



مجلة العلوم التربوية

## **Using Reflective Journal for Enhancing Secondary School Students' EFL Reading Comprehension Skills**

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**Abstract**

The present study investigated the effect of using reflective journals on developing EFL reading comprehension skills of second year secondary school students. The Sample consisted of (60) female students enrolled at Alsadat Secondary School for girls at Naga Hammadi. The experimental group (N=30) were taught reading comprehension using reflective journals whereas the Control group (N=30) received traditional reading comprehension instruction. Collected data were statistically treated qualitatively and quantitatively using a set of statistical procedures through SPSS. Data were collected through the English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT). Findings of the post testing revealed a remarkable improvement in EFL reading comprehension skills of the experimental group were compared with control group. Based on the above mentioned findings, the study concluded that reflective journals were found to be effective for teaching EFL reading comprehension. It was recommended for teachers and instructors to take advantage of reflective learning in EFL reading comprehension classes with an emphasis on reading comprehension skills.

**Key words:** Reflective Journal, EFL Reading Comprehension

## اثر اليوميات التأملية في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية

هدفت الدراسة إلي التعرف علي أثر استخدام اليوميات التأملية في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب الصف الثاني الثانوي، وقد تكونت عينة الدراسة من (٦٠) طالبة بمدرسة السادات الثانوية بنات. حيث تم اختيار فصلين. تلقت المجموعة التجريبية (N=30) التدريس باستخدام اليوميات التأملية بينما تلقت المجموعة الضابطة (N=30) التدريس بالطرق المعتادة. تمت معالجة البيانات التي تم جمعها إحصائياً نوعياً وكماً باستخدام مجموعة من الإجراءات الإحصائية من خلال برنامج SPSS (إصدار ٢٩.٠.١٠). تمثل الإحصاء الوصفي في هذه الدراسة علي المتوسط، الانحراف المعياري، اختبارات للعينات المستقلة، معامل ارتباط سبيرمان واختبارات للعينات المرتبطة. بالإضافة للاستعانة بمربع إيتا للاختلافات من أجل قياس حجم تأثير اليوميات التأملية علي الفهم القرائي. تم جمع البيانات من خلال اختبار الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية (ERCT). كشفت نتائج التطبيق البعدي عن تحسن ملحوظ في مهارات فهم القراءة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى المجموعة التجريبية مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة، إلى جانب وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في كل من مهارات الفهم القرائي: الاستدلال، التفسير، تخمين معاني الكلمات و ربط المعرفة السابقة لصالح التطبيق البعدي، و بذلك يمكن استخدام اليوميات التأملية في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي لدي تلاميذ المرحلة الثانوية، وقد أوصت الدراسة باستخدام اليوميات التأملية في الصفوف الدراسية المختلفة لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بالإضافة الي الاستفادة من التعلم التأملي عند تدريس الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية مع التركيز على مهارات الفهم القرائي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اليوميات التأملية. الفهم القرائي باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

## Background of the problem

Reading is a fundamental skill in English language learning; however, reading means nothing without reading comprehension. It is just sounding letters and words. When readers successfully understand the hidden message of a text, reading for them becomes more inspiring and enjoyable. Hence, extracting meaning becomes the ultimate goal of reading. Wagner, Schatschneider, and Sence( 2009) showed that Reading Comprehension is important for students' academic performance especially, advanced grades. Also, Oakhill, Cain, and Elbro(2015) stated that Reading Comprehension is substantial not only for getting the meaning, but also for deeper learning in class, success in education, employment and for social lives.

The ability to comprehend a written text is influenced by the reader's skills and his ability to process information. Consequently, many skills are needed for efficient reading comprehension such as inferencing, guessing meaning through the context, interpretation, predicting, and judging ideas. Saddleback (2002) argued the importance of Reading Comprehension skills to reinforce and extend the reading skills of students. To present these skills, a table was made containing some skills like analyzing prefixes, using context clues, analyzing multiple meanings, recognizing sequence, identifying fact and opinion, drawing conclusions, and many other skills which students need during reading to be able to instruct meaning. Reading Comprehension includes many skills through literature.

