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Empowering the young reader: An educational perspective on developing foundational reading skills

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perspectives of preschool educators in Amman, Jordan, regarding the importance of specific reading skills for preschool learners. It aims to prioritize reading skills according to teachers' perceptions and to identify any variations based on their educational qualifications. Utilizing a quantitative research design, the study employed a detailed 32-item questionnaire designed through literature reviews and expert consultations in early childhood education. A sample of 690 teachers responded to the survey, revealing that skills related to reading comprehension and expression were deemed most significant. Key skills identified include recalling textual details and using specific vocabulary in everyday conversations. In contrast, teachers rated higher-level language skills as less important, reflecting their consideration of preschoolers' developmental readiness. The study's findings, supported by a one-way ANOVA, indicated no significant differences in perceptions among teachers based on academic qualifications, suggesting a common ground in teaching practices and professional growth. It emphasizes the necessity for integrating more complex interactive language skills into early childhood curricula and preparing teachers accordingly. Furthermore, the research advocates for ongoing professional development to foster independent critical thinkers among young learners and calls for more qualitative and mixed-methods studies to deepen the understanding of early literacy development across diverse teaching contexts.

KEYWORDS: Reading, reading skills, language skills, childhood education, language education

1. Introduction

In essence, foundational literacy skills are central to a child's personal growth and development, shaping their ability to learn actively and participate meaningfully in society (Al-Barakat & AlAli, 2024). In addition, children should understand that elementary reading is an analytical process as opposed to just mechanical decoding through letters and numbers. Through reading, one is able to shape and develop one's consciousness, thinking as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Azizifar et al., 2015; Carter et al., 2024). Supporting children to develop these competencies is a worthy educational investment in children's long-term futures as it enables children to articulate and understand complex material. It fosters the growth of their ability to engage in a constructive, creative, and critical manner with a multitude of ideas and diverse cultures.

The goal of enabling the child to read effectively and efficiently is achieved through providing them with appropriate and rich learning environments that support their exploration, and learning enables them to interact with diverse materials and texts (Al-Barakat et al., 2025; Fatyela et al., 2021; Fraihat et al., 2022; Guimarães et al., 2020). Current research in education shows that reading is not a passive act of receiving information, but rather an active process that requires thinking, making connections, analyzing, and interpreting. They also need to know how to ask evaluative and meaningful questions, make a judgment, and grasp the deeper aspects of texts (Wan, 2022; Yang et al., 2018). In relation to this, Cekiso (2012) emphasizes the need to develop the ability to read critique texts using higher order thinking skills by reading and understanding beyond the literal to using focused, meaningful inquiry that foster the construction of fresh ideas, making predictions, and analyzing what is. These skills contribute to the development of a person's analytical thinking ability (Head et al., 2018; Asadi et al., 2017; Bani Irshid et al., 2023).

Text analysis fosters cognitive engagement in a manner that promotes young learners' scientific thinking. Khudair & Abu Ghazal (2016) argue that purposeful and reflective reading allows children to distinguish fact from opinion and enhances their ability to structure analysis of evidence and data. Hence, reading serves as a purposeful pedagogical tool that develops scientific attitude, critical thinking and readiness to deal with complex ideas in an information-rich society. In addition, Al-Barakat and AlAli (2024) state that reading promotes children's ability to learn language on their own. This deepens their ability to understand, which improves their text comprehension as well as their ability to reason. The interaction of language and knowledge instills a deep, intuitive grasp of the subject and promotes ultimate retention of learning by reinforcing the knowledge, and the development of higher order reasoning. This ability to reason and interpret is a critical skill and further illustrates the multi-faceted nature of reading as a tool which integrates, and advances, learners' language and cognitive development to encourage active and critical thought.

Responding to the current challenges in education, Asadi et al. (2017) focused on teaching strategies in which reading is used to develop creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The aforementioned strategies foster students' critical thinking and their analysis of different approaches. This becomes vital, as Bataineh et al. (2025) emphasize, in training the learners to address the issues of a more complicated and more dynamic world, as education helps to enhance cognitive flexibility. This approach to education serves to demonstrate the value of viewing reading as a richly creative and highly complex activity.

