Some Reading Problems of Arab EFL Students

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The Extensive Approach to   :

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ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on the reading problems that Palestinian school and university EFL students face. After evaluating the current situation in the Gaza Strip, and collecting data on the basis of observation, a teacher questionnaire, and case studies, I classify these problems according to their causes into four: 1. Reading problems related to the misunderstanding of the reading process. 2. Reading problems related to insufficient linguistic competence in general, and practice of reading in particular. 3. Reading problems related to differences between English and Arabic. 4. Reading problems related to the English spelling\sound system. Finally, I state some pedagogical suggestions to develop EFL reading in Gaza such as using the Extensive Approach to reading and dealing with students in a human fashion.

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Introduction:

Gaza students can tell how teachers teach reading. In their talk about reading, many of my freshman students explained that some schoolteachers ask the whole class to repeat after them, then one by one to sound out words. Sometimes they read for the class and then ask students one-by-one, to read loudly. Sometimes they focus on every single word, how it is pronounced, and what it means. They are the authority that interrupts to give immediate correction. For many of them, student/student interaction is always looked at as a noise, confusion, and disturbance to them and to the other students' understanding. Just read fast with correct pronunciation, and you are a good reader. Based on this, one should conclude that there is a misunderstanding of what reading is and what the reading process is all about. Accordingly, our students find reading English a very complicated skill, and therefore, they have many problems with it. The product of the Gaza schools, therefore, is poor readers who realize this fact only when they encounter big reading assignments when they enter a university.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on some oral and non-oral reading problems that Arab EFL students, especially university students, in the Gaza Strip encounter when they read English. These problems are classified into four categories:

1. Problems related to the misunderstanding of the reading process.
2. Problems related to insufficient competence in and use of English.
3. Problems related to the differences between Arabic and English
4. Problems related to the English spelling/ sound system.

When analyzing the four categories, data collection is based on the researcher's teaching experience at the IUG where he taught EFL for about twelve years at the Department of English. Therefore, most of the examples in this paper are real examples written by his students, whom he is familiar with. In addition, the present researcher obtained much support for his claims on the causes of students' weaknesses in EFL reading from a questionnaire distributed among 30 male and female teachers of English whom the researcher randomly selected (See appendix I). The schoolteachers were teaching at both junior and senior high schools in Gaza City. Furthermore, a lot of support was drawn from case studies conducted by junior and senior students under this researcher's supervision.

Actually, the literature reveals that most of the work done on Arab students is about writing, but little about reading. In addition, when talking about reading problems of Arab EFL students, researchers used to attribute these problems to differences between L1 and L2.sush as Farquharson, 1988; Lebauer, 1985; Torry, 1971; Block, 1992; Panos and Rusic, 1983;

Duncan, 1983; and George, 1975. In doing so, such researchers seem to blame both L1 and L2, but not the students or their EFL teachers. For instance, slow reading, insufficient comprehension, total dependence on the print to get the meaning, inability to locate main ideas, insufficient linguistic competence, etc, are all not necessarily to be attributed to differences between L1 and L2.

Before analyzing each category, it is important to shed some light on the educational situation in the Gaza Strip, which clearly contributed to our weak student readers.

Description of the situation

In addition to some private schools, the schools in the Gaza Strip are run either by the government or by the UNRWA. Since the Israeli occupation in 1967 until the advent of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994, school pupils started learning English from the seventh grade, which means they studied for six years before entering one of the local universities. In the last a few years, the PNA has decided to start teaching English at elementary schools from the first grade, and therefore, English as a foreign language has become an important subject in all schools. In spite of the drastic change in the Palestinian curriculum, this curriculum, as far as the researcher is concerned, is still fixed and teachers' concerns are more to finish the syllabus within the time allotted than to benefit their students because of the political unrest in the region. In addition, many teachers follow teacher-oriented approaches in class management and therefore, they forbid any kind of interaction and cooperation between students.

It should be noted here that such a system of education in which the only classroom aid available is the traditional blackboard is a paternalistic and authoritative system that emphasizes imitation and memorization of fixed patterns rather than learning of research skills and the ability to develop solutions to problems (Farquharson, 1988). However, perhaps only nowadays, more and more competent, well trained, and university graduate teachers have been employed. As a result, many of them have started to move towards more interactive student-oriented approaches to teaching English because of many teacher-training courses conducted by scholars from local universities and international institutions.

