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IMPACT OF WEAK READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS ON LANGUAGE USAGE

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Abstract- This study aims to investigate the relationship between reading comprehension skills in the Arabic language among secondary school learners. The study addresses the issue that learners face difficulty in using and mastering the Arabic language due to their weak reading comprehension skills. In other words, they lack the necessary reading comprehension skills, even after transitioning to the secondary level, which affects their readiness to continue learning. This impacts their ability to use the language correctly or utilize it effectively to build their knowledge in subjects taught in Arabic, thus affecting the quality of their education. To address this issue and achieve its objectives, a sample of 89 male and female students from two different levels, scientific and mathematical streams of the secondary year, were selected. They underwent regular tests throughout the academic year 2022-2023. These tests included various texts and different topics, and the data collected from the tests were analyzed using specific indicators to answer the research questions and reach the study's goals. The study revealed several results, confirming the weak performance of secondary school learners in reading comprehension skills and the direct impact of comprehension on their control of the Arabic language. Consequently, learners face obstacles and weaknesses that hinder them from effectively utilizing and controlling the language for their benefit, both in the processes of reception and production, whether for school or life purposes.

Keywords: Comprehension Skills, Levels of Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Use of the Arabic Language, Improving Arabic Language Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

No doubt, what is expected from secondary school learners in our educational system is their proficiency in the Arabic language, considering it a fundamental requirement to pursue a new path that leads to obtaining their high school diploma (Baccalaureate). Especially since they have been studying it for at least nine years in both primary and middle school levels, which should make them fully prepared to use it in various contexts and situations, demonstrating their ability to control and adapt it for their benefit.

However, reality, as usual, surprises us with unexpected data and shocking results. Despite transitioning to the secondary level, learners are classified as not proficient in the Arabic language and its basic competencies, particularly in reading comprehension skills. It is expected that they would have acquired both lower and higher levels of proficiency. But, in reality, they struggle to construct or comprehend meaning in simple or complex contexts. This leads us to assume that weak reading comprehension skills are the main reason hindering their ability to use the Arabic language in the processes of reception and production. They are unable to effectively utilize and control the language for their academic or life purposes. Based on the above, we will attempt to describe the reality of reading comprehension skills among secondary school learners and their relationship with their inability to control the Arabic language in various contexts. The aim is to highlight their need for improvement in these skills, allowing them to enhance their usage and mastery of the Arabic language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Levels of Reading Comprehension and Skills

When discussing reading comprehension and its skills, we find ourselves in need of understanding the nature of these skills and their different types. This understanding will provide a clear perspective on the essential aspects of comprehension and its necessary skills, emphasizing their importance and role in improving linguistic performance in various contexts. In this context, various writings have attempted to identify the skills of reading comprehension, although there may be differences in their number and nature. However, they largely agree on three main levels: the literal level, the inferential level, and the critical level [1]. Through these three levels, it becomes apparent that they start from a minimal level related to literal comprehension of the text, as it focuses on the surface-level meanings present in the text.

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However, it forms the basis for elevating the reader to the subsequent level, which involves inferring and clarifying meanings. This level acts as a means to achieve critical comprehension, which is one of the higher levels that expect learners to be capable of evaluating and judging the text. Some researchers add two additional levels to the previous ones, known as "appreciative or aesthetic comprehension" and "creative comprehension". These levels are considered extensions of the comprehension process in relation to the text. They are associated with the reader's expertise and enhance their ability to delve into the depths of the text and its meanings. Consequently, these levels elevate the reader's expertise and linguistic performance, making them expert readers. Appreciative comprehension is related to "the reader's interaction with the text, being influenced and emotionally affected by it and the writer's personality, and engaging with it on a heartfelt level" [2]. On the other hand, creative comprehension involves the reader interacting with the text to deduce the underlying ideas and concepts, rearranging and linking them with their own experiences and knowledge, arriving at new ideas, conclusions, and expectations, and the ability to justify them [2].

Based on the above, some researchers have enumerated the skills of reading comprehension and categorized them within the aforementioned levels. Although they differ in the specific branches, which may vary from one researcher to another and are influenced by the targeted educational level, their significance lies in clarifying the intended meaning of reading comprehension skills. It is also crucial to note that the process of developing comprehension involves specific procedural steps. While the number and types of levels may vary, the process will differ in the number of branches and categories.

