

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING  
STRATEGIES ON DEVELOPING READING  
COMPREHENSION AMONG STUDENTS IN  
SAUDI ARABIA**

**LINA ABDURRAHMAN MUSALLAM  
BASHAYREH**

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2018**

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING  
STRATEGIES ON DEVELOPING READING  
COMPREHENSION AMONG STUDENTS IN  
SAUDI ARABIA**

by

**LINA ABDURRAHMAN MUSALLAM  
BASHAYREH**

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2018**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who believed in me and raised me to cherish learning and knowledge. Their prayers have lightened my way and kept me going. Their love and consideration gave me courage to face challenges and overcome obstacles.

To my husband, Abdullah and my children, Saffanah, Faris, Sulafah, and Beshr for their encouragement, sacrifice, and understanding during all these years. They dedicated their time and happiness with patience and tolerance in order for me to complete this long journey. If it was not for their support, I would not have been able to accomplish this.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost, I thank Allah for His guidance and infinite blessings that He bestowed on me. This thesis is one example of His myriad blessings.

I would like to express my deep and genuine gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Mohamad Jafre for his continuous support of my PhD study and related research, for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His inspiration and guidance helped me do my research and write this thesis. I could not imagine having a better advisor and mentor for my PhD study.

I would also like to convey my sincere appreciation to my co- supervisor Prof. Muhamad Kamarul, and Dr. Amelia Abdullah for their insightful comments. I am particularly thankful and deeply indebted to Prof. Shaik Abdul Malik Ismail for his thoughtfulness and resourceful remarks that guided me since the beginning and throughout my study.

My sincere thanks are extended to Madam Azlina Md Sadiq and her colleagues; Ms. Mazlina Baharudin, Ms. Aishah Wahab, Ms. Nur Faraliana Mohd Yusoff, and Ms. Siti Nor Hamahida Zainal at the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation for making the Bahasa Malayu so fun, burden- free, and enjoyable to learn.

Sincere thanks are also extended to all the IPS (Institute of Postgraduate) staff members at the USM. Their prompt and in- detail replies to all my emails and queries helped put me on track. Special thanks go to Mr. Mohammed Nazri Bin Mohd Feroz Khan at the IPS help desk. For handling my queries and concerns with professionalism and calmness and a big smile on his face. Thank you all.

I am indebted to my best friend, Mrs. Amira Ali not only for all her useful suggestions but also for being there to listen when I needed an ear. A big “Thank you!” also goes out to all my colleagues in the ELC, especially Basma, Heba B., Zainab, Salihah, Canan, and Mounira for their prayers and support. Their invaluable contributions and comments added so much to this research.

To my family back in Jordan, I extend my appreciation for their encouragement and for being there for me. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, brothers, and two sisters Esra’ and Reema for their huge support throughout my education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>ABSTRAK .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>xv</b>

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1	Introduction .....	1
1.2	Study Setting .....	5
1.3	Problem Statement .....	9
1.4	Research Objectives .....	13
1.5	Research Questions .....	14
1.6	Research Hypotheses .....	14
1.7	Conceptual Framework .....	15
1.8	Study Significance .....	18
1.9	Definition of Terms.....	19
1.9.1	Reading Comprehension .....	19
1.9.2	The Interactive Reading Comprehension Model .....	19
1.9.3	Training Program: .....	20
1.9.4	The Preparatory Year Program (PYP) .....	20
1.9.5	The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies (MARS) ....	21
1.9.6	Metacognitive Reading Strategies .....	21
1.9.7	CALLA Reading Approach .....	22
1.10	Study Limitations .....	22

1.11	Summary .....	24
------	---------------	----

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction .....	26
2.2	Theoretical Considerations.....	27
2.2.1	Reading Comprehension .....	27
2.2.2	Metacognition .....	28
2.2.3	Metacognition and Reading Comprehension: .....	30
2.2.3(a)	Metacognitive reading strategies: .....	33
2.2.3(b)	CALLA Model .....	35
2.2.3(c)	Cognitive and Metacognitive Reading Strategies .....	37
2.2.3(c)(i)	Making Predictions .....	38
2.2.3(c)(ii)	Answering Questions: .....	38
2.2.3(c)(iii)	Finding Main Ideas and Supporting Details: .....	39
2.2.3(c)(iv)	Guessing Meaning from Context: .....	39
2.2.3(c)(v)	Making Inferences:.....	40
2.2.3(c)(vi)	Summarization: .....	40
2.2.4	Reading Comprehension Models .....	41
2.2.4(a)	The Bottom-up Reading Comprehension Model .....	42
2.2.4(b)	The Top-down Reading Comprehension Model.....	43
2.2.4(c)	The Interactive Reading Comprehension Model .....	45
2.2.5	Schema Theory.....	48
2.3	Theoretical Framework .....	51
2.4	Studies on the effect of reading strategies on reading comprehension .....	53
2.4.1	Foreign Studies .....	53
2.4.2	Saudi and Arab Studies .....	62
2.5	Summary .....	75

## **CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

3.1	Introduction .....	78
3.2	Research Design.....	78
3.3	Study Participants .....	80
3.3.1	Student Participants.....	80
3.3.2	Teacher Participants .....	81
3.2.3	Interview Raters .....	82
3.4	Research Instruments .....	82
3.4.1	Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) .....	83
3.4.2	Reading Comprehension Exams .....	85
3.4.3	Interview .....	87
3.5	Validity and Reliability .....	91
3.6	Pilot study .....	94
3.6	Study Variables .....	98
3.6	Intervention Procedure .....	99
3.6.1	The Training Program .....	99
3.6.2	The Control- Group Reading Instruction Scenario .....	104
3.6.3	The Experimental Group Reading Instruction Scenario .....	107
3.6.3(a)	Preparation Phase .....	110
3.6.3(b)	Presentation Phase.....	112
3.6.3(c)	Practice Phase.....	113
3.6.3(d)	Self- Evaluation Phase .....	113
3.6.3(e)	Expansion Phase .....	114
3.7	Study implementation Procedure and Data Collection Method.....	116
3.8	Data Analysis Procedure .....	118
3.9	Summary .....	119



## CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction .....	121
4.2	Quantitative Results .....	122
4.2.1	Study Groups' Homogeneity .....	122
4.2.2	Research Findings .....	125
4.2.2(a)	The reading strategies that are frequently used by the experimental and control group students. ....	125
4.2.2(b)	The effect of the training program on the experimental group reading strategies employment.....	128
4.2.2(c)	The effect of the training program on the experimental group reading comprehension performance.....	131
4.2.2(d)	The reading comprehension strategies that are most affected by the training program. ....	133
4.3	Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis Findings .....	135
4.4	Qualitative Results: The experimental group experiences in the training program that was instructed to them. ....	135
4.4.1	Previous Reading Difficulties .....	138
4.4.1(a)	Difficulty Finding Main Ideas and Supporting Details	139
4.4.1(b)	Difficulty Finding New Word Definitions .....	139
4.4.1(c)	Difficulty Finding answers to questions .....	140
4.4.2	Experiences on Metacognitive Reading Strategies .....	141
4.4.2(a)	Helpful Strategies.....	141
4.4.2(b)	Enjoyable Strategies.....	142
4.4.2(c)	Can be Expanded.....	143
4.4.2(d)	Negative Attitudes.....	144
4.4.3	Most Appreciated Strategies .....	144
4.4.3(a)	Main Ideas and Supporting Details .....	145
4.4.3(b)	Guessing Words from Context.....	146

4.4.3(c)	Finding Answers to Questions .....	146
4.4.4	Training Program Reading Material .....	147
4.4.4(a)	Reading Activities .....	148
4.4.4(a)(i)	Helpful, Beneficial, and Fun .....	148
4.4.4(a)(ii)	More practice Time Needed.....	149
4.4.4(b)	Training program Reading Topics .....	149
4.4.4(b)(i)	Positive Experiences .....	150
4.4.4(b)(ii)	Negative Experiences.....	151
4.4.5	Responses on the Training Program and Suggestions .....	152
4.4.5(a)	Positive Experiences in the Training Program .....	152
4.4.5(b)	Negative Experiences in the Training Program.....	154
4.4.5(c)	Suggestions for improvement .....	155
4.5	Summary of the Qualitative Data Analysis Findings.....	156
4.6	Summary .....	156

## **CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

5.1	Introduction .....	158
5.2	Overview of the Study .....	158
5.3	Summary and Discussion of the Study Findings .....	159
5.3.1	The frequently used reading strategies by the two study groups ..	160
5.3.2	The Effect of the Training Program on the Experimental Group Reading Strategies Employment .....	162
5.3.3	The Effect of the Training Program on the Experimental Group Reading Comprehension Performance.....	164
5.3.4	The Effect of the Training Program on the Targeted Reading Strategies .....	166
5.3.5	Experimental Group Experiences in the Training Program .....	168
5.4	Pedagogical Implications .....	174

5.5	Recommendations for Further research .....	176
5.6	Conclusion .....	177
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>		<b>179</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		

## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 3.1	Study Sample Distribution and Intervention	81
Table 3.2	MARSI Questionnaire Usage Level	85
Table 3.3	Semi- structured Interview Codes and Categories	90
Table 3.4	Raters’ Agreement on Interview Thematic Analysis	91
Table 3.5	(MARSI) Questionnaire Pilot Study Results	96
Table 3.6	Reading Comprehension Exam (pretest) Reliability Analysis	98
Table 3.7	Reading Comprehension Exam (posttest) Reliability Analysis	98
Table 3.8	Lesson Plan Outline for the Control Group	106
Table 3.9	Lesson Plan Outline for Experimental Group	108
Table 3.10	Metacognitive Reading Strategies Guidelines	111
Table 3.11	Summary of the Two Study Groups’ Reading- Instruction Scenario	116
Table 3.12	Data Analysis Procedure	118
Table 4.1	Independent T-test/ MARSI Questionnaire Results	123
Table 4.2	Independent T-test/ Reading Comprehension Results	124
Table 4.3	Metacognitive Reading Strategies Employment	126
Table 4.4	Paired t- test/ MARSI Questionnaire pre- posttests Results	128
Table 4.5	Independent T-test results comparing experimental and control groups (MARSI questionnaire) posttest mean values	130
Table 4.4	Paired Samples T- Test comparing experimental group’s pre- posttests reading comprehension results	132
Table 4.7	Independent Samples T- Test results to compare tribal and remote scores of the experimental group on the reading strategies	133
Table 4.8	Interview Themes and Subthemes	137

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1      The Conceptual Framework of The Study	17
Figure 2.1      Based on Chamot & Robins, (2007).	36
Figure 2.2      (Bottom- up model). Based on Nuttall, (1996)	43
Figure 2.3      (Top-down model). Based on Nuttall, (1996).	45
Figure 2.4      The theoretical framework of the study	52
Figure 3. 1      Research Design and Methodology	79
Figure 3.2      Study Variables	99
Figure 4.1      Study Groups' Homogeneity; MARSI questionnaire Mean Values	123
Figure 4.2      Metacognitive Reading Strategies Employment Mean Values of both study groups	127
Figure 4.3      MARSI questionnaire pre- posttest Mean Values	129
Figure 4.4      Experimental and control groups (MARSI) post-test Mean Values	131

## **LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS**

CALLA	Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach Model
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELC	English Language Center
L2	Second Language
MARSI	Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory
PYP	Preparatory Year Program

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

<b>APPENDICES A</b>	Reading comprehension Pretest
<b>APPENDICES B</b>	Reading comprehension Pretest
<b>APPENDICES C</b>	Reading Comprehension Posttest
<b>APPENDICES D</b>	Reading Comprehension Posttest
<b>APPENDICES E</b>	MARSI Questionnaire
<b>APPENDICES F</b>	The Training Program Lesson Plans
<b>APPENDICES G</b>	The Training Program Reading Topics
<b>APPENDICES H</b>	Interview Questions
<b>APPENDICES I</b>	Transcripts
<b>APPENDICES J</b>	Student Evaluation Checklist
<b>APPENDICES K</b>	Validity Panel and Raters

**KEBERKESANAN PROGRAM LATIHAN BERDASARKAN STRATEGI  
MEMBACA METAKOGNITIF UNTUK MEMBANGUNKAN PEMAHAMAN  
BACAAN PELAJAR EFL DI ARAB SAUDI**

