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**The Effects of Teaching Affixes on EFL Learners' Reading  
Comprehension.**

The Case of Second Year Students of English at Biskra University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages in Partial Fulfillment  
for the Requirements of Master Degree in Sciences of Language

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## DEDICATION

*This work would not have been possible without the loving support of so many people. I find myself overwhelmed in offering them all my thanks in dedicating this work to them. The following is not a hierarchy since each person made his/her own unique contribution and none could stand above the others in that regard.*

*To my father and my mother*

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## **Abstract**

This study presents a qualitative and quantitative investigation designed to provide a concrete relationship between teaching morphemes (roots, prefixes and suffixes) and second year EFL students' reading comprehension level by adopting two research instruments, namely a test and a questionnaire. The main concern of the test is to depict the morphology level of the students and their morphological awareness (MA) as well; than elicit their comprehension difficulties, and the ability to use the strategy of prediction upon affixes. The aim of the students' questionnaire is to develop knowledge of the learners' strategic repertoire and strategy use of morphemes. The hypothesis raised for this study is that students reading comprehension shall be enhanced after teaching affixes and English roots systematically. They make predictions upon them to attack the meaning of unfamiliar words. Whether morphological analysis can actually help students understand unknown words and whether morphological analysis has a long term effect on vocabulary acquisition are issue still being researched and debated. Our findings show that the participants are quite able to guess words' meaning from their affixes, but they actually lack the morphological awareness which is the focus of our study.

**Key words:** morphological awareness (MA), morphological analysis, prediction, affixes, unfamiliar words.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**EFL:** English as Foreign Language.

**ELL:** English Language learners.

**LMD:** License, Master: Doctorate

**MA:** Morphological Analysis

**MA:** Morphological Awareness

**N:** Number of participants.

**R. C:** Reading comprehension.

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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# **General Introduction**

## **Introduction**

Reading is the heart of learning a language. It stimulates the brain to know much about the language. At the level of university, learners of English must read too much. However, they find reading exciting and challenging at the same time especially with comprehension. Therefore, improving EFL students' reading comprehension is a goal which every responsible teacher tries hard with his students to achieve. The mastery of reading comprehension skills can be very useful if they lead to discussion about what the text means and if information in the text is explored for greater understanding. Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension; one cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean. Hence; writers, educators and researchers have dealt with this matter seriously. In particular, they have investigated the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension, and they tried hard to find out the best techniques to improve EFL learner's knowledge of vocabulary.

In fact; English has a rich vocabulary, and a large number of English lexical items that is derived from other languages. Nevertheless, the lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge is already an obvious and serious obstacle for many students. One cannot look up every new word or expression when reading. Consequently, it is necessary for teachers to provide their learners with another strategy so that they can achieve a good comprehension level and get meanings easily. For example, asking students to engage in predicting, clarifying, summarizing, and questioning; all done while discussing the meaning of the text information- will provide real comprehension.

One of the most popular strategies in vocabulary encoding supported by many researchers is using affix knowledge (Bauer & Nation, 1993). The majority of English words have been created through the combination of morphemic elements that are prefixes and suffixes with base words and word roots. If learners understand how this combination

works, they possess one of the most powerful understandings necessary to vocabulary growth. This understanding of how meaningful elements combine is defined as morphological knowledge or Morphological awareness (MA) because it is based on an understanding of morphemes, the smallest units of meaning in a language. For example; when a reader comes across to the word “*research*”, he can guess something about the meaning because he knows that the prefix “*re*” means repeat again or repeat over.

Accordingly, students are then taught to find the meaning of an unknown word by breaking it into elements in order to obtain the meaning of the entire word. Vocabulary items, whether one-word or multi-word, can often be broken down into component ‘bits’. How these bits are put together is useful information. For example, if learners know the meaning of *able*, this will help them guess the meanings of words like *ungrateful*. They should, however, be warned that in many common words, the affixes no longer have any obvious connection with their root meaning such as *comfortable* and *outline*. So, in order to better understanding of the correlation between reading comprehension and teaching English affixes and roots, this research study attempts to spot the light on the students’ needs to be taught how to use affixation and roots to be confident with words meaning in order to prevent them from negative attitude towards reading and sustain for them a “lifelong reading”.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Why does much vocabulary instruction often fail to increase comprehension measurably? According to Freebody& Anderson (1983), there are two basic ways to account for this failure. The first is that most vocabulary instruction fails to produce in-depth word knowledge. A number of studies indicate that reading comprehension requires a high level of word knowledge. Only those methods that go beyond providing thorough knowledge of the words taught will reliably increase readers' comprehension of texts

containing those words. The implication is that teachers should augment traditional methods of instruction such as memorizing definitions with more intensive instruction aimed at producing richer, deeper word knowledge. A second reason for the failure of vocabulary instruction to improve reading comprehension relates to the comprehensibility of texts containing unfamiliar words. The presence of a certain proportion of unfamiliar words hinders comprehension. In fact, inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words in text is itself a major avenue of vocabulary growth (Nagy, Anderson, 1984).

Most English instructors complain that their students suffer a lot from being unable to comprehend reading texts because they lack the required size of vocabulary to understand the target texts. Therefore, Students are not successful in reading comprehension due to their deficiency in vocabulary. Unknown words hinder students from understanding the reading texts and the given questions as well. Therefore, it is very important to attempt and examine various vocabulary teaching techniques and strategies so as to find the most effective ones which may help a lot in developing students' vocabulary, and as a result, to improve their reading comprehension skills. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of teaching affixes and roots on the development of EFL learners' vocabulary and improving their reading comprehension skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

English is thought to be the most complex of all the European languages, in part because it had had a mixture of Greek, Latin, French (which is based in Latin) and Germanic roots (Frost 2005). In addition, English is generally thought to have significantly more words and expressions than any other language. This seems useful and beneficial a writer in search of the perfect phrase, but for striving readers and language learners, it can be a nightmare. These two factors -the mixed complexity of English spellings and the size and scope of the lexicon- combine to create a major challenge for students and teachers

alike, especially in reading comprehension. Thus, Readers who are more aware of words structure should more readily comprehend academic texts, because advanced texts contain a lot of morphologically complex words (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Vocabulary and Reading comprehension through Morphemes: Suffixes, Prefixes, and Roots for EFL learners was undertaken as a research study to address that challenge.

Vocabulary and reading comprehension through morphemes was designed to promote structural analysis, referred to hereafter as morphological awareness (MA). Morphology refers to the structure of words through the smallest elements of meaning - *morphemes*- prefixes, roots, base words, and suffixes. Morphological awareness may be viewed as the ability and aptitude to infer word meaning and/or grammatical function through morphemes. Because the brain constantly seeks patterns and rules, student do indeed develop MA; however, this type of knowledge can become meta-cognitive through instruction (Nagy, 2007). Until about 1990, MA had been somewhat overlooked in research and particularly in practice, but recent studies have shown it to be strongly related to literacy, including reading, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, and even grammar (Carlisle, 2003).

These techniques can be developed as a vocabulary teaching strategy in the English department to meet the needs of EFL learners concerning the ability to read in terms of vocabulary and reading comprehension; as well as, to help them develop greater confidence and competence when faced with complex words composed of multiple affixes, roots or combining forms. This research supplies students with a safe strategy to practice inferring meaning when they encounter unknown words in every kind of print English, by combining context clues with morpheme clues. EFL teachers use these materials to convey effective independent reading habits among learners, and encourage them to transfer these

skills to all aspects of reading. the goal here is not to become linguists, but to become interested in words and aware of patterns (Ebbers& Denton, 2008).

### **Aims of the Study**

English vocabulary is enormous and grows steadily with technological and cultural assimilations. The vast majority of English words and a great percentage of the words used to express abstract ideas are complex words that are made up of simple word parts (prefixes, roots, and suffixes) that can be understood in context without an exact definition. Fortunately, by slow and steady teaching the most prominent prefixes, roots, and suffixes, students can acquire easily an ability to decode the words meanings in context and consequently they achieve a high level of reading comprehension. This is the foundation of this research study which is aimed at:

1. Discovering the morphological instruction used by EFL learners to decode words meaning in their reading.
2. Evaluating the effectiveness of their use.
3. Exploring whether direct instruction in Affixes and Roots increases reading comprehension for university English language learners.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of teaching affixes on EFL learners' reading comprehension?
2. Did EFL learners improve their reading abilities after affixes and roots teaching?
3. What happens to reading comprehension for foreign language learners when affixes and roots are emphasized in vocabulary study?
4. To what extent teaching affixes and English roots enhances EFL Learners' reading comprehension?

## **Research Hypothesis**

Although reading is crucial for student at the level of university, learners' reading comprehension seems to fall behind their teachers' expectations. We hypothesize that this problem may be attributed to the unawareness of the importance of using affixes and English roots to unlock unfamiliar words in reading. In other words, if learners make effective use of affixes and English roots when reading, their reading comprehension shall be enhanced.

## **Research methodology**

We have found that this research though theoretically based is worth researching. Hence , we have conducted it through the descriptive method. Certainly, the choice of this method can be justified by the fact that this research methodology can provide us with consistent and comprehensive information and valid result. However, it is worth mentioning that our study can lead to further applicability of the research findings. To follow up this study we have chosen forty (40) respondents among 425 of second year LMD students of English at Mohamed kheider university of Biskra, and a morphological test for 25 subject to depict their morphological level. The students were chosen randomly and they have responded to questionnaire anonymously. The questionnaire results are important for our research as for the analyses data have been analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Consequently, the analyses of the questionnaire and the test have showed to which extent students' responses correlate either positively or negatively with our hypotheses.

### **Limitation of the study**

As any piece of research work, this dissertation has its limitations. First of all, this study is limited in that it focuses on a particular comprehension strategies. Benefit from metacognitively-oriented reading instruction based on English morphemes is optimal if a repertoire of behaviours larger than the instructed one has been at work, particularly in our EFL context where students are less exposed to this type of teaching. In fact, it would be preferable if more strategies have been involved in the study, especially as far as word-attack operations are concerned. The study of cognates makes a good example of such additional strategies.

Time constraints proved to be another restricting condition for the present research work. Time is needed not only to learn new strategies but also to practice the ones already taught. Although the training tasks have been recommended in this study in the form of explicit teaching of morphemes, more rehearsal and training would be desirable for automatising of strategy use to take place. In addition, the nature of this research would be better undertaken through the experimental method.

Last but not least, it should be acknowledged that the most important restriction which resides at the root of most of the abovementioned limitations is the absence of 'reading' as a module standing for its own in the Department of English, at Mohamed Kheider University, where the current research study has been carried out. Therefore, it is necessary to call for a reading module in the department.

# **Chapter one: Teaching Affixes and English Roots**

**Introduction:**

Vocabulary plays an important role in language learning of ELL (English Language Learner) students, and vocabulary acquisition in this population has been studied extensively. The research that deals specifically with teaching word formation mechanisms to adult English Language Learners and increasing their awareness of English morphology has not received a great deal of attention, although studies that have been conducted to date suggest that this approach might be beneficial for adult language learners (Guo, Roehrig, & Williams, 2011). Researchers have suggested that adult ELL students often benefit from explicit language instruction, and being able to recognize affixes in newly encountered words and make connections with words they already know might give them an advantage in understanding and even being able to remember new vocabulary better (Bauer & Nation, 1993).