The aim of teaching English for secondary schools, is to equip students with the necessary language, thinking and study skills to communicate effectively and understand competently spoken and written English. It aims to give students the necessary experience and confidence to apply these skills both inside and outside the classroom (Simon, 2019). Likewise, Zwiers (2010) presented his view about the students at secondary schools that they have a quite bit knowledge to decode and practice the primary requirements of Reading Comprehension. English learners often misinterpret dialogues, metaphors, slang expressions and word forms such as verbs or adjectives. In fact, many students already infer feelings from pictures, guess word meanings from posters, ask questions about movies, predict the end of their television shows, or summarize what they did in previous days. In brief, our students need to transfer and extend the

comprehension skills they already use in the outside world to the comprehension of academic texts.

Students can improve the application of knowledge and skills through different ways. Metacognition is a way for developing those skills, it means thinking about thinking and it is widely used in English language learning. Davidson(2016) stated that metacognition (reflection) is the moment after learning, where students take some minutes to think about what they think that they have learned. Reflection is an approach that helps student think about the new event or existing knowledge and how this knowledge challenges. It includes standing on events and new knowledge to analyze from different perspectives. Reflection is well suited to situation where student is in the workplace.

Models of reflection are designed to simplify the complex process of reflection. It divides the process of learning into stages in order to achieve better understanding. Gordijn, Eernstman, Helder, and Brouwer (2018) mentioned some models of reflection including Argyris and Schön Model (1974), Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984), and Conscious Competence Learning Model. Furthermore, other models of reflection including Gibbs Model (1988), John's Model (1994), Adkins and Murphy's Model (1994), and Bass's Holistic Reflection Model (2018).

In language classes, reflection is needed. Orem and Taylor (2001) showed that second language learners can be encouraged to reflect on their learning to develop their language skills. In addition, Ghaye( 2011) asserted that reflective practice gives an evidence on the importance of work with experience even if it is positive or negative. Teacher can use many strategies to guide students to the period of reflection such as discussion, interviews, questioning, logs and journals. Students need also to develop their abilities to self-monitor and assess their developing skills. It is through the use of reading logs and other ongoing records of student thinking, students can keep track of their ideas and thinking process (Zwiers, 2010).

Applying reflective journal may have changes in English language class. As it was indicated by O'connell and Dyment (2013), reflective journals help students to practice new ways of knowledge, try out different ideas in a safe place and change their experience both in and out the classroom into learning through the reflective process. Moreover "Reflective journal supports understanding and the presentation of the understanding" (Moon, 2006, p. 45). When students respond in writing to readings, usually in

learning journal, they retain more and are more active during the class discussion. By writing in a journal, students can integrate and apply course content, practice skills, and develop insight as well (Cooper & Steven, 2009). Journals help to comprehend topics, think related to these topics and make notes to memorise it (Khan,2019).

In sum, the importance of Reading Comprehension in second language is evident. Many of the studies are made on foreign language Reading Comprehension have been concerned with the basic skills such as decoding, fluency and vocabulary. Little attention was given to other skills such as prediction, monitoring comprehension, comparing and contrasting, inferences, and other skills. Besides, research on such skills is neglected although they are important to deepen comprehension of the written text. In addition, Reflective journal is a strategy that has been promoted by educators as a means of encouraging reflective learning. The absence of this strategy in the learning environment urged the researchers to investigate its effect on students' learning. Therefore, this study will attempt to investigate the reflective learning approach as a means of improving students' English Reading Comprehension skills

### **Statement of the Problem**

Secondary students face difficulties with EFL reading comprehension.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The following hypotheses were formulated to be tested:

2.3.1 There would be a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental (reflective) and control (non-reflective) groups in the overall English Reading Comprehension posttest (ERCT), in favor of the experimental group.

2.3.2 There would be a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental and control group in the English Reading Comprehension posttest (ERCT) regarding each of these skills, i.e., making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge, favoring the experimental group.

### **Questions of the Study**

Based on the above-mentioned problem, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What is the effect of using reflective journals on enhancing EFL reading comprehension skills of second year secondary school students?
- What is the effect of the use of reflective journal in developing the students' EFL reading comprehension skills, i.e., making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge?

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. The study aimed to investigate the effect of reflective journal on enhancing the participants' EFL reading comprehension skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study can be described in the following points:

- Findings of the study might evaluate the worth of reflective journal in improving the students' EFL reading comprehension skills.
- The study might be useful for teachers to monitor their students, to know what students have learned, what is unclear for students and find out a lot about their students' learning progress.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited to the following:

- A group of second year female students learning English as a foreign language, enrolled at Al Sadat secondary school for girls at Nag Hammadi Town.
- The use of reflective writing as a learning approach..
- Some reading comprehension skills (mainly; making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words, and relating background knowledge.