More often than not, schoolteachers in the Gaza Strip join teacher-training programs administered periodically or annually by the local universities, the PNA, the AMIDEAST or by the British Council. However, reading has never been given enough time and effort by Gaza EFL

instructors. As a result, EFL students are poor readers, who find reading a foreign language such as English a complicated task. Consequently, reading is not popular among both teachers and students. The problem of weak student readers emerges at the surface when some of those students enter the English departments of the local universities. EFL professors, especially those who teach freshman students find themselves victims to unbelievably weak readers who do their best to avoid reading because of the "error phobia".

Reading Problems Related to the Misunderstanding of the Reading Process Weaver (1988) defines reading as, …the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction [transaction] among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation. (p. 161).

Due to different reasons, many of the EFL teachers in the Gaza Strip are always stuck to the syllabus dictated by the ministry of education and do not generate, develop, or test hypotheses. More often than not, these teachers follow a traditional bottom- up approach or the Grammar-Translation method when teaching reading. For instance, they view reading as a one- way process and therefore, focus mainly on word identification. This is clear in many classrooms of reading where student readers are stopped from time to time to be corrected or to be asked about the meaning of individual words they have read.

Sometimes, when student readers are asked to read loudly in class, they are asked to put their index finger on the words they are reading. This behavior might develop a way of reading that these students might follow in their whole life; a way that is slow, loud, and with subvocalization. However, the reading teachers need to know that if the eyes look at words one at a time, the brain deals with words in meaningful clusters. Therefore, using the index finger to refer to every word while reading aloud makes reading slow, and slow reading is bad " because it tends to create tunnel vision, overloads short-term memory, and leaves the reader floundering in the ambiguity of language" (Smith, 1994: 153). Smith adds that subvocalization is like loud reading slows readers down and interferes with comprehension…" (160).

It is hypothesized by this researcher that teachers' misunderstanding of the reading process is the cause of many reading difficulties their students face. Miller and Yochum (1991) maintain that the reading difficulties students face may be related to inaccurate knowledge of the reading process.

If this is true, then the teachers themselves have inaccurate knowledge of the reading process, too. This relationship is clear in Weaver's words:

Children's success at reading reflects their reading strategies; their reading strategies typically reflect their implicit definitions of reading; children's definitions of reading often reflect the instructional approach, and the instructional approach reflect a definition of reading whether implicit or explicit. (P. 2)

This sequence can be more clearly illustrated in the following figure:

Teachers' definitions of reading,

Instructional approaches teachers use,

Student readers' definitions of reading,

Student readers' reading strategies,

Student readers' success/ failure at reading.

It is clear that everything depends on how teachers define reading, and their teaching practices will follow accordingly. It is almost the first step on the ladder that determines the other steps. If that step is not strong enough, the whole ladder may collapse. This is why, perhaps, there has been much attention to teacher education, and teacher training has become the focus of many governments especially in the Third World.

The above hypothesis was tested in item (1) of the questionnaire mentioned above. The item elicits the teachers' definition of reading and how they teach it (see appendix 1). Results revealed that while two thirds of the teachers (20) defined reading as extracting meaning from the prints, only eight mentioned steps in the process of teaching reading such as pre-reading questions, silent reading, pointing out difficult vocabulary items, and post reading comprehension questions. In addition, 10 teachers gave ambiguous definitions such as the following:

- Reading is what we use to acquire new knowledge and experiences of others.
- Reading is a process in which students read many words to form sentences to reflect their ideas.
- Reading is a skill used in teaching language to let students to reflect their ideas and directions.
- Reading is a system in which the teacher encourages his students to read the topic in order to develop their four primary skills.

While teachers blame their students for not working hard and blame the government for their low salaries, students blame their teachers for not

teaching them well, and they blame the political situation for not being able to concentrate.

2. Reading Problems Related to Insufficient Linguistic Competence in General and Use of English

Hargis (1999) states that readability measures are the number of difficult words, frequency of these words and sentence complexity. When an Arab EFL student is asked why s/he finds English a complicated language to read, the common answer is that most of the words in the text are new and s/he does not know what they mean. Let us compare this student reader with a car driver: a car driver might drive well in his/her hometown because s/he is familiar with the roads, the locations of the different kinds of traffic signs, traffic lights, exits, etc. Therefore, s/he will drive fast, smoothly, and comfortably. However, when this driver enters a city for the first time, s/he may feel hesitant, confused, and almost afraid of making any traffic violation. It is not because s/he is not a competent driver, but because the city is new to him/her, and s/he cannot attend to all traffic lights, signs, exits, etc, in one time. Therefore, driving will be slow and not easy.