Therefore, as reading shows, reading is a crucial ability to master, yet it is also a complex task that involves the integration of numerous interdisciplinary skills that aid in the enhancement of one's cognitive and persona abilities (AlAli et al., 2024; Alkiş & Temizel, 2018; Asadi & Khateb, 2017; Labordo, 2024).With advanced critical and creative reading skills, children can engage with knowledge and the world intellectually and with deeper awareness. As such, reading not only helps in personal development but also assists them in becoming better social participants, thus, making the educational spending in reading skills a primal building stone of quality education and a comprehensive child development (Khudair & Abu Gazal, 2016).

Different studies from earlier and recent years (Abdelhadi et al., 2011; Al-Barakat et al., 2023; Asadi et al., 2017; Asadi & Khateeb, 2017; Carter et al., 2024; Khudair & Abu Ghazal, 2016) have underscored the importance of adopting different methods of teaching that help nurture reading skills in children. These activities defy the traditional view of reading as decoding or superficial comprehension and involve thinking at higher levels. These include, but are not limited to, asking deep questions regarding the unstated message of the text, innovative idea proposing, advanced multi-dimensional titling, advanced writing of story endings, in-depth character analysis, solution generation for text-based problems, proactive and creative outcomes prediction, and theme innovation based on the text's content (AlAli et al., 2025; Hawamdeh et al., 2025; Khasawneh et al., 2022; Castles et al., 2018).

These types of educational activities enhance reading skills while at the same time promoting thoughtful and creative idea generation. Such activities foster a flexible and creative approach to problem-solving. New and developing readers can deepen their engagement with individual texts, understand a broad range of materials, and analyze multiple texts with a discerning and critical focus (Bataineh et al., 2007; Elston et al., 2022). Children experience a wide range of emotional and mental activities, and their inner selves are restless and active toward more and more.

Reading is important in the development of Multiple competencies, including intellectual, cognitive, psychological, emotional, physical, and social (Cekiso, 2012; Chen, 2024). Children learn to master difficult ideas, promote emotional development through self-knowledge and expression, and understand more through various ideas. Moreover, it develops social competencies through critical thinking and independent thought and by coordinating and working collaboratively; thus, it facilitates smooth entry into the social and cultural milieu (Soto et al., 2019; Siregar et al., 2019). This improves the quality of life while improving the emotional, social, spatial, and cognitive well-being (Castles et al., 2018; Kasmaini & Riswanto, 2024).

In educational settings, gaps persist in implementation and analysis, especially in low-resource and under-trained contexts. Many educational programs still emphasize rote learning that comprehension-skill reading, instead of using reading as a tool for deeper critical thinking. There is an equally pressing gap in the creation of new assessment frameworks that measure the reading, creativity, and problem-solving impact of the activities conducted, instead of using the standard comprehension assessment (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2024; Maaranen & Kynäslahti, 2021; Mukminatien et al., 2024; Paakkari et al., 2024).

Integrated and flexible curricula that consider varying learning needs/existing frameworks, approach educational technology, and empower educators for practical implementation needs to be addressed (Combrinck & Mtsatse, 2019; Elston et al., 2022; Tárraga-Mínguez et al., 2024). In the elementary and preschool settings, robust, ongoing teacher training practice is equally pressing to guarantee the practical adoption of such methods within the classroom. This change enhances the teacher's instructional methods as the child becomes a learner and optimally nurtures the congenital education growth (Fraihat et al., 2022; Khasawneh et al., 2023; Rashid et al., 2024; Rello & Bigham, 2017; Sin & Siahpoosh, 2020).

In closing, encouraging the child to become a proficient and active reader is not a shallow or fleeting educational goal (Vargas et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2017). Instead, educating students is a purposeful initiative that enables building well-rounded, active learners across the globe that can think critically, and positively contribute to the world. It is best summed as, "We learn to read, and we read to learn," a saying, that discusses reading as the main way a person can obtain knowledge and grow. This phrase also captures this initiative with reading as the most important resource to vastly improve one's life.