### **Method Design**

The present study adopted one of the quasi-experimental designs which is the 'pretest posttest non-equivalent group design'.

### **Variables of the Study**

Variables of the study were: (1) Reflective Journal (independent variable), (2) EFL reading comprehension skills dependent variable.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants selected for the present study (n= 60 ) were randomly selected from the population of second-year students enrolled at El-Sadat secondary school for girls at Nag Hammadi town, Qena. The participants

included only female students. To carry out the study, the researcher randomly selected two classes to serve as the experimental and the control groups (n=30 for each group). The students who participated in piloting the instruments were excluded (25). All participants have studied English as a foreign language for 11 years. The average age of the participants was between 16 and 17 years.

### **Instruments of the Study**

- EFL Reading Comprehension Checklist
- English Reading Comprehension Test
- Reflection Sheet

### **Literature review: Reflective Journals**

#### **Journal Writing**

The history of journal writing refers to the early times when prehistoric people use their homemade paint to write their light events. Journals also were written to give a birth to some civilized societies like inks on papyrus, Greek as well as Roman journals. Journals were written by ink on papyrus, however; the Chinese in 56 A.D are considered the first to write the journals as they are known today. In 900 A.D Japanese woman recorded events of Japanese High Court. Also, in 354 to 430 A.D journals were used to record daily events to understand how the mind works. Later, in Middle Ages 400 to 1500 A.D journals were used to save knowledge. In 17th century they were the political thoughts in Great Britain. In addition, from early 20th century until 2006 journals were used for many purposes and Facebook and Twitter allowed the electronic format of journals (O'connell & Dymont, 2013).

Writing journals can help students record experience in order to process it later. Journals facilitate learning through experience, meaning that journals can help students develop experience to make his/her own theory. In addition, it supports understanding, critical thinking, and questioning. Furthermore, journals improve writing, self-expression, interaction between learners in a group and planning in research (moon, 2006). Liuliene and Metiuniene (2011) completed that journals provide a space where learners can think and encourage active involvement in learning. Besides, Moon (2013) indicated that journals facilitate learning through experience, deepen the quality of learning, a means of assessment, supporting behavior change, free-up writing, and the representation of learning. One of the good benefits,

journals provide an alternative voice for students who are not good at expressing themselves. Further, Peery (2005) assured that it makes learners more confident.

Writing journals for O'connell and Dymont (2013) is a way of recording learners' experiences that let them look back to their previous writings anytime later and think how their learning progressed. Journals help learners write down their observations of places, events, people, and natural events that happened outside the classroom to reflect on as supplemental learning activities for the future learning. learners in journals have the chance to assess their position and learning to build their future learning. In addition, learners develop their writing skills, problem solving skills, and understanding as well.

### **Forms of Journals**

Reflective journal comes in any form, size, or shape. It can exist on a paper as colored sticky notes on walls and as a five -year diary with space for everyday or it may not exist on a paper. Journals can be found in an electronic form in word format, audio, or video tape. Also, as they have written on stones and walls of old caves. The form of journals depends on the writer's imagination. Moon (2006) stated that there are two main forms of journals including relatively unstructured journal, and structured journal. In the form of unstructured journals, there is both reflective and free writing. The subject and work in this journal are chosen by the writer, using specific manner and the length that he/she chooses. Besides, the writer can make his or her structure. On the other hand, structured forms of journals, are journals that will be overseen by another with perceived expectations of the overseer. Structure help students get much more benefits from the journal. In addition, structure ensures that learners would reflect on certain topics, continue in reflection and learning, and not to go around in a circle.

Furthermore, O'connell and Dymont (2013) added that choosing the type of journal depends on the class topic and the outcomes intended. O'connell and Dymont presented other forms for journals as "Nature Journal". It is filled with information about wild places that learners visit. It contains learners' observations of the environment. It does not encourage students to explore the environment but rather to know their position in the cycles of the nature. In addition, learners may write about life lists of birds and seasons. Science journal is considered a subset of the nature journal as it

focuses on certain fields like physics, biology, or chemistry. Science journal estimates students to reflect on the results of experiments and to go beyond mentioned knowledge to relate it to their understanding of the world.

