

Teachers and Learners Perceptions on the Impact of Different Test Procedures on Reading: A Case Study

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Abstract—The main aim of this research was to investigate the perspectives of English language teachers and learners on the effect of test techniques on reading comprehension, test performance and assessment. The research has also aimed at finding the differences between teacher and learner perspectives, specifying the test techniques which have the highest effect, investigating the other factors affecting reading comprehension, and comparing the results with the similar studies. In order to achieve these objectives, perspectives and findings of different researchers were reviewed, two different questionnaires were prepared to collect data for the perspectives of teachers and learners, the questionnaires were applied to 26 learners and 8 teachers from the University of Batna (Algeria), and quantitative and qualitative data analysis of the results were done. The results and analysis of the results show that different test techniques affect reading comprehension, test performance and assessment at different percentages rates.

Keywords—Reading Comprehension, Reading Assessment, Test Performance, Test Techniques.

I. INTRODUCTION

ASSessment is one of the most important areas in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning processes. It is necessary for both teachers and learners in terms of observing and measuring development of learners in foreign language learning process and determine the effectiveness of teaching and proficiency of learning. So, assessment forms of the curriculum of many educational systems all around the world. Testing is a way of assessment, and during different assessment processes, learners are exposed to tests with variety test techniques in order to each some concrete results about the performance and ability of learners in a foreign language.

Reference [2] indicated that there were some different purposes of language assessment. According to them, one of the aims of assessment is to measure learners' language ability to select and place them in courses or English-medium Universities by making use of proficiency or placement assessments. Another aim of assessment is to learn the abilities of learners considering a pre-specified skill, task or knowledge, compare the results with the expected outcomes, make decisions about which skill areas to emphasize in the course and specify further aims for ongoing assessment plans by the help of diagnostic assessments which can be applied as pre or post-course assessments. Evaluating and reporting the success of learners by looking at the test scores or course

grades after covering and mastering course material and content with progress assessments in another aim of assessment. Different instruments such as quizzes, exercises, reading journals, blog entries, literary portfolios, individual or collaborative projects, presentations, or classroom discussions can be used to accomplish these purposes.

In foreign language education process, the focus of assessment is on the language skills. These language skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening vocabulary, and grammar. Testing of these skills leads teachers to measure the ability of learners in these skills separately. According to [4], the testing of reading ability is more challenging when compared with the testing of other skills. As he claims, when receptive skills such as writing and speaking are intended to be measured, they cannot be observed in the overt behavior of learners, so it is teachers' responsibility to set tasks to cause learners to exercise reading and result in behavior that will show the effective use of that skill.

Reading comprehension is the essential point of reading assessment. As [8] claims, the primary objective of reading comprehension is to find meaning in what is read, so learners are exposed to find meaning in what is read, so learners are exposed to reading assessment in order to test their reading abilities. While preparing the assessments for reading, the important points include ensuring the appropriateness of the text which is selected, the suitability of the language in the text with learners' proficiency, and the relevance of the information in each paragraph. According to Mohammad, some teachers are not aware of the fact that the answers of the comprehension questions which are formulated to test learners' ability to understand and recall what they read can be directly stated in the text, so comprehension assessment do not go beyond this level of comprehension. It is clear from [8] inferences that questions have an important place in the assessment of reading comprehension. So, it can be said that there are many factors that affect reading comprehension and assessment including the ones related to environment, teacher, student or the test itself with the text and testing items, and test techniques including different question types is one of the factors affecting reading comprehension and assessment.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of different test techniques on reading comprehension and assessment of an English as a foreign language – EFL text by taking language teacher and learner perspectives on the issue as base and comparing them with the previous similar research studies.

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Before discussing the effects of test techniques on reading comprehension and assessment of an EFL text, it is necessary to have an idea about the test techniques. There are many test techniques which are used during the assessment of reading ability of learners, and different techniques have been defined, explained and discussed by some researchers.

Reference [3] explained some reading test techniques including multiple choice technique, unique answer technique, guided short answer technique, summary cloze technique, information transfer technique, and the techniques for particular purposes including identifying order of events, topics, or arguments, identifying referents, and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. In multiple choice technique, the candidate is given a number of alternatives to show reading comprehension by making a mark against one out of them. Unique answer technique of which use is necessarily limited includes only one possible correct response which can be a single word or number, and short answer technique is an alternative for it when unique answer items are not possible. Guided short answer is a bit problematic one in which learners who find the answer in his or her mind after reading the related part of the text may not be able to express it well, and it may result in unrelated productions. As an extension of guided short answer technique, summary cloze includes a reading passage which is summarized by the tester and some gaps are left in the summary for completion by the candidate. In information transfer technique, the candidates are required to complete a reading task by being supplied simple information in a table. As for the techniques for particular purposes, identifying order of events, topics or arguments, and numbering them, identifying referents such as it, them, that etc. in the text, and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context of the text by scanning are interpreted by [3].