2. Statement of the Study

At an early stage in the learning process and for advancement in the learning continuum, the young child needs to acquire age-appropriate reading skills to be able to function in society. The ability to read enables them to benefit into different learning resources, to use the language effectively, and to think and respond to different issues within and outside the environment in a socially meaningful way. Young readers, therefore, need educationally meaningful support and investment must be made in the development of early years reading programs, as well as in the preparation of educators with the right knowledge, skills and resources to deliver such programs.

One of the most important skills a young child can master is reading. The ability to read, particularly with regards to educational instruction, appears to be on the decline, and with this decline comes the consideration of the available educational and pedagogical strategies. The implications here are that the existing educational and pedagogical approaches need to be supplemented to ensure basic reading skills are developed in order to prepare children for higher order thinking and educational tasks.

Close of this stage of development, early childhood educators understand which reading skills students should possess. This understanding can provide a basis for modification of educational interventions and policy frameworks. Moreover, understanding how these viewpoint changes across educational strata of the teachers can inform the development of more focused professional training programs.

This educational research seeks to define the means of helping children acquire the basic skills of reading. This is to enhance the quality of early childhood education and the development of positive learning environments that equip children for future educational and social achievements.

Based on this, the research will examine the following questions:

1.   What foundational reading skills are considered essential for children to master by the end of early childhood from the perspective of early childhood educators, as guided by modern educational approaches?

2.   To what extent do early childhood educators' views on their role in developing children's foundational reading skills vary significantly based on their academic qualifications, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$?

3. Method and procedures

3.1 Research design and study sample

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to assess the perceptions of early childhood educators regarding reading skills development that enable children to master foundational skills. This design provided a broad snapshot of the pedagogical perceptions and teaching methods employed in early education in Amman Jordan that are current for the time and place of the research. This study's population consisted of all early childhood educators (KG1 to Grade 2) in both public and private schools in the capital. Based on the official records of the Ministry of Education for the year 2025, there are 755 teachers in total. From this population, educators were randomly selected to obtain a representative sample of 690 educators using a computerized draw. This random selection of educators improved the generalizability of the results. The participants were stratified according to their academic qualifications as 112 (16.2%) diploma holders, 478 (69.3%) bachelor's in education holders, and 100 (14.5%) master's and above. The stratified sampling method meets the objective of the study, as it provides the data necessary to assess the extent to which differences in educators' academic qualifications is related to their perceptions of the teaching of developmental reading skills.

3.2 Questionnaire Development

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect early childhood educators' perceptions of the reading skills necessary for children aged 5 to 7 years. The first authors' step in the construction of the questionnaire was a systematic review of educational literature focusing on phonological awareness, decoding, vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and comprehension. The purpose of the review was to identify the fundamental skills of reading that foster a functional and proficient young reader who can interact with texts in developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and constructive ways.

To improve content validity, a series of semi-structured interviews were performed with a sample of 11 specialists in early literacy and language teaching. The specialists' knowledge and expertise, combined with findings from the literature, produced a detailed list of 35 fundamental reading skills. For the survey, participants were requested to assess the skills using a five-point Likert scale, measuring the variables from "Not Important" to "Very Important." The survey was developed to measure the theoretical and practical dimensions of the skills the specialists viewed as integral to the development of early literacy and literacy. This was complemented with data to inform the reading skills the educators were able to provide were so as to aid in the development of early literacy and subsequent academic success.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Regarding the content validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by experts in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) and early childhood education pedagogy. The experts reviewed each question for relevance, clarity, and the appropriate developmental level. From their suggestions, three questions were omitted for overlap or developmental level mismatch, and additional language revisions were made. The suggested changes made the instrument target the elementary reading skills expected of children aged five to seven years.