### **Journal Responses and Assessment**

There are many who argued that journals should not be assessed or too difficult to be assessed because there are no definite criteria. However, there is need for developing means of assessment (moon 2006). According to moon (2006) journal assessment may be formative or summative. Formative as in case of presenting feedback for learners on their work, while summative is at the end of the work provides learners with an overview of the work quality. There are other ways mentioned by moon (2010). The first is the formal assessment, in which learners get marks on the basis of criteria that may not be entirely clear for them. The second is the informal and peer-assessment, when learners assess their own work as in higher level learning, and the last is feedback which can be in the form of comments about work.

Good responses achieve many benefits at classrooms. Responses enhance students' motivation to engage and participate in classrooms activities. One of the most important benefits is that responses give a look on what learners have missed during learning. Moreover, educators and learners exchange knowledge and ideas. Rogers (2002) pointed out that though good responses provide all these benefits, there are many challenges related to good responses. Some teachers present poor responses, some learners may misunderstand teachers' responses, in addition many responses cannot be trusted, sometimes these responses are not correct, and so teachers need to read well before they give their responses. Finally, there is not much evidence that responses help learners learn more. Explaining the same idea Rogers (2002) that only educators who give responses is no longer exist. There are many other people can give their responses such as peers, the interactive whole group, one educator or many educators, and self.

### **Experimental procedures of the study**

Based on the checklist results, some reading comprehension skills the learners need to develop are listed as; guessing meaning of words, interpretation, making inferences, and relating background knowledge. Afterwards, the final form of the test (ERCT) was prepared. Later, a pilot study was carried out to determine the validity and reliability, of the instruments of the study. Prior to the experiment, the participants (reflective

and non-reflective groups) were given the English Reading Comprehension Test. The participants (experimental group) were trained to reflect. They were introduced to Atkin and Murphy's model of reflection at the first week of the second term (2021) at Al sadat secondary school for girls. Also, the participants were presented to the dialogue and double-entry journals (reflection sheet).

The experiment of the study was carried out at the beginning of the second term, the participants (experimental group) are asked to reflect on some selected reading passages. It's noted that the two groups (experimental and control) had the same reading passages and activities. The teacher was just a helper for learners to complete their reflections. Each participant of the reflective group made a dialogue or double-entry journal format on the reading passages. In the dialogue journals, the participants share with their classmates. Writing journals occurs directly after reading the passages once a week at least, then the teacher gives his /her feedback to the participants' journals. By the end of the term, the two groups (experimental and control) were post-tested. The participants had the English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT).

## Results of the Data Analysis

### Results of the post- test for the experimental and control groups

#### Results concerning the overall English Reading Comprehension Test of both groups in the post administration (ERCT).

The independent samples t-test was used to analyze the post-administration

Scores. The mean scores, standard deviations, t-values and t significance of English Reading Comprehension Test on the post administration are presented in table 4.1

Table 4.1 t-value for the Overall English Reading Comprehension Test of both Groups in the post administration (ERCT)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Experimental	30	90.53	6.36		
Control	30	33.26	3.75	42.42	0.000**

**\*\*P>0.01.**

Data displayed in Table 4.1 indicated that the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post administration of the ERCT were

(90.53 and 33.26), respectively. It also showed that the t-value was 42.42. This means that the experimental group excelled the control group in English Reading Comprehension Test. Thus, the first hypothesis: There is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the experimental (reflective) and control (non- reflective) groups in the overall English Reading Comprehension posttest (ERCT), in favor of the experimental group, was accepted. These findings provided an answer for the first question of the study: What is the effect of reflective journal on enhancing EFL reading comprehension skills of secondary school second year students?

Figure 4.1 illustrates the results reported in Table 4-1.