2.2. The Importance of Reading Comprehension Skills

One cannot deny the important role that comprehension plays in developing various language competencies, specifically in writing and reading skills. The Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research has considered both writing and reading competencies as "weak acquisitions of learners, and the fact that they form the foundation upon which our education and educational system are built" [3]. The focus will be on reading proficiency, as reading is the learner's means of achieving comprehension, and its primary purpose is to enable the reader to understand what is read easily [4]. It is also the means through which language is acquired, its structure comprehended, and its usage improved, thus positively and permanently impacting linguistic performance in both speaking and writing. Studies have indicated that "children who read books from an early age may achieve greater success in language reading and spelling in the future [5].

Furthermore, reading proficiency is the desired goal to ensure lifelong learning, as it serves as a tool for self-directed learning based on internal motivation and a desire to explore new and diverse knowledge, whether concerning general culture or specific fields. Therefore, the learner's need for comprehension and skills is not limited to a specific subject or particular materials, nor is it solely tied to their academic path; instead, it is an urgent need to graduate a proficient reader capable of continuing their learning journey, understanding and critically analyzing texts in various contexts, whether in formal education, informal settings, or their professional and daily lives.

Moreover, when we consider the importance of comprehension in language acquisition, especially in the case of the Arabic language, the matter becomes clear. Language is the means through which humans communicate, and as long as it remains so, its essence lies in its usage. Language thrives through its use and perishes without it, whether it is in written or spoken form, as both usages are dependent on comprehension in various forms. Comprehension is the individual's means to develop their abilities for effective language usage, whether it's in understanding what they read, write, or hear. Language thrives through its use, and comprehension plays a crucial role in making it a flexible and user-friendly means of expression, avoiding it becoming burdensome or difficult for its users. It may even lead individuals to dislike it instead of embracing its characteristics for expression and its flexibility in usage.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

To achieve the research objectives and address its problem, a group of students attending the secondary level at Al-Farabi Secondary School in Ouled Ayad was targeted. The school is under the supervision of the Directorate of Fquih Ben Salah and falls under the authority of the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, and Sports. These students belong to the first year of the science stream but are divided into two different tracks: 22 students in the mathematics science track, and another 67 students in the experimental science track. All of them underwent periodic exams throughout the entire year, with a total of four tests. The results of these exams provided data and information that can be analyzed to present significant findings that address the study's questions related to reading comprehension skills and their impact on the use of the Arabic language.

It is worth noting that the baccalaureate system in Morocco is divided into three school years: the first year is called the common core, the second year is known as the first year of baccalaureate, and the final third year is referred to as the second year of baccalaureate. Each of these years includes two school streams, one for literature and humanities, and the other for science with its various branches. Therefore, the random sample we selected is limited to a sample from the common core stream in literature and humanities and another sample from the first year of baccalaureate in the science experimental track.

3.2. Study Instrument

This sample of learners underwent four different tests, which were administered periodically during the academic year 2022-2023. The tests included various texts and different questions targeting reading comprehension skills at various levels. This was done after preparing a list of the targeted skills, which were classified into five levels: literal, inferential, critical, aesthetic, and creative. It is worth noting that in each test, we attempted to change the questions while targeting the same skill or retaining it, to gather sufficient data to describe the learners' performance in reading comprehension and its relationship to their use of the Arabic language in diverse contexts.

3.3. Data Analysis Process

In this study, we relied on using the SPSS (25 version) software for data processing and analysis, which enabled us to measure the indicators of ease and difficulty, in addition to conducting various statistics, such as Pearson correlation coefficient and standard deviation.

4. RESULTS

After administering the four tests to the study sample, collecting and processing the data, and conducting statistical analysis, the results in Tables 1 and 2 are obtained.