**ABSTRAK**

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji keberkesanan program latihan berdasarkan strategi-strategi pembacaan metakognitif terhadap pemahaman bacaan pelajar EFL. Untuk mencapai maksud tersebut dan bagi tujuan pengumpulan data penyelidikan, penyelidik telah menggunakan pendekatan metodologi campuran. Instrumentasi penyelidikan kuantitatif mengandungi versi Kesedaran Metakognitif Inventori Strategi-Strategi Pembacaan (MARSI) yang telah disesuaikan, yang dibangunkan oleh Moktari dan Reichard, (2002) dan peperiksaan pemahaman bacaan sebagai praujian dan pascaujian. Alat kualitatif pula mengandungi temu bual separa berstruktur yang dijalankan pada penghujung kajian antara penyelidik dengan 10 orang wakil sampel daripada kumpulan percubaan yang menawarkan diri untuk ditemu bual. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada 70 pelajar EFL daripada Program Tahun Persediaan (PYP) yang dibahagikan sama banyak kepada dua kumpulan pelajar; (percubaan dan kawalan) dan dipilih khusus untuk mengambil bahagian dalam satu intervensi selama 8 minggu mengajar. Berdasarkan keputusan praujian pelajar yang mengambil bahagian dalam kedua-dua alat kuantitatif, penyelidik menyesuaikan silibus bacaan semasa dalam ELC dan mengukuhkannya demi memenuhi keperluan pelajar untuk mendapat latihan membaca dan arahan berdasarkan strategi yang lebih banyak yang bertujuan meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan mereka. Program latihan ini mengandungi enam strategi pembacaan terpilih, petikan bacaan berorientasikan wanita dan pelbagai aktiviti yang memperkaya dan menarik. Selepas selesai latihan



dan data penyelidikan dikumpul dan dianalisis, hasil keputusan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat kesan strategi pembacaan metakognitif yang signifikan ke atas penggunaan strategi pelajar dan kesannya terhadap pemahaman bacaan mereka. Selanjutnya, analisis bertemakan data temu bual menunjukkan kepuasan dan sikap positif secara keseluruhannya dalam kalangan para pelajar yang mengambil bahagian dalam program latihan, strategi-strategi pembacaan metakognitif dan bahan bacaan program latihan. Kajian diakhiri dengan beberapa cadangan untuk kajian dan penerokaan selanjutnya ke atas strategi pembacaan dan hubungannya dengan pemahaman bacaan terutama dalam konteks EFL.

# **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING STRATEGIES ON DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION AMONG STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a training program based on metacognitive reading strategies on EFL students' reading comprehension. To that end and for research data collection purposes, the researcher applied mixed methodology approach. The quantitative research instrumentation consisted of an adapted version of the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) that was developed by Mokhtari and Reichard, (2002) and a reading comprehension exam as pre and posttests. The qualitative tool, on the other hand comprised semi- structured interviews that were conducted at the end of the study between the researcher and 10 samples from the experimental group who volunteered to be interviewed. The study sample consisted of 70 EFL students in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) who were equally distributed over two study groups; (experimental and control) and were purposefully chosen to participate in an intervention that lasted for 8 teaching weeks. Based on the participating students' pretest results in both quantitative tools, the researcher adapted the current reading curriculum in the ELC and customized it to fit students' needs for more reading practice and strategy- based instruction towards promoting their reading comprehension. The training program consisted of six selected reading strategies, female- oriented reading passages, and various enriching and engaging activities. After the training has completed and research data were collected and analyzed, the resultant findings showed that there was a significant effect of metacognitive reading strategies on students' strategy employment and consequently on their reading

comprehension. Further, thematic analysis of the interview data revealed an overall satisfaction and positive attitude on the part of the participating students towards the training program, metacognitive reading strategies, and the reading material of training program. The study was concluded by some recommendations for further study and exploration on reading strategies and their relation to reading comprehension, especially in the EFL context.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

*In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful. "Proclaim! (or read) in the name of the Lord and Cherisher who created \* Created man, out of a clot (a piece of congealed blood) \*" (Quran 96<sup>th</sup> surah: 1-5).*

The first Qur'an revelations upon prophet Mohammad (PBUH) guide people to read in order to acquire knowledge. Reading not only affects language and thinking abilities, its impact on all aspects of human life is tremendous. The first surah of Quran emphasizes the importance to read for through reading, people acquire the most important means for establishing and developing civilization. Due to its importance to success in human life and all content areas of language arts, such as social studies, science, and math, reading is a fundamental language skill for achieving and developing educational and intellectual growth (Heller& Grenleaf, 2007; Mohammadi& Abidin, 2011). Further, the importance of acquiring reading skill lies in the fact that it: "functions as a gateway to the world, enabling individuals to effectively participate and compete in a knowledge-based environment." (Mohamed et al. 2012, p.159). Likewise, acquiring good reading skills is essential to handle and be able to function actively in today's life.

It goes without saying that the reading ability, especially in English has become a predictor of educational success (Snow& Biacarosa, 2003) and even economic growth (Mohamed et al. 2012). Moreover, reading enhances EFL students' academic achievement and motivation to learn. EFL Students with weak reading skills become unmotivated, lose educational confidence, and become at risk of dropping out of school (Moats & Tolman, 2009). Emphasizing the importance of the reading skill in English to EFL students, Al-Qahtani and Lin (2016) stated that:

"Reading is an indispensable skill for foreign language learners."(p.1519). Although EFL students might not need to use or speak in English, they need to read in English to be able to access the information provided via this language (Eskey,2005). Nonetheless, enabling EFL students to achieve better reading abilities and comprehension of what they read, demands they should be taught what, how and when to use appropriate strategies when reading.

Wang (2009) pointed out that an increasingly important trend in strategy learning has evolved since the second half of the previous century. She explained that interest in the role of metacognition on reading instruction is growing. Similarly, Zhang and Seepho, (2013) suggested that in order to improve students' reading comprehension, they must become familiar with what is required of them to do as they carry out a reading process, then they will be able to manage their reading more successfully as they become skilled and independent readers.