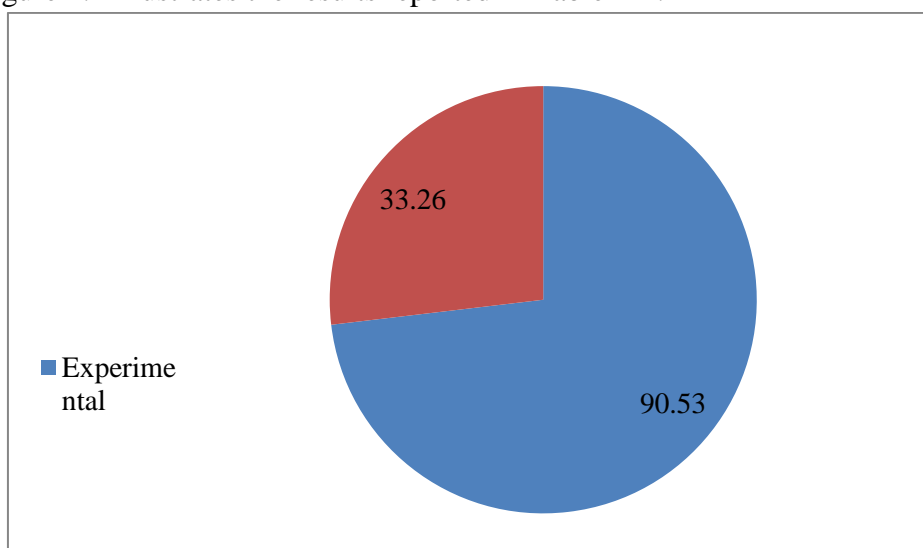


Figure 4.1 Comparison between Scores of both Groups in the overall English Reading Comprehension in the post-administration (ERCT)

#### **Results Concerning the four skills of English Reading Comprehension Test of both Groups in the post- administration (ERCT).**

Table 4.2 below demonstrates the mean scores, standard deviations, t-values, and t-significance of both groups on the four skills of English Reading Comprehension Test in the post-administration (ERCT).

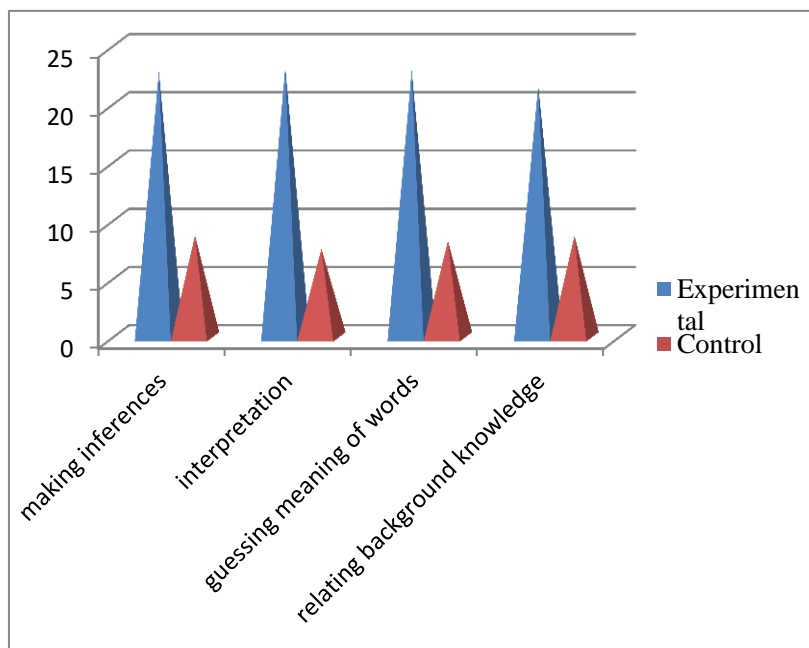
**Table 4.2 t-value for each of the Four Skills of English Reading Comprehension Test of both Groups in the post-administration(ERCT)**

Skill	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig(2-tailed)
<b>Making inferences</b>	Experimental	30	22,83	2,50	23,17	0.000**
	Control	30	8,73	2,19		
<b>Interpretation</b>	Experimental	30	23,16	1,91	36,20	0.000**
	Control	30	7,56	1,38		
<b>Guessing meaning of words</b>	Experimental	30	22,9	2,04	30,63	0.000**
	Control	30	8,26	1,63		
<b>Relating background knowledge</b>	Experimental	30	21,63	3,30	19,90	0.000**
	Control	30	8,70	1,31		

\*\*P>0.01.

Data reported in Table 4.2 showed a noticeable improvement in the participants' (experimental group) four skills of EFL Reading Comprehension; making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge. The scores obtained by the Participants (experimental group) in making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge were 22.83, 23.16, 22.9 and 21.63, respectively. On the other hand, the participants (control group) scored 8.73, 7.56, 8.26 and 8.70 in making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge, respectively. This revealed that the experimental group (reflective) outperformed the control group in the four skills. The obtained t-values showed that statistically significant differences at 0.01 level were found between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the four skills of the English Reading Comprehension Test, in favor of the experimental group. T-value of the four skills; making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge were 23.17, 36.20, 30.63 and 19.90, respectively. Thus, the interpretation skill excelled the other three skills. The participants (experimental group) obtained the maximum score on interpretation skill while they obtained the minimum score in relating background knowledge.