Table 1. Performance of the study sample in four comprehension levels in four tests

Levels	Participants	The first year of baccalaureate - scientific experimental track				The first year of baccalaureate in mathematical science track			
	Tests	test 1	test 2	test 3	test 4	test 1	test 2	test 3	test 4
Literal	Controllers	29.85	69.40	63.68	55.22	61.36	88.64	84.85	66.67
	Relatively Controlling	19.4	7.46	11.94	13.93	36.37	9.09	9.09	13.63
	Non-Controllers	50.75	23.14	24.38	30.85	2.27	2.27	6.06	19.7
Inferential	Controllers	27.61	44.78	38.81	25.37	52.27	54.55	60.61	43.18
	Relatively Controlling	17.16	17.91	10.45	14.18	13.64	27.27	18.18	22.73
	Non-Controllers	55.23	37.31	50.74	60.45	34.09	18.18	21.21	34.09
Critical	Controllers	0	7.46	8.96	2.99	27.27	13.64	27.27	27.27
	Relatively Controlling	17.91	34.33	29.85	11.94	27.28	54.54	54.55	22.73
	Non-Controllers	82.09	58.21	61.19	85.07	45.45	31.82	18.18	50
Aesthetic	Controllers	26.87	57.46	35.82	32.84	50	77.27	77.27	61.36
	Relatively Controlling	8.21	5.22	1.49	6.34	29.55	11.37	4.55	10.23
	Non-Controllers	64.92	37.32	62.69	60.82	20.45	11.36	18.18	28.41
Creative	Controllers	7.46	17.91	2.99	5.97	31.82	36.36	13.64	27.27
	Relatively Controlling	29.85	40.30	22.39	16.42	50	36.37	40.91	27.28
	Non-Controllers	62.69	41.79	74.62	77.61	18.18	27.27	45.45	45.45

Table 2. Average performance of the study sample in reading comprehension levels

Participants	The first year of baccalaureate - scientific experimental track			The first year of baccalaureate in the mathematical science track		
Levels	Controllers	Relatively controlling	Non-controllers	Controllers	Relatively controlling	Non-controllers
Literal	54.54	13.18	32.28	75.38	17.05	7.58
Inferential	34.14	14.93	50.93	52.65	20.46	26.89
Critical	4.85	23.51	71.64	23.86	39.78	36.36
Aesthetic	38.25	5.32	56.44	66.48	13.93	19.60
Creative	8.58	27.24	64.18	27.27	38.64	34.09

This table reflects the overall performance of the two study samples in the four tests, which were classified into three categories: controllers, relatively controlling, and non-controllers, based on their proficiency in reading comprehension skills. The percentages of the first two categories represent the ease index for each, while the difficulty index represents the last category related to learners who are not proficient in reading comprehension skills. Upon careful observation of the same table, it becomes evident that the performance of the two samples is entirely different. The first-year baccalaureate students in the experimental sciences track show an average performance in the literal comprehension level, but they fall into the non-controller's category in the other levels. In most cases, their scores did not reach 50% of the ease index and followed a downward trend as we progressed in the levels of comprehension. On the other hand, the difficulty index increased in the non-controller's category as we moved to higher levels of comprehension, especially in the critical comprehension level, where it achieved the highest percentage of errors in the fourth test at 85.07%, and in the creative comprehension level, where difficulty index reached 77.61% in the same test.

As for the first-year baccalaureate students in the mathematical science track, their performance was entirely different from the previous sample. Their performance in the four tests was characterized by a high ease index, making them fall into the controller's category, and a low difficulty index, indicating their better comprehension skills. In most cases, the ease index exceeded 50%, while the difficulty index showed a noticeable decrease compared to the previous sample and did not exceed 50% in all cases except for one instance in the critical comprehension level. This table illustrates the average performance of the two samples in the overall four tests, reflecting their performance in the five levels of reading comprehension. This is done through the ease index, representing the controlled and relatively controlled categories, and the difficulty index, representing the non-controlled category.

This table confirms our previous conclusion, which indicated the weak performance of the first sample, characterized by a decreasing ease index as they progressed in the levels of comprehension, contrary to the difficulty index, which follows an increasing trend from the lowest to the highest level of comprehension. On the other hand, the second sample showed an opposite pattern, with a higher ease index representing the performance of the controlled and relatively controlled categories and a lower difficulty index representing the non-controlled category. To clarify this result further, we can merge the controlled and relatively controlled categories into one group for comparison with the overall performance of the non-controlled category. However, we will retain the controlled category to observe any shifts or changes.