Just like driving, Arab EFL students are poor readers because they find reading materials something new and hard to deal with. While they think that all of the meaning lies in the print, they do not have the linguistic competence to utilize that. In addition, they are not trained or told how to use their schemata because their teachers, too, may think that the meaning lies only in the print. Therefore, they focus on many things at one time: phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic clues, so as to read fluently with comprehension. However, it is hard for the brain to attend to all these things simultaneously and "the harder we try to look, the less we may see" (Smith, 1988: 71). In order to get the meaning from the text, (Eskey, 1986, quoted in Devine, 1988), the reader should have two categories of knowledge to interact: Form (recognition of graphophonic, lexical, syntactic/semantic, and rhetorical patterns of language) and substance (cultural, pragmatic, and subject-specific information). In addition, Donnell and Wood (1999) state three categories of factors that affect comprehension: factors in the reader (interest/motivation, fluency and metacognition); factors in the text (concept density, organization, and style); and readability (length of sentences and difficulty of vocabulary). If the students do not have the above categories of knowledge, and the teachers are unaware of the factors that affect comprehension, then, the reading for these students will be really difficult, slow and with little comprehension. In other words, these readers do not have the "reading competence" that enables them to become proficient readers. This lack of competence seems

to be the result of insufficient practice in and lack of exposure to English whether through reading, writing, speaking, or listening.

Insufficient exposure to English is clear at schools, and in the wider community. At schools, for instance, there is always a small book of reading, and sometimes, a small story without any supplementary materials for the whole academic year. Even out of schools and universities, the sociolinguistic situation is too poor. Neither public nor private libraries exist. At home, fathers are more concerned about financing their big families than buying books, while mothers are always busy in their housekeeping. If some books are at home, they are almost in Arabic and about Islam. Then, how can we imagine developing students' reading comprehension with such little exposure, which is not enough to build a threshold for reading? Krashen states that "reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers" (Day and Bamford, 1989: 38).

It has something to do with attitudes toward Arabic, but not English, and toward the text being read. According to Farquharson, (1988), people feel that they are in love with Arabic, that Divinely blessed language, which was the vehicle of God's ultimate revelations to the world. In this regard, Farquharson adds, the sanctity of the text should be mentioned with the Quran being the prime example that is not to be disputed, criticized, or contested. This attitude towards Arabic and the Quran makes Arab students inclined neither to survey an English text to see whether it is worth reading, nor to distinguish between important and unimportant information. While everybody acknowledges the importance of English as a universal language, only those who plan to continue their study abroad do not question its use in the daily life. So, Arab EFL students find reading difficult, laborious, and time consuming. Therefore, their reading practices are little, and consequently, their competence remains insufficient.

Question 1 and 2 in the questionnaire mentioned above test the above assumption. Here are the two questions followed by the product of Chi Square Test:

3. Do you think your students practice enough reading in English? "Yes" "No".

4. Roughly, how many pages of English do your students read a week? ------
   Chi Square Products

Response		Observed N	Expected N	χ^2	p
Q.1	Yes	6	15.0		
	No	24	15.0	10.8	.001***

   In the above table, the difference between the observed frequencies of 'yes' and 'no' (column 2) and the frequencies that would be expected (column 3) were statistically significant because the Chi Square coefficient yielded p values of $< .001$. So, in each case $p < .05$. This means that the proportion of teachers who said 'no' to the item was much larger than the proportion of students who said 'yes'.

  As for the second question, the average page number given by these teachers was 3.1 page a week. Accordingly, the above assumption was confirmed that teachers believe that their students do not practice enough reading in English.

3. Reading Problems Related to Differences between English and Arabic

  It is assumed that phonological differences between L1 and L2 constitute some of the reasons that make reading difficult. (Duncan, 1983). For instance, in a study of Haitian refugees conducted by the Center of Applied Linguistics in 1981, it is reported that Haitian students find many reading problems as a result of differences between their language and English.

  The Arabic alphabet is different from the Roman alphabet. For instance, there are no capital letters of the 28 Arabic letters, many of which have different shapes, depending on their position in a word. In addition, Arabic is written through the line from right to left, which makes the adaptation (Panos and Ruzic, 1983) to the opposite direction in reading a problem. Undoubtedly, this can be a serious problem to fast reading in skimming, scanning, and note taking.

