



## Developing Reading Skills Among Students with Learning Disabilities in English

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### Abstract

*This research investigated developing the reading skills among students with learning disabilities in English language. The study sample included 20 male and female students from Irbid city, Jordan, who were chosen purposefully, and distributed randomly to two groups. The first group was the experimental group that was taught using the active learning method, and the other group was the control group that was taught according to the usual method. The study used a reading test, which was verified by presenting it to a group of judges. The reliability of the list was checked by using the test and re-test method and the Pearson's coefficient, which was (0.95). The findings revealed the presence of differences between the mean scores of the two study groups on the post-reading test, in favor of the experimental group. The results did not show any statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups in the post-reading test due to the gender variable. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends preparing training programs on active learning and preparing a guide for teachers, which can be used to teach and learn reading skills for students with learning disabilities.*

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## Introduction

Active learning is linked to learners' inclinations and desires, in which creative, collaborative, exploratory strategies are used to help students to progress through the different stages of education. It also enables them to make their own decisions after being trained using such a method. The positive teacher is the active teacher who is not satisfied with the information he obtained during university education only but is also keen on continuous learning for life. The active teacher is keen to achieve interaction and to ensure the formation of integrated personalities of learners (khasawneh, 2021a). He is also able to partner with families to develop the educational presentation service for children to contribute to highlighting the talented and distinguished learners (Badir, 2012).

Reading skill is a complex mental process with a hierarchical shape linked to thinking in its different levels, which are based on each other. The reading process is similar to all the processes that the teacher performs in education, it requires understanding, linkage, and conclusion. The good reader must possess the mental skills of the reading technique in terms of the wealth of vocabulary, the realization of the layers of meanings, the disclosure of the writer's goal and meaning, and the ability to criticize the reading. Reading is a complex process, where multiple senses and skills interact with each other (Ashour & Al-Hawamdeh, 2010).

Reading helps the student to prepare for scientific education. As the student becomes able to achieve the educational attainment that helps him to be successful in his school life. By being a good reader, the student can solve many scientific and daily problems that he faces, enables

him to achieve a successful learning process for the rest of the academic subjects, and enables him to form a scientific structure that qualifies him to succeed in life (khasawneh, 2021b). In addition, reading in the basic school constitutes a large part of the student's school life, as the student reads all the time and in all academic subjects. Therefore, it can be said that reading is a social process that is not linked to a specific time or place but goes beyond that to all levels of education (Pickett, 2000).

### **Problem of the study**

Reading is an important part for the success of any student in the basic stage. Students who find it difficult to read cannot perform what is required of them. Because English language represents, especially reading in basic schools, one of the important means in achieving the school's functions, it is important to develop students' reading skills. Active learning has been chosen as a means to address the phenomenon of poor reading, and in light of this, the study's problem is determined in developing reading skills among students with LDs in English language.

### **Literature review**

#### ***Active learning***

Faust and Paulson (1998) argued that active learning is what students do in the classroom other than passively listening to what the teacher says during the class. This instead includes active listening that helps them understand what they hear, and write the most important ideas presented in the classroom, such as explanations, comments, or suggestions. It also includes working with group exercises and activities in a way that applies what they have learned in various life situations or solving various daily problems. Sharon and Martha (2001) stated that active learning is a process of dynamic inclusion of learners in educational situations, which requires them to participate and be more active in all activities under the guidance and supervision of the teacher.

The objectives of active learning are to encourage students to acquire many critical thinking skills, to diversify the appropriate educational activities for students to achieve the desired educational goals, and to support learners' self-confidence towards various fields of knowledge. It also aims to help learners to discover important issues, to encourage students to ask different questions and to encourage them to solve problems, determine how students learn different subjects, measure students' ability to build and organize new ideas, and encourage and train students to teach themselves (khasawneh, 2021c).