Reference [10] also mentioned some reading test techniques including selective deletion gap filling technique, short-answer question – SAQ careful reading technique, and information transfer technique. In selective deletion gap filling technique, content words are deleted from the text according to some principles, and the candidates are expected to find the appropriate word for each blank from a list given with the text. In SAQ careful reading technique, the candidates are required to write down limited short answers to the given questions in the blanks or spaces provided on the question sheet. As for information transfer technique, the information transmitted verbally is transferred to a non-verbal form, and the technique includes many possible questioning ways.

A lot of researchers have done many research studies on the effect of test techniques on test performance in reading. Reference [7] found that different test techniques affect learners' scores in reading comprehension. The test methods he dealt with in his study include gap filling test, multiple-choice questions, and short answer questions. He argues that the most difficult test technique among these three is gap filling test, and multiple – choice questions and short answer questions are easier than gap filling test. Moreover,

completing short answer questions takes long time than completing multiple-choice questions and gap-filling test. According to him, both the high-proficient and the low-proficient learners are affected by these test methods. Therefore, the results show that test methods affect the learners' performance on reading comprehension.

In his study, [5] analyzed the differences in fifth graders' reading comprehension scores by using four different tasks to measure comprehension including multiple –choice, recall, cloze and maze and four different reading passages which were equated according to readability formulas. While dealing with the tasks, he found that the maze, in which every fifth or seventh word can be replaced by three choices, and multiple-choice tasks were consistently easier than recall and cloze. Then, he concluded that the choice of a particular testing procedure and tasks had significant effects on reading comprehension.

Reference [9] designed a study aiming at exploring and examining the nature of test method effect on reading comprehension. The two methods he compared with this aim were free-response and multiple choice format. The analysis of the scores showed that these two tests with identical content but different formats might not yield measures of the same trait, so the methods affected examinees' reading performance.

According to [11], second language – L2 reading researchers use many comprehension assessment procedures which are difficult to compare, so it is not possible to inform educators as to appropriate testing procedures. He claimed that learners' performance on comprehension tasks differed from each other according to the task used, and there were two factors that can be attributed to such variations: the test type of task and the language of the task. In his article, Wolf examined the effects of some testing procedures used in recent L2 reading research on learners' performance on these tasks. The constructed response task types he dealt with include open-ended questions, cloze tasks and recall protocols. While examining the effects of these response task types on testing reading comprehension, [9] argued that open-ended questions may encourage bottom-up processing of a text in that test took probably derive measuring only from textual features, and got high comprehension scores although they did not really read the test. He also argued that the open-ended questions which were used to test reading comprehension usually tested only isolated facts and details, thus test-takers could answer them with a surface reading instead of in-depth reading. For cloze tasks, [11] argued that the only thing on which the test taker must rely was information outside the immediate environment of a deleted item to fill in the blank instead of reading the whole text and comprehending it properly. As for recall protocols, they were explained as the ones in which the test-takers read a passage several times and wrote down everything they remembered from what they read without referring to the passage [11]. Reference [11] asserted that recall protocols does not influence test-takers' comprehension of a task as to multiple choice or open-ended questions do because it does not give any other clues to the meaning of the passage. As a

result, the assessment task type affected learners' ability to show their reading comprehension [11].

In addition to different test techniques, there are some other factors affecting reading comprehension and assessment accordingly. These factors have been investigated by many researchers.

Reference [1] specified some factors related to reading problems. Some of these factors concerning learners are intellectual factors including intelligence, learning aptitude and experience, physical factors including visual and auditory problems, language factors including language acquisition and development difficulty, and special learning problems learning disabilities. All these factors affect comprehension of learners in reading and so learners may fail in the tests.

Reference [6] also explained some learner factors that influence reading performance. According to them, one of these factors is learners' prior content knowledge of the text and their experiences. Another factor is knowledge about reading and writing including phonological awareness and metacognitive awareness which influence learners' acquisition of reading and writing. Attitudes and motivation of learners is another factor which is central. Lastly, correlates of reading and writing performance including social and emotional development, language development, physical development related to hearing and vision, and cognitive developments related to intelligence, information-processing abilities and memory affect reading performance to great extent.