Based on these results, the second hypothesis: There is statistically significant difference at 0.01 level between the mean scores of the



experimental and control group in the English Reading Comprehension posttest (ERCT) regarding each of these skills, i.e., making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge, favoring the experimental group, was Confirmed. This finding gives an answer to the second question “How effective is the use of reflective journal in developing the students’ EFL reading comprehension skills, i.e., making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge? Figure 4. 2 illustrates the results presented in Table 4. 2.

Figure 4.2 Comparison between scores of both Groups on each of the Four skills of English Reading Comprehension in the post administration (ERCT)

### **The Effect Size of Reflective Journal on the overall EFL Reading Comprehension Gain.**

To measure the effect size "d" of using reflective journal (independent variable) on EFL Reading Comprehension (dependent variable) of the participants (experimental group), Eta Squared ( $\eta^2$ ) was Computed using the following statistical. formula (Al Dardeer, 2006, p. 77) ( translated).

$$\eta^2 = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}$$

Where  $t^2 = (t = \text{value})$  and  $df$  Presents degree of freedom.

Thus, " $\eta^2$ " = 0.96

Based on " $\eta^2$ " value, the effect Size "d" was Computed using the following statistical formula (Kiess, 1989).

$$d = \frac{\sqrt{2\eta^2}}{\sqrt{1-\eta^2}}$$

The effect Size. "d" was 9.7. According to Kiess (1989), the effect Size identified whether it is large, medium, or small depending y the following:

"d" value =	0.2	Small
"d" value =	0.5	Medium
"d" value =	0.8	Large

Table 4.1.2.3 presents "t" value,  $df$ , " $\eta^2$ " value, "d" and the effect size.

**Table 4.3 The Effect size of Reflective Journal on the Overall EFL Reading Comprehension Gain of the Experimental Group**

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	T	DF	$\eta^2$	D	Effect Size
Reflective Journal	Overall EFL Reading Comprehension	42.42	58	.96	9.7	Large

Statistical findings in the above table revealed that the independent Variable (reflective Journal) had a very large effect (9.7) on the dependent variable (EFL Reading Comprehension).

#### **The Effect Size of Reflective Journal on the four skills of the ERCT**

Table 4. 4 presents "t" value,  $df$ , " $\eta^2$ " value, "d" and the effect size.

**Table 4.4 The Effect size of Reflective Journal on the Four Skills of EFL Reading Comprehension of the Experimental Group**

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	T	DF	$\eta^2$	D	Effect Size
Reflective Journal	Making inferences	23.17	58	0.90	6	Large
	Interpretation	36.20	58	0.95	8.7	Large
	Guessing meaning of unknown words	30.63	58	0.94	7.9	Large
	Relating background knowledge)	19.90	58	0.87	5.1	Large

Data represented in Table 4.4 indicated that the effect of using reflective journal on the participants' (experimental group) four skills of EFL Reading Comprehension; making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge were 6, 8.7, 7.9, and 5.1 respectively. This finding showed that the reflective journal had a large effect size on making inferences, interpretation and guessing meaning of words of the experimental group. Meanwhile, the score of the effect size in interpretation (8.7) was the highest, and the lowest score of the effect size was in relating background knowledge (5.1). Accordingly, the reflective journal had a larger effect on making inferences, interpretation and guessing meaning of words than relating background knowledge. This is an answer for the second question of the study: How effective is the use of reflective journal in developing the students' EFL Reading Comprehension skills, i.e., making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge?.

### **Summary of the Results**

Results of the present study were summarized as follows:

- The experimental group students were much better in the English Reading Comprehension Test (T- value is 42.42) as compared with the non-reflective group.
- There were statistically significant differences in the posttest of EFL reading comprehension skills ; making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge favoring the experimental group. The reflective (experimental) group

gained higher scores than the non- reflective (control) group (t values were 23.17, 36.20, 30.63 and 19.90 respectively).

- Reflective journal had a large effect on the overall EFL Reading Comprehension of the experimental group ( $d=9.7$ ), and on making inferences, interpretation, guessing meaning of words and relating background knowledge (d values were 6, 8.7, 7.9 and 5.1, respectively)

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the present study, the following recommendations are offered:

- It is recommended for EFL teachers to take advantage of reflective journal in English reading classes.
- It is recommended to provide teachers with opportunities to implement reflective journal in EFL contexts.
- Teachers should use ongoing reflective journal feedback to determine how much reflective journal is effective on students' reading.

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