Active learning respects diversity, plurality, exclusivity, and participation. Therefore, there are many teaching methods and techniques in active learning (Bdeir, 2012). First, the questioning strategy: The teacher must possess fluency in asking questions that represent many types of verbal interaction systems in the classroom. The teacher needs to understand the subject and its levels to be able to understand students' needs, abilities, tendencies, and readiness. He must be aware of the answers to the questions he asks, which must be clear in phrasing and content.

Second, decision-making strategy. When the teacher himself chooses the teaching method, teaching aids, etc., he feels emotionally and psychologically satisfied. Because he is the one who decided himself, and this morally motivates him to commit to achieving this decision, as it increases the motivation of the teacher to achieve the goals of the learning process. The teacher's decision-making has psychological, moral, and mental importance for him, and through the teacher's planning and making his decisions, this is directly reflected on the student, that is, the student acquires the ability to make a decision as well (Alkhalwaldeh & Khasawneh, 2020a).

Third, the discussion method, which is one of the common ways used in active learning. The discussion technique urges teachers to continue learning, apply the learned knowledge in new situations, and develop the learners' thinking skills. This method needs a good knowledge of the subject matter by the teacher. The teacher should be able to use the appropriate methods of asking questions and managing discussions. He also should be able to create a discussion environment (mental and moral) that encourages learners to put forward their ideas and questions with fluency and courage (khasawneh, 2021d).

Fourth, Micro-teaching, which is a learning situation that takes place in a short time (about 10 minutes on average) and involves a small number of students (usually between 5-10 students) during which the teacher introduces a specific concept, or trains students in a specific skill. Micro-education has been used to allow the teacher to get feedback on this teaching situation and has been used in many areas, including pre-service teacher training, in-service training, micro-psychological counselling, supervisor training, pleading training, and college teacher training (khasawneh, 2021e).

### ***Reading***

The reading process is a complex mental process, with a hierarchical shape that is linked to thinking in its different degrees, so that each degree of thinking depends on what is under it and is not done without the other degrees of thinking. The reading process is similar to all the processes that the teacher performs in education, as it requires understanding, linking, and conclusion (Ashour & Hawamdeh, 2010). Reading is defined as the process in which written and other symbols are translated into spoken words and audible sounds of varying significance. It depends on the eye's vision of the read symbol, the activity of the mind in perceiving the symbol, and the pronunciation of the voice that expresses what that symbol indicates (Jamil & Al-Faisal, 2004).

Reading is one of the thinking processes that are no less important than those used by the writer of the text. In both cases, there are the organization, analysis, reflection, synthesis, judgment, problem-solving, selection, inference, data comparison, criticism, linkage, conclusion, generalization, and understanding. When the reader reads, he does not read with his eyes, mind, or mouth only, but he reads with all of these together, and with all the vigilance, feeling muscles of his body, and emotions. Reading has received a lot of attention in studies and research from educators. Great efforts have been made in the research of teaching and learning reading. Reading opens the doors of culture to students by focusing on ideals and myths that depict human experiences and experiences (Aser, 2000).

### **Previous studies**

Yusuk (2020) investigated the attitudes of 41 school teachers regarding active learning. The teachers received training for 40 hours on the active learning approach. The study used interviews, questionnaires, and observation to collect data. The findings yielded a positive impact of active learning according to the teachers' opinions. The observations in the classroom revealed that moderate practicality of the approach implemented in the classroom. In addition, the teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the classroom facilities. The findings of interviews revealed some negative factors that could stand in the way of implementing the strategy of active learning. These obstacles included limited resources, space limitation, and classroom management.

Al-Aslani (2019) investigated the effect of utilizing various competitions using active learning strategies in English language skills for female students in Jubail schools. The study used forms of the pre-questionnaire for learners and teachers to identify their opinions about the application

of competitions and competition models as a post- model. The study was applied to 150 students and 10 teachers, who were chosen randomly and then divided into two groups. The findings showed that the differences in the mean scores between experimental and control groups in the post-application of both forms were in favor of the experimental group.