  The spelling sound system of English is different from that of Arabic, especially in the vowel system. Avery and Ehrlich (1987) state that the big number of English vowels in comparison with that in other languages is a problem. For instance, while English uses six vowels in writing, and about 14 in speaking, Arabic has only three. In addition, in Arabic, only long and stressed vowels are represented in writing: "ا" (for "a"), "و" (for "o" and

"u"), and "ي" (for "e" and "i"). For instance, the Arabic verb "*kasara*" (broke) is written in Arabic "*ksr*." In reading their English texts, Arab EFL students tend to stress and elongate vowels such as the following: comf<u>o</u>rtable, postm<u>a</u>n, policem<u>a</u>n, b<u>ee</u>n, etc. A famous example of elongated vowels always heard in Oxford, MS is the second vowel in the word "Memph<u>i</u>s." Arab EFL readers might be confused when reading words such as beat, bet, bait, bet, pot, bat, bought, etc. The confusion, as far as I am concerned, stems out from the fact that these vowel differences which are phonemic in English are allophones in Arabic.

Another reading difficulty at the vowel level is that weak vowels in English have the phonetic value [ə] and are represented in any vowel symbol in writing. Therefore, Arab EFL learners are expected to misread words like *administrater for administrator, *biginnar for beginner, *villigers for villagers, *husbund for husband, etc.

Differences at the consonant level also exist. For instance, While English differentiates between two bilabial plosives [p] and [b], Arabic has only the latter. As a result, Arab EFL students always replace [b] for [p] when they read their English texts. It happened to me in 1991 when I was in a two month language course at the University of Pennsylvania, when I read to my professor "lamp" as 'lamb"

Another difference between Arabic and English that causes a problem is the English voiced apico-alveolar fricative [v], which has no equivalent in Arabic. I still remember when I was in my undergraduate study, I used to criticize my colleagues for reading "seven-up" as 'sefen-up", "off" for "of," "profe" for "prove," etc.

Consonant clusters in English are, perhaps, the most obvious reading problem Arab EFL students face when they read English. It makes their reading very slow and ambiguous. It should be noted that this is not only the problem of Arab learners of English, but also of many of their teachers as well. It is well known that English allows up to three consonants between two vowels (in one syllable). However, Arabic allows only up to two. To overcome this problem, Arab EFL students tend to divide the English consonant clusters by inserting a vowel between them so as to facilitate pronunciation. Famous examples I always hear are as follows: *again<u>e</u>st, *con<u>e</u>stitution, *trans<u>e</u>cribe, *un<u>e</u>stressed, *worl<u>e</u>d, etc.

Finally, it might seem to the reader that the problems mentioned above are mere pronunciation problems, but not reading ones. Actually, research does not show a clear -cut line between oral reading and pronunciation since both are oral and might embed comprehension if not

handled properly. It is not only the comprehension of the student readers in class, but also that of the student listeners in the reading class.

4. Reading Problems Related to the English Spelling/Sound System

Since most of the Gaza school students are oral readers; that is, they associate meaning phonetically; their reading problems have something to do with spelling. Stanback (1980) states the following:

> Dr. Orton in 1937 stated that "Reading disability cases are without exceptions poor spellers" (Orton, 1937). More recently, Black (1973), in a study of 50 subjects selected because of a reading problem, found that all 50 also had a spelling problem.   (P. 5)

Stanback adds that these problems, for sure, will be more complicated when we realize the fact that English has around 43 sounds for only 26 letters. This means that there is no correspondence between the English alphabets and their sounds. (McPherson, 1984; Pei, 1967; Sowers, 1991; Weaver, 1988; Rohner, 1989; Moretz, 1971). As a result, " The spelling of words is not a reliable guide to their sound" (Smith, 1988:119). It is not the aim of this paper to show whether the spelling/sound inconsistency is good or bad; however, it is clear that a close relationship exists between spelling and oral reading. Hence, good knowledge of the spelling system of English will be a good aid to reading (Templeton, 1991; Rohner, 1989; McPherson, 1984; Moretz, 1971).