In line with the above, Noor (2010) indicated that good reading skills are vital as they facilitate the ability to process information as well as to interact with a print at a higher learning level. Noor (2010) also debated that many first-year university students, specifically language learners, are under prepared for the reading requirements of their education level which leads to difficulties. Thus, readers' strategy awareness which is crucial for their academic success must be optimized. Extensive studies on comprehension have proven the efficacy of metacognitive reading strategies on students' reading level.

Literature on this topic stresses the importance of using appropriate metacognitive strategies in order to improve the quality of readers' reading experience. Whether students are proficient readers or not determines their success in almost all other subjects and learning skills. Proficient readers will be more likely to do better in their exams and achieve better because they are able to comprehend,

manage their time, derive meaning from text, perform assigned tasks, and simply work better, (Al Khreshah, 2008).

Metacognitively, Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) suggested that less competent readers, who lack awareness of their cognitive process, must be assisted to acquire and employ the reading strategies that have been proven as being effective. Moreover, Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) explained that teachers should prepare their students to become competent readers through increasing their reading strategy knowledge. They further argued that teachers' knowledge of the reading strategies employed by their students, can lead to more effective reading instruction.

Educational research on the effective instruction of reading skills have emphasized the closely related role of metacognitive reading strategies in aiding EFL students' reading comprehension. Students' awareness and thinking of their reading strategies helps them become more engaged in the reading process and leads to better results with their reading comprehension. Additionally, reading instruction needs to be strategy- focused to produce efficacious readers and learners that are capable of dealing with college and modern life demands, technological advancements, and highly qualified careers (Handyside, 2007).

By the same token, an increasing demand has grown on acquiring training on thinking skills, especially metacognitive thinking skills due to the tremendous development in the field of information to keep up with rapid changes in the means and methods of learning and teaching. Thus, educationists as well as researchers are required to design and develop effective training activities and programs that can train students on modern reading skills and strategies as well as metacognitive thinking skills. Wang (2009) indicated that developing EFL students' awareness of their reading strategies will increase their control over the reading process as they monitor what and how they read which will help them employ problem solving skills

to overcome the obstacles they might face as they read and consequently facilitate their reading process. Additionally, raising students' awareness of the importance of these strategies will result in transferring the learning- monitoring responsibility from teachers to students (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) and as such create student-centered classes. Schraw (1998) pointed out that strategy instruction can promote metacognitive awareness.

Furthermore, the importance of the reading skill in various contexts made training students on how to employ and effectively build up the reading strategies to make them become independent and successful readers imperative. Thus, researchers and educators seek methods of reading instruction that guarantee that students fulfill better learning and comprehension results as well as instilling lifelong reading skills. Similarly, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) in their turn argued that in order to develop students' reading proficiency and comprehension as well as to design reading skills development training programs in an effective manner, teachers' knowledge of their students' knowledge about reading and reading strategies must be increased.

Pretorius (2002) argued that reading proficiency and academic success positively correlate at all ages, from primary school straight through to university level. This entails that reading classes should become more student- oriented. Thus, in the process of enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension, EFL reading instructors must train their students on how to use appropriate reading strategies that suit different reading stages until they become able to actively engage and interact with the text to become self- directed readers. Kito (Hammash, 2004) argued that contrary to the traditional view of the reading comprehension which was considered a skill in which the reader is a passive recipient of whatever writers deliver through the print, research on metacognition emphasizes that passive readers are poor, bored, and less achieving readers.

In short, elevating the reading skill demands that the reading comprehension which consists of many skills is enhanced through the utilization of proper reading strategies and tactics that readers consciously carry out throughout the reading process in order to master these skills. In addition, empowering students and training them on using good reading strategies is essential for learning skills, (Al Shehani, 2002) and motivates them to become engaged in the reading in a way that encourages them to positively interact with the text to reach the ultimate goal of the reading experience which is comprehension. Finally, in an attempt to achieve this endeavor, the researcher of this study sought to explore Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension after having been exposed to the training program that was based on metacognitive reading strategies.

## **1.2 Study Setting**

Saudi Arabia is located in the heart of the Middle East. It is a developing country with a growing population of over 31 million people. As oil was discovered in the 1930s and oil- based industries flourished in the 1950s, the need to recruit specialized as well as qualified Saudis to cope with the growing economy emerged. This dramatic economical, industrial, and commercial prosperity entailed the importance of developing Saudi human resources to respond to the country's rising demand on professional and well-trained manpower which was almost entirely fulfilled by the flux of foreign laborers, (Al-Seghayer, 2014) who interestingly make almost one third of the Saudi population. Saudi policy makers realized that there has become a need for creative initiatives that can provide effective learning opportunities that suit Saudis' needs in the present time and future to enable them to become active participants in the overall developmental process in their community.



In its endeavor to meet the needs of this rapid economic activity and to prepare highly qualified nationals, the Saudi Government set a plan to improve the national educational system and allocated a huge budget for this purpose. Although it was established almost two decades after the first Saudi university was opened in 1956, the Ministry of Education (1975) is now supervising and regulating about 25 different universities and over 36 thousand schools, (Ministry of Education, 2016) that are scattered over the country's different cities.

The Saudi Government represented by the Ministry of Education made various arrangements to encourage the nationals to pursue their education which were mainly financial, though. For instance, public universities and schools in Saudi Arabia offer free education, books, transportation, and dormitories for students who come from other cities (Alsubaie ,2014). The Ministry also provides reimbursement for the printing costs of Doctoral dissertations and Masters' thesis for postgraduate students as well as paying SR1000 as a monthly allowance to every university student. This is supported by (Al Samadani,2008; Alsubaie, 2014) who reported that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made available mammoth budgets to support the Saudi national education and to make it feasible to all Saudis.

In line with the above, King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Program was launched in 2005 to further ensure that Saudi nationals obtain high qualifications that enable them to compete in the local and international market with an announced budget of SR210 billion in 2015 (Saudi bureau, 2016). There are about 80 thousand Saudi students who benefited from this program. Many of them finished their studies and joined the labor force while others are still studying different majors at different international universities worldwide with scholarships provided by the Saudi Government. In 2007, King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz public education development project(Tatweer) with an estimated cost of SR11.8 billion was initiated to review and

improve the quality of the educational system in Saudi. The project targeted to achieve a number of objectives including; curricula development, requalification of teachers, and educational environment improvement (Tatweer, 2014).