Aldous (2019) explored the relationship between using active learning strategies represented in the strategy of the cartoon concepts, cubes, learning table, concept maps for improving and raising motivation, and achievement of students with LDs from the perspective of teachers of special education at the basic stage in Riyadh. The study used the descriptive approach and was applied to a sample of (60) teachers with learning difficulties. The results showed that the relationship of the use of active learning strategies in improving motivation and achievement of students of learning difficulties from the perspective of teachers of learning difficulties is high.

De Moraes Feltes & De Oliveira (2019) explored the impact of using active learning in teaching English. The study conducted an extensive review of the literature. The findings showed that the active learning method was effective in learning and teaching the English language. The study proposed several activities to be implemented using active learning techniques, such as projects, portfolios, visual-based instruction, the debate as a learning activity, discussion in class, flipping the lesson, and think-pair-share.

Al-Ghamdi (2018) investigated the obstacles that hinder using active learning strategies by learning disability teachers. The study used a descriptive approach and used a questionnaire to collect data. The sample of the study consisted of 205 teachers (124 males and 81 females). The results showed that participants agree on obstacles that hinder using active learning strategies by learning disability teachers. These obstacles were related to the teacher and the school environment. The findings also showed that participants agree on ways to overcome obstacles that hinder using active learning strategies by learning disability teachers. Ways to overcome obstacles related to the school environment came first, followed by ways to overcome obstacles related to the teacher. Ways to overcome barriers related to the learner came last

Al-Shuaibat & Al-Khatib (2018) identified the level of practicing active learning among English language teachers of the first three grades in schools of Ma'an, Jordan. The study utilized the descriptive approach and used a questionnaire, which was distributed to a sample of 138 teachers. The results showed that diversity of teaching methods is one of the most important aspects the teachers use in active learning. The findings also showed no impact of the variable of experience on the use of active learning.

## Methodology

### Population and Sample

The study sample included 40 male and female students, distributed in two divisions representing the two study groups. Table (1) shows the distribution of the study members by gender and number.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample according to gender and group

gender	Control group	Experimental group	Total
Male	10	10	20
Female	10	10	20
Total	20	20	40

## Instrument

The study used the reading test of the English language for students with LDs in the English language.

The apparent validity of the reading test was verified by presenting the objectives and test items in their initial form to a group of specialized and experienced judges. The purpose was for reviewing and reformulating the test items, expressing their opinions in the linguistic form of its vocabulary, and expressing their observations in the test items in terms of clarity of its objectives, and the extent of its comprehensiveness (khasawneh, 2021f). The judges checked the scientific accuracy of the paragraphs of the test, and their representation of the content and objectives to be measured or any other suggestions. After collecting the judges' notes, some test paragraphs were modified, and some of them were reformulated to become more accurate.

The reliability coefficient of the reading test used in this study was calculated by applying the test on an exploratory sample of (20) students of the fourth grade, who were not part of the participants of the study. The test-retest method was used, where the test was applied twice with an interval of two weeks. The reliability coefficient using the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, which was (0.95). This value is acceptable and justifies the use of the test for the current study.

## Results and discussion

The two questions of the study were answered by calculating the mean scores and standard deviations of the performance of the study members on the pre and post-reading tests according to the teaching method (active learning method, the regular method). Table (2) shows the results.

Table 2. The mean scores and standard deviations of the study sample's performance on the pre-test and post-reading test according to the variables of teaching method and gender

Teaching method	Gender	No.	Pre-test		Post-test	
			Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation
Traditional	Male	10	25.50	6.13	30.55	5.88
	Female	10	22.00	6.98	28.87	8.37
	Total	20	24.00	6.65	29.83	6.99
Active learning	Male	10	19.14	6.23	37.29	4.19
	Female	10	23.64	7.49	34.50	6.15
	Total	20	20.94	7.02	36.17	5.17

Table (2) shows that the mean scores of the performance of the experimental group on the post-reading test, who studied using the active learning method, was (36.17). This score was higher than the mean score of the performance of the control group who studied using the usual method, which was (29.83). The mean score of the male students was (34.00), which is higher than the mean score of the female students, which was (31.29).