To establish reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers distributed it to a pilot sample of 23 early childhood educators who were members of the same population. Using the test-retest method, a Pearson correlation of .95 was obtained, indicating a strong correlation. Stability of the instrument was verified. Equally high internal reliability was ascertained to be .91 via the use of Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency. The completed 32-item questionnaire was then disseminated to the entire 690 educator sample. The 100% return rate confirmed the facilitators' enthusiasm, as well as their unambiguous, suitable use of the instrument in the research setting.

3.4 Data Gathering and analyzing Procedure

In order to achieve the aims of the study and to ensure reliability, the study followed distinct, systematic, and consecutive steps. It began with the construction of a Standardized One Questionnaire designed to discover the particular reading

skills of children 5 to 7 years. This was developed and refined using a comprehensive review of the relevant education literature, followed by interviews of experts in early language and literacy education. A panel of experts verified its content validity, while reliability was measured by the test-retest approach with a group of educators unconnected to the study.

Having validated this instrument, the researchers proceeded to select a simple random sample of schools of the public and private sectors and of different geographical locations in the city of Amman, in order to collect data. Arrangements with the school managers were made to facilitate the effective distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

The final part of the survey was also sent to a subset of the population made up of 690 early childhood educators on the kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 classes. This was during the last part of the first term of 2024/2025 academic year. Respondents were given enough time to respond to the questionnaires so that their responses could be well thought out and accurate. After one month the questionnaires were completed and a 100% response rate was attained, which attests to the incredible commitment and involvement of the educators who took part in the survey.

The complete questionnaires were secured in a database. A sample was randomly selected and checked in order to validate the accuracy and completeness of the information. The data in the database was analyzed using SPSS 25 where both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed so as to ascertain the educators perceived and the possible relationship that certain demographic variables could have on the educators' perceptions on early reading skills. This due diligence provided the study the empirical foundation to make reasonable reflections on the need to equip learners with the ability to read early by using proper methodologies on effective teaching.

4. Results
4.1 Results of the First Question

At this time, the authors intend to discern the degree of self-reported reading skill capability of children, based on the analysis of the self-reported reading skill capability of professional educators from the preschool and primary teaching sectors. The aim of this analysis is to provide an understanding of the role of fundamental reading capability skills in the development of an independent, critical, and lifelong learner.

This process involved reviewing the educational literature, obtaining consultation from relevant subject matter experts, and undergoing the process of instrument validation, and this ultimately achieved the aim in developing the most comprehensive list defining the 32 reading skills competencies deemed most critical to early literacy. The skills involved represent a complex and factored skill set including phonemic awareness, breadth and depth of vocabulary, reading comprehension, expressive language skills, critical thinking, and engagement with the text.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the importance of various skills of reading in order to gather the scores of response patterns from the 690 early childhood education educators in Amman who participated in the study subsequently analyze them using means and standard deviations to assess individual reading skills. Early childhood education's perceived importance and relevance prioritization of skill requisite at foundational levels are easily discernible from these statistical indicators.

The findings highlighted a varied spread of the importance ratings and a number of skills, especially meaning-making and critical and expressive thinking, received the highest rankings. On the other hand, skills relating to formal grammar and higher order syntactic awareness received lower ratings because of educators' teaching priorities focused on comprehension and the function of language during this stage of development.

As shown in Table 1 below, the 32 reading skills are listed and ranked in descending order based on their arithmetical means and weights. This order demonstrates the insights reflecting the early childhood educators' opinions on the skills they believe to be foundational and essential for reading and literacy development.

Table 1: Arithmetic Means, and Standard Deviations, of Ratings by Early Childhood Education Teachers for Required Reading Skills

No.	Skill Description (Items)	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Recalling basic details from simple texts and comprehending them.	4.98	0.81
2	Using new vocabulary learned from stories in daily life situations.	4.82	0.79
3	Identifying main ideas and themes in short passages.	4.78	0.88

No.	Skill Description (Items)	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	Expressing opinions about characters and events shown in illustrations.	4.75	0.67
5	Sequencing story events logically to retell them.	4.70	0.55
6	Reading aloud with appropriate tone and