes and knowledge resources allow the reader to generate text comprehension to the level required (Grabe, 2004).

As for the Jordanian context, all universities in the kingdom have a series of compulsory courses aiming to improve the students’ ability in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. One of these courses is the English Communications Skills (101), which focuses on improving the learners’ communication skills in EFL.

Many instructors of English in the Jordanian universities complain that there is an observable weakness in reading comprehension skills, noting that most students fail to deal with the whole text as a unit. This deficiency in reading comprehension could be attributed to many factors, including the reading material and the improper strategies used to teach reading (Freahat, 2015).

Migdadi & Baniabelrahman (2016) indicated that teaching and learning English skills in Jordanian schools and institutions need a lot of attention. Reading is the first and most essential skill which learners need in order to develop other language skills. Al-Husban & Alkhawaldeh (2016) said that the traditional method of teaching reading consists of reading the text silently, answering questions and explaining the meanings of new words by stating the dictionary meaning with no effort to clarify or consolidate meaning verbally and visually.

As for the reading comprehension skills that EFL university students need, studies conducted in TEFL field revealed that university students should be able to make inference through analyzing reading text, identify the meaning of unfamiliar words, answer questions depending on critical thinking, get grammatical information from reading a text, develop reading strategies to identify the speakers’ purpose and get ideas from the reading text (Freahat, 2015 and Qrzez & Rashid, 2017).

1.2. The flipped learning strategy and its educational implications

The flipped classroom approach was started in 2006 in Colorado. "The strategy basically refers to the idea that the lectures and explanations would no longer be done in class but at home, leaving what was previously treated as homework to be done in the class time” (Bergman & Sams, 2012 as quoted in Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri, 2016). Ekmekci (2017) indicated that flipped learning is a relatively new instructional method which emphasizes effective use of class time by changing the traditional tasks of teachers and students inside and outside the classroom.

Bergmann & Sams (2012) argued that the flipped learning strategy could be
viewed as one of the active learning activities since the classroom is considered to be as a workshop to discuss ideas, do some activities and implement what the students have learnt outside the class via tech tools. The flipped classroom allows the replacement of direct instruction with videos that can be accessed anytime and anywhere by learners and also by creating a problem-based learning environment during face-to-face teaching time.

The Flipped Classroom Instruction (FCI) implies a reversal of the normal class set up and the switch between class instruction and homework. What happens through a FCI approach is that students acquire the basic information outside of class, constructing their learning, enjoying the freedom of researching online for further learning. They “pause to reflect on what is being said, rewind to hear it again, listen to as much or as little of the lecture as their schedules permit, and view the lecture on a mobile device rather than in a fixed location” (Talbert, 2012).

“Flipping the classroom is an instructional strategy in which students do homework in class and classwork at home, with the ultimate goal of spending more in-class time on problem-solving and individualized instruction” (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000 as quoted in Webb, Doman & Pusey 2014).

The University of Houston (2017) indicated that a successful flipped classroom follows the following principles:

1. Provide opportunity for students to gain first exposure prior to class.
2. Provide an incentive for students to prepare for class.
3. Provide a mechanism to assess students’ understanding.
4. Provide clear connection between in-class and out-of-class activities.
5. Provide clearly defined and well-structured flipped classroom activities.
6. Provide adequate time for students to carry out their assignments.
7. Provide facilitation and guidance that supports a learning community.
8. Provide prompt and adaptive feedback on group and project work.
9. Provide technologies familiar and easy to access.

Alzain (2015) asserted that the flipped classroom is a modern technological solution for treating academic weaknesses of students and developing levels of their skills of thinking, adding that the flipped classroom strategy provides teachers with enough time to converse and discuss with students in classroom instead of memorization.

Based on what have been argued, the current study comes to investigate the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL and to measure the learners’ attitudes towards the use of this strategy.

2. Statement of the problem:

In light of the researcher’s experience, as a university instructor in TEFL field, he observed that most university students face difficulties in reading in EFL and that most students get low grades in their reading exams.