In the light of the definitions of different test procedures and research studies on the impact of different test procedures on reading comprehension and assessment, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are the effects of different test procedures on reading comprehension and assessment of an EFL text?
- 2- What are the insights of English language teachers and learners on the impact of different test procedures on reading comprehension, test performance and assessment?
- 3- Which test procedures have the highest effect on reading comprehension and assessment?
- 4- Are there any differences between learner insights and teacher insights in terms of the impact of test procedures on reading comprehension and assessment?
- 5- What can be the other factors that influence reading comprehension and assessment?
- 6- What are the similarities between the insights of teachers and learners and the findings of similar research studies?

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants include two different groups. The first group includes 26 foreign language learners selected randomly from different proficiency levels in the Department of English of Batna University. Most of them have studied English as a foreign language for more than 5 years. The second group includes 8 teachers randomly selected from the Department of

English of Batna University. They have taught in this Department for more than 3 years.

Before taking part in this study, both groups were told that its purpose was to find out their experiences and perspectives on the effects of different test techniques on reading comprehension and assessment of an EFL text.

B. Data Collection Tools

Two different questionnaires were used in the experiment. Both of them were designed to learn the ideas and perceptions of teachers and learners on different test procedures for reading comprehension and assessment by using different questions. The questionnaires include 7 different test procedures and the questions address to these procedures in addition to the questions to learn the comments of teachers and learners.

C. Design and Procedures

A questionnaire was prepared to learn the perceptions of learners on reading tests and test procedures. At the beginning of the questionnaire designed to learners, the purpose of the study was explained briefly. Then, in the "background information" part, learners' proficiency level is asked in addition to how long they have been learning English. In "your opinions related to reading tests" part, 13 different open-ended statements for 7 different reading test types including multiple choice, gap filling, unique/short answer, summary/recall, identifying the order of events/topics, identifying referents and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context are given and learners are expected to choose the relevant ones to their perceptions. In this part it is aimed to reach some quantitative data and analyze them. In the last part of the questionnaire, an open-ended question is asked to learn the other factors affecting their comprehension while reading and reach some qualitative data. Before applying the questionnaires to learners, a pilot study was done to see the limitations of the questionnaire by applying it to 3 learners. After the pilot study, necessary improvements and changes were made in the questionnaires and it was applied to 26 learners.

Another questionnaire was prepared to learn the insights of teachers on reading tests and test procedures. It is almost in the same format with the questionnaire prepared for learners, however the content and number of the questions are slightly different. The "Background information" part includes some questions about how long they have been teaching in the Department of English. In "your opinions and experiences with reading assessment" part, 7 different statements for the same test types are given and teachers are expected to choose the relevant ones according to their experiences and perceptions. Then, 2 questions are included at the end of the questionnaire to collect data about the other comments of teachers on these test procedures and their effect on reading comprehension and assessment. The purpose of these questions is to collect some qualitative data in addition to the quantitative data which are expected to be collected in the

second part of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was applied to 8 teachers.

III. FINDINGS

The first data to be analyzed are the ones that were collected through the questionnaires applied to the learners. According to the findings, there are differences for the percentages of the learners' preferences for the easiest and most difficult techniques. According to 13 of 26 learners (50%), the easiest reading test procedure is multiple choice. 13 of the 26 learners (50%) see summary / recall technique as the most difficult technique. 11 learners (42%) selected multiple choice technique as the one in which they understand the questions easily in reading tests. 9 learners (35%) selected gap filling technique as the one in which they cannot understand the questions. According to (35%) of the learners, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context technique facilitates their comprehension while reading an EFL text. However, gap filling technique complicates their comprehension according to (31%) of the learners. The choices of 15 learners (58%) show that summary/recall technique takes the longest time and the choices of (50%) of the learners show that multiple choice technique takes the shortest time. (58%) of the learners prefer multiple choice technique most and (46%) of the learners never prefer summary / recall technique. According to 10 of the learners (38%), multiple choice technique affects their performance positively and according to 8 learners (31%), summary /recall technique affects their performance negatively. (31%) of the learners indicates with their choices that the technique which they mostly encounter in reading tests is identifying the order of event/topics.