More often than not, all EFL/ESL students find themselves victims to spelling /sound inconsistency because " learning to read the word will be easier if the language is written as it sounds" (Rohner, 1989:5). For instance, an Arab EFL student is expected to find difficulties in reading words such as:

- Too, clue, shoe, where different letters represent one sound.
- Dame, mad, fall where a single letter represents different sounds.
- Shy, seal, this, then, faint, rough, station, philosopher, coach, colleague, character, where a combination of letters represents one single sound.
- Know, psychology, lamb, often, whole, paradigm, name, through, isle, where some letters have no sound at all

In order to test the above assumption, 40 freshman students at the IUG English department were chosen randomly and asked one by one to read some words with spelling-pronunciation irregularities. These words such as honest, half, knife, bottle, allow, etc, were carefully chosen by the researcher and his students to suit the level of these students. Therefore,

they are considered familiar to all the students. Counting errors and corrections, results indicated that errors constituted 60%.

It should be remembered that pronunciation of words is also related to their meaning. This means that when a student reader mispronounces such words, this might affect his/her comprehension as a reader, and confuse others as listeners. To sum up, knowledge in spelling and pronunciation might make good readers and facilitate comprehension.

To sum up, Arab EFL/ESL students, including the Palestinian ones, suffer from many reading problems as a result of teachers' misunderstanding of the reading process, students' lack of the linguistic competence, differences between English and Arabic, and English spelling-pronunciation irregularities.

After mentioning all these difficulties that encounter Arab EFL/ESL learners, one might wonder who is to blame, and what the solution is. In the following section, I am going to state some pedagogical suggestions that might change the situation.

Pedagogical Suggestions

It seems to me that different approaches and/techniques based on the Extensive Approach to reading, along with class instructions to develop skills and strategies are enough to solve our students' problems. However, before starting using any of these approaches/techniques, teachers need to know that teaching is a humanistic career, and that teaching and anxiety can never meet. Hence, the first step that teachers should take is motivating their students by creating a humanistic teaching/learning environment. Students can be informed that problems in reading might exist, but there are ways of solving them, and this might be more important than teaching the meaning of specific words, phrases, and concepts (bliock, 1992).

Unfortunately, many schoolteachers find it hard to believe that effective teaching /learning might take place without physical punishment. Weaver (1988) states that student readers "rarely or never had the opportunity to read under conditions that made reading pleasurable for them" (365). Maden (1988) quotes Classer (1986) stating that up to 50% of students fails to learn because their basic needs (love, power, freedom, fun, etc.) are not met and therefore, they refrain from working hard. Dwyer and Dwyer (1994) state that:

> Teachers must create within each classroom a positive atmosphere, a way of life conductive to promoting reading through positive affect. Positive teachers are realistic but always looking for the best in their students. Positive teachers

are competent teachers, constantly striving to better their skills. They realize that positive effect coupled with a high level of teaching ability promotes maximum achievement from their students (p. 72).

In addition, Carbo (1987), mentioned in Weaver (1988), maintains that"…reading achievement generally depends on how well the instructional program accommodates a given youngster's natural reading style (369). It is well known that Arabs like to recite the Quran loudly and word by word. In addition, being taught by the Grammar-Translation method, Arab EFL students tend to be analytic and seem to benefit from the phonics approach. However, such a reading style might fit short reading assignments, accomplished in a short period of time, and require slow reading. This can be problematic when students are confronted with huge amounts of prints, especially when entering a university. Therefore, what I suggest is building on this style and dedicating part of each class time for interesting silent reading, skimming, and scanning followed by group discussions. In this regard, it should be noted that silent reading is much more effective than loud reading (George, 1975; Weaver, 1988; Smith, 1988) except when the aim is to improve oral reading abilities or to test pronunciation (Weerenand Theunissen, 1987).

While knowledge in the spelling/sound system is helpful to those who need it (Templeton, 1991), the crux here is how to provide this knowledge. Is it by the phonics approach or by explicit teaching of the spelling/sound rules? It should be known that phonics rules vary, are numerous, and difficult to memorize. Instead, both fluent reading and the phonics rules can be taught by practicing reading and writing. Integrating reading and writing will provide students with a rich language environment of a variety of reading and writing through which they infer the rules themselves, inductively develop them from the living materials they are dealing with, and perform them (Torrey, 1971; Rivers, 1987).

Practicing much writing and reading such as critical reading and drills of speeding up the rate of fast reading can be accomplished through keeping journal entries in which students summarize, react to, and express their feelings toward the readings. Not only do journal entries provide language practice, but they also demand generating writing in which students must think of what to say instead of repeating formulaic phrases or imitating a published text. It is recommended that students in each class read each other's journal, which I think, will create fluent readers.