In addition, the results of a number of studies, conducted in the field of TEFL in Jordan, indicated that learners showed a lack of confidence in tackling reading

Freahat (2014) pointed out that in spite of all the changes that are taking place in the Jordanian educational system, there is an observable weakness in reading comprehension skills on the part of the students. This deficiency in reading comprehension may be attributed to many factors among which is the reading material and how reading is presented in the textbooks at high school and university.

Smadi & Alshra’ah (2015) noted that despite the fact that the reading skill is one of the most basic skills in foreign language learning and teaching, some foreign language teachers have continued to teach reading just as silent reading or reading aloud. This reason may contribute to students’ weakness in English in general and in reading in EFL in particular. Using the most appropriate reading strategies that can develop students’ reading ability could be a solution to this problem.

Therefore, the researcher believes that using the flipped learning strategy may have a positive role in helping university students develop their reading comprehension in EFL.

3. Questions of the study:
The current study attempts to answer the following questions:
- What is the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL?
- What are EFL students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy?

4. Objectives of the study:
The current study aims at:
- Investigating the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students' reading comprehension in EFL.
- Revealing EFL students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy.

5. Limitations of the study
The study, which was conducted during the first semester of the 2017-2018 academic year over 6 weeks, two classes per week, is confined to the students of the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Amman enrolled in 101 English Communication Skills course.

The study is also confined to using a pre-post reading comprehension test to investigate the effect of the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL, in addition to a scale to measure students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy.

Moreover, the current study is confined to certain reading comprehension skills as follows:
- Making inference through analyzing reading text.
- Identifying the meaning of unfamiliar words.
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- Answering questions depending on critical thinking.
- Getting grammatical information from reading a text.
- Developing reading strategies to identify the speakers’ purpose.
- Getting ideas from the reading text.

6. Significance of the study:
It is hoped that the findings of the current study would help in:
- Guiding EFL teachers to use new strategies and techniques in EFL class, especially in teaching reading.
- Improving the level of the students in EFL in general and reading in particular.
- Helping curriculum planners take into account new strategies while designing EFL curriculum.

7. Instruments:
- To achieve the purpose of the current study, the researcher developed the following instruments:
- A pre-post reading comprehension test to measure the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on university students’ reading comprehension in EFL.
- A scale to measure EFL students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy.
- Semi-structured interviews to help in revealing EFL students’ attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy.

8. Related Studies:
8.1. Studies related to reading in EFL
Khalaf (2017) examined the effect of an e-mail and WhatsApp based instructional program on Jordanian EFL tenth-grade students’ skimming and scanning skills of reading. To collect the data, two instruments were utilized: a pre-test and a post-test. The study used a quasi-experimental design. The participants of the study were 60 Jordanian tenth-grade female students from four sections who were purposefully chosen from Bahraini Basic School for Girls in Jordan. 15 students comprised the control group and 45 comprised three experimental groups of 15 students each. The findings reveal significant differences (at 0.05) in the students’ mean scores on the post-test, in favour of the students in the WhatsApp group, the e-mail and WhatsApp combination group and the e-mail group respectively. The findings also reveal a significantly high effect of the instructional program on scanning than on skimming.

Qrquez & Rashid (2017) conducted a study to investigate English as a foreign language (EFL) reading comprehension difficulties faced by students at a university in Jordan. Data were collected using questionnaires which were distributed to 200 students at Yarmouk University. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part contains demographic information about the participants and the second part includes two sections: the students’ preferences and the students’ reading difficulties. The findings reveal that
the respondents are motivated to learn as they are in dire need for acquiring English. However, they face several problems in the reading process, such as ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to cognitively process the text. The findings of this study may be useful to policy makers in Jordan to improve the learners’ reading experience.

Bataineh & Mayyas (2017) examined the effect of Moodle-enhanced instruction on Jordanian EFL students’ reading comprehension and grammar performance. The study used a quasi-experimental, pre/post-test design. A purposeful sample of 32 students, enrolled in a language requirement course at a Jordanian state university, was randomly divided into an experimental group (n=17) and a control group (n=15). The former used blended learning in which Moodle supplemented in-class instruction whereas the latter used in-class instruction only. Using means, standard deviations, ANCOVA and MANCOVA, the analysis revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group (at α = 0.05) in both reading comprehension and grammar.