One focus of this chapter is on the importance of metalinguistic awareness in teaching vocabulary to adult ELL students at an intermediate- or advanced-level of English language proficiency. An emphasis will be placed on learning vocabulary through word families and increasing learners' morphological awareness as a means of expanding their lexical knowledge.

**1. Vocabulary Needs of English Language Learners**

Vocabulary is an essential aspect of language learning, and lexical growth contributes to increased language comprehension and production. Vocabulary appears to be particularly important for beginning-level ELL students, but it also plays an essential role in language learning of more advanced students. Nation (1993) suggested that when English Language Learners become more proficient, their improved language use (reading skill in particular) promotes vocabulary development, which in turn helps advance

language use. Furthermore, vocabulary, language use, and knowledge of the world are overlapping skills for proficient readers, and development of one of the areas influences an increase in knowledge or skill in the other two. According to this view, vocabulary at later stages of language learning is not necessarily “a prerequisite to the performance of language skills” (Nation & Waring, 1997, p. 6), but it is certainly a crucial factor that contributes to and is influenced by the development of other skills. Therefore, it is important that more proficient language learners are guided in their vocabulary development and that vocabulary practice activities they engage in are designed to fit the needs and language goals of this student population.

Researchers who study lexical growth, have explored some important questions concerning vocabulary and ELL students such as what does it mean to know a word? How many words should ELL students know to be able to use the English language for various purposes? And what words should ELL students focus on learning? This paper will first summarize some of the research findings in the areas of word knowledge, vocabulary size, and vocabulary selection for ELL students and later will focus on understanding of word parts as an important aspect of word knowledge for intermediate and advanced adult English Language Learners.

## **2. Morphology: What Is It and Why Does It Matter for Reading?**

The word morphology can be broken down (morphologically) into two meaningful parts (known as morphemes): morph means shape and –ology means the study of. Thus, morphology is the study of shape. In language and reading, morphology refers to the study of the structure of words, particularly the smallest units of meaning in words: morphemes. A morpheme is generally one of these types:

- Bound morphemes, which are prefixes and suffixes that cannot stand alone as words, such as geo-, re-, and -ity.
- Unbound morphemes, which are roots within more complex words that can stand alone as words, such as popular

Bound morphemes that are suffixes are one of the two following types:

- Inflectional morphemes such as -ed and -s that change the tense or number of a word without changing its part of speech.
- Derivational morphemes such as -ity and -tion that change a word's part of speech

For example, adding -ity changes popular from an adjective to the noun popularity. When an inflectional morpheme is added, as in walked, we call the new word inflected whereas when a derivational morpheme is added, as an information, we call the new word derived

An understanding of word structure can be a powerful tool for students faced with the daunting task of acquiring academic vocabulary. A large number of the unfamiliar words that students encounter in printed English could be understandable if students knew the more common root word and could break the complex word down (Nagy and Anderson, 1984). Because texts contain many of these complex words, students' abilities to attack them are essential to their understanding of these texts.

Students develop awareness of morphology throughout their practice. They generally understand how inflectional morphemes (such as -s on plurals or -ed on past tense verbs) are attached to words, then continue to develop understanding of how derivational morphemes connect to words (such as -ity on popularity, Tyler and Nagy, 1989). A few studies have shown that understanding of derivational morphology is related

to reading comprehension (Carlisle, 2000). Because the ability to attack words is our particular focus, we will use the term morphology and breaking down words interchangeably in this research paper. Although there are many ways in which students can understand morphology, the ability to use morphology to attack novel words is the most promising for improving reading comprehension.

### **2.1. Morphology and Comprehension**

Researchers have found that morphology was related to reading comprehension in both fourth and fifth grade, and became more important as students grew older. Students with greater understanding of morphology also have higher reading comprehension scores when holding constant their word reading fluency. Although this relationship was significant in fourth grade, it grew stronger in fifth grade, such that students' understanding of morphology was a better predictor of reading comprehension than their vocabulary level. In addition, we found that this relationship was the same for Spanish-speaking ELLs as for native English speakers in an urban setting. That is, morphology was equally important for reading comprehension in both populations of students.

### **2.2. Vocabulary and Morphology**

Students with larger vocabularies tended to have greater understanding of morphology. As with the relationship between reading and vocabulary development, the relationship between vocabulary and morphology appears to be reciprocal. Understanding morphology may help students broaden their vocabularies, and vocabulary growth may improve students' understanding of morphology. This suggests that teaching morphology may work well with other types of context-rich and thoughtful vocabulary instruction to improve students reading and language outcomes.

Some of the items on the morphology task were more difficult for students than other items. The following three factors influenced the difficulty of the items:

- Whether they required a change in sound to go from the derived word to the root( e.g., popularity to popular)
- Whether the word required a change in spelling ( e.g. , from swimmer to swim)
- The frequency of the root word

Items that required both spelling and sound changes (e.g., strength to strong) were among the most difficult. Items that also included less frequent root words (e.g., from furious to fury) tended to also be difficult for students. The easiest items had common root words and did not require changes in spelling (e.g., dryer to dry, growth to grow). These findings suggest that teachers may need to point out to students how some derived words relate to their roots. Although students may automatically see the connection between dry and dryer, they need to be taught to recognize that strength and strong are related. The findings also suggest that for some words, students need to be taught the meaning of the root even before they learn about its relationship with the derived word. Teaching students to recognize *fury* with *furious* can only be helpful if they first learn the meaning of *fury*. The conclusion that students with greater understanding of morphology are more successful at learning academic vocabulary and comprehension text is a strong argument for including morphology instructions in language programs. This conclusion also raises important instructional questions regarding how teachers ought to go about teaching morphology in the context of general vocabulary instruction.

### **2.3.What Does Good Morphology Teaching Look Like?**

Mecheal (2007) recommends four principals for teaching morphology to improve students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. We take three of them as the most important ones:

#### **2.3.1. Principle one: Teach Morphology in the Context of Rich, Explicit Vocabulary**

##### **Instruction:**

According to Mecheal (2007), findings suggest that understanding morphology is related to, but also distinct from, overall vocabulary. Therefore, it makes sense that morphology strategies should be taught within the context of a comprehensive program of vocabulary improvement, but as a distinct component of that program. Although a complete discussion of effective vocabulary instruction is not possible here, it is worth summarizing some of the key elements that make up rich, explicit vocabulary instruction, with an emphasis on how morphology may fit into such a program.

Vocabulary instruction has been conceptualized in several different ways. In their classic meta-analysis on vocabulary instruction, Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) found that the most effective approaches provided multiple exposures to words, introduced the words in meaningful contexts, and involved students in deep processing of the words' meanings. By synthesizing results from 52 studies on the topic, they found that these methods had substantial effects not only on vocabulary knowledge, but also on students reading comprehension.

Similarly, Beck (2002) defined what they call "robust vocabulary instruction" as strong and powerful instruction that "involves directly explaining the meaning of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow up" (p. 2). They suggested that teachers choose useful, academic words that appear in a wide variety of texts, provide

student-friendly explanations for them, create instructional contexts that supply useful information about new words, and engage students in actively dealing with word meanings. Although they did not address morphology in particular, they highlighted the importance of teaching relationships among words. Teachers should emphasize the relationships among words based on their shared roots, prefixes, or suffixes.

In his recent book, Grave (2006) suggested that a comprehensive vocabulary program would include activities that serve the following four functions:

- To provide student with “rich and varied language experiences” (38)
- To teach a relatively small number of well selected individual words directly
- To teach word learning strategies, including morphology, dictionary skills, and the use of context clues
- To foster “word consciousness” , that is, students’ “awareness of words and their meanings” (119)

Addressing the specific needs of ELLs, Carlo et al. (2004) suggested four principles that underlie an effective vocabulary program for these learners.

- New words should be taught in meaningful contexts.
- Words should be encountered in variety contexts.
- Word knowledge involves depth of meaning as well as spelling, pronunciation, morphology, and syntax.
- Native Spanish speakers should have access to the text’s meaning in Spanish

From this perspective, morphology is considered both a component of knowing a word well and a strategy for learning new words.

### **2.3.2. Principle two: Teach Students to Use Morphology as a Cognitive Strategy with Explicit Steps:**

Our findings, along with those of other researchers, suggest that using morphology to manipulate words is best understood as a cognitive strategy to be learned, not simply a set of rules to be memorized. Like other strategies related to reading comprehension, this is a strategy that is best taught with the cognitive steps of the task on mind. To break a word down into morphemes, a student must complete the following four steps:

- Recognize that he or she does not know the word or does not have a deep understanding of the meaning of the word.
- Analyze the word for morphemes he or she recognise (both roots and suffixes).
- Hypothesize a meaning for the word based on the word part.
- Check the hypothesis against the context.

Teachers should teach these four steps explicitly, model them several time with various words, and provide students with time to practice them. In so doing, teachers can scaffold this process, gradually realizing the responsibility to the student.

### **2.3.3. Principle three: Teach the Underlying Morphological Needed in Two Ways, both Explicitly and in context:**

Although the ability to break words down into morphemes is best taught as a cognitive strategy, it also requires a certain amount of knowledge about language. Along with the four steps described above, this knowledge should be taught explicitly. There are

three types of knowledge of language that students need to know to use morphology effectively:

#### **2.3.4. Knowledge of Prefixes and suffixes**

Teachers can teach prefixes and suffixes in a variety ways. Teachers should engage students in grouping words by prefix or suffix. They can then discuss what these words share in meaning of part of speech. Teachers can also develop students' word consciousness by encouraging them to analyze new examples of word parts. Like other vocabulary items, learning prefixes and suffixes will require practice and reinforcement. Table 1 displays the 20 most common prefixes and suffixes, adapted from Blevins (2001). Students may know many of the high-frequency affixes but need to learn the low- and medium-frequency affixes.

#### **2.3.5. Knowledge of How Words Get Transformed:**

Students should be taught the changes in sound and spelling that are often required to extract roots from derived words. To do so, teachers can group words by root to show how a single word can take many forms. This can expand students' written vocabulary by root to show how a single word can take many forms. This can expand students' written vocabulary by providing them with several forms for a known word. For instance, Kinsella (2002) and others have advised teachers to create a word chart that displays these various forms of key words selected from a text that students are reading.

#### **2.3.6. Knowledge of Roots:**

Students' abilities to extract roots from derived words can be a powerful strategy for acquiring new vocabulary, but only if students know the meaning of the roots. Although some roots are known to upper elementary students, it appears that others (such

as *dense* and *fury*) may not be. Thus teachers need to teach a selected number of these roots as well. Clearly, this is a big task, given the huge number of roots that exist. As starting point, teachers can teach some of the most common Latin and Greek roots (see table 2 and 3).