Occasionally, specific techniques can be used to solve specific problems. For those related to consonant clusters, teachers can write down

examples on the blackboard and divide them in the areas of difficulty. For instance, consonant clusters such as in
'Chomsky', 'against', 'constitution', etc., can be divided as chom-sky, again-st, cons-titution. The next step is to ask students to read repeatedly each word as if it were two. Then, students in each time can be asked to speed up their pronunciation till the two parts become one word.

Problems related to individual letters can be solved by using minimal pairs, nonsense pairs, and minimal sentences. For instance, to teach students how to distinguish between [p] and [b], minimal pairs such as pan/ban, pen/ben, and Pack/back, are useful when students are asked to read them loudly and tell the difference. Nonsense words are more useful since teachers feel free to create as many words as they can to show the difference. When teaching the difference between [f] and [v], teachers can use nonsense pairs such as fat/vat, far/var, sefen/seven, etc. However, it is much more effective when these problematic sounds are taught in context such as in the following minimal sentences:
- I bought a _van_ because my car is small.
- I bought a _fan_ because it is hot today.

Such a technique will be useful if students find themselves in a humanistic language-rich environment in which they read and write as much as they can. Undoubtedly, they "learn to read by writing and by reading their own writing" (Weaver, 1988:147). In doing so, their reading problems will gradually take care of themselves when they receive occasional constructive feedback from qualified teachers.

Since comprehension is essential in teaching reading, exploiting students' background knowledge to get meanings from the print is a highly effective technique. Unfortunately, this is neglected by many teachers who believe that the meaning is only in the print. Smith (1988), quoted in Egan (1994), states that teachers rarely explain readers' background to their students though 10% of the information comes from the text while 90% of the information comes from the readers' background or schemata. In this regard, many techniques to teaching reading comprehension have been invented that utilize student readers' background knowledge such as these of Cunningham and Wall (1994) and Wallace (1995).

It is a fact that language skills are developed through practice while comprehension is improved and developed through extensive reading. Since Arab EFL students do not have enough exposure to English, the Extensive Approach to reading might be one of the best solutions. In his experimental research, Bell (2001) studied two groups of young adult Yemeni

elementary-level learners. One group was taught by the Extensive Approach, while the other was taught by the Intensive Approach. After two semesters, Bell revealed that the extensive group achieved both significantly faster reading speeds and significantly higher scores on measures of reading comprehension.

In their book *Extensive Reading in the Second Language classroom*, Day and Bamford (1998) state the following characteristics for the Extensive Approach: reading as much as possible, book after book, where the meaning is the focus, students select their own readings, students cover a variety of materials and topics, students read for pleasure, information and general understanding, reading is its own reward, reading materials are within the range of the students' linguistic competence, reading is individual and silent, reading speed is usually fast, reading teachers are guides and facilitators, and teachers are role models of a reader for students. This approach can be very beneficial and rewarding to student readers. Day and Bamford mention the following benefits: developing good reading habits, encouraging a liking for reading, developing structure and vocabulary, increasing general second language competence, developing automaticity, enhancing background knowledge, improving comprehension skills, and promoting confidence and motivation.

When teachers function as guides and facilitators in the Extensive Approach, they actually integrate different reading approaches together in their instructions to maximize their students' reading comprehension. They might use different techniques from different approaches such as bottom-up, top-down, skills and strategies, etc. In this regard, Duffy (1997) reveals that no instructional model is superior. All are ideas to be adapted not tenets to follow. Therefore, teachers need to be instructed on how to use instructional models to be creative, but not to get stuck on only one.

To conclude, although the reading problems of Arab EFL students vary and their reading competence seems to be below the threshold level, the techniques mentioned above might make a change. With collaborative efforts from teachers, students and administrations, it is possible to develop students' reading skills and strategies in order to give them the chance to be independent readers who, after being trained, will take the responsibility for their own learning. However, in the light of the politically unstable situation and the lack of public and private libraries in the Gaza Strip, more research is needed to show whether it is possible or not to apply the Extensive Approach in that region.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on reading problems of Palestinian EFL students

Dear Colleagues,

I would greatly appreciate your response to the following questions, which don't take much time, and are easy to answer. It is only for research purposes and has nothing to do with the evaluation of the course or the teacher. Do not write your name, teacher's name or the course section number.

1. In the space bellow, define briefly what reading is, and how you teach it.

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2. Do you think your students practice enough reading in English?

  Yes   No.

3. Roughly, how many pages of English do your students read a week?