The utilization of the English language to become the language of instruction at university education level entailed further improvement at school level (Habbash, 2011). The main change in English education in Saudi at school level took place in the year 2010 when the Saudi Ministry of Education decided that students in public schools must begin learning English in the fourth grade rather than intermediate grades (7- 9) as was the case before since 1927, (Alamri, 2008; Al-Qahtani, 2010). It has become required of all Saudi public schools to provide 2 hours of English language instruction every week to elementary stage students which increase to become four classes for the intermediate stage students, while secondary school students receive four to five 45- minutes' sessions of English instruction on a weekly basis, (Al- Qahtani, 2016).

At university level, the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) which receives students upon finishing high school before moving into university various faculties was a continuation in the same direction. The successful experience with this program at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in the academic year (2006- 2007) was contagious that it shortly spread in the rest of Saudi public and private universities as well. The major goal of this program is to further improve the knowledge and proficiency level of Saudi students, mainly in English education and in other fundamental subjects, such as math, chemistry, and physics.

Nevertheless, this was not sufficient to harvest fruitful results as students' achievement in English in general and in the reading skill in particular was below the required level (Al-Qahtani, 2010; Al-Roomy, 2013). Regardless of the enthusiasm and expansion of education which took place at different levels across the country to

develop the educational system and educational outcomes in general, indicators were not yet reflective of satisfying results in English language education and was still: "very low and does not reach government goals." (Alsubaie, 2014, p.36). Al-Seghayer (2014) indicated that although it is believed that English became part of the Saudi curriculum since the late 1920s, the outcomes are still insufficient. He also noted that:

*"Regardless of such status, functions, and exerted efforts, Saudi English education continue to seriously suffer on all aspects and that the outcome has not been satisfying or, to state the least, is not up to the mark. Specifically, the English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' proficiency level in English remains inadequate and below expectation." (2014, p. 17).*

Al-Seghayer (2014) attributed the poor and disappointing outcomes of the English language education to four main obstacles that seem to hinder the success and advancement of the EFL teaching- learning process in Saudi Arabia at a satisfactory level. These constraints include: (1) Constraints related to Saudi EFL students' beliefs towards learning English. Al-Seghayer, (2014) indicated that Saudi EFL students come to the language classrooms with negative attitudes and low intrinsic motivation. He further explained that this is due to a number of reasons among which is students' anxiety towards English language as they feel it is difficult to learn. Also, they do not feel that English learning fulfills their needs and consequently believe that their efforts in this regard will not pay off. As such, their abilities remain confined to those of passing English exams or passing English language requested subjects, (Al-Seghayer, 2014)

The second kind of constraints on the list are those related to the Saudi curriculum which Al-Seghayer, (2014) attributed to the currently used course books which do not focus on instilling learning skills in students. They also, according to him, refer to the short time given to teachers to cover the required material. He further added the lack of learning aids and limitations imposed on the teaching

methodology to this category. (3) Constraints related to the administrative body. In this regard, Al-Seghayer, (2014) pointed out that these are the boundaries that are set by the Saudi Ministry of Education through a centralized kind of system whereupon the Ministry regulates, supervises, and controls the educational process throughout the country and includes the curriculum, guidelines, and deadlines that everyone has to comply with. Finally, (4) Constraints that are reflective of pedagogical shortcomings that hinder Saudi students from achieving better English learning. Al-Seghayer, (2014) noted that the inadequacy of teachers' professional development plans and projects, lack of incentives for hard-working teachers, unavailability of teacher-training resources, and teachers' employment of traditional teaching methods in the Language classes add to the complexity of these constraints.

In the statement problem, the challenges that seem to hinder the reading skill development are discussed in depth in line with the reading- in English skill and why it is still yielding unsatisfactory educational outcomes in Saudi universities in general, (Ismail and Tawalbeh, 2015) and in the (ELC), PYP where the current study was conducted, in particular.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

In the context of reading in English and despite its tremendous significance to the overall target language achievement, it is not only still viewed and handled as another learning skill that is only performed during English reading classes but also: "Reading is often marginalized in a Saudi EFL classroom settings." (Al-Qahtani and Lin, 2016, p.1519). Further, the problems and boundaries that negatively impact the English language education in Saudi in general seem to affect the reading skill in L2. In the statement problem, the various factors that hinder Saudi EFL students from

meeting the desired reading performance as well as the reading comprehension levels are discussed.

Many of the language- learning methods have been subject to change over the past few decades due to the fact that the traditional means of instruction were no longer able to keep pace with the modern demands that countries worldwide are undergoing and therefore they lost the ability to contribute to the developmental process effectively (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Numerous studies on EFL/ ESL reading skill provided evidence on the positive effects of strategy- based reading instruction. Nonetheless, many EFL instructors in Saudi still use the conventional reading methods, such as the grammar translation method (Al Nooh; McPherson, 2013) which concentrate on memorization of the text vocabulary and linguistic structures at school and university level.

Why do many EFL instructors still follow the traditional approach of reading instruction and ignore modern approaches that were research- proven to be more efficient? Wang (2009) commented that some of them hold the assumption that once EFL students are made familiar with grammatical rules and vocabulary knowledge, their reading in English will become automatic. This assumption, nonetheless, has become, expressed Smith (2004), problematic as research has proven that even EFL students with good grammatical and vocabulary knowledge still have issues in comprehending a reading text (Wang, 2009).

Althewini (2016) suggested that students' unsatisfactory reading results are due to improper reading instruction methods which language instructors employ in reading in English classes. Official university records indicated that  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the total number of students registered in the PYP fail each semester. With regard to the ELC, where the researcher is holding a teaching position, reading achievement situation, the Testing Unit records reveal that the majority of students' reading scores fall in

the good and satisfactory levels (60- 69) based on the reading section in the midterm and final exams. Students' reading scores reflect weak reading abilities and low reading comprehension performance level which can be attributed to a number of factors, among which are scarcity of good reading strategies, appealing reading topics, and engaging reading activities added to teachers' indifference about instilling good reading behavior and habits in their students.