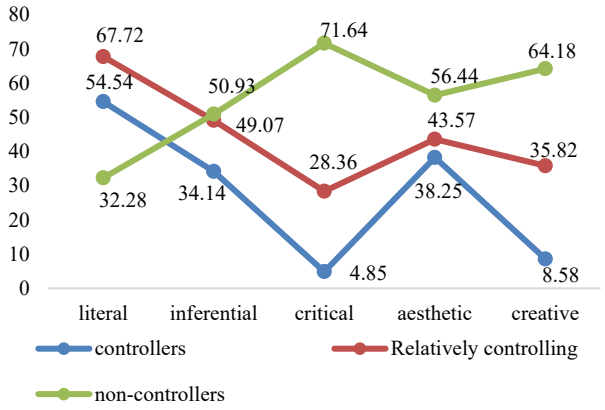

Figure 1. Presentation of average performance of the first year of baccalaureate in experimental science for reading comprehension levels

Despite combining the controlled and relatively controlled categories into one, the performance of the sample improved compared to the previous results that focused solely on the controlled category. This improvement is evident in the literal comprehension level, where the ease index increased from 54.54% to 67.72%, while the difficulty index, representing the non-controlled category, decreased to 32.28%. However, even with this increase, the expected performance in this level, which is considered one of the lower levels of comprehension, should be higher. In the other comprehension levels, the student's performance did not differ significantly from the previous results. Their performance remained relatively low in the ease index, with 49.07% in inferential comprehension, and it decreased further to 28.36% in critical comprehension, before showing a relative increase in the aesthetic comprehension level at 43.57% and creative comprehension level at 35.82%.

In contrast, the difficulty index followed an ascending trend, reflecting the challenges faced by the non-controlled category as they progressed through the comprehension levels. In general, it can be concluded that the dominant category in this sample is the non-controlled learners, who need to acquire and develop comprehension skills to enhance their performance in various contexts. On the other hand, relatively controlled learners need to improve their performance and develop their skills to join the controlled category, thus refining their language and utilizing it effectively in different situations and scenarios.

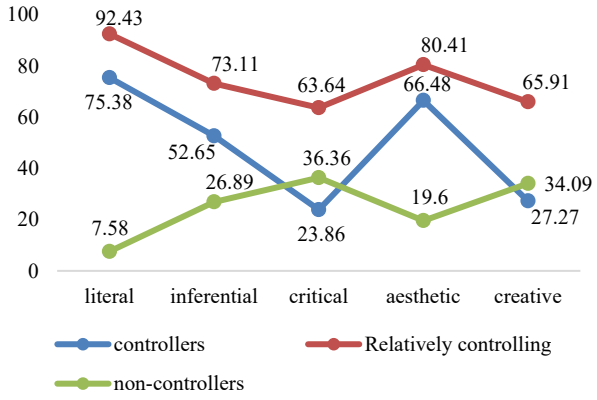

Figure 2. Average performance of the first year of baccalaureate mathematical science track in reading comprehension levels

The table shows a significant increase in the performance of the learners in the relatively controlling category, resulting from combining it with the controllers. This led to a rise in the ease index to 92.43% in the literal comprehension level, then decreasing to 73.11% in the inferential comprehension, and further dropping to 63.64% in critical comprehension. It then rises again to 80.41% in aesthetic comprehension and declines to 65.91% in creative comprehension, reflecting overall good performance. On the other hand, a small proportion of learners, the non-controllers, demonstrated limited skills in reading comprehension, with difficulty indices ranging from 7.58% to 36.36%. In general, it is essential to emphasize that the controller category exhibited the highest level of performance, while the relatively controlling learners need to improve their reading comprehension skills. As for the non-controllers, they are in urgent need of acquiring and developing reading comprehension skills to enhance their performance.