Migdadi & Baniabdelrahman (2016) investigated the effectiveness of using team-teaching strategy on EFL students’ reading comprehension. The study also aimed to find out whether Team-Teaching strategy can improve EFL students' English language reading comprehension and to investigate the students' attitudes towards the use of team teaching. The study used the quasi-experimental design in one part to examine the effect of team teaching on developing the students' performance in reading comprehension. The study also used the descriptive design to describe the students' attitudes. The researchers chose a school purposefully. It was one of the secondary schools in Alkourah Directorate of education. Two eleventh grade classroom sections were chosen to be the sample of the study. They were 48 students. The students of the sections were appointed randomly into two groups; the control group which had 23 students, and the experimental group with 25 students. The researchers developed two instruments in order to achieve the purpose of the study. The instruments were a reading comprehension test and a questionnaire. The results of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences at (α = 0.05) between the two groups (control and experimental) in the post test in favor of the experimental group. The result of the study also showed that there were statistically significant differences at (α=0.05).

Al-Shawesh & Hussin (2015) examined the extent to which the CAREY (Computer-Assisted Reading Yemen) program affects the Yemeni EFL students’ reading attitude towards reading English materials. To achieve this objective, the data was collected from pre-and post-questionnaires of reading attitude. Additionally, the data was collected based on an interview and an observation. 20 students selected purposively from level one of an English proficiency course, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University, Yemen in this study. All participants answered the pre- and post- reading questionnaires, and five of them were further interviewed. The study used both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data including descriptive statistics of the
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responses from the questionnaires and thematic analysis of responses from the interviews. The results revealed that all participants showed their positive attitudes toward reading English materials especially after they joined the class of reading via CAREY program. In addition, it was found that CAREY program positively affected the participants’ attitudes towards reading English materials.

Smadi & Alshra’ah (2015) investigated the effect of a reading instructional program based on the strategies of successful readers on Jordanian secondary stage students’ reading comprehension in English. The participants of the study were 50 first secondary stage male students who were chosen purposefully from the northwestern badia directorate of education. Based on the results of the pretest, two groups were used: An experimental group which consisted of 26 less successful readers who were taught through the instructional program which was designed by the researchers, and a control group of 24 students who were taught the textbook material. The training lasted for two months during the first semester of the academic year 2013-2014. The results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the two mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post reading test in favor of the experimental group due to the teaching strategy.

Alzu’bi (2014) investigated the impact of extensive reading on improving reading proficiency. The study tried to find the effect of ER on EFL student’s reading, vocabulary and grammar. The researcher designed two instruments; a program based on the extensive reading strategy and general test. Forty-one university students who study English was purposefully chosen from several universities in the academic year 2012 and the study continued for three semesters. To establish the validity for the instruments, the method of content validity was used; the instruments were given to a jury of specialists. In addition, the reliability of the test was established. Before carrying out the experiment, a pre-test for the general reading comprehension was administrated. By the end of the experiment, the researcher administrated the general reading comprehension post-test. The researcher used the t-test to detect any significant differences between the pre-test and post-test on the reading, grammar, and vocabulary. The findings show that ER improves university EFL students’ reading, vocabulary and grammar achievement.

Al-Jamal; Al-Hawamleh & Al-Jamal (2013) assessed the level of reading comprehension proficiency of EFL Jordanian readers with regard to the relationship between identifying the main idea in a paragraph and language proficiency in expository texts. Additionally, this study investigated comprehension instruction process by EFL teachers. This research, in other words, demonstrated an intensified focus on the significance of the main idea while reading comprehension instruction takes place. The focus of the current mixed-methods study was on the descriptive data from a reading comprehension test, as well as, the classroom observation data. The sample of the study consisted of (649) 10th graders distributed randomly on Irbid directorate of education schools in the scholastic year (2011/2012) who undertook a reading comprehension test as
developed for the purposes of this study. Also, the sample of the study included (15) teachers who were observed three lessons for each single teacher. The results of the study revealed a moderate reading comprehension proficiency level among 10th graders along with negligible instruction of comprehension skill by EFL teachers.