Prefix	Suffix
<p><b>Highest frequency:</b>                      Un- (not, opposite of)                      Re- (again)                      In-, im-, ir-, il-, (not)                      Dis- (not opposite of)                      En-, em-, (cause to)                      Non- (not)                      Under- (too little)                      In-, im- (in or into)</p> <p><b>High frequency:</b>                      Over- (too much)                      Mis- (wrongly)                      Sub- (under)                      Pre- (before)                      Inter- (between, among)</p> <p><b>medium frequency:</b>                      Trans- (across)                      Super- (above)                      Semi- (half)                      Anti- (against)                      Mid- (middle)</p>	<p><b>Highest frequency:</b>                      -s (plural)                      -ed (past tense)                      -ing (present tense)</p> <p><b>High frequency:</b>                      -ly (characteristic of)                      -er, -or (person)                      -ion, -tion (act, process)                      -ible, -able (can be done)</p> <p><b>Medium frequency:</b>                      -al, -ial (having characteristics of)                      y (characterized by)                      -ness (state of, condition of)                      -ity, -ty (state of)                      -ment (action or process)                      -ic (having characteristics of)                      -ous, -eous, -ious (possessing the qualities)                      -en (made of)                      -ive, -ative, itive (adjective form of a noun)                      -ful (full of)                      less (without)</p>

**Table 1.** Most common prefixes and suffixes in order of frequency; adapted from Blevins (2001).

Root	Definition	Examples
Audi	Hear	Audience, audible, audition
Dict	Speak	Dictate, predict, contradict
Port	Carry	Import, export, portable, transport
Rupt	Break	Abrupt, interrupt, rupture, erupt, bankrupt
Scrib/script	Write	Describe, prescribe, scribe, inscribe
Spect	See	Inspect, respect, spectacles, spectator
Struct	Build	Construct, destruct
Tract	Pull, drag	Attract, detract, contract, subtract
Vis	See	Visible, supervise, vision, visionary

**Table 2.** Common Latin Roots; adapted from Blevins (2001).

Root	Definition	Examples
Auto	Self	Automatic, autograph, autobiography
Bio	Life	Biography, biology, biome
Graph	Written or drawn	Graphic, telegraph, seismograph
Hydro	Water	Hydrant, Dehydrate, hydrodynamic
Meter	Measure	Barometer, centimeter, diameter
Ology	Study of	Biology, archeology, Geology
Photo	Light	Photograph, photocopy, photosynthesis
Scope	See	Microscope, telescope, periscope, stethoscope
Tele	Distant	Telephone, telescope, telegram, telecast

**Table 3.** Common Greek Roots; adapted from Blevins (2001).

Like other vocabulary words, these roots should be not presented as list to be memorized, but rather they should be taught in meaningful contexts when they are most useful for students to comprehend particular texts.

### **2.3.7. Systematically Teachers Teach the Meaning of Prefixes, Suffixes, and Root Words**

The majority of English words have been created through the combination of morphemic elements, that is, prefixes and suffixes with base words and word roots. If learners understand how this combinatorial process works, they possess one of the most powerful understandings necessary for vocabulary growth (Anderson and Freebody, 1981). This understanding of how meaningful elements combine is defined as morphological knowledge because it is based on an understanding of morphemes, the smallest units of meaning in a language. In the intermediate grades and beyond, most new words that students encounter in their reading are morphological derivatives of familiar words (Aronoff, 1994).

In recent years research has suggested some promising guidelines for teaching the meanings of prefixes, suffixes, and word roots as well as for the ways in which knowledge of these meaningful word parts may be applied (Templeton, 2004). Word roots such as *dict*, *spect*, and *struct* are meaningful parts of words that remain after all prefixes and suffixes have been removed but that usually do not stand by themselves as words: *prediction*, *inspection*, and *contract*. In the primary grades students begin to explore the effects of prefixes such as *un-*, *re-*, and *dis-* on base words. In the intermediate grades students continue to explore prefixes and an increasing number of suffixes and their effects on base words: *govern* (verb) + *-ment* = *government* (noun). Common Greek and Latin roots begin to be explored, along with the effects of prefixes and suffixes that attach to

them (Templeton, 1989). These include, for example, chron (“time,” as in chronology), tele (“distant, far” as in television), and fract (“break,” as in fracture). A large proportion of the vocabulary of specific content areas is built on Greek and Latin elements. As this morphological knowledge develops, teachers can model how it may be applied to determining the meanings of unfamiliar words encountered in print.

### **2.3.8. Teachers Teach the Application of a Word Learning Strategy**

As noted earlier, written texts contain richer vocabulary and, therefore, more opportunities for expansion of vocabulary through reading as compared to the word challenge in oral language. However, the probability of learning a new word’s meaning through encountering it in reading is not high—only about one chance in twenty. There is research that shows that students can be taught strategic behaviors to improve their ability to learn the meaning of words (Kuhn and Stahl, 1998). While skills such as application of morphological clues, reference works, and spelling clues to word meanings are all useful, they become more powerful and functional when combined with the use of context clues. J. Pikulski and Templeton (2004) have suggested the following sequence:

#### **Step 1: They carefully look at the word, and decide how to pronounce it.**

Carefully processing the letters or chunks of letters of a word and thinking about the sounds for them will leave a memory trace for the word even if it is not a word that the reader knows. At very least, it is likely that if the reader encounters the word again in future readings there will be at least a kind of familiarity with it.

#### **Step 2.a: They look around the word for context clues, including**

- Look within the sentence.
- Reread previous sentences.
- Read ahead for more context clues.

**Step 2.b: They look in the word for prefixes and suffixes, base words, and root words that might offer clues.**

We have listed this and the previous step as 2a and 2b because with experience, students will apply one or the other first depending on the word. For a word with a common prefix such as un-, morphological clues would likely be used before the use of context clues. The hallmark of a strategic reader is the flexible application of strategies.

**Step 3: Make your best guess at the word's meaning.**

It is important to stress with students that natural context most often will not lead to a clear understanding of a word's meaning and that some words will not contain recognizable morphological clues. Nevertheless, it seems useful to take the step of making a best guess at the word's meaning since this further mental activity is likely to make the word more familiar the next time it is encountered-even if the student's understanding of the word has to be revised.

**Step 4.a: If you don't have a good idea as to the word's meaning and if the word seems important, use a dictionary or glossary.**

We suggest two touchstones for determining whether or not a word is important. First, if the reader is beginning to have difficulty understanding what he or she is reading, the meaning of the word may contribute to a better understanding of what is being read. It is, therefore, important. Second, if it is a word that the reader has encountered before and still has no good idea as to its meaning, it is probably an important word since it is likely to be encountered again in the future.

**Step 4.b: If you think you have figured out the meaning of the word or if the word doesn't seem important, keep reading.**

It would be unrealistic to tell a reader to look up every unknown word in a dictionary; mature readers don't. Therefore, it is legitimate to move on and keep reading if context and morphological clues have been somewhat helpful or if the word doesn't seem

to be important for comprehension of what is being read or for adding to one's functional vocabulary. Teachers need to strategically and flexibly model and teach each of the above steps. Eventually, as students mature in their reading skills, they can and will internalize the steps in this strategy. Application of these steps then becomes much smoother and more automatic, requiring less attention. In fact, good readers usually "blend" these steps.

### **3. Morphological Awareness**

Morphological awareness refers to student's "conscious awareness of the morphemic structure of words and their ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure" (Carlisle, 1995, 194). Morphemes are the fundamental building blocks of words within both spoken and written language. Words that contain more than one morpheme can be broken down into these smaller units, providing cues for meaning, spelling, and pronunciation (e.g., Carlisle, 2003). For example, the word *payment* contains two morphemes, the base *pay* and the suffix *-ment* that transforms the verb into a noun. A growing body of research indicates that morphological awareness contributes to reading ability (Nagy, 2006).

#### **3.1. Development of Morphological Awareness**

Within the domain of morphology, typically a distinction is made between inflectional and derivational morphology. Inflections alter the grammatical function of a word, without changing the word class. For example, the word *played* is formed when the suffix *-ed* is added to the base *play*. The word changes from present to past tense, altering the grammatical function, while the word class, as a verb, remains unchanged. Derivations involve the generation of new words from a base morpheme that differ in meaning and may differ in word class. For example, adding the derivational suffix *-ful* to the free-standing base *play* creates the word *playful*, thereby altering the meaning of the word and changing the word class from a verb to an adjective, whereas adding *dis-* creates the word

display which has a different meaning and can be either a verb or a noun. These morphological transformations in oral language are also encoded in print in English (and in other orthographies). In the word *playful*, the denotation of the base remains, encoded by the consistent spelling (e.g., *play* in *playful*).

Morphological awareness develops with exposure to oral and written English. Evidence of morphological awareness assessed with oral tasks has been found in beginners (Berko, 1958). Beginner students show implicit morphological awareness by demonstrating that they understand the ways that morphemes can be combined to express meaning (Carlisle & Fleming, 2003). Berko's seminal example of four-year-old children's ability to produce the plural *wugs* for the pseudo-word *wug* demonstrates the ability of preschoolers to inflect words, though her participants were less successful producing other plurals such as *tasses*, indicating that their morphological development is incomplete. Young elementary-age children can decompose words into component morphemes, before being able to use that information to extract meaning or demonstrate awareness of the suffixes that change grammatical roles (Carlisle & Fleming, 2003). However, the majority of studies examining the relationship between morphological awareness and reading with young children have focused typically on inflections while those with older children have targeted derivations (Carlisle & Nomanbhoy, 1993); to sample the full morphological construct, we need to include both inflections and derivations in a measure of morphological awareness. This would allow us to better understand the contribution of morphological awareness as a broad construct to reading development. As an example, the predictive power of a task based solely on inflections might peak early (as suggested by Kirby 2009), while that from a task that includes derivations might continue to predict reading as students continue their morphological development in this area.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of this chapter, we have seen that knowledge of morphology- the ability to gain information about the meaning, pronunciation, and part of speech of new word from their prefixes, roots and suffixes- is an important component of skilled reading to achieve comprehension. Skilled reading depends not just on knowing many words but on being able to deal effectively with new ones. The nature of our language is such that one cannot expect to have prior knowledge of all the words one will encounter in a text. For instance, affixes and English roots are good indicators of words meaning. If the reader can identify them in unfamiliar words, he will have the chance to guess the meaning of these words. Furthermore, using affixation strategies has another benefit, which is that it helps learners naturally expand their knowledge of grammatical categories. Thus, EFL teachers and learners should seriously consider using affixation-based instruction to enhance comprehension of reading.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**READING AND READING COMPREHENSION**

## **Introduction**

This chapter sheds light on reading which is; perhaps, the most difficult language skill to learn and to teach, for it involves a lot of different elements such as: mechanical eye movement, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension. Today, many teachers and educators have realized that the skill student need most is reading. By all measure, reading would seem to be the most complex language skill for EFL Learners.

The chapter will deal with identifying some reading processes and the major skills involved in reading. These skills also called strategies, have to be worked on; so that comprehension would take place. Also, the important reading types will be presented, i.e. extensive and intensive reading. The main purpose is to encourage students to pay more attention to the reading process.

After dealing with these strategies, it is important to speak about the different types of reading deficiencies mainly some vocabulary problems, which will be much more focused on. This idea leads to the need to focus on vocabulary. Then, a major attention will be attributed to the process of teaching/ learning of new items.

Finally, the researcher will discuss the close relationship that exists between knowledge of morphology and reading and how instructions of morphemes (affixes and roots) increase comprehension measurably. Also, we will mention that this morphological awareness supplies readers with a safe strategy to practice inferring meaning when encounter unknown words in print English, by combining context clues with morpheme clues. As a result, they develop greater confidence and more independence in reading.