Speaking out of their experience as EFL teachers, Ismail and Tawalbeh (2015) mentioned that: "teachers' practices in Saudi universities are far from teaching reading skills and strategies", and even remarked that there is: " this huge gap between the world's rapid movement toward teaching reading skills and strategies and the reality of reading instruction in Saudi Arabia." (Masadeh, 2015, p.72). Masadeh, (2015) further reported that the way reading is delivered in Saudi EFL classes reflects that teachers lack knowledge of what reading and reading comprehension are. Thus, their poor content and strategy knowledge is reflected negatively on their students' learning and reading skill.

Wang's (1999) believed that reading materials are also a major problem in reading. Almost all of the selected reading topics in the current curriculum are irrelevant to students' interest and culture. None of them address Saudi traditions or customs, nor do they address female students' interest or need for learning and knowledge. Despite the fact all Saudi educational bodies adopt the single- sex educational policy (Alsubaie, 2014; Al Qahtani & Lin, 2016), male and female students share the same reading curriculum. The same reading material and reading topics are imposed on all students. Very few of these topics are suitable to female students or are female- oriented. For example, topics about the "history of soccer", "decreasing crime rates in Canada" or about how "the Satere- Mawe tribe's boys can become men in the Brazilian Amazon jungle" are neither interesting nor appealing to

female students. In this regard, Schiefele (1999) pointed out that the reading topics, especially those expressing “personal interest” have a great effect on readers’ motivation and thus their reading comprehension. The current reading material fosters grammar and vocabulary learning but does not develop students’ engagement or reading comprehension achievement, (Albednah, 1982; Wang, 2009).

In his study on reading comprehension challenges which Saudi EFL students encounter, Alsubaie (2014) pointed out: “Since the Saudi Arabian curriculum is so centralized and standardized, neither students nor teachers have much opportunity to select reading texts or textbooks to suit individual students' interests.” (p.42). Some other problems the researcher was able to identify through interviewing his subjects were students' lack of knowledge of reading strategies, their dissatisfaction with ineffective teaching practices such as teachers' employment of traditional instruction methods in delivering reading, and ineffective curriculum.

Finally, while "Lack of reading strategies training,"( Al Qahtani & Lin ,2016, p.1519) is considered by many studies in the Saudi context to be the major factor contributing to Saudi EFL students' poor reading competency, other cited factors that a number of studies with similar interest highlighted as leading to this problem which Saudi EFL students face when reading in English are: EFL instructors' overuse of and reliance on EFL students' mother tongue (Arabic) in explaining reading texts while neglecting the target language (Alsubaie, 2014; Al Qahtani and Lin, 2016). In his turn, Al Qahtani (2016) pointed out that Saudi EFL students' low reading tendency and proficiency in their native language (Arabic) impacts their reading performance in the target language(English).

Consequently, and based on the aforementioned factors, it can be concluded that the EFL students’ reading skill in general and their reading comprehension performance level in particular need to be reviewed and accounted for by providing

better reading and learning environment which can be achieved by putting forward a training program that includes modifications on the current reading module to infuse (metacognitive reading strategies, effective cognitive reading strategies, interesting reading topics, and enriching activities, along with an interactive reading instructional procedure).

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

In his study on Saudi EFL students' reading abilities, Al Qahtani (2016) indicated that there is: "gap in the literature on Saudi EFL readers' low proficiency in terms of reading skills" (p.2). Through proposing a training program that is based on the metacognitive reading strategies, the current study attempts to add to the paucity of research on the use of metacognitive reading strategies to promote Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension. The following subheadings will be examined too.

1. Identify the reading strategies that are frequently used by the experimental and control groups.
2. Determine the effectiveness of the proposed training program on the experimental group students' reading strategies employment.
3. Identify the effectiveness of the proposed training program on the experimental group students' reading comprehension performance.
4. Identify the reading comprehension strategies that are most affected by the proposed training program among: (a) making predictions, (b) finding answers to questions, (c) finding main ideas and supporting details, (d) making inferences (e) guessing words from context, and (f) summarization.



5. Explore the experimental group students' experiences in the proposed training program and reading strategies that were instructed to them and their suggestions of how to improve it.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The current study attempted to address the following questions:

**R Q 1:** What are the reading strategies that are frequently used by the experimental and control groups?

**R Q 2:** Is there any significant effect of the training program on the experimental group reading strategies employment?

**R Q 3:** Is there any significant effect of the training program on the experimental group reading comprehension performance?

**R Q 4:** What are the reading comprehension strategies that are most affected by the training program among: (a) making predictions, (b) finding answers to questions, (c) finding main ideas and supporting details, (d) making inferences, (e) guessing words from context, (f) summarization?

**R Q 5:** What are the experimental group experiences in the training program and reading strategies that were instructed to them and their suggestions of how to improve it?

### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

The following are the related research hypotheses:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant effect of the proposed training program on students' reading strategies employment (RQ2).

**H02:** There is no significant effect of the training program on students' reading comprehension performance (RQ3).

**H03:** There is no significant effect of the training program on making predictions (RQ 4).

**H04:** There is no significant effect of the training program on finding answers to questions (RQ4).

**H05:** There is no significant effect of the training program on finding main ideas and supporting details (RQ4).

**H06:** There is no significant effect of the training program on making inferences (RQ4).

**H07:** There is no significant effect of the training program on guessing words from context (RQ4).

**H08:** There is no significant effect of the training program on summarization (RQ4).

## **1.7 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that supports this study is an adaption of Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text (START) Reading Strategies Diagram in Scharlach (2008). As the base for the training program, metacognition is employed through the three reading stages to enhance students' reading skill and reading comprehension in L2. Metacognitive reading strategies are referred to as strategic knowledge and relate to a person's knowledge of how to proceed to focus, follow through, and finish a task (Chamot, 2006). The participating students in the current study were trained to use and apply these reading strategies in different reading activities and situations. According to Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002) training opportunities need be given to all readers to apply these strategies which successful readers apply in order to develop their reading comprehension.

Alongside the reading strategies that formed the essence of the training program, CALLA reading instructional model formed the basis for the training program teaching method. With its five stages (preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion), the researcher prepared the training program lesson plans in accordance with CALLA reading approach to further increase student-teacher and student- student interaction through modeling and scaffolding of all the selected reading strategies.