TABLE I
RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE APPLIED TO THE LEARNERS

The easiest reading test procedure is multiple choice.	(50%)
Summary / recall technique is the most difficult technique .	(50%)
Multiple choice technique is the one in which learners understand the questions easily in reading tests.	(42%)
Gap filling technique as the one in which they cannot understand the questions.	(35%)
Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context technique facilitates learners' comprehension while reading an EFL text.	(35%)
Gap filling technique complicates learners' comprehension.	(31%)
Summary/recall technique takes the longest time.	(58%)
Multiple choice technique takes the shortest time.	(50%)
Multiple choice technique is mostly preferred by learners.	(58%)
Learners never prefer summary / recall technique	(46%)
Multiple choice technique affects learners' performance positively.	(38%)
Summary /recall technique affects learners' performance negatively.	(31%)
The technique which learners mostly encounter in reading tests is identifying the order of event/topics.	(31%)

TABLE II
RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE APPLIED TO THE TEACHERS

The procedures which are mostly used in reading tests are :	
- multiple choice	(19%)
- unique /short answer	(19%)
- identifying referents	(19%)
- guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context	(19%)
- the gap filling procedure is also used very much	(14%)
The teachers mostly prefer:	
- unique / short answer in reading tests	(28%)
- Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context	(20%)
- identifying referents	(20%)
The techniques which were preferred by the teachers least:	
- multiple choice technique	(30%)
- summary / recall technique	(30%)
- gap filling	(20%)
- identifying the order of events / topics	(20%)
The ideas of the teachers related to the techniques which were preferred by learners :	
- multiple choice technique is highly preferable for learners	(78%)
The techniques preferred least by learners according to the teachers:	
- gap filling	(33%)
- unique / short answer	(33%)
- summary / recall	(33%)
The choices of the teachers:	
- learners achieve more while dealing with multiple choice technique	(22%)
- gap filling technique	(22%)
- unique / short answer technique in reading tests.	(22%)
The achievement level of learners is the lowest according to teachers in:	
- unique/short answer technique	(33%)
- gap filling technique	(25%)
- multiple choice technique	(25%)

The results of the teachers' choices in the questionnaire show that the procedures which are mostly used in reading tests are: multiple choice (19%), unique /short answer (19%), identifying referents (19%) and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context (19%). The gap filling procedure is also used very much (14%) according to the findings. Findings also show that the teachers mostly prefer (28%) unique/short answer in reading tests. Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context (20%) and identifying referents (20%) procedures are also preferred by the teachers to a great extent. As for the techniques which were preferred by the teachers least, multiple choice technique (30%) and summary/recall technique (30%) are not preferable for the teachers. Other procedures they do not prefer are gap filling (20%) and identifying the order of events/topics (20%). The ideas of the teachers related to the techniques which were preferred by learners show that multiple choice technique (78%) is highly preferable for learners. As for the techniques which are preferred least by learners according to the teachers, gap filling, unique/short answer and summary/recall are indicated in the same percentages (33%). The choices of the teachers in the questionnaire show that learners achieve more while dealing with multiple choice technique (22%), gap filling technique (22%) and unique/short answer technique (22%) in reading tests. The choices of the teachers also show that the achievement level of learners is the lowest in unique/short answer technique (33%). Learners also fail in gap filling technique (25%) and multiple choice technique (25%) according to teachers. Some qualitative data were collected

from the learners and the teachers by the help of the questionnaires too. Both participant groups stated their opinions about the other factors affecting reading comprehension and assessment. According to the learners, the factors affecting their comprehension while reading during reading tests are unknown words in the text, too long paragraphs, texts which are not interesting, level of texts, and time limitations. They regard time limitation as the most important factor affecting their performance. The teachers also mentioned some factors including type of reading, texts which are not interesting for learners, length of texts, familiarity of students with the topics of texts, textual use of grammar structures, difficulty of texts, unknown words, font of texts, content of questions, classroom instructions, technology, physical factors such as temperature or noise, psychological factors, motivation of learners, and proficiency level of learners.

IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions of learners and teachers on the effect of different test procedures on reading comprehension and assessment, so necessary data were collected from the learners and teachers by making use of questionnaires in which they indicated their opinions on the issue. After analyzing the collected data, some striking results have been reached.

First of all, according to the learners, the easiest procedure is multiple choice and the most difficult procedure are summary/recall and gap filling. The reason can be that the learners have difficulty in the productive procedures. Multiple choice procedure is not productive because it gives them some choices which can be suggestive for the answers. Moreover, it is the technique which takes the shortest time, and probably they do not like to spend too much time on tests. As a result, multiple choice technique is also the one which they mostly prefer and which affects their test performance positively as it can be seen in the findings. It shows that learners are more motivated and achieve more when they are given opinions for the answers and when they do not spend too much time on dealing with the questions. As for the summary/recall technique which they selected as the most difficult one, it requires production during the test, and it can be one of the reasons why the learners have difficulty in it. Moreover, summary/recall technique takes the longest time, and spending too much time is not preferable for the learners. The learners never prefer to be exposed to summary/recall technique, and according to them, the technique affects their test performance negatively. It can be understood that the learners cannot achieve when they have to produce too much and spend too much time during the test.