## 1. Definition of the reading skill

Defining reading is not an easy task. It is difficult to explain it briefly and correctly since the process involves the interaction of various components used in different ways, by different readers. In this regard reading is seen as a complex skill involving the interaction of various cognitive, metacognitive, linguistic and sociolinguistic elements. Accordingly, researchers recognize the complex nature of the reading process. Dubin (1882), for instance states that: “Reading is a multifaceted, complex skill made up of a number of psychological, physical and social elements. Just as there are many sides to knowing a language, so there are many aspects to effective mature reading” (125).

Therefore, the process involves the interaction of the reader’s general information, linguistic competence, visual and mental means as well as socio-cultural knowledge. In traditional approaches to language teaching, reading was labeled as a passive skill. However, the reader is equally involved in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, evaluating and interacting.

Reading is thought to be a receptive skill. It is both a process and a product. Indeed, reading is more than just receiving meaning in a literal sense. It involves bringing an individual’s entire life experience and thinking powers to be able to understand what the writer has encoded and to provide readers with wealth interesting information. In this respect, Strevens (1977) suggests that: “Advanced reading is no longer a language task, but ...a contribution to the general education and intellectual development of the learner” (116).

In the same way, Rivers notes that: “reading is certainly an important activity for expanding knowledge of language” (Rivers, 1968: 263). Indeed, all quotations from educationalists concerned with reading in a second or foreign language, stress that active

interaction must take place between the writer of the text and the reader. Goodman (1988) and others have posited a psycholinguistic view of reading in which reading is viewed as an interactive process between language and thought: “Reading is a long-distance discussion between a reader and an author ... There is an essential interaction between language and thought in reading ... the writer encodes thought as language, and the reader decodes language to thought” (12).

The decoding aspect of reading, according to Goodman, is a meaning decoding. The reader’s role is to find answers to questions about possible meaning. In the same vein, Anderson (1999), states that: “Reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading materials in building meaning. Meaning does not reside on the printed page, nor it is only in the reader” (1).

In this respect, and according to Coady (1979): “This interactive process involves three factors: conceptual abilities, background knowledge, and process strategies” (07). In other words, for successful reading to occur, an individual must possess basic intellectual ability, knowledge of the word, and reading strategies such as familiarity with the phonology, morphology, grammar and lexicon of the language. Accordingly: “Reading may well be a psycholinguistic guessing game but words are the toys you need to play it right” (Laufer cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997: 32).

Therefore, words and phrases are essential to language learning in general and reading in particular. The only real issue is the best manner by which to acquire them. For a long time, reading classes have tended to focus on the last factor, i.e. the process strategies. As Coady (1979) pointed out: “a typical reading class involves the reading of a passage by comprehension questions, vocabulary exercises ..., etc.” (9). Another point,

which deserves consideration, is that reading is viewed as “A twofold phenomena involving process (comprehending) and product (comprehension)”. (Silberstein, 1985: 30)

It has been commonly agreed on among researchers and applied linguists such as Grabe and Stoller (2002) that students must read slowly and carefully in order to extract information and understand the material. For comprehensive reading, a combination of various types of knowledge and techniques must be acquired. These techniques are emphasized because they can help students deal successfully with the problems they face while reading.

To read comprehensively, students must learn and practice the following:

- Vocabulary recognition.
- Sentence comprehension.
- Paragraph analysis.
- Interpretation of illustration.
- ❖ **Vocabulary recognition:** When reading a material in English, the student frequently faces a crucial problem: being unable to determine the meaning of words and, thus being unable to understand what he is reading.
- ❖ **Sentence comprehension:** It frequently happens that although a student knows every word in a sentence, he still cannot understand what the sentence means, especially when it is long and complicated.
- ❖ **Paragraph analysis:** sometimes the student understands all the sentences in a reading passage, but still does not understand what it says as a whole. This is because he does not know how the material is organized.

❖ **Note – taking:** To gain more from their readings, students should take notes as they read. This will help them to understand better as well as to retain what they have read.

Up to this point, there has been a great emphasis on the reading skill and the role it can play as it is the most attainable language skill for EFL Learners. However it is not sufficient to speak only about reading since it includes intricate processes and skills, which differ according to tasks, purposes and language abilities. Without knowing these elements independently, the concept of reading remains unclear. Therefore, in order to get a better understanding of the reading mechanisms, reading process, skills and purposes (of different kind of reading) will be discussed in the following sections.

### 1. Reading Processes

Although reading comprehension abilities are complicated, there is a set of common underlying processes that are activated when someone reads. Grabe (2002), have made a list of these processes:

Lower- level processes	Higher- level processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lexical access.</li> <li>• Syntactic parsing.</li> <li>• Semantic proposition formation.</li> <li>• Working memory activation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text model of comprehension.</li> <li>• Situation model of reader</li> </ul> <p>Interpretation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background knowledge use and inferencing</li> <li>• Executive control process.</li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Reading processes (Grabe and stoller, 2002:20).

Grabe and Stoller state: “The lower- level processes represent the more automatic linguistic processes and are typically viewed as more skills oriented. The higher- level

processes generally represent comprehension processes that make much more use of reader's background knowledge and inferencing". (Grabe and Stoller, 2002:20)

Brown (2001) claims that processing time of reading need not to be emphasized too much because most reading context allows readers to read at their own rate. However, because of the existence of the working memory, the speed processing is indispensable. Indeed, Grabe and Stoller (2002) highlight the important role of working memory because the information fades from memory quickly, which makes the reading process inefficient.

To sum up, then, reading involves various types and levels of cognitive and meta-cognitive processes, which are intertwined complicatedly. Therefore, all of these processing should be taken into consideration in developing students' reading sub-skills.

## **2. Reading Sub- Skills and Types**

It is important for students to identify the different reading sub-skills and types required for different reading situation. These skills are naturally used when reading in the native language, but are often forgotten when applied to English reading. In fact, students in many situations come across unfamiliar words; therefore, different set of strategies is needed. Among these strategies: to deduce the meaning of these words by referring to the words already known by students, though it is not so successful strategy, since it is better to guess the unfamiliar word from the text to give a diffuse idea of its meaning.

### **2.1. Reading Sub-Skills**

Teaching reading can be an arduous task as it is often difficult to know how to improve student's skills. Reading skills can be described roughly as a: "Cognitive ability which a person is able to use when interacting with written text". (Urquart & Weir, 1998: 88). Indeed, one of the most obvious points about reading is that there are different types of reading skills. These include skimming, scanning, careful reading and predicting.

*i. **Skimming***

A term commonly used in discussion about reading is skimming, which refers to the way of reading in which readers quickly run their eyes across a whole text for its gist. Skimming may sometimes be the prerequisite of reading for full understanding. One of the effective series of procedures for approaching reading text, so-called ‘SQ3R technique’ (see, for example, Nuttall, 1996; Brown, 2001) starts with skimming the text for an overview of main ideas and then readers embark on more focused reading. It is also a common part of many reading tasks. The best way, however, to teach skimming is to have students read the first and last paragraphs in full, and pick up the key words such as: dates, figures and names while moving their eyes down the page.

*ii. **Scanning***

Scanning or searching reading is also a common reading activity when readers extract necessary pieces of information from a text without reading through the whole text. They do not have to read every word and line; on the contrary, such an approach would stop them scanning successfully. This is a useful skill to locate (a) specific item (s) of information needed, such as: a date, a figure, or a name. The wide spread of the internet may well accelerate the need for this type of reading.

*iii. **Careful Reading***

Urquhart and Weir (1998) point out that *careful reading* is associated with reading to learn. The reader attempts to handle detailed information in the text. Thus, reading rate seems to be rather slower than other types of reading because in this type of reading, readers often require rereading and inferencing to connect information with background knowledge.

#### iv. **Predicting**

According to the psycholinguistic models of reading, efficient reading depends, to a large extent, on making correct predictions with minimal sampling. At the word level, the reader guesses the meaning of unfamiliar words by using the context. At the syntactic level, the reader uses what he/ she knows about the form of the language to extract meaning without actually reading all the words.

### **2.2. Reading Types**

Most of skills and strategies we want our students to develop are generally trained by studying short texts or stories in detail. Others should be developed by the use of longer texts, including complete books. This is what is traditionally referred to as ‘Intensive Vs Extensive reading’. In this way, Nuttall claims that: “Their principle function is to make the student concentrate on the text and to give him a clear purpose for reading.”(Nuttall, 1982: 137).

#### **3.2.1 Intensive Reading**

This is an activity involving reading for details. This type of reading which seeks to the whole message including both arguments and supporting details, encourages careful literal processing of texts. Teachers should provide students with some opportunities to engage intensive reading on the purpose of reading by the careful selection of texts.

Anderson (1999), while highlighting the superiority of extensive reading, still emphasize the importance of intensive reading through which readers can develop strategies and skills, which they can transfer to extensive reading contexts. Nuttall (1996) also states the importance of teaching how meaning is produced through intensive reading, which is intended to train readers to cope with the texts through reading strategies.

However, teachers should be careful not to put too much emphasis on intensive reading, so that students will not think it is only way of reading.

### **3.2.2. Extensive Reading**

Many ESL or EFL experts emphasize the importance of extensive reading. However, in reality, extensive reading is not well promoted in English classrooms in general. Grabe and Stoller (2001: 198) point out a set of reasons why extensive reading is not promoted in EFL reading courses; among these:

1. Teachers sometimes do not feel that they are teaching when students are reading silently in class: they think that extensive reading is something that should be done at home.
2. Teachers would like to involve their students in extensive reading, but do not know how to incorporate it into their lessons.

Indeed, extensive reading will improve learners' command of a second/foreign language on at least certain levels. Nuttal (1982: 168), for example, claims that: "The best way of acquiring proficiency in a language is to read extensively in this Language". The purpose of the extensive reading program is to train students to read fluently in the target language. Thus, extensive reading is to be included in any reading program to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To strengthen and develop learners' reading ability.
2. To push them to become more autonomous readers.
3. To develop learner's stock of vocabulary and make them experience the language in several forms and contexts.

To sum up, EFL learners with advanced reading proficiency build their vocabulary knowledge through extensive reading rather than instructions. Krashen (1989)

argues that language learners acquire vocabulary and spelling most efficiently by receiving comprehensible input while reading. Similarly, Grabe and Stoller (2001) conclude that reading and vocabulary abilities develop as a result of extensive reading practice. Hence, an effective way to develop language abilities over time is elaborated extensive reading.

#### **4. Selection of the Reading Material**

EFL learners should be given reading materials appropriate to their level of cognitive functioning. Indeed; they themselves are best capable of choosing what interests them. Nuttall (1996) points out that speed, enjoyment and comprehension are closely linked with one another. Teachers should consider what kind of materials they should use carefully. If reading gives them pleasure, students will manage to find time to read even if they are busy. Accordingly, there are several proposed conditions to choose appropriate reading materials:

1. The material should appeal to the student.
2. It should not be too heavily culture-laden.
3. The language should be appropriate to the student's linguistic competence.

#### **5. Reading Comprehension**

Understanding is a very complicated process that entails many definitions as does reading. Persson (1994, p.14) indicates that comprehension has been defined through:

- Theories based on text structure.
- Theories base on the reader.
- Theories based on metacognition.

