

Explore the profile of students reading comprehensions proficiency in the universities of the KSA

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***Abstract**--The aim of the study is to investigate the profile of universities students reading comprehensions proficiency in Saudi Arabia based on the benchmarking. To achieve this objective, the data was collected from the English students who were studying in the Saudi Arabia Universities by using a purposive sampling technique. The research design was consisting of both quantitative and qualitative approach. The analysis of the study was done based on the both perspectives, namely, descriptive and inferential. The key findings have shown, the mean score of the female as compare to male is more in the universities of Saudi Arabia which shows that the female is more as compare to male in the Saudi Arabia universities. Based on the findings of the study, current study contributed a body of literature which could become a valuable for future research. The current study also contributed a finding which could provide a guideline to the universities, educationist and policy makers to know about the importance of the English in Saudi Arabia universities and for other Arab universities. The research limitations and future directions are also discussed at the end of the study.*

***Keywords**---Adapted READS, Original Reads, Saudi Arabia, universities, performance*

I. Introduction

It is agreed that reading falls among the most prominent and genuine communicative skills tends to happen in a class room related to English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 1986). It is regarded as among the highly productive methods for the learners (English learners) to gain language skills (Krashen (2004). Previously researchers (Alderson, 1984; Carrell & Carrell, 2006; Koch, 1974) have also postulated it as a significant among the four skills for English language learning (ELL). At same point, being a linguistic skill, it is said that it carries some complexities and difficulties in comparison to other skills as it does link the other skills as well. English is considered to be an important language in Saudi Arabia due to various historical, societal, traditional and trade and industry aspects. It has emerged as a main language to be followed in vast range of professions. It is used as a medium of communication between Saudis and rather a huge number of workers is working in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it has become important that the professionals must be equipped with advanced level skills in English language across the majority of professions. "It is worth to mention that it has also earned a place for itself as an international language of science and technology aligned with the language of internet as well (Alrashidi & Phan,

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2015). In this regard the current study is focused on standardizing and sketching English language reading comprehension proficiency among students with English major particularly in Saudi Arabia context.””

Recently, both the academicians and government of Saudi Arabia has showed serious concerns about not having a high level of achievement in English language (reading) particularly in case of students of both school and university. Besides the fact, a pool of serious efforts are being made by the government to strengthen and have better English teaching but still the reading comprehension tends to be low and even is not able to meet up the expectations (Al-Johani, 2009; Fareh, 2010; Khan, 2011). Previously, studies have postulated that students spend almost nine years while educating themselves in school but still after the graduation they are not able to accomplish high level of English reading comprehension (Alhawsawi, 2013; Rajab, 2013). Consequently, when they go to university with such weak linguistic skills they tend to confront various difficulties in English classes and courses. In this regard, it is worthy to mention that there are restricted admission policies in counties such as United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom and other countries. Whereas, since 2000 there is not restricted policy or tough criterion to enter in a college in Saudi Arabia as the Ministry related to High Education has made a policy to admit students with the single requirement of high GPA only (Al-Jarf, 2008). All the tests conducted for admission before 2000 were nullified; however, they remained intact in Colleges of Medicine and Dentistry. Aptitude test is used for the students wishing to pursue education in Colleges of Engineering and Architecture. It is worthy to mention that the universities (Saudi state) are confronted with increasing pressure since parents and graduates themselves who were not able to get admission. There was also a lot of pressure by newspapers as well (Al-Jarf, 2008).