Table 3. Dispersion characteristics of the first year of baccalaureate in experimental science track's performance in reading comprehension levels (standard deviation)

	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Aesthetic	Creative
N Valid	67				
Average	0.7704	0.5622	1.4155	0.5661	3.2749
Sd (∓)	0.14071	0.20811	0.83172	0.22062	1.34971

The standard deviation results of the performance of the first year of the Baccalaureate in the experimental science track in reading comprehension levels indicate a very low deviation in the literal comprehension level, with a slight increase in the inferential and aesthetic comprehension levels. This suggests that most learners have a good performance in literal comprehension, but face some difficulties in inferential and aesthetic comprehension. However, their performance at the critical and creative levels shows a significant variation in

comprehension skills, indicating weakness in these levels and a critical need for improvement and development. In other words, we can conclude that the majority of the study sample has a level between good and moderate in the lower levels of comprehension (literal and inferential), along with a relatively good performance at the aesthetic level. However, at the same time, they demonstrate a significant weakness in their performance in comprehension skills at the critical and creative levels.

Table 4. Dispersion characteristics of the first year of baccalaureate in mathematical science track's performance in reading comprehension levels (standard deviation)

	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Aesthetic	Creative
N Valid	22				
Average	0.9141	0.7900	2.3486	0.8041	4.5986
Sd (∓)	0.08238	0.16642	0.58735	0.17525	0.74165

The standard deviation of the results for the first year of Baccalaureate in the Mathematical Science Track confirms their good performance compared to the previous group. Their strong performance is evident in the literal, inferential, and aesthetic comprehension levels, as indicated by the weak variability around the mean in literal and moderate variability in the other two comprehension levels. However, there is significant variability in the critical and creative comprehension levels. Despite this, considering the relationship between the standard deviation and the mean, it becomes apparent that most learners in these two levels demonstrate high proficiency in their skills.

Table 5. Pearson correlation coefficients between reading comprehension levels of the first year of baccalaureate in the experimental science track

	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Aesthetic	Creative
N	67				
Literal	1	+0.657**	+0.717**	+0.680**	+0.729**
Inferential		1	+0.767**	+0.613**	+0.748**
Critical			1	+0.774**	+0.821**
Aesthetic				1	+0.742**
Creative					1

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 6. Pearson correlation index between reading comprehension levels of first-year students in the mathematical science track of baccalaureate

	Literal	Inferential	Critical	Aesthetic	Creative
N	22				
Literal	1	0+.380	0+.655**	0+.826**	0+.486*
Inferential		1	0+.571**	0+.469*	0+.774**
Critical			1	0+.807**	0+.694**
Aesthetic				1	0+.609**
Creative					1

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)
* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

The table, through the Pearson correlation coefficient, shows that there is a highly significant statistical correlation between all levels of reading comprehension at the 0.01 level. The relationship between these levels is strong and positive, indicating a close association between different levels. This means that learners who demonstrate excellent performance at a certain level usually show good performance in other levels as well. Therefore, outstanding performance and proficiency in one level of comprehension and mastery of its skills contribute to improving performance in other levels.

The table, through the Pearson correlation coefficient data, indicates a positive relationship between different levels of reading comprehension. The statistical significance is at the probability level of 0.01 and occasionally at the level of 0.05. This suggests that students who perform well in one level of comprehension may also have a good performance in the other levels. Therefore, their proficiency in a specific level corresponds to a good performance in the other comprehension levels.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to attempt to describe the reality of reading comprehension skills among high school students and their relationship to their inability to control the Arabic language in various contexts. The purpose is to highlight their need for improvement in these skills, enabling them to master the use of the Arabic language in different educational and life contexts. Based on this, it appears that the two targeted samples in this study showed distinct differences in their possession of reading comprehension skills. The first sample of the experimental science track exhibited good performance in the reading comprehension level, but its performance declined continuously in the higher levels, indicating a clear weakness in advanced comprehension levels.

On the other hand, the first sample of the mathematics track showed good performance at all levels, both in literal and inferential comprehension, which reflected a good performance in the ease index. The other levels also displayed satisfactory performance, especially in the critical and creative levels, which improved due to the inclusion of the relatively controlling group into the controlling group, unlike the first sample, which continued to show weak performance in the various advanced levels, despite combining the two previous groups, particularly in the critical and creative levels.

Therefore, it can be said that the weak performance of the first sample reflects the diversity of learners belonging to the first year of the Baccalaureate in the experimental science track at the secondary level. The second sample, it represents a distinct and special group, which is the learners belonging to the first year of Baccalaureate in the mathematical science track. It is worth noting that this latter group is known for the diligence and perseverance of its members, which distinguishes them in the educational system as a whole. The results, therefore, do not differ significantly from various national and international reports that have also highlighted the weak language skills and comprehension abilities of learners.