The interactive reading model was also part of the conceptual framework of this study. Unlike the Top- down and the Bottom- up reading models that are either text- driven or reader- driven, the Interactive reading model highlights the mutual reader- text relationship for the purpose of deriving meaning. The Interactive reading model combines the valid traits of both of the other reading models. Attention should be paid to the print which is the source of information and the reader as the seeker of comprehension and not be steered towards one direction solely in the process of meaning construction as the ultimate goal.

In an attempt to involve a communicative language teaching approach, the Interactive reading model was exploited in the study to establish a reader- text relation where the readers were encouraged to decode the text features (using text clues to infer, guess meaning of new vocabulary ...etc.) while using their schema and previous knowledge of the text topic to help them understand the intended meaning. The training program lesson plans (Appendix F) were prepared and executed in an effective way to work both directions; reader- text and text- reader interchangeably over the various reading stages.

To further support and foster the active role of the readers' strategic knowledge in depicting the intended meaning from the text, students were taught how to controll and regulate the reading process over the three reading stages (pre-

reading, during reading, and post reading) in the training program through the exploitation of metacognitive reading strategies. They were taught how to think about which reading strategy to use at each of the reading stages and how to apply them effectively through modeling and scaffolding.

Finally, through the involvement of metacognitive reading strategies that formed the content of the training program, CALLA reading approach and the Interactive reading model as the reading instruction medium, students' reading comprehension was expected to be enhanced through teaching students how to regulate the following cognitive reading comprehension strategies: (making predictions, answering questions, finding main ideas and supporting details, guessing meaning from context, making inferences, and finally summarization). The training program consisted of 8 sessions of 1 hour and forty minutes each and included some selected reading passages, and activities that were devised to address the targeted phenomenon that is students' reading comprehension. Figure (1.1) presents an illustration of the conceptual framework of this study.

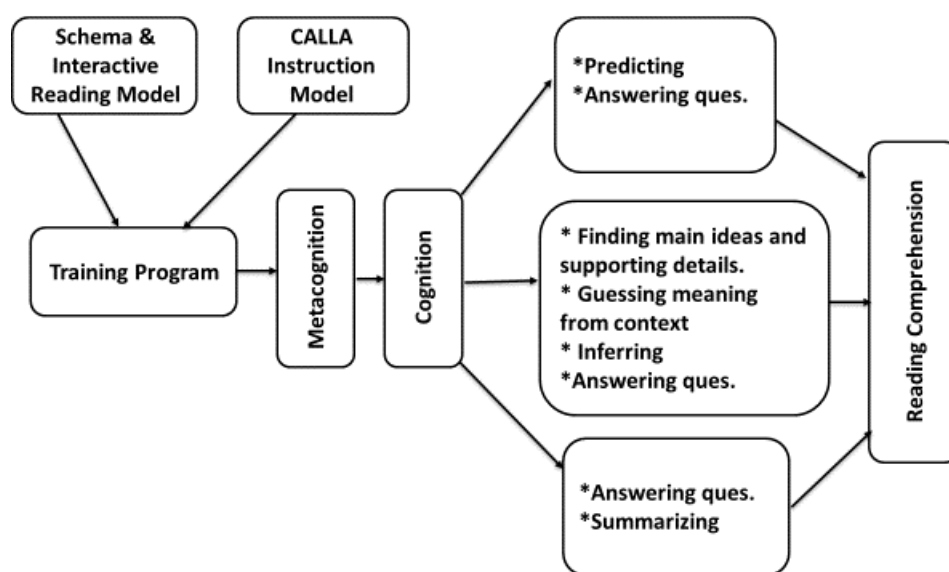


Figure 1.1: The Conceptual Framework of The Study

## **1.8 Study Significance**

The current study attempted to build up on previous research findings and open new perspectives for future studies. After the implementation of the current study and analyzing the collected data, it is hoped that this study findings might be used to familiarize Saudi EFL students with metacognitive reading strategies in order to facilitate and elevate their reading capability and comprehension as well as to increase EFL instructors and Saudi EFL students' strategy knowledge and awareness.

This study findings can also be used to help EFL students reflect on and adapt the reading strategies used while reading and think about their suitability to different texts and consequently enable them to become better and achieving readers. In addition, it is hoped that this study might shed light on Saudi EFL students' reading in L2 situation and what is required to improve it through introducing useful information for other developing EFL/ESL studies with a similar learning/ teaching interest.

This study helps give insight to educators and instructors about Saudi EFL students' needs, as far as the reading in English is concerned, to properly address them through suitable reading instruction that employs proper reading comprehension mechanisms. Further, as the current study involves a training program that aimed at developing EFL students' reading comprehension through introducing class tasks and activities that are based on metacognitive reading strategies, it contributes to solve the difficulties that Saudi EFL students face when reading in English through offering some effective ways for effective reading practice. It also presents a practical example of an experiment implementation, that involved Saudi EFL students as a study sample and reading strategies as a tool that can be successful. Finally, this study should also provide insight to EFL instructors

on effective reading instruction practices and techniques to help improve their performance and their students' reading results as well.

## **1.9 Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of the current study, the following terms have been used throughout. This section presents procedural definitions for each:

### **1.9.1 Reading Comprehension**

"Reading is at once a perceptual and a cognitive process" (Rumelhart, 1980). In its simplest meanings, reading comprehension was defined by Masadeh, (2015) as being the process of deriving meaning from text. Al harby (2015) further asserted that it is a meaning- construction process through which readers make use of what they already know to understand what they read. Nevertheless, research shows that reading comprehension is complicated and that students are challenged in the process of deriving meaning from writing text (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

In this study, reading comprehension refers to the participating EFL students' ability to achieve the ultimate reading goal in deriving meaning from reading passages in English through the employment of effective reading strategies at various reading stages.

### **1.9.2 The Interactive Reading Comprehension Model**

According to Grabe (2004) it is a reading model that highlights readers' interaction with the text and balances the roles of both of the reader and the text in the quest for meaning construction. unlike the other two models, the Bottom- up reading model which depends on the text for reading comprehension and the Top-down relies on the readers to construct meaning, the Interactive reading model

combines the valid features of both of them during the reading process (Grabe, 2004). In this study, however, it refers to the instruction method that was followed by the experimental group's instructor in delivering the training program reading lessons to increase students' interaction with the text.