Alarfaja & Alshumaimeri (2012) tested the efficacy of a training program to increase the reading speed and comprehension of female students at King Saud University. Over the course of six weeks, the program consisted of 12 training sessions, 60 minutes each. Results indicated that (a) a six-week period is appropriate for speed-reading and comprehension training; (b) the program has a significant impact on increasing reading-speed; and (c) the program has a significant impact on comprehension (literal, deductive, and critical reasoning).

Alkhawaldeh (2012) investigated the challenges which secondary students faced in their EFL reading comprehension in Jordan. To achieve this purpose, 500 students responded to a 49-item close questionnaire to collect data in the first semester 2010. Results of the study revealed several reading challenges which embodied the learner's memorization of reading passages and their related questions due to the difficulty of these passages, lack of familiarity with vocabulary items, mismatch of some reading material with the students' life and the ineffectiveness of related reading teaching methods. Others included lack of co-operative learning in reading instruction, L1/L2 interference, teacher-related mal-practices in teaching reading comprehension, lack of speed reading, lack of consideration of learner's reading challenges and methods, lack of connection between intensive and extensive reading activities, incongruence between learner's pre-knowledge and existing ideas in the passage. The study did not reveal any statistically significant differences in EFL reading comprehension challenges ascribed to gender, academic stream and achievement level.

8.2. Studies related to the flipped learning strategy

Elmaadaway (2017) investigated whether a flipped classroom approach enhanced perceptions of levels of engagement and skill performance among students enrolled in a Blackboard course at a Saudi university. Fifty-eight participants were divided into control and experimental groups, which were taught using a traditional and a flipped approach respectively. To determine the effect of the approach on participants' perceived levels of engagement and skill performance, questionnaires were administered and student performance was examined in terms of quantitative descriptive analysis. The results revealed that participants in the experimental group were more active and engaged compared with those in the control group. In terms of classroom engagement specifically, participants in the experimental group exhibited greater behavioral and emotional engagement.

Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri (2016) examined the impact of flipped classroom strategy in teaching grammar on secondary school students’ performances, perceptions, and attitudes toward learning English independently. The researchers implemented the
flipped classroom strategy by selecting videos based on the students’ textbook and uploading those videos on the Edmodo site before each lesson to provide opportunities for active learning interactions. The students of the experimental group (n = 20) were required to watch the videos to learn by themselves and to come to class prepared to ask for clarification, if needed. They also practiced what they had learned under the teacher’s supervision by completing collaborative and competitive tasks in groups or pairs. Meanwhile, the control group students (n = 23) received in-class only traditional teaching. They learned the grammatical lessons without the help of any videos. The statistical analysis of the post-test results showed that adopting the flipped classroom strategy appeared to play a role in enhancing the students’ grammar performances, as the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group, but this difference was not statistically significant. The students’ responses to a questionnaire and Semi-structured interviews indicated that their attitudes’ towards using the flipped classroom strategy in the EFL class were positive.

Ahmed (2016) investigated the effect of a flipping classroom on writing skill in English as a foreign language and students’ attitude towards flipping. The study sample consisted of 60 students at Qassim University and was divided into two groups: 30 students for the experimental group and 30 students for the control group. The instruments of the study are an EFL writing test and a questionnaire to measure students’ attitude towards flipping. Students in both the experimental and the control group were pre-tested using the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing test. Then, the questionnaire was pre-applied for the experimental group only before the experiment. After that the experimental group was taught using flipping while the control group was taught using the traditional method. Finally, students in both groups were post-tested using the EFL writing test while the questionnaire was post-applied for the experimental group only. Results of the study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test of EFL writing. Second, there was statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post application of the questionnaire of the experimental group in favor of the post application.