For instance, the international PISA report confirmed that only 27% of learners reached the minimum proficiency level in reading comprehension, while the average in OECD countries is 77%.

Additionally, 21% of the learners did not even reach the minimum proficiency level, with only 6% reaching level three, and 0.5% at level four. None of them reached levels five and six [6]. Similarly, the national report (PNEA2016) issued by the Higher Council for Education, Training, and Scientific Research also emphasized that "students in the common core of humanities and human sciences in public education have not acquired the required language competencies according to the official curriculum at its minimum level. In fact, the national achievement rate in Arabic language does not exceed 39%" [7]. Both reports confirm what we have concluded regarding the weak reading comprehension skills of secondary school students. However, they do not distinguish between the general and specialized categories.

The general category refers to literary and scientific streams in general, while the specialized category, such as the mathematical science track, might not have been differentiated due to the focus on learners aged 15 years, as in the PISA report, or only those in the common core, as in the PNEA report. Nevertheless, both reports were able to highlight the weak language skills of these students, where comprehension remains a significant factor. Understanding written material is crucial for accurate linguistic expression, as clear ideas are directly related to comprehension and understanding. This was detailed and evident in the (PNEA2016) report, which showed very low percentage scores highlighting their performance in comprehension. Their inability to express themselves clearly and straightforwardly is indicative of the fundamental importance of comprehension in language.

Based on this, the distinction of the mathematical science track in most levels of comprehension compared to the experimental science track does not negate the fact that a significant number of secondary school learners experience weak reading comprehension skills and have an urgent need to develop or acquire them to enhance their performance and control over these skills. This will provide them with better opportunities to use the Arabic language effectively and flexibly to express their ideas and perspectives. As long as learners struggle with weak reading comprehension skills, their use of the Arabic language will remain deficient, which will have an impact on building and acquiring knowledge in various subjects of the secondary school curriculum. This applies not only to Arabic language courses but also to other subjects they study. Furthermore, their difficulties in linguistic expression, which require understanding ideas and then formulating them in a specific structure to achieve the purpose and meet the learner's needs in communication.

Therefore, mastering reading comprehension skills at various levels, both basic and advanced, make learners more capable of building their knowledge in different subjects of the secondary school curriculum, especially in Arabic language courses or other subjects that demand critical and creative thinking - both of which fall under advanced levels. These levels of proficiency can only be achieved if learners possess and master the basic skills, which, in turn, necessitates their mastery of all comprehension skills. This highlights the need for learners to control and improve their reading comprehension skills across different levels.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the need for high school students to acquire and develop reading comprehension skills for their benefit. This may allow them to overcome various language learning difficulties and significantly improve their understanding of written texts. It should be noted that reading comprehension is closely related to listening and spoken comprehension, as they rely on the same mechanisms. The results of this study do not merely highlight the educational reality in general but also shed light on the Arabic language specifically. The weakness in reading comprehension skills among learners directly affects their ability to control the Arabic language in both reception and production. Their use of the language remains limited and deficient, which may hinder their transition to higher education, as they may not be proficient enough to use the language effectively and appropriately in educational and life contexts. This deficiency is particularly evident in their inability to possess a solid foundation of comprehension skills, which are fundamental for effective oral and written communication.

Therefore, the necessity for learners to develop their comprehension and mastery skills is of paramount importance, to the point where it has become an inescapable imperative. This compels all of us to consider the essential and effective programs and strategies for nurturing expert readers. Additionally, it is vital to enable teachers to be adept at solving practical problems, inventing solutions, and utilizing appropriate tools for their teaching practice [8]. Moreover, it is crucial to contemplate the adoption of curricula that inherently incorporate information and communication technology in education, along with fitting standards within the reference frameworks related to learner assessment [9]. This is because the secondary qualification stage expects learners to exert double the effort to achieve their desired goals and objectives, ensuring their transition to the university level with qualifications that empower them to engage in advanced academic and research endeavors. This stands in contrast to being powerless in the face of even the simplest academic university situations. Additionally, it equips them for active involvement in the economic and social domains with unique linguistic and intellectual competencies.

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