Being a reader, it is not easy at all to read the second languages such as English as a Second/ Foreign Language (Smith, 2006). How much a reader is successful in reading a language is assessed by how much he or she is able to understand. It is not based on the word count which he or she can read (Alsubaie, 2014). Driving the meaning from text cannot be substituted with text decode and reading them verbally. It is the process in which reader interacts with the text and it continues with reading (Hammerberg, 2004). It is also worthy to mention that learning how to read English language always carries various difficulties for Arabic speaker which may be weak vocabulary grammar and syntax which needs to be investigated to resolve the such issues (Mourtaga, 2004). It is worthy to mention the findings of previously available empirical and conceptual literature which states that the students with English Majors persistently do confront with the vast range of complexities. Some of them are pointed out in literature such as how much someone is proficient in reading (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2003), state to acquired knowledge in particular domain (Carrell, 1984) and how to read (technique) (Pearson & Duke, 2002). Notably, four challenges have been identified by the previous study (Farquharson, 1988) which is faced by the Arabic speakers while studying EFL. The four challenges are as follows; issues to develop understanding of reading process; non-familiarity with use of English; difficulties regarding the clear discrepancy between the both English and Arabic language; and finally, the challenges are also related to association between English spelling and phonetics. Previously, it is identified as lesser interest in topic (Schiefele & Krapp, 1996) whereas another study (Asherson, Harris, Hughes, & Farquharson,

1988) has pointed out lack of quality supplementary material which has negative influence on reading comprehension.

Besides this there are various other difficulties and challenges being faced by Saudi students with English Majors. Some of them (related to teaching practice) are as follows: lack of favourable environment to learn, reading comprehension skills, and conventional ways to teach students, inappropriate study material. Notably, some of the factors are related to the students' characteristics such as they don't know the reading strategies, insufficient prior knowledge, zeal, grammar, and time spent of task. It has also been admitted by the previous research studies that having a poor motivation will not help the students much and they will fail to recognize and acknowledge the purpose of reading (Alsamadani, 2009)).

Previously available empirical and conceptual literature states that when it comes to students in Saudi Arabia, they do lack the training and preparation for English language as Major at tertiary level due to the pre-university education they received and teaching methods (Mohammed Aedh, 2014). Consequently, students found to be unable to tie up with the tertiary level education particularly in subject English as Foreign Language. Furthermore, the poor techniques of reading and constructing meaning from text will continue and flourish more when they will join the teaching profession and teach EFL. There is possibility that due to the reasons mentioned earlier they will not teach effectively the EFL to the younger Saudi generation. Going on further Alhazzani et al. (2016) argued that the difficulties may not stop at only the student life but they will further go on and will also reflect in the Saudis sufficient participation globally. Consequently, it will also dampen the communication, cooperation and relations including at both international and business level. Moreover, it will also influence the way communication is carried out and its influence is also seeming to be observed in scientific, engineering, information and communication domains which can be resolved only by resolving the reading comprehension issues among Saudi students.

Above mentioned earlier, in reading comprehension are significant and reported by the previous studies; however, they do not explain the full variance in reading comprehension among the Saudi students with English Major (Mohammed Aedh, 2014). Notably, the previously conducted research studies do not fully provide the insights of problems confronted by Saudi students with English Major. Moreover, the previously conducted studies have extensively emphasized on the cognition perspective. However, only the cognition cannot fully explain the variance with limited tools available and also do not fully explain the influence of social and cultural factors which can potentially influence the Saudi students with English Major reading comprehension. Additionally, a study has also pointed that the previously available findings did not consider the mediation of social and culture of Saudi Arabia (Smagorinsky, 2001). Therefore, examining the reading comprehension associated problems, complexities and notably the standardizing and sketching the English proficiency by receiving a comprehensive accepting of difficulties which are related with comprehension ask for a profounder method through a searching and comprehension research tools (Mohammed Aedh, 2014). Based on the previous discussions, "the aim of the study is to investigate the profile of universities students reading comprehensions proficiency in Saudi Arabia based on the benchmarking."

II. Literature Review and conceptual Model

Barrett Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension

Barrett Taxonomy is developed by Barrett backed by the earlier work done by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues in Blooms Taxonomy. Cognitive and affects spheres of are evaluated with the help of this Taxonomy. Various types of questions are used to assess the levels of understanding among the students by teachers (Barrett, 1968). It is very much useful for the individuals who were focused to assess the aspects of objectives as a significant component of reading test (Pumfrey, 1986). It is further divided into five skills which cover reading. The five skills are as follows:

1. Literal Comprehension

The first skill is literal comprehension which emphasize on concepts and info which is clearly provided in the text. It just asks for the understanding from the reader regarding what he or she is reading. Previously researchers have pointed out that commonly teachers asks such questions in (Barrett, 1968)pre-reading stage (Kasulis, 1986). It falls at lowest level regarding hierarchy in Taxonomy. However, it should not be misinterpreted that it is not important as such questions serve as a boost the students' attention towards lesson (Gall, 1970).