Alsowat (2016) investigated the effect of a suggested EFL Flipped Classroom Teaching Model (EFL-FCTM) on graduate students’ English higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), engagement and satisfaction. Also, it investigated the relationship between higher-order thinking skills, engagement and satisfaction. The sample comprised (67) graduate female students; an experimental group (N=33) and a control group (N=34), studying an English course at Taif University, KSA. The study used mixed method design; a pre-post HOTS test was carried out and two 5-Likert scale questionnaires had been designed and distributed; an engagement scale and a satisfaction scale. The findings of the study revealed statistically significant differences between the two group in HOTS in favor of the experimental group. Also, there was significant difference between the pre and post administration of the engagement scale in favor of the post administration.
Moreover, students satisfaction on the (EFL-FCTM) was high. Hung (2015) examined the possible impacts of flipping the classroom on English language learners’ academic performance, learning attitudes and participation levels. Three different formats of flipped teaching were applied and it was found that the structured and Semi-structured flipped lessons became more effective than the non-flipped lessons.

Butt (2014) investigated the flipped classroom in his final-year actuarial course in Australia. By giving a two-part questionnaire to his students, he found that students perceive that they learn the most from performing an activity and that they prefer individual study over lectures, tutorials, and group study. By comparing students attitudes at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end, Butt found that students who originally viewed the flipped classroom unfavorably at the beginning of the course began to change the opinions about this by the end of the course.

Basal (2012) introduced the implementation of a flipped classroom in English Language classes and offered some suggestions. After applying the flipped model in 2012-2013 fall semester in Foreign Languages Education Department of Yildiz Technical University in the “Advanced Reading and Writing I” course, he concluded that the attitudes of the majority of the students towards using a flipped learning model were positive.

Having reviewed a number of studies on reading in EFL and the flipped learning strategy, it is clearly observed that the outlined studies were conducted in various contexts to address means to develop students’ skills in EFL in general and reading in particular. The studies also underlined the importance of technology implications in improving the learners’ language skills.

The reviewed studies contributed to helping the researcher design the tools of the current study, including the pre-post reading comprehension test and the attitude scale. The studies also helped in identifying the reading skills needed for university students in EFL. Moreover, the studies highlighted the proper use of the flipped learning strategy in teaching EFL in general and reading in particular and the appropriate steps that should be followed to effectively carry out the strategy.

9. Methodology
9.1. Design of the Study

The study followed the quasi-experimental design; two sections, enrolled in 101 English Communication Skills course at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Amman, were chosen randomly. They were assigned to two groups, (control and experimental).

In this design, the experimental group received instruction through the flipped learning strategy while the control group was instructed through traditional reading strategies, mainly reading the text, explaining the meanings of new words by stating the dictionary meaning, and translating the main ideas into Arabic. The two groups were
taught by the same instructor.

A pre-post reading comprehension test was administered to both groups before and after the implementation of the flipped learning strategy which was applied to the experimental group over 6 weeks.

In addition, an attitude scale was applied to the experimental group after the experiment, so as to reveal the attitudes of the students towards the flipped learning strategy.

9.2. Participants

The sample of the study comprised 72 students enrolled in “English Communication Skills 101” course at the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Amman. They were randomly assigned to two groups, (control and experimental). There were 37 students in the experimental group and 35 students in the control group.

The two groups’ participants, aged 19-21, were nearly of similar levels in reading in EFL, as shown in their pre-test scores. They were studying the same course, English Communication Skills 101, which is a university compulsory course. The textbook assigned for this course is ”Total English/ intermediate level”, by Antonia Clare and J.J. Wilson.

9.3. Instruments

9.3.1. The reading comprehension test

The initial form of the reading comprehension test consisted of 32 multiple-choice questions. The test, which included two passages followed by questions, aimed at measuring the level of both groups in reading comprehension in EFL before and after the implementation of the flipped learning strategy, which was applied to the experimental group.

9.3.1.1. Validity of the test

To ensure the validity of the test, it was submitted, in its initial form, to a jury of seven university instructors in the TEFL field. The instructors were asked to provide their feedback and suggestions concerning the suitability of the test to the purpose of the study. The jury proposed certain changes related to the wording of some questions and time of the test. They suggested excluding two items and increasing the time of the test to 60 minutes. The final form of the test included 30 questions. The students were asked to select one answer only from four options for each question.