The predictions of the teachers related to the preferences of learners in the questionnaires are correct to some extent. According to them, learners prefer multiple choice most, and they do not prefer gap filling, unique answer, and summary/recall techniques. In fact, the learners are not as against to unique answer questions as the teachers think. They also think

that learners achieve in multiple choice, gap filling, and unique/short answers more. This is similar to the learners' ideas on the same issue because these techniques do not take too much time and do not require too much production. The teachers chose the unique/short answer technique as the one learners fail more and none of them chose summary/recall in contrast to the choices of the learners. It is interesting that the learners see themselves unsuccessful in summary/recall technique while the teachers do not think so. As for the teachers' own preferences for the techniques, they mostly prefer unique/short answer technique. The reason is probably that they can see the comprehension of learners and it is easier for them to grade it in terms of objectivity and uniqueness of the answers and timing. They do not prefer multiple choice and summary/recall technique. The answers given to multiple choice questions do not show students' comprehension of the texts exactly and summary/recall technique takes too much time although it shows comprehension, probably for these reasons, they are not preferred by the teachers. The teachers indicate that multiple choice, unique answer identifying referents and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context techniques are used most in reading tests while the learners think that they mostly encounter identifying the order of topics/events technique. It is quite interesting that how such a subjective answer can differ so much. The reason for these conflicting results can be that the teachers may have chosen the techniques which they prefer to use in the tests or the ones they are accustomed to see in the other test, which makes the techniques remain in their minds as the mostly used ones. Another probable reason is that the learners may have thought that identifying the order of events/topics is the most noticeable technique in the exams which makes them put emphasis on the text and leads them to associate the technique mostly with reading tests. According to the findings of the questionnaires applied to the learners, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context facilitates their comprehension while reading the text. The reason seems to be that learners have difficulty in dealing with unknown words in the text during the test, so it is easier for them to understand the texts when they understand the meaning of the words. The technique which complicates their comprehension while reading the test is gap filling. Gap filling technique mostly requires finding the relevant words or prepositions from the text. It seems to result from the learners' attitude towards the words in the text again. As it is difficult for them to deal with unknown words, they are confused while trying to find the words and becomes difficult to understand the text properly. According to the teachers, although gap filling technique is not preferable for the learners, they achieve it in the tests.

There are some similarities and differences between the perceptions of teachers and learners and the findings of the previous research studies on the similar issue, but the common point of their perceptions is that test techniques have an effect on reading comprehension and test performance. According to the findings of [7], multiple choice and short answer techniques are easier than gap filling technique. It is very

similar to the findings of this study when the learners' choices in the questionnaire are considered. Another finding of Liu is that short answer technique takes longer time when compared with multiple choice and gap filling techniques. However, according to the findings of this study, gap filling technique takes longer time than unique/short answer questions for the learners. Reference [5] findings show that multiple choice technique is easier than recall and cloze, and it is very similar to the findings of this study in addition to the findings of [7] as he found that multiple choice technique is one of the easiest ones. According to the findings of [11], open-ended questions and cloze tasks require just surface reading of the text while recall requires reading the texts for several times, so the test types affect reading comprehension. Reference [9] also recognizes the effect of test procedures with identical content but different formats while dealing with free-response and multiple choice techniques in his study. Thus, it is possible to see the different effects of different test techniques on reading comprehension and test performance both in the findings of the studies of mentioned researchers and the findings of this study.

In addition to the test procedures, both the learners and the teachers mentioned other factors affecting reading comprehension, test performance and assessment in the questionnaires. Some of these factors are related to text, environment and timing. Findings of [1] and [6] especially draw attention to the learner factors such as intellectual factors, psychological factors, physical factors, language factors and developmental problems of learners. Some of the learner factors emphasized by them are also included in the findings of this study according to the comments of the learners and teachers in the questionnaires.

All things considered, different opinions on different test techniques prove that test techniques affect reading comprehension, test performance and assessment. Perceptions of the learners, including the ones who are from different proficiency levels and who have been learning English for a long or short time, show that they are affected by different test techniques during reading tests. The teachers are also in substantial agreement with the learners on the idea that there is a close relationship between different test techniques and reading test performance. All the teachers in the study think that different test techniques affect reading comprehension and test performance. The findings of both, this study and other studies compromise on the effect of test procedures on reading comprehension, test performance and assessment. By taking these findings into consideration, it can be recommended that the reading tests should include different test techniques which affect comprehension differently and common preferences of teachers and learners should be considered while selecting the test techniques. This research can be extended in order to find out the reading test techniques which should be proffered in reading tests to increase the effectiveness of the tests and assessment.

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