To find out whether the differences between the mean scores of both groups were statistically significant, the accompanying two-way analysis of variance (ANCOVA) was conducted for the effect of teaching method and gender. Table (3) shows the results of the analysis.

Table 3. The results of the (ANCOVA) analysis for the performance of the study sample on the post-reading test according to the variables of teaching method and gender

Source of variance	Sum of square	Freedom value	Mean square	F-value	Sig.
Pre-test	12.26	1	12.26	0.327	0.569

Source of variance	Sum of square	Freedom value	Mean square	F-value	Sig.
Teaching method	617.003	1	617.003	16.464	0.000 *
gender	82.078	1	82.078	2.19	0.144
Error	2473.365	66	37.473		
Total	3274	69			

\*Statistically significant at ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

Table (3) shows that the F value for the teaching method was (16,464), which indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the two study groups (experimental and control) on the post-reading test. This means that the active learning method had a significant impact on learning the English language among the sample of the study.

Table (3) also shows that the F value concerning the gender variable was (2.19) and at a level of significance (0.144), which indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the performance of the two study groups (experimental and control) on the post-reading test due to gender variable. The use of the active learning approach is not affected by the gender of the student. this could be explained by that both genders received the same training and treatment.

The modified mean scores have been extracted to find out to which group the differences are in favor. Table (4) shows the results.

Table 4. The modified mean scores and standard for the performance of the study sample on the post-reading test according to the teaching method variable

Method	No.	Mean score	Standard deviation
Traditional	35	29.77	1.05
Active learning	35	35.86	1.06

Table (4) shows that the adjusted means score of the experimental group, which studied using the active learning method, was (35.86), while the mean score of the control group that studied using the traditional method was (29.77). This indicates that the difference was in favor of the experimental group, which was studied using the active learning method. This also confirms the effect of this method in developing the reading skill of third-grade students compared to the traditional method.

The reason for the superiority of the experimental group over the control group could be attributed to the focus on the learner's positivity. The active learning method focuses on learning in cooperative groups and gives students the freedom of responsible learning. Using this method puts the student in an environmental education that fosters students' willingness to learn, carrying out activities with enthusiasm and effectiveness, reaching sound scientific results, writing them down, reading, discussing, and reviewing them to ensure their validity and select the best ones before presenting them to the members of the other groups, then taking feedback on these ideas from their peers in the classroom and the teacher, and rewriting and classifying them.

While teaching the experimental group, the procedures were concerned with presenting information and ideas at the beginning of each lesson, in the form of a real problem related to the students' daily lives. This encouraged students to search for data and information, by returning to various sources (reading the textbook, asking the teacher, asking for help from colleagues). Such a method might help to realize the characteristics and common relationships between knowledge, ideas, and information, analyze and classify them, identify the similarities

and differences between them. and compare it with the information and ideas possessed by the student. Moreover, this method increased the student's attention to the subject and skills of the lesson, reformulating them, using shapes and drawings to clarify them, identifying the main concepts and ideas in the problem, and activating the role of investigation in reaching sound reading.

The findings of this study could be also attributed to the aims of such a strategy in enhancing meaningful learning represented in giving the learners the opportunity for cognitive activity, such as thinking out loud, interpreting data, participating in the cognitive conflict based on an active and constructive discussion about the studied situation, and developing assignments and read them in the student's language.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the researcher recommends training educational supervisors and teachers on practical applications for using the active learning method, and evaluating it in the classroom, through the adoption of training programs, and the holding of specialized technical seminars and workshops in this field. The study also recommends urging English language teachers to use the active learning method in the classroom, in the various units of the English language subject in the basic stage.

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