9.3.1.2. Reliability of the test

The researcher administered the test to a pilot sample of 25 students other than the sample of the study; the students were retested after 15 days. By using Pearson Correlation Formula, the reliability coefficient stability was computed. It was 0.85, which indicates that the test is reliable.

9.3.2. The attitude scale towards the flipped learning strategy

Having reviewed a number of studies on learners’ attitudes towards the use of electronic tools and applications in teaching, including the flipped learning strategy,
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(Hung, 2015; Ahmed, 2016; Alowat, 2016 and Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri, 2016), the researcher designed the initial form of the scale consisting of 14 five-point Likert items (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree). The scale was reviewed by experts in TEFL to examine its validity; it was modified according to the experts’ comments. The final form of the scale included 12 items. The scale reliability was inspected using Cronbach’s Alpha (0.83).

9.3.3. Semi-structured interviews

A number of questions were prepared by the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with some participants so as to help in revealing their attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy. The questions were reviewed by a number of specialists in the TEFL field to check their suitability to the purpose of the current study. The experts proposed interviewing the students about their experiences in using the flipped learning strategy and their suggestions to overcome difficulties they encountered while using the strategy.

9.4. Reading material

The reading material consisted of five passages based on Total English / Intermediate Level textbook by Antonia Clare and J.J. Wilson. The textbook is assigned by the university to teach English Communication Skills (101) course. The passages were selected from the first five chapters, in line with the syllabus of the course as shown in table (1).

Table (1): The reading comprehension passages used in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit No.</th>
<th>Unit title</th>
<th>Title of reading comprehension passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Brotherly love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Who wants to be a millionaire?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Life Style</td>
<td>Top cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
<td>Catch me if you can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spare time</td>
<td>Three ways to become (more) creative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To achieve the purpose of the current study, the instructor prepared the reading material, making use of the following multimedia applications: WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube. The material included voice and video messages prepared by the instructor on concepts, main ideas, explanations and new vocabulary relevant to the assigned reading passages. It also included relevant electronic websites.

After ensuring that all students of the experimental group have an easy access to the internet and multimedia applications, namely WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, the instructor asked the students to create and join WhatsApp and Facebook groups, and then a supervisor was assigned for each group.

The instructor uploaded the recorded voice and video messages and relevant documents and sent them to the experimental group via the WhatsApp and Facebook groups. The students were asked to study the content before class and prepare for the day’s activities according to a timetable set by the instructor. The students were also
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provided with relevant electronic links and asked to access the internet and study the assigned reading passages, especially that the passages are available either on YouTube, such as "brotherly love", "who wants to be a millionaire?", and "catch me if you can", or on other websites such as "top cities" and "three ways to be (more) creative". In addition, the experimental group’s students were notified that a copy of the book is available as a PDF version.

At the beginning of each class meeting with the experimental group, the instructor held general discussions with the students on the voice and video messages and topics that the students were assigned to study outside the classroom. The aim of the discussions was to figure out whether the students had studied the content via electronic tools or not in accordance with principles of the flipped learning strategy.

The experiment lasted for six weeks. The students learned one reading text every week. They were retested after the experiment to evaluate the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing their reading comprehension in EFL.

9.5. Procedures of the study

The study was carried out according to the following sequential procedures:
1. Reviewing the related literature in the field of reading comprehension in EFL and the use of the flipped learning strategy.
2. Using the course material recommended by the World Islamic Sciences and Education University to teach English Communication Skills (101) course and selecting the reading texts.
3. Preparing the material (voice and video messages, documents and relevant electronic websites) to be compatible with principles of the flipped learning strategy.
4. Designing the tools of the study (the reading comprehension test, the attitude scale and questions of the semi-structured-interviews).
5. Checking the validity and reliability of the tools.
7. Administering the pre-test to both experimental and control groups.
8. Administering the flipped learning strategy to the experimental group.
9. Administering the post-tests similar to the procedures followed in the pre-test to all students in both the experimental and control groups.
10. Administering the attitude scale to the experiential group students.
11. Conducting semi-structured interviews with a random sample representing the experimental group students.
12. Analyzing data and presenting results and recommendations.