2. Reorganization

It is the second skill which emphasize that reader must be able to assessment, incorporation and organization of information provided which is clearly stated in text. Notably, such type of questions (Barrett, 1968)are also appropriate in pre-reading stage because it assist a student to develop understanding of words. Importantly, it also do helps a student to develop understanding about ideas and how they are linked with each other (Alderson, 1984).

3. Inferential Comprehension

It's third skill of reading according to Taxonomy which asks to think and imagine more than what is provided in printed form. It is asked from the reader that he or she must summarize key information, supportive information, compare, arrange, cause and effect, and association. Additionally, it asks that reader must be able to anticipate outcomes and make interpretation of figures.

4. Evaluation

Evaluation is at fourth number in the Taxonomy in which interpretative, assessment and appreciation related higher-end questions are included. These questions are used for the development of thinking skills among students and teachers are asked to use such questions (Othman & Pilus, 2014). Critical assessment of the content being read is asked from the reader.

5. Appreciation

Appreciation is ranked fifth in the Taxonomy which asks for the capability of readers to cognitively respond to the readings. It is worthy to mention that the in present study the initial three stages of reading skills namely literal comprehension, organization and inferential comprehension are emphasized for getting acquiescence in line with the requirement of the Saudi National Assessment. Importantly, Malaysia READS is somehow similar to the Barrett's

Taxonomy (Alderson, 1984).”It is worthy to mention Lee (1999) according to which English language syllabus also mentions that skills regarding the language are required to be established collectively and must be treated in such manner that its recurrence and persistent application can add up to maximum learning output (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1990).

“The above discussion holds that Saudi students are anticipated to be equipped with a favorable attitude with regard to learn English and good English skills for communication in diverse circumstances and communities. “Above discussion also revealed that the skills and their subcategories asked by Saudi Basic Education Core Curriculum are similar with the three streamline categories of comprehension capabilities in Taxonomy of reading comprehension. Earlier discussed levels are literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. Conclusively, modified READS consist of three key categories of comprehension abilities in the Taxonomy of reading comprehension by Barrett.”It is stated that READS’ modified form is same, and it also do not contain cultural bias. It is important to mention that greater attention and recognition is focused on the development of reading performance indicator, therefore extensive know-how regarding the Barrett’s Taxonomy will increase the evaluation of reading comprehension abilities.”

When someone stores information or any experience, he or she has gone through it will ends up in becoming a schema. It is the stored information or events happened for long-run (Singhal, 1998). It can be defined as systematically storing information which includes in line with how they are perceived and reaction towards a difficult circumstance(s) (Merriam-Webster, 1999). While from another point of view it can be described as systematically stored information/knowledge in the mind of reader which he or she utilizes while going through latest experiences and information to construct meanings (Alvarez and Risko (1989). In addition, the German philosopher like Kant is acknowledged as a pioneer who initially put forward the schema which can be described as stored knowledge. In addition the author also put forward that to construct the meaning of latest knowledge the reader has to go through and recall what is already stored in mind (Zhao & Zhu, 2012).

While discussing its link with the reading it becomes necessary to mention that researchers in this domain focus of the significance of this paradigm to reading. Furthermore, it’s input in the assessment of reading comprehension process and particularly the construction of meaning and instructions how to read (Webster, 2001).Theory is significant because it has been used by various researchers and academicians to elaborate how to learn recall and comprehend the things and events which happen around. True spirit of schema originates with the postulation that meaning is not provided by text. It only serves as an instruction for reader regarding how to construct meaning by using the already existing knowledge, their experiences which they will link with the latest information available (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Therefore, when a reader is confronted with the latest information or topic then he or she will recall the information stored in mind and try to understand the latest one with the help of previous one (Hammash, 2004).