### **1.9.3 Training Program:**

Wang (1999) asserted that: "a modified curriculum and program for instruction focused on students' needs requires newly designed materials." In this study, it refers to the intervention during which the Preparatory Year Program EFL students received strategy- based instruction and included selected reading passages, strategies, and activities to enhance the participating students' reading comprehension and provide practice on reading strategy use hopefully towards better reading performance. The training program is an adapted version of the currently taught reading curriculum in the English Language Center (ELC) and integrates metacognitive reading strategies as a means of promoting students' reading comprehension.

### **1.9.4 The Preparatory Year Program (PYP)**

In this study, it refers to a one- year introductory program that is offered by Saudi Arabian universities and targets students who have just finished high school and are not yet in a degree program. This program prepares students for joining different faculties after they finish it by providing nine basic but intensive courses which are important for their future study, like English, math, chemistry, etc., in order to achieve high quality education.

### **1.9.5 The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies (MARSI)**

It is a measure of reading strategies that was developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) to facilitate the reading skill in L2. This survey is an adaptation of Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002). Metacognitive-Awareness of Reading Strategies (MARSI) which was developed to aid reading in L1(Wang, 2009). In this study, however, it refers to the metacognitive reading strategies questionnaire that comprise 30 strategy items and was applied on the study sample as pre and posttest to measure their reading strategy employment level and consists of the following three subscales.

### **1.9.6 Metacognitive Reading Strategies**

They refer to readers' ability to comprehend beyond cognition through planning, regulating, and evaluating their reading (Chamot, 2006). On their part, Salataki and Akyel (2002) defined them as an effective factor that is employed to foster reading comprehension among readers. In this study, they refer to the reading techniques that comprise the training program that was instructed to Saudi EFL students who were trained on a number of sessions on how to use these important reading mechanisms to manage and monitor their reading towards better reading comprehension and consist of:

**1.9.6(a) Global Reading Strategies (GLOB)** which consist of 13 items and refer to the strategies that readers use to manage their reading throughout the reading process.



**1.9.6(b) Support Reading Strategies (SUP)** which consist of 9 items and refer to the strategies that readers use to support their comprehension of the text such as contextual clues.

**1.9.6(c) Problem Solving Reading Strategies (PROB)** which consist of 8 strategies and refer to the strategies that readers use to overcome difficulties they face while reading.

### **1.9.7 CALLA Reading Approach**

Calla in this study can be defined as the reading instruction framework for the training program. CALLA is the model that shaped the procedure of how the EFL instructor executed the reading lessons to the subjects of the experimental group. The reason why the researcher chose CALLA as the instructional medium is that it consists of 5 different phases (preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, expansion) move the study subjects gradually throughout the reading lesson to acquire the new reading strategies and skills.

CALLA 5 stages cover the reading lesson from beginning to end shifting students learning and mastery of the new knowledge in accordance with the desired objectives that is recalling their previous knowledge and experiences on the new skills, presenting the skill on the part of the teacher through modeling and scaffolding, practicing the skill on the part of the students collaboratively, evaluating the subjects' learning and finally expanding and applying the new knowledge on other skills like writing and listening or even other subjects.

### **1.10 Study Limitations**

According to James and Murnan' (2004) definition of study limitations, they reported that those can be: "The constraints on generalizability, applications to

practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study .... used to establish internal and external validity." p 66-67). Alsubaie (2014) also commented that regardless of how much a study is well planned and executed, there will always remain limitations on the generalizability and the quality of the study. However, he added that these limitations can be utilized by other researchers to fill any identified gaps.

As such, the findings of the current study cannot be generalized as it was limited by the following:

Human limitations: The training program was applied on female EFL students in their first university year- in the PYP at a public university in Saudi Arabia. Due to the single- sex educational policy constraint (Alsubaie ,2014; Al Qahtani and Lin, 2016), this study was limited by not including any male respondents. Thus, the findings of the study do not reflect male EFL students' reading skill in English situation. Also, the researcher was not able to interview students in the men section to explore the challenges they undergo and/ or the concerns they have about reading in English in order to reach bigger understanding on the current subject matter that can be applicable to all (ELC) students (males and females).

The study samples comprised 70 EFL students (control= 35 + experimental= 35) out of the 300 students who studied in the PYP in the academic year (2016-2017), this study results can only be generalized to students that have similar characteristics as those of the study population. As the researcher and the 2 study groups' instructors had the same teaching schedules, this study was also limited by the fact that the researcher was not able to carry out any classroom visits to the study groups' classrooms. For the same reason, the researcher was unable to perform any classroom observations for other teachers to observe their reading practices.

Measurement limitations: the reading comprehension exam that was applied in this study as pre- posttests was adapted by the researcher of the current study to measure the subjects' reading comprehension level on particular reading comprehension strategies. The test was only administered to the study sample. As such, "there was no prior evidence for the reliability and the validity of the test related to this type of sample population."(Al-Shaye, 2002, p.8). The fact that only six reading strategies were employed in the training program, due to time constraints and to tight students- teachers' schedules, would also limit the generalizability of this study.

### **1.11 Summary**

In summary, the reading curriculum, reading instruction, and reading skill situation in EFL classes in Saudi Arabia needs to be improved. Saudi EFL students need to be granted real opportunities and more time to practice reading in English in a better learning environment in order to promote their reading comprehension. The reading curriculum that students, especially females, are taught needs to be reformed and modified to include effective reading comprehension strategies in addition to emphasizing the role of teachers in using effective reading instruction methods to meet their students' need to become strategic readers who are able to extract meaning from text more efficiently.

The first chapter of the current study included in detail the background of the study, statement problem, research objectives, questions, hypotheses, operational as well as conceptual definitions of the terms that were used throughout the study, the study conceptual framework, and study limitations. This chapter is followed by the literature review that provided the researcher with better understanding of the issue being tackled in this study that is to investigate the effectiveness of a training

program based on metacognitive reading strategies on developing Saudi EFL students' reading comprehension.