10. Results and discussion

To answer the first research question: “What is the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students' reading comprehension in EFL?”, the researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze data; mean scores and standard deviations of the pre-/post-test scores of both groups were
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calculated as shown in table (2).

Table (2): Means and Standard Deviations of pre-post test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre: 18.95</td>
<td>Pre: 6.85</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post: 23.24</td>
<td>Post: 8.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Pre: 19.67</td>
<td>Pre: 6.42</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post: 20.85</td>
<td>Post: 6.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2) shows that there is a difference between the mean scores of both groups.
The mean of the pre-test scores of the control group is 19.67 while the mean of the post-test scores is 20.85. The table also shows that the mean of the pre-test scores of the experimental group is 18.95 while the mean of the post-test scores is 23.24.

Further statistical analysis, as shown in table (3), indicates that there is a statistical difference at (a=0.05) between the two groups (control and experimental) in the post test in favor of the experimental group. T-value is (2.474), which is significant at (a=0.05). Such results could be attributed to the positive effect of the flipped learning strategy on developing the reading skills of the experimental group’s students in EFL.

Table (3): Results of T-test Independent Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>D.F.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20.85</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>2.474</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer the second research question: “What are EFL students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy?”, means and standard deviations of responses of the participants on the scale’s items were calculated as shown in table (4):

Table (4): The mean and standard deviation of items of students’ attitudes scale towards the flipped learning strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I enjoyed learning English through the use of the flipped learning strategy.</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The use of the flipped learning strategy reduced the feeling of boring and tension.</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The use of the flipped classroom is easy and applicable.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the control and freedom of choosing what and how to learn.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The flipped classroom has suitable tools for supporting my learning.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Viewing video lectures and reading the materials before class prepared me for class activities.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I prefer watching video lessons at home rather than live teacher instruction in class.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If given the choice, I would continue learning English with the flipped classroom strategy.  
4.09  .87

The flipped learning strategy is helpful in learning English in general and reading in particular.  
4.15  .75

I am satisfied with the content and topics of the flipped learning materials.  
4.12  .81

I am satisfied with the integration of technology and multimedia resources.  
4.00  .86

I think the flipped learning strategy helped me overcome some challenges in reading in EFL.  
4.16  .86

Overall  
4.13  .48

Based on table 4, the overall mean score of students’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy was (4.13) and the SD was (.48). The scale shows that the students reflected positive attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy. The students indicated that the use of the flipped learning made them less bored and tense (M=4.35, SD.73). They also pointed out that they were satisfied with the control and freedom provided by the flipped learning strategy to choose what and how to learn (M. 4.18, SD.88). The students also noted that the flipped classroom has suitable tools for supporting their learning (M. 4.17, SD .84).

On the other hand, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with a number of participants representing the experimental group to help in revealing learners’ attitudes towards the flipped learning strategy. Six students were interviewed and asked to comment on their experiences while learning through the flipped strategy and their suggestions to overcome difficulties they encountered while using the flipped learning strategy.

The students pointed out that the flipped learning strategy motivated them to learn English away from pressure and traditional learning strategies. “I enjoyed learning through the flipped learning strategy; it helped me manage my time, since I was able to repeat some videos and reread illustrations and comments many times”, a sophomore female student said.

One of the students (male- third year) indicated that: “the flipped classroom improved my engagement through using technology. It provided us with opportunities for discussion and interaction through the WhatsApp and Facebook groups”. A second-year female student said that: “the flipped learning strategy provided me with an opportunity to take part effectively in some activities since I was able to gather some information about the topics and come up with some ideas; I also enjoyed the videos very much”.

In addition, a first-year female student indicated “I faced some problems in understanding and dealing with the reading material, since there were some new words, but the comments and discussions raised by my friends on the WhatsApp and Facebook groups helped me overcome such difficulties”.

Furthermore, a first-year male student, said: “I like this way of learning because it is not traditional, I like modern applications and I think learning through the use of
technology is more interesting than traditional learning methods, I hope the strategy would be used in teaching other language skills”.

Moreover, a second-year male student said “I faced some problems in comprehending some ideas, so I kept posting some questions on the WhatsApp and Facebook groups and I got some answers and clarifications from some students”.