Going on further it is necessary to mention Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) according to whom schema is organized and acknowledged theory and also mentioned that there are various types of knowledge which is possessed by individuals and they do store it for long-run (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Whenever a reader is confronted with new information he or she uses the already stored knowledge to process and comprehend the meaning (Bischoff & Anderson, 2001). The new knowledge is inference, formed and stored with the help of old knowledge which is already stored and serves as a driver to process the latest one. At this point, it is worthy to mention that while encountering with latest knowledge the individuals try to neglect or modify to normalize the circumstances which are contradictory which they already have stored (Carroll (1999).

Importantly, Carrell (1984) argued that schema is not an all-in-one construct rather it has three types which are as follows: (1) linguistic schema which represents the already stored knowledge of the reader which is inclusive of grammar and vocabulary, (2) content schema covers the content domain of reading text which is inclusive of different facets such as having known the topic, cultural familiarity and previous events which happened in aligned with the text context (3) formal schema represents the summarizing, encoding, internalizing, coherence patterns of meta-understanding an evocative piece of knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 82). The researchers who support the schema theory argue that only linguistic knowledge is not solely sufficient to get the meaning of any text. To comprehend the meaning of text the reader has to recall his or her previous experience which makes him or her able for interaction with text and reach to the meaning intended by an author. It is worthy to mention findings of Zhao and Zhu (2012), according to which schema's functioning is dependent on the recall to the particular knowledge which is already stored in memory of an individual. When an individual is confronted with the latest circumstance either verbal or non-verbal, he or she will refer to the existing knowledge to resolve any issue which occurs. Therefore, it is concluded that the greater the knowledge is stored in mind of a reader the better his or her reading skill will be.

Schema is advantageous however it also has some drawbacks as well. Zhao and Zhu (2012) in their study entertained some limitations of schema which are as follows: (1) any reader lacking linguistic skill will not be capable to construct his or her linguistic schema (2) any reader with insufficient knowledge of culture from which text has originated or related to will be unable to understand fully even though he or she can understand words and structure of text (3) it is necessary that a reader must have knowledge regarding various types of text and genres. It is undeniable until reading instructor widens the student's scope of reading and let them get involved in different readings. Previously a study has argued that readers commonly employ the schema while he or she is reading. The greater application of schema will result in better understanding (Riswanto (2014). Whereas the teachers can act significantly by assisting the students in their learning and how to employ the schema, interpret the reading material and it can stimulate at any stage (pre and post reading). It can be stimulated at any stage however pre-reading stage is important as at this stage the instructor may prepare a reader to get him or herself to get involved in reading with various diminutions, suppositions and, rumours in turn they help a reader to make regarding the text while the

schema is activated. Conclusively, the present study will adopt these stages in administration of readings as well as discussing the findings.

III. Research Methodology

The research is to be established to answer the research questions. In this regards, it could be a primary plan of the research which consist of all the steps which are consummate from the researcher (Creswell, 1998). After seeking the importance of research design, mixed research design was established which consist of quantitative and qualitative approach. The mixed research approach also known the exploratory approach(Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).The quantitative data was found from the “adapted READS”, “although the qualitative data is consisting of document analysis and from the interview of semi-structured for the opinion which are experts with the analysis of document like “curriculum and English language policy in Saudi Arabia,” to name a few.” To collect the data, the target population of the current was from the English department of Saudi Arabia school of humanities which is year 1 to year 4. The target sample for the current study 100 students which represents the sample size of the study. Based on the sample of the study, the respondents were divided on the four group and each group was consisting of the twenty-five students. In the interview session, three lecturers of faculty members were selected from the humanities university of Saudi Arabia were selected. All of these samples were selected by using the purposive sampling technique.