##### **❖ Text –Based Theories**

For the advocates of this theory, the structure and the features of the text are the salient factors for successful understanding. According to Brown (1986), comprehension

depends to a large extent on text characteristics. Persson (1994, p.16) gives some theories of which the text is the basic holder of meaning as story grammar, case grammar, propositional analysis, cohesion and structural analysis of prose. All of which claim that the structure or the organizational pattern of the text (causation, comparison, description) is the key to understand the writer's ideas. In other words, when the text has a lucid structure, coherent ideas, a clear message and the like, comprehension is but guaranteed. Here, lies the weakness of this theory as comprehension does not only require the familiarity with the language and text aspects, but does also involve other factors like the reader. Consequently, the reader becomes the centre of interest that has led to new considerations and variables that affect comprehension.

#### ❖ **Reader-Based Theories**

The reader is the heart or the active processor of the comprehension circle. Assumptions based on the readers' knowledge structure are called "schema theory". The latter entails the knowledge of the world as a whole to realize effective comprehension (Persson, 1994). With reference to this theory, comprehension occurs through bridging new situations and information in the text to those already existing in the brain. The criticism leveled at this theory is its over-reliance on the reader's past knowledge and its ignorance of the text role. However, it is worth mentioning that comprehension is a "co-operative task that stands halfway between the text and the reader" (Nuttall, 1982, p.10) . Allen and Corder (1975) share the same view of Nuttall's, and further argue that understanding results from an interaction between various features of the text, reader and context. Indeed, this combination of text and cognitive activities has led to new factors that may uncover some of the secrets of this complex process.

### ❖ Theories- Based on Metacognition

For the success of understanding, one has to know everything about the process of such a complicated activity. As a matter of fact, and according to Persson (1994), a skilled reader is someone who is acquainted with linguistic means as well as with reading strategies. This is so mainly as reading comprehension is both “search for meaning and construction of meaning in the reader’s brain” (Persson, 1994, pp.10-19). In the same vein, Snow (2003, p.11) agrees with such a view and states that understanding is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language”. Accordingly, this interpretation entails three elements (snow, ibid):

- 1) The reader: who is doing the comprehension; here we include the abilities, knowledge, and experience that a person brings to the act of reading.
- 2) The text: what is to be comprehended; it includes any printed material in which comprehension is a part.
- 3) The activity: in which comprehension is a part; it involves the purposes, processes, and consequences pertinent to the act of reading.

So, reading comprehension is a complex activity that involves three factors: the reader (his knowledge, abilities, and experiences), the text (grammar, organization, and structure) and the activity (purposes, processes, and consequences).

### 5.1. Models of Reading

Reading models were mainly set to describe the way a reader uses to construct meaning from printed. These models aim to find out how readers translate prints into meanings. There are three models: Bottom-up model, top-down model and interactive model.

### **5.1.1. The Bottom-up Model**

This model assumes that a reader first decodes graphic symbols into sounds in order to build up a meaning. In other words, this model refers to the view that reading is a process of building letters into words, words into sentences and then proceeds to the overall meaning. Many linguists stress on this model. For instance, Gough (1985) claims that the bottom up processing involves a series of steps the reader has to go through; moving from a step to another one, departing from recognizing the key features of every letter and then words, sentences until reaching the meaning of the text.

### **5.1.2. The Top-down Model**

Unlike bottom-up model, the idea of the top-down model is that a reader uses prior knowledge and experience, as well as expectations in relation to the writer's message during reading, in order to process information. Top-down models are described to be "concept driven". That is to say, ideas or concepts in the reader's mind trigger information processing during reading. As in Smith's words, "The more you already know, the less you need to find out" (Smith, 1985: 15). In other words, the more readers know in advance about the topic and the text to be read, the less they need to use graphic information on the page.

### **5.1.3. The Interactive Model**

Interactive model seeks to account for both of bottom-up and top-down processing. So, reading process is initiated by formulating hypotheses about meaning and by decoding letters and words. According to Rumelhart (1977), reading is an interactive process which includes both perceptual and cognitive process. In other words, this process consists of an interaction between a set of a variety of orthographic, syntactic lexical and semantic information, until the meaning is constructed.

## **5.2. Types of Reading Comprehension Difficulties with a Focus on Vocabulary Knowledge**

Saville- Troike summarizes an effective way to teach EFL reading when she says: “Improving the reading skill of any student begins with identifying his weaknesses and then implementing appropriate methods for strengthening these skills”. (saville-Troike, 1979: 103). Thus, the first thing for the teachers of EFL reading to do is to find out the weaknesses or difficulties of their students through questionnaires, diagnostic tests, classroom observation and other related aspect. There are three major reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners:

1. Structural problems.
2. Content (especially cultural) problems.
3. Vocabulary problems.

We would like here to focus on the third one because it has received the least attention. In fact, most students read with the fear that they are going to have problems with vocabulary and unfamiliar words. For instance, the vocabulary and syntax of magazines, novels and nonfiction books seem quite beyond the reach of most foreign language readers since they all too frequently believe that to comprehend a text, they must first understand every single word in the text. Obviously, “For many third world students, the syntax, general vocabulary, and sub-technical vocabulary are a sufficient hurdle to reading fluency”. (Walsh 1981, cited in English Teaching Forum. July 1982. P. 28.). If the vocabulary is complicated and esoteric with too many new items, students will feel swamped. They will lose confidence in their ability to read without the support of the teacher or the dictionary, and will often fall back on translation instead.

Indeed, the major problem for most foreign language readers, is the lack of a solid language base and consistent vocabulary stock. Laufer (1992) claims that even highly skilled readers cannot read on task at the criterion of high comprehension unless they have such a lexical foundation. In other words, Lexis was found to be the most predictor of success in reading, better than syntax or general reading ability.

### **5.3. Processes Affecting Reading Comprehension**

Word-level processes are involved in decoding words and accessing their meaning in memory. They consist of decoding and vocabulary:

#### **5.3.1. Decoding**

The decoding of words; i.e., going from the printed shapes to some articulatory or phonological representations of letters relying on graphemic-phonemic relationships, has genuinely been proved to be a major impediment to reading comprehension. Unless the reader is able to decode, his comprehension will be impaired (Adams, 1990; Metsala and Ehri, 1998; Pressley, 1998; in Pressley, 2000: 546). Skilled decoders do not sound unfamiliar words letter by letter; they are rather able to recognize letter chunks such as suffixes, prefixes, Latin and Greek roots...etc. This considerably affects word comprehension; in other words, the more readers develop the skill to recognize these chunks quickly, the more this facilitates their comprehension. This is mainly because both recognition and comprehension of words take place in short term memory which is limited in its capacity (5 – 7 elements). The more capacity is devoted to the decoding of vocabulary, the less capacity is available for its comprehension; the more automatic and fluent word decoding is, the better its comprehension tends to be. So, at the level of words, comprehension efficiency depends heavily on decoding adequacy (Gough and Tunmer, 1986; in Pressley, 2000: 547).

### 5.3.2 Vocabulary

As comprehension depends on word-level processing, the quantity of vocabulary a reader knows is closely linked to his comprehension skills (Anderson and Free body, 1981; Nagy, Anderson and Herman, 1987; in Pressley, 2000: 548). Experimental data find out that a more extensive vocabulary promotes comprehension skills (Beck, Perfetti and McKeown, 1982). However, as skilled decoding tends to affect reading comprehension, it also relies much on understanding. That is to say, the more fluently letters are linked to their sounds, the less conscious effort is required for this, and the more capacity is left over for comprehension of words.

On the other hand, skilled deciphering of vocabulary depends partially on comprehension; i.e., readers have to consider the context in order to determine if the words they read make sense. In like manner, readers are able to detect the misread lexicons if they do not match to the context in which they occur. (Pressley, 2000: 547-548). In regard to the extent to attribute context effects into word recognition process, word recognition theories have taken antagonistic positions. The bottom-up model considers word recognition as a bottom-up process (letters, sounds, and words); whole language (top down) theory, on the other hand, views it as being context dependent. Recognition of a word, according to them, involves graphemic – phonemic cues, syntactic cues (information about the syntactic role of a word in a sentence), and semantic cues (meaning of word in a sentence). All these information interact together to assign meaning to a word, with meaning cues considered more critical (Daneman, 1991: 514).

#### 5.3.2.1 Word Recognition and Vocabulary Development

Whereas ignorance or poor identification of lexical items hampers comprehension, automatic word recognition enhances comprehension proficiency because “words are the labels assigned to represent ideas and concepts” (Marinaket. *al.*, 1997: 29). Equally, the

impact of vocabulary knowledge on comprehending script is obvious. The larger the reader's vocabulary stock is the more understanding is accessible (Duke and Pearson, 2002: 218). Tankersley (2005: 110) confirms that employing comprehension strategies at word level to speculate about new words meaning is characteristic of metacognitively aware readers as fluency liberates the mind for constructing meaning. Thus, training students in to recognise vocabulary items and define them should make a crucial part of educated reading instruction. Phonemic awareness, dictionary use, context clues and word analysis are methods to attain this objective (Duke & Pearson).

## **6. Prediction in Reading**

Good readers are strategic. They make use of a variety reading strategies. A reading strategy refers to a plan or a way to solve problems encountered in constructing the meaning of a text. For instance, many linguists like Goodman (1967) support the use of prediction as a good reading strategy including reading in broad sentences and inferring the meaning of unknown words.

### **6.1. Reading: a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game**

In his seminal article, "Reading a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game". Goodman (1967) puts forward that reading constantly involves guessing, predicting and checking one's anticipations concerning the structure and the content of the text.

C. Nuttall's *Teaching Reading Skills in a foreign Language* is another valuable methodology book on reading which clearly reflects the psycholinguistic view of reading. Nuttall (1982) argues:

A good reader makes fewer eye movements than a poor one; his eye takes in several words at a time. Moreover, they are not just random sequences of words: one characteristic of an efficient reader is his ability

to chunk a text into sense units, each consisting of several words and each taken in by one fixation of his eyes. (Nuttall, p.33)

## 6.2. Guessing Words Meaning from Context

Context is defined as "... the words and ideas that surround a particular word or phrase to help express its meaning" (Chelsa, 2000: 41). When coming across a novel word, the reader should examine the sentences which are around it for hints that may help him find out what it means.

As a reader read, he may come across unfamiliar words. He does not need to look these words up because if he does a little detective work, he can figure out what these words mean without the help of a dictionary. This is called **determining meaning through context**. Like a detective looking for clues at the scene of a crime, he can look in the context for clues or surrounding words that will tell him what the unfamiliar words mean.

## 6.3. Guessing Words Meaning from its Morphology

Using context clues is one way to discover meaning of an unfamiliar word. Another way is word analysis; that is, looking at the meanings of parts of words. Many English words have been formed by combining parts of older English, Greek, and Latin words. If you know the meaning of some of these word parts, you can often guess the meaning of an unfamiliar English word, particularly in context.

For example; reports is formed from *re*, which means back, and *port*, which means carry. Scientist is derived from *sci*, which mean know, and *ist*, which means one who. *Port* and *sciare* called stems. A stem is the basic part on which groups of related words are built. *Re* and *istare* called affixes, that is, word parts that are attached to stems. Affixes like *re*, which are attached to the beginning of stems, are called prefixes. Affixes attached to the end, like *ist*, are called suffixes.

The skilful reader analyses the parts forming up the unfamiliar word (root, prefixes and suffixes) by thinking about their meanings and then joining them together to end up with an explanation of this lexical item. This strategy works better when combined with context clues (Baudoin et al., 1997: 9). Word analysis is not always enough to give you precise definition of a word you encounter in a reading passage, but often along with context it will help you to understand the general meaning of the word so that you can continue reading without stopping to use a dictionary.

## **7. Relationship between Knowledge of Affixes and Reading comprehension**

One of the most popular strategies in vocabulary encoding supported by many researchers is using affixes knowledge (Baur & Nation, 1993). The majority of English words have been created through the combination of morphemic elements that are prefixes and suffixes with base words and word roots. If learners understand how this combination works, they possess one of the most powerful understandings necessary to vocabulary growth. This understanding of how meaningful elements combine is defined as morphological knowledge or Morphological awareness (MA) because it is based on an understanding of morphemes, the smallest units of meaning in a language. For example; when a reader comes across to the word “*research*”, he can guess something about the meaning because he knows that the prefix “*re*” means repeat again or repeat over.

Accordingly, students are then taught to find the meaning of an unknown word by breaking it into elements in order to obtain the meaning of the entire word. Vocabulary items, whether one-word or multi-word, can often be broken down into component ‘bits’. How these bits are put together is useful information. However, student should be warned that in many common words, the affixes no longer have any obvious connection with their root meaning such as *comfortable* and *outline*. Teachers as Baumann et al (2003) trained their students to use different strategies for attacking new words in context so that to promote a sense of independence in reading. Blachowicz

and Fisher (2005) point out that the likelihood of being able to directly teach students the meaning of every word is slim. Instead, teachers have to provide vocabulary development programs to assist their students in independent word learning. They suggested teaching independent strategies by using clues within words; that is morphological analysis: compound words, incidental morphemic analysis, affixes and root words.

Nation (1990) mentioned the following direct teaching methods to assist ESL/EFL learners in acquiring new words. They are rote memorization, using context to guess vocabulary, mnemonic techniques for vocabulary acquisition, and word analysis skills. Word analysis skill teaches learners roots and affixes and encourages them to use this knowledge to learn new words. There are three skills needed in word analysis as cited in Nation (1990): recognizing the parts of the word, learning the meaning of roots and prefixes/suffixes, and using them to create new words. Nation also states that knowing 14 key words can lead to recognizing the meaning of over 14,000 words in English as well. McShane (2005) also stated that teaching word analysis is necessary for ESL/EFL learners whose first language is not English.

Similarly many researchers have conducted studies investigating the effectiveness of morphological instructions for literacy development in terms of vocabulary and reading comprehension. They found two apparently contradictory outcomes. The most common findings substantiate that morphological instruction fosters the vocabulary development and reading comprehension of second language learners. The consideration of combining reading and interactive vocabulary instruction was recommended. On the other hand, the researchers urged that introducing derivatives should be treated with caution.

Laufer (1997) stated that deceptively transparent words could easily cause misanalysis, for example, the word “outline”, could be interpreted as the meaning of “out of line” in the case of low proficiency EFL learners who have got limited vocabulary. So, there are still some contradictory arguments against the previous findings. Farsi (2008) conducted a study to investigate morphological awareness and its relationship with

vocabulary knowledge and morphological complexity among 54 Omani EFL university students. The result of the study showed that there is no relationship between morphological awareness and ability to cope with word complexity.

To sum up, word analysis based on morphemes (prefixes/suffixes and English roots) reliably fosters reading comprehension. It gives many about the meaning of unfamiliar words which makes the reader independent in reading. The reader cannot look up every unknown word in the dictionary. Fortunately, by slow and steady learning of the most prominent prefixes, roots and suffixes, he will acquire easily an ability to attack words and decode meanings in the context.

## **Conclusion**

No matter how reading is being defined and whatever definitions are attributed to it if all of them agree on the fact that reading is meaningless without comprehension and that understanding is the essence of reading. Accordingly, reading is best described as the product of decoding and comprehension without either of them the reading act is hampered (Nation, 2005: 41). Hence, students are told that some of their beliefs need to be adjusted or altered. They are informed that reading is not a receptive and passive skill; it is rather productive and active

Students are also made aware that reading is a process which requires them to show some understanding of its meaning, complex nature and the many mental strategies it appeals for to be achieved successfully. This chapter has had to draw students' attention to other possible ways which have been proved practical and frequently used by good readers. Since a dictionary is neither available nor possible to check in all reading events, learners should know how to rely on themselves to find explanations for unknown words they meet here and there when reading print. Therefore, using knowledge about morphemes to guess unfamiliar words meaning can be a safe reading strategy to increase comprehension.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**FIELD WORK**

## **Introduction**

The present study is based on the assumption that metacognitively-oriented instruction in the comprehension strategy of guessing word meaning through morphemes (mainly roots, prefixes and suffixes), applying knowledge of morphology is of assistance for learners in improving their text understanding. To examine this hypothesis, a field work is organized and held through two periods or stages. At the beginning, a questionnaire is administered in an attempt to explore the ground; i.e., to see whether the learners for whom this study is intended do actually use morphemes to decode words meaning or not, to analyse their needs, and accordingly to target some comprehension strategies for instruction. The findings of the questionnaire are reported and commented here. Next, a test is carried out just to examine the learners' morphological knowledge. Thus, the participants sit for two simple exercises to measure their morphological level. Population and participants, methods and procedures, data collection tools and results are presented and discussed here. Lastly, the results are further statistically analysed by the Excel.

### **1. Participants**

Our target population is that of English language students; our study population is that of second year students of English at Mohamed Kheider of Biskra. The sampling chosen is purposive.

### **2. The Questionnaire**

This study starts with the use of a questionnaire which includes eighteen items. It is intended to survey the participant's actual situation with regard to the use of comprehension strategies in general and the use of morphemes to guess unfamiliar words meaning. Drawing on the information it provides, the researcher recognizes the learner's attitude towards this strategy to set the prominent vocabulary instructions for training.

## 2.1. Description of the Questionnaire

There is a general proclamation among teachers at the Department of English, at Mohamed kheider university, that students do not display high awareness of what the reading process and comprehension strategies are all about; owing to which, they show low reading comprehension performance. It is also presumed that reading comprehension in the preacademic and academic education is not taught as such, but rather tested via some questions that follow the reading passage. An exploration of the students' state of affairs is conducted before the actual embarkation upon the present study. It takes the form of an eighteen-item questionnaire administered to 40 students who represent the initial sample population.

The questionnaire is used to corroborate (or not) the aforementioned observations, and to see to what extent the researcher has been successful in selecting the comprehension strategies. Specifically, these are inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words using morphological clues, detecting main ideas and finding details which support them. The authorities in reading metacognition like Baker and Brown (2002), Baudoin *et. al.*, (1997), Block and Pressley (2007) and Israel (2007) all concur that distinguishing important from less important information while reading a passage is a basic strategy highly recommended to be learnt and implemented by readers. They also argue that examining an unknown word's context and/or parts (stem and affixes) is a very useful way to guess its sense, mainly for EFL readers.

The rationale behind choosing to study the strategy element is dictated by comprehension strategies' close relationship and considerable impact on comprehension amount and level especially for second and foreign language learners (Richard, 2002: 249), and because many experts believe that to overlook to teach learners comprehension

strategies is simply "...to neglect to show them ways of reaching reading." (Singhal, 2001 online pages). In more specific terms, the above listed comprehension strategies are opted for the reason that research has attested them to be vital for students to learn and use in order to grow into autonomous effective comprehenders of script (Brown *et. al.*, 1986: 3), especially in second and foreign settings like ours (Singhal).

## **2.2. Administration of the Questionnaire**

In a usually held class meeting, the researcher has administered the eighteen-item questionnaire to the sample population following the steps aligned next:

- he clearly explains to students what they have to do, states the purpose of the questionnaire and tells them that there are no right or wrong answers. So, their responses should be completely free and honest,
- he tells them they can say "I don't know" or "no idea" if they have no answer to a given question,
- he distributes the copies and asks students first of all to fill in the identifying information spaces,
- he explains each of the 7 questions of the questionnaire,
- he draws their attention to the importance of answering as frankly as possible since they are not going to be rated for correct or incorrect responses,
- he encourages them to ask any question or request any clarification helping them to respond to the questionnaire truthfully either before or during its completion, and finally
- he collects the subjects' sheets for study and analysis, after allowing them all the time necessary for answering the questions.

### 2.3. Analysis of the Questionnaire

#### Section one: Background Information

##### Item 01: Gender distribution

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	17	42.5%
Female	23	57.5%

**Table 5.**Students' Gender Distribution.

This table shows the over representation of females; out of 40(100%) participants, 23(57.5%) are females, and 17(42.5%) are males. This may be due to the fact that females are dominant in education especially in the Department of letters and languages. Also, this presentation reflects girls' motivation and interest towards studying English at the university, as it reflects the opposite concerning boys. This is may be because the latter prefer other scientific branches to study for future jobs requirements and considerations.

##### Item 02: Why did you choose English as your major?

Option	Subjects	Percentage
Personal	<b>29</b>	<b>72.5%</b>
Imposed	<b>11</b>	<b>27.5%</b>
Total	<b>40</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 6.**Students' Responses towards their Choice of Studying English at the University.

According to the results shown in the table, the majority of students (72.5%) declare that their choice was personal. This may reveal that they like and believe that it is

the language of the world, while only 11(27.5%) of our participants declared that studying English was imposed. They owe this decision to a personal side, their averages and their parents. This question is not asked randomly; in fact it aims to see if students are motivated to learn more about the English language, because there is strong relationship between the comprehension of the text and the positive attitude of the students.

**Item 03:** pick the most important skill that you need to develop more

Skill	Subjects	Percentage
Speaking	27	67.5%
Listening	6	15%
Writing	4	10%
Reading	3	7.5%

**Table 7.**Students' Responses towards their Best Skills.

This question aims to discover which skill learners think is the most important to develop. Twenty seven students (67.5%) who represent the majority choose speaking as the most important skill. While six learners choose listening (15%).Four choose writing (10%) and only three choose reading (7.5%). Speaking obviously is the most important skill for learners. Writing came in the second place while listening in third place. Finally reading came at the last place and that shows that the vast majority of learners have no interest in it. This may be due to such difficulty they find it in print.

## Section Two: Reading Comprehension

**Item 04:** how do you do read in English?

Option	Subjects	Percentage
Easily	7	17.5%
Fairy easily	28	70%
With difficulty	5	12.5%

**Table 8:** Students' Attitude towards Reading

As can be noticed from the table, 70% of the respondents say they read English 'fairly easily', against 12.5% of the subjects who rather read 'with difficulty'.

**Item 05:** How often do you read?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Often	7	17.5%
Sometimes	18	45%
Rarely	15	37.5%

**Table 9:** Students' Reading

Only seven (17.5%) students say they read in English; fifteen (37.5%) say they read rarely. The high percentage for the 'often' answer is but an indication of the students' awareness about the importance or maybe the necessity of reading in English.

**Item06:** what do you often read?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Newspapers and magazines	2	5
Books of fiction and stories	25	62.5
Others	13	32.5

**Table 10:** Student’s Reading Habits in English.

The respondents' first motivation for reading in English is literature since they are specialized in the language. This is clear from the rate of answers for option (b) which collected the highest rate 62.5% against 5% for the first option, and 32.5% for the third one.

**Item 07:** when you read a text or a book outside the class, what do you expect to gain from it?

Option	Participants	Percentage
More vocabulary items	26	65
New ideas	12	30
Know more about the language	2	5

**Table 11:** Setting a Purpose for Reading.

Considering the context of our study, the purpose underlying more specifically reading in English is immediate rather than deferred, and the text is used as a linguistic object rather than a vehicle for information. One would say that the subjects’ choices (a, and b with 38% of answers) fit perfectly the situation and that the two first options are primarily needed compared with the last one which is considered of secondary importance. So, the majority of students read to expand their vocabulary stock of new items.

**Item 08:** I understand what I read in books?

Comprehension percentage	Participants	percentage
100%	0	0%
75%	22	55%
50%	15	37.5%
20%	3	7.5%

**Table 12:** Reading Comprehension Ability.

Concerning comprehension, the above table identifies the current reading comprehension level of the students. 55% of them claim that they can understand 75% in reading, 37.5% can understand 50%, 7.5% can understand 20% and no one can understand 100%. The majority claims that are good comprehenders; though, a significant proportion of students struggle with reading comprehension

**Item 09:** when you read a text, what are the main problems that impair your comprehension?

Option	Participants	Percentage
a- The meaning of words	16	40%
b- New items	20	50%
c- The general idea of the text	4	10%

**Table 13:** Students' Main Problems in Reading.

It is clear that option (b); i.e.; ‘new items’ has gathered the highest percentage by being ticked by 50% of the students, followed by (a) with 16 (40). In the third position option (c) comes last with only (10%) answers. So, the majority of students attribute reading difficulty to poor vocabulary knowledge. Another proportion of students locate

their difficulty at more than one level by ticking two to three options, 50% and 40% respectively.

**Item 10:** In the process of reading, you think:

Option	Participants	percentage
some words can be skipped without disturbing understanding	10	25
Check the dictionary	22	56.6%
All the words are important	8	20%

**Table 14:** Importance Laid To Vocabulary.

As can be read from the table, the highest percentage 56.6% was attributed to the use of the dictionary, followed by 25% for skipping, while only 20% of the respondents would give all the words equal importance.

**Item 11:** in your opinion, what causes a reading failure?

Option	Participants	Percentage
The lack of vocabulary	21	52.5%
The lack of reading activities	10	25%
The lack of reading strategies	09	22.5%

**Table 15:** The Reading Failure.

Table 15 shows that there are 52.5% of the total population (N=40) have vocabulary problems when reading in English, only 25% claim that their reading failure is due to the lack of reading activities in the classroom. There are only few students (09) claim that the lack of reading strategies may hinder their reading. This means that the majority of students are not aware of the importance of reading strategies. Hence, difficulties in reading in English may result from the inadequate use of those reading

strategies; for successful reading requires a wide variety of strategies and the students' handling of texts is weak because they cannot manipulate them successfully.

### **Section three: Using Morphemes to Guess Words Meaning**

**Item 12:** In reading, when you do not understand the meaning of some words, is the dictionary the only solution you have?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Yes	25	62.5%
No	15	37.5%

**Table 16:** The Use of Dictionary.

62.5% of the students say they use only dictionary when they find an unknown word. 37.5% of the respondents seem to engage in another ways to find out words meaning because they say that the dictionary is not the only solution they have. Actually, identifying meaning of unknown words through using the dictionary is sometimes necessary after students fail to skip them or guess their meanings successfully from context. However, the dictionary should not be considered as the immediate resort to reading problem. Since the extensive use of it may disturb for the flow of information and destruct the reareader concentration in the reading task.

**Item 13:** when you read, can you guess the meaning of some words without referring to the dictionary?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Yes	30	75%
No	10	25%

**Table 17:** The Ability to Guess Words Meaning.

From the above Table we see that 75% of the total population can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words without the need to look up at the dictionary, and 25% cannot. Justifications of the “yes” answer are all about guessing the meaning from context, and no one could mention that he can look at roots, prefixes or suffixes to identify meanings.

**Item 14:** Morphemes refer mainly to roots, prefixes and suffixes. They are good predictors of words meaning. How often do you use them to recognize the word meaning without looking up in the dictionary?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Always	2	5%
Often	10	25%
Sometimes	22	55%
Rarely	4	10%
Never	2	5%

**Table 18:** The Use of Morphemes to Decode Words Meaning.

Except for 15% who do not usually guess the meaning of unknown words, Table 18 shows that 30% of the total population do not rely on the dictionary, and use morphological clues to guess the meaning of unknown words.

**Item 15:** do you know some English roots?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Yes	28	70%
No	12	30%

**Table 19:** Students’ Knowledge of English Roots.

70% of our respondents claim that they know some English roots, and 30% said that they do not. Those who know were asked to give examples like:

- The words explanation, motivation, dictionary, coffee
- The word ‘calm’ comes from the French word ‘calme’.
- The word ‘genre’ comes from the French word ‘genre’

The analysis of these responses shows that many student are not enough aware about English roots, and many know only French ones rather than Latin, Greek, and Germany.

**Item 16:** How often do you use English roots to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Always	3	7.5%
Often	13	32.5%
Sometimes	12	30%
Rarely	8	20%
Never	4	10%

**Table 20:** The Use of Roots to Guess Words Meaning.

Except for 15% who do not usually use English roots to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, Table 20 shows that 40% of the total population use them in reading tasks.

**Item 17:** do you think that the use of morphemes (roots, prefixes and suffixes) to decode the meaning of unfamiliar words is a good strategy?

Option	Participants	Percentage
Yes	34	85%
No	06	15%

**Table 21:** The Use of Morphological Clues as a Reading Strategy to Guess Words Meaning.

Table 21 indicates that 85% of the total population has a positive opinion about prediction upon morphemes. Only 20% of the total population develops a negative view about prediction upon morphemes.

**Item 18:** What do you think the importance of this kind of prediction for reading comprehension is?

Option	Participants	Percentage
It pushes you to continue reading	07	17.5%
It makes you confident and independent	19	47.5%
It saves your time	14	35%

**Table 22:** The Significance of the Strategy of Guessing Upon Morphemes.

Table 22 indicates that except for 15% who claim that prediction upon morphemes is not important, 47.5% of the total population (N=40) suggest that prediction is important

because it helps them become self-confident, 35% have claim that prediction saves their time, 17.5% have said that prediction warms the topic for them before reading

#### **2.4. Discussion of the Results of the Students' Questionnaire**

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the students' answers concerns the students' most important skill. On the whole, most students do not like reading and it comes in the last place. This may be due to the different reading difficulties they face in print, or they are not enough aware the importance of this skill.

As for comprehension difficulties our subjects, they seem to be located at more one level, with a particular emphasis on poor vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, the psychological factors that may hinder their comprehension have to do with losing concentration, or lack of confidence.

Concerning the use of dictionary to find the meaning of unfamiliar words, we can say that the dictionary is the trusty friend that accompanies students on their journey. Most of the students use it heavily as the main or the only solution they have. They consider the need of using the dictionary rather than skipping the unfamiliar words or guessing the meaning. Apparently, the questionnaire indicates that the students deal with new lexical items in one prominent way: to check the dictionary, so the researcher has had to draw their attention to other possible way which have been proved practical and frequently used by good readers.

As far as the third section is concerned with morphemes (roots, prefixes and suffixes) and its use to predict unknown words meaning, the first conclusion rate to the word-level strategies. By putting together the answers for the questions of this section, we can say that while reading, and at the vocabulary level, the subjects activate the two following strategies: they consider the need of using dictionary rather than skipping the

unfamiliar words or guessing the meaning. The later strategy is considered to be more effective than the former. The questionnaire reveals that many students do use affixes and roots to guess meaning when come across a word they do not know.

The two concluding items indicate that there is an area of agreement among students about the value of using morphemes for prediction. Table 21 indicates that the whole population consider inferring meaning from their roots and affixes is an important strategy. The most important aspects of prediction are suggested in the last item: 47.5% of the population, as table 22 shows, consider this kind of prediction as important because it develops their self confidence to be able to read new texts, 35% of the total population have said prediction saves their time, and 17.5 % of the total population said that predictions from roots and affixes make them continue reading. We say that, since second year students of English are extensively exposed to many and somehow complex texts full of unfamiliar words and are usually asked to read them quickly, but effectively, in order to be assessed about their content. So, the best way to read such complex texts with plenty of difficult lexical items in a short time, effectively, and especially with self confidence, can be the strategy of using morphemes for meaning prediction.

### **3. The Morphology Test**

#### **3.1. Description of the Morphology Test**

One test is used in this study, administered without any treatment and has been completed by the subjects. They have had two practices and selected the right option in answer to each question. They have accomplished the test individually and silently in just ten minutes after which their copies have been gathered for correction and later analysis. The ultimate aim of this kind of test is to see whether the learners know about morphemes or not. Particularly, the first practice aimed at examining the learners' ability to guess the meaning



**Item 02:** Diameter, speedometer, centimeter, metric

The root “*meter*” most likely means: a. distance                      b. machine                      c. measure

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	10	40%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	15	60%

**Table 24:** Students’ Answers of the Item 02

The result shows that the majority of students 60% were not able to guess the meaning of the root ‘meter’ which means measure, and only 40% could guess successfully.

**Item 03:** Audience, audible, audition, auditory

The root “*aud*” most likely means: a. speed                      b. hear                      c. people

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	19	76%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	06	24%

**Table 25:** Students’ Answers of the Item 03.

According to the table 25,we can see that an important number of the respondents76% guessed correctly the meaning of the root ‘aud’ which means hear, whereas, 24% of students could not. Perhaps the given words like auditory was behind the success of students correct guesses.

**Item 04:** Construction, instruct, destruct, structure

The root “*struct*” most likely means: a. build                      b. destroy                      c. stop

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	16	64%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	09	36%

**Table 26:** Students’ Answers of the Item 04.

Here too, the majority of the subjects 64% could guess the meaning of the root ‘*struct*’. 36% could not guess the option build, because they are not familiar with the given words like construction, though it is very common word.

**Item 05:** Circus, circle, circular, circumstances

The root “*circ*” most likely means: a. fun                      b. around                      c. five

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	24	96%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	01	04%

**Table 27:** Students’ Answers of the Item 05.

As far as the root *circ* is concerned, almost all the subject 96% could guess that it means around. This allows us to guess also that they got the correct answer from the word circle

**Item 06:** Minor, minute, miniature, minimum

The root “*min*” most likely means: a. most b. less c. small

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	13	52%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	12	48%

**Table 28:** Students’ Answers of the Item 06.

A large number of the group 52% circled the right answer which is small. Many could not guess the meaning of the root *min* which means small.

**Item 07:** Solitary, solo, solely, solitude

The root “*sol*” most likely means: a. alone b. free c. near

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	23	92%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	02	08%

**Table 29:** Students’ Answers of the Item 07

As it is indicated by the table; 92% of the group succeeded to guess the right meaning of the root *sol*. The right answer is the option (a); i.e. alone. Only two students could not figure out it.

**Item 08:** Uniform, unicorn, unit, united

The root “*unit*” most likely means: a. one b. kind c. form

	N	%
<b>Correct answers</b>	21	84%
<b>Wrong answers</b>	04	16%

**Table 30:** Students’ Answers of the Item 08.

Table 30 shows that 84% of the respondents could successfully unlock the meaning of the root unit which refers to ‘one’. Whereas, 16% failed to predict the right answer.

**Practice Two:** circle the words where the prefix (in) means not. Watch out; there are false negatives in this list.

**Item 09:** The word ‘*inject*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	02	8%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	23	92%

**Table 31:** Students’ Answer of the Item 09

Table 31 shows that the majority of the students 92% were aware that (in) in the beginning of the word inject is not a prefix that may mean not. Only two students seem to be not aware that there is no connection between (in) and its root.

**Item 10:** The word ‘*inside*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	02	08%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	23	92%

**Table 32:** Students’ Answer of the Item 10.

This table demonstrates that 92% of the respondents were aware that (in) means not not; while two students believe that in means not. So, according to them inside is the opposite of side

**Item 11:** The word ‘*insane*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	11	44%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	14	56%

**Table 33:** Students’ Answer of the Item 11.

Now, many students 56% fail to circle this word because they think that in is not a prefix and they are often confronted with insane rather than sane. However; 44% of them were aware that it exists both insane and sane.

**Item 12:** The word ‘*inspect*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	04	16%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	21	84%

**Table 34:** Students’ Answer of the Item 12.

The results show that the majority 84% of the students could figure out that in is not for making the opposite of the root ‘spect’. The rest 16% think that in means not.

**Item 13:** The word ‘*invaluable*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Wrong</b>	21	84%
<b>(in) means not NOT</b>	<b>Right</b>	04	16%

**Table 35:** Students’ Answer of the Item 13.

Table 35 reveals that, regardless of the 16% who have answered correctly concerning the word invaluable, 84% have claimed that ‘in’ means not. So, according to them invaluable is the opposite of valuable. But they are synonyms and have the same meaning.

**Item 14:** The word ‘*inflammable*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	20	80%
<b>(in) means not Not</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	05	20%

**Table 36:** Students’ Answer of the Item 14.

Here too, most of the respondents (80%) fail to answer the correctly. They think that in means not in the word ‘inflammable’, though flammable and inflammable are in fact synonyms. However, only 20% seem to be aware of the two words and think they are the same.

**Item 15:** The word ‘*inactive*’

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	21	84%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	4	16%

**Table 37:** Students’ Answer of the Item 15.

It is clear from the table that the majority of the students 84% succeed to figure out that (in) means not in the word ‘inactive. Four students think that it is one word and (in) never mean not.

**Item 16:** The word *'invisible'*

		N	%
<b>(in) is a prefix means Not</b>	<b>Right answer</b>	22	88%
<b>(in) is not a prefix at all</b>	<b>Wrong answer</b>	03	12%

**Table 38:** Students' Answer of the Item 16.

Except for 12% who did not recognize that 'in' means 'not', table 38 shows that 88% of the total group made sense of the prefix 'in'. So, we can say that most students are familiar as well as aware of the word 'inactive'.

**3.4. Discussion the Findings of the Morphology Test**

Students begin the morphological test by guessing the meaning of some common roots. The purpose of introducing this exercise is to know to which extent students are aware about English roots. The majority of students were, to a large extent, successful in identifying the different given roots. Most of them have actually relied on the suggested words as well as on their knowledge of morphology.

The second exercise was an attempt to check the students' awareness about the simple prefix 'in' which is usually stands for 'not'. However, in many cases such as the word 'inflammable', the prefix 'in' no longer means 'not'. Thus, the majority of students have failed with the words invaluable and inflammable. They think that that the prefix 'in' is for making the opposite of valuable and flammable respectively, though they are actually synonyms.

## Conclusion

The present study can be said to have a number of theoretical contributions. First, it has revealed the subjects' morphological level concerning English roots and affixes, and second, it depicted the subjects' morphological awareness which has been given a huge attention in our research. Hence, inter-correlations of morphological awareness with vocabulary and reading comprehension in English are summarized in this chapter.

This provides correlation evidence for a relationship between morphological awareness, vocabulary, and reading comprehension among second year English language students. Our results suggested that morphological awareness of roots and affixes has a direct influence on reading comprehension beyond the mediating effects of vocabulary. Students who are aware about morphemes will have the ability and attitude to infer word meaning and grammatical functions of unfamiliar words. They should, however, be warned that in many common words, the affixes no longer have any obvious connection with their root meaning such as *comfortable*, *outline*, *inflammable* and *invaluable*.

## General Conclusion

In this section, I will summarize the points that have been discussed throughout the previous chapters. This research is about the role of using affixes and English roots to enhance EFL learners' reading comprehension. The analysis of the obtained results confirmed that this strategy helps students become skilled readers and good comprehenders.

Students' reading problems may be rooted in their poor vocabulary in English, and students' reading problems may be related to lack of strategic approach to handle unfamiliar words. The strategy of guessing words from their roots, prefixes and suffixes has proved to be an important and effective method that helps EFL learners to develop their reading comprehension. Its importance; however, lies in the fact that it helps students develop self-independence from the teacher or the dictionary.

The use of morphological clues for vocabulary improvement has long been highly recommended because of its purported advantages over other strategies. The theory is that students need not be dependent on a dictionary or glossary; instead, they can independently apply morphological strategies when confronted with unknown words. Consequently, teachers should tell their students to use morphological clues when come across a word they do not know

The theoretical foundations on which this research is backed are numerous as. Reading, here, is discussed as being an interactive process where the reader relies on his past knowledge of and the elements of the text. Consequently, he needs both lower and higher level strategies to process print successfully. Bottom-up (e.g. letters' and words' identification) along with (background knowledge) processes are used at once to reach better comprehension which is the ultimate goal of reading. In this study, comprehension is defined as the interaction between the text and its processor to construct meaning. The

reader's metacognitive awareness about how comprehension works is the key factor in this interface. Because the brain seeks patterns and rules, students do indeed develop morphological awareness which can become metacognitive through instructions.

## **Recommendation and Suggestions for Further Researches**

The present study has provided answers to the questions posed at the outset of the students' questionnaire and the morphological test has added confirmation to the argument that advocates morphological clues instruction to be an effective teaching model to follow when seeking promoting learners' comprehension and success with print. Nonetheless, it raises many other questions and opens more horizons for future research.

1. Metacognitively-oriented comprehension strategies instruction of guessing word meaning from contextual cues, detecting main ideas and identifying details has been proved helpful in improving trainees' performance in this ability, and in reading comprehension altogether. But, wondering whether metacognitive training in each of these strategies individually or in isolation would lead to the same outcomes or not is an unresolved issue demanding more inquiry and experimentation.
2. Researchers, educators and teachers are in need for more substantive data about the role of strategies like summarizing, inferring...etc plays in good text understanding.
3. The transfer of strategy use among the different language macro-skills is a topic that necessitates further examination. Once a learner gets used to the implementation of a behaviour in a given area of literacy, reading, for example, does he apply it to handle situations in other contexts of language learning like listening and writing?. Another cases in point are the following: after a trainee becomes capable of executing anticipating the sense of novel lexical items while reading, does he try to guess at meaning when listening to people talking? Or if he succeeds to recognise main ideas of a passage thanks to its pertinent body of metacognitive knowledge, does he apply this knowledge to construct the main ideas

when producing a piece of writing? Numerous similar questions call for answers in further research.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 01

### Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire to express your attitudes toward the **role of teaching morphemes (prefixes/ suffixes and English roots) in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension proficiency in English.**

Your answers are very important for the validity of this research we are undertaken. As such, we hope that you will give us your full attention and interest.

Please tick the choice that corresponds to your answer. Thank you very much in advance.

#### Section one: Personal Information

1. Gender:

a. Male

b. Female

2. Why did you choose English as your major?

.....

3. Pick the most important skill that you need to develop most:

a. Speaking

b. Listening

c. Writing

d. Reading

## Section two: Reading Comprehension

4. How do you do read in English?

a. Easy

b. Fairy easily

c. With difficulty

5. How often do you read?

a. Frequently

b. Sometimes

c. Rarely

6. What do you often read?

a. magazines

b. Books of fiction and stories.

a. Others

7. When you read a text or a book outside the class, what do you expect to get from it?

a. More vocabulary items

b. New ideas.

c. Know more about the language.

8. I understand what I read in books?

- a. 100%  b. 75%  c. 50%  d. 20%

9. When you read a text, what are the main problems that impair your comprehension?

- a. The meaning of words.
- b. new terms.
- c. The general idea of the text

10. In the process of reading, you think:

- a. some words can be skipped without disturbing understanding
- b. Check the dictionary
- c. all the words are important

11. In your opinion, what causes a reading failure?

- a. The lack of vocabulary
- b. The lack of reading activities
- c. The lack of reading strategies

### **Section three: Using Morphemes to Guess Words Meaning**

12. In reading, when you do not understand the meaning of some words, is dictionary the only solution you have?

- a. Yes  b. No

If your answer is no, please justify.....

.....

13. When you read, can you guess the meaning of some words without referring to the dictionary?

a. Yes

b. No

If your answer is yes, please tell us how? .....

.....

14. Morphemes refer mainly to prefixes/affixes and English roots. They are good predictors of words meaning. How often do you use them to recognize the word meaning without looking up in the dictionary?

a. Always

b. Often

c. Sometimes

d. Rarely

e. Never

15. English vocabulary is thought to be the most complex of all European languages, because it is a mixture of Greek, Latin, French and Germanic roots. Do you know some of them?

a. Yes

b. No

If yes, can you give an example? .....

16. When you read, how often do u use English roots as a predictor of words meaning?

a. Always

b. Often

c. Sometimes

d. Rarely

e. Never

17. Do you think that the use of morphemes (prefixes/ suffixes and roots) to decode the meaning of unfamiliar words is a good reading strategy?

a. Yes

b. No





## ملخص

تعتبر القراءة مهارة لغوية ذات أهمية بالغة بالنسبة لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة محمد خيضر. لهذا فان البحث عن طرق واستراتيجيات ناجعة لتدريس هذه المهارة بات من الأهمية بمكان. يهدف هذا البحث المتواضع الى تقديم احدى هذه الطرق ألا وهي تدريس استراتيجية تخمين معنى المصطلحات عن طريق النظر في المورفيمز التي تتكون منها وهي ثلاثة أقسامة: بريفيكس، سافيكس، و جذور بعض كلمات اللغة الانجليزية المستعارة من اللغات الأوروبية الأخرى. ومن أجل هذا خصصت هذه الدراسة لاثبات أن ادماج هذه الاستراتيجية في القراءة سيحسن مستوى فهم الطلبة. وقد اجريت الدراسة الميدانية بجامعة بسكرة في السنة الدراسية 2016/2015 علي عينة بحث من صف سنة ثانية ليسانسة، تتكون من 40 طالب تم استجوابهم عن طريق استبيان و اختبار لمستواهم المورفولوجي. وعليه جاءت نتائج التحليل في صالح الفرضية لتثبت ان منهجية التدريس المعتمدة على المورفيمز فعالة وتؤدي الى تحسين أداء الطلاب من ناحية فهم النصوص الانجليزية.