In light of the findings, it could be concluded that the flipped learning strategy had a positive effect on student performance in reading comprehension in EFL. The outcome of the current study conform with findings of other studies, such as; Ahmed (2016); Alsowat (2016) and Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri (2016).

The results indicated that the flipped learning strategy provided the students with the opportunity to play an effective role in the learning process and shift instruction to a learner-centered approach. Such findings are supported by the results of Elmaadaway’s (2017) which indicated that “through the flipped approach, participants were able to study course content at home first, thereby preparing themselves to participate in relevant class activities, pose questions and engage in problem solving with peers”.

Furthermore, it is expected that the flipped learning strategy has contributed to creating an attractive and motivating learning environment. Such outcomes are in line with the findings of Ekmecki (2017), who pointed out that “flipped learning transforms classrooms into interactive and dynamic places where the teacher guides the students and facilitates their learning”.

The results indicated that in flipped classroom, most students spent time engaged in class applying information through problem-solving, case discussions, or other activities that require thoughtful processing of content. Alsowat (2016) revealed that “the flipped learning strategy was more engaging than the traditional instruction and gave greater opportunities for communication. It motivated students to learn the language and encouraged them through various untraditional activities being implemented”.

The current study’s results also conform with the outcomes of several studies concerning the role of the flipped learning strategy in creating an active learning environment. Li (2013) recommends the flipped classroom as a practical teaching approach, stressing that the “strategy helped individualize instruction, reduce note taking and lecturing time, and promote engagement, creativity, and active learning environment”. As for the attitudes of the students’ towards the use of the flipped learning strategy, the attitudes scale and the semi-structured interviews revealed that the students showed positive attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy. The results are in line with the findings of Basal (2012); Butt (2014) and Hung (2015).

The students pointed out that the use of the flipped learning made them less bored and tense and said they were satisfied with the control and freedom of choosing what and how to learn.

They also indicated that the flipped learning strategy helped them improve their engagement through using technology, and provided them with opportunities to discuss
topics through the WhatsApp and Facebook groups, pointing out that the flipped learning strategy helped them overcome some challenges in reading in EFL and study according to their own pace.

Moreover, the students indicated that the flipped learning strategy provided them with an opportunity to study the material outside the classroom at their own pace. Such findings agree with outcomes of Zainuddin & Halili (2016) which showed that the flipped classroom allows students to watch the videos according to their preferred time and need, and they can study at their own pace; this type of activity also increases students’ collaborative learning in distance education outside the class.

Based on the findings, it could be concluded that the significant improvement in reading comprehension and in the positive attitudes towards using flipped learning can be attributed to many factors. First, urging students to try a new way of teaching and learning other than the boring traditional ways, has contributed to creating a flexible environment. In this environment, learners have many options that may lead to comprehending the material. Second, the strategy gave learners a broader margin to be self-dependent using their intelligences rather than being spoon-fed. Students in this environment were more willing to learn through discovery referring to different up-to-date sources. Third, using these web applications enhanced students’ motivation and transferred them from passive to more active learners. So, it is natural to have positive results as the use of these applications boosts appetite to work harder while enjoying all stages throughout the experiment.

11. Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL. It also attempted to reveal students’ attitudes towards the use of the flipped learning strategy. The results of the study showed that the flipped learning strategy had a positive effect on developing university students’ reading comprehension in EFL. The results indicated that there was a statistical difference at (a=0.05) between the two groups (control and experimental) in the post reading comprehension test in favor of the experimental group. The results also revealed that the experimental group’s students, who received instruction through the flipped learning strategy, showed positive attitudes towards the use of the strategy.

12. Recommendations:

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends:
- Making use of electronic applications in TEFL field, including the flipped learning strategy, so as to create a motivating learning environment and move towards learner-centered classroom methods.
- Holding training sessions for EFL instructors on new teaching strategies and applications of new technologies in the educational process, such as the flipped learning strategy.
- Equipping universities and schools with electronic tools to help instructors prepare the
needed materials in accordance with technology-based teaching methods.
- Conducting further studies to examine the effect of using the flipped learning strategy on developing other language skills.

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