Research Instruments

A research instrument was established to acquire the study objective. The main data gathering tool for the is Adapted READS which stands by “Reading Evaluation and Decoding System”. There was aprevaling original READS which was used in the Malaysian context and seemed to have a culture pf Malaysian in the test series. To confirm that an original read is comprises from the cultural biasness and could be applied in the context of Saudi Arabia. The information was gathered from the English experts. These experts were the senior lecturer from the Saudi Arabia universities. There was asked to the experts to check the original READS contents. “The experts examined each item to validate and approve the adapted READS by using Index of Consistency to depict their response to the statements based on the scale of (-1), (0) and (+1) as follows”:

+1 = Agree; 0 = Uncertain; -1 = Disagree

“The validity was computed through the following formula”

$$\text{Item Objective Congruence} = \frac{\sum R}{N}$$

Table1: Adapted Reads Validation

	Subject	Index of Consistency			
		1	2	3	Mean
1	"There are no cultural biasness such as in customs and traditions.				
2	"There are no contextual biasness such as currency, names, and places."				
3	"There are no cognitive biasness such as level of thinking."				
4	"There are no prejudices such as religious and ethnicity issues."				
5	"The format of the encoder is clear and well-organized."				
6	"The type of texts is suitable."				
7	"The length of text is suitable."				
8	"The level of difficulty is suitable for Saudi university educational level"".				

Adapted READS Evaluation

The valuation of the adapted READS was done by the same experts which were chosen for the original REDAS. Every item mean value if greater than 0.5 is represent the adapted READS suitability in the context of Saudi Arabia environment. The results of this are depicted in the following Table 2.

Table2: Adapted READS Validation

Subject		Index of Consistency				Notes
		1	2	3	Mean	
1	"There are no cultural biasness such as in customs and traditions."	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		
2	"There are no contextual biasness such as currency, names, and places."	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		
3	"There are no cognitive biasness such as level of thinking."	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		
4	"There are no prejudices such as religious and ethnicity issues."	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		
5	"The format of the encoder is clear and well-organized."	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		

6	“The type of texts is suitable.”	+	0	+	0.67	Somewhat
		1		1		Agree
7	“The length of text is suitable.”	+	+	+	1.0	Agree
		1	1	1		
8	“The level of difficulty is suitable for Saudi university educational level.””	+	0	0	0.65	Somewhat
		1				agree

Variables

The respondents in the current study was categorized into the independent and dependent and independent variable categorized. The independent variable for the current study was gender, years (1 to 4). The dependent variables were, above standard, below standard, achieve standard, academic writing.

IV. Data Analysis

The results were obtained by using the SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) 23 software. Both of the descriptive and inferential analysis was used to get score of the respondents from the test. The descriptive analysis presents the quantitative data in the form of frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentage. In addition, for the qualitative analysis, “document analysis of Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading comprehension, Saudi English Language Syllabus, Malaysian English Language Syllabus were established.”

Descriptive Statistics

The target sample of the current study was 100 students which were selected from the Saudi Arabia Universities by using the purposive technique. The descriptive statistics results are depicted in following Table in terms of age (19 to 23), gender (male and female), years (1 to 4).

Table3: The Respondents’ in Terms ofthe Gender, age and year.

		Frequen	Perce	Valid	Cumulative
		cy	nt	Percent	Percent
Valid	Male	Year 1	20	20.00	20.00
		Year 2	10	10.00	10.00
		Year 3	10	10.00	10.00
		Year 4	10	10.00	10.00
	Female	Year 1	20	20.00	20.00
		Year 2	10	10.00	10.00
		Year 3	10	10.00	10.00
		Year 4	10	10.00	10.00
Age					
	1	18	18.00	18.00	18.00

9					
2	30		30.00	30.00	48.00
0					
2	24		24.00	24.00	72.00
1					
2	17		17.00	17.00	89.00
2					
2	11		11.00	11.00	100.00
3					

Inferential statistics

Research Question One

RQ1: “What are the profiles of the universities students’ reading comprehension proficiency in Saudi Arabia based on the benchmarking by the adapted READS results?”

To answer the following question, the ANNOVA test was to be employed which shows the comparison within the performance standard which is performance according to the demographics like gender and study year. The key findings have shown that reading of the students of university comprehension is entirely based on the gender, mean score of females is 3.025, while the male student mean score is 2.750. The key findings have shown that student score of the female is high as compare to male student. “The data in the above indicated the profile of female students from year one to your, which shows that the mean for year was 2.500, standard error .247, lower bound 2.010 and upper bound 2.990, for the second year mean 2.500, standard error .349, lower bound at 1.807 and upper bound at 3.193, while for the third year the mean for the female students 3.500, while standard error .349, lower bound was 2.807 and upper bound stood at 4.193. For the fourth year, mean stand at 3.600. While standard error .349, lower bound 2.907 and upper bund at 3.993.” These findings are supported with the extant literature of Alsamadani (2011) who explained that there is still huge gape within the actual proficiency level students and their expected reading proficiency, even at the level of the university. Nonetheless, the extant literature on the reading is suggested that various other factors which might be contributed to the student’s poor reading comprehension. The results which were obtained from the following test are depicted in the following Table 4, 5, 6, 7.

Table4: “Tests of Between-Subjects Effects”

Dependent Variable: Performance Standard								
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	26.690 ^a	7	3.813	3.135	.005	.193	21.944	.933
Intercept	762.300	1	762.30	626.73	.0	.872	626.735	1.000

			0	5	00			
Gender	1.729	1	1.729	1.421	.2	.015	1.421	.218
					36			
Year	24.940	3	8.313	6.835	.0	.182	20.505	.973
					00			
Gender * Year	.060	3	.020	.016	.9	.001	.049	.053
					97			
Error	111.900	92	1.216					
Total	917.000	10						
		0						
Corrected Total	138.590	99						

a. R Squared = .193 (Adjusted R Squared = .131)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Table.5: “Profile of University student Reading Comprehension Proficiency based on Gender”

Dependent Variable: Performance Standard				
Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	3.025	.163	2.701	3.349
Male	2.750	.163	2.426	3.074

Table6:Profile of University student Reading Comprehension Proficiency based on Year”

Dependent Variable: Performance Standard				
Year	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Year 1	2.400	.174	2.054	2.746
Year 2	2.350	.247	1.860	2.840
Year 3	3.350	.247	2.860	3.840
Year 4	3.450	.247	2.960	3.940

Table7:Profile of University student Reading Comprehension Proficiency based on Gender and Study Year”

Dependent Variable: Performance Standard					
Gender	Year	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	Year 1	2.500	.247	2.010	2.990

	Year 2	2.500	.349	1.807	3.193
	Year 3	3.500	.349	2.807	4.193
	Year 4	3.600	.349	2.907	4.293
Male	Year 1	2.300	.247	1.810	2.790
	Year 2	2.200	.349	1.507	2.893
	Year 3	3.200	.349	2.507	3.893
	Year 4	3.300	.349	2.607	3.993

V. Conclusion

The current research has shown that there a number of readings which are student do for their schools and for their personal enjoyments have paid a positive effect on their achievement of their reading, comprehensions skills of readings, and also contributes to the development of the academic knowledge (Cox & Guthrie, 2001; Stanovich, 2000). Thus, based on this, “the aim of the study is to investigate the profile of universities students reading comprehensions proficiency in Saudi Arabia based on the benchmarking by the adapted READS results”.To achieve this objective a mixed method approach was formulated. The key findings have shown that reading of the university student comprehension is entirely based on the gender, mean score of females is 3.025, while the male student mean score is 2.750. The key findings have shown that student score of the female is high as compare to male student. These findings are supported with the extant literature of Alsamadani (2011) who explained that there is still huge gape within the actual proficiency level students and their expected reading proficiency, even at the level of the university. As the study was conducted on the universities of the Saudi Arabia. In this regards, the current study results could provide benefits to the universities, policy makers for enhancing the reading efficiency in the academic perspective and also to the educationist in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and also for other Arab countries which have same education system. “In view of the discussions on language of instruction policies in Saudi it is very well conceivable that the current design might be applied to investigating reading proficiency in local languages. Therefore, further work needs to be done to establish whether factors such as teaching of text structure, vocabulary instruction and the use of active learning methodologies in settings can directly improve reading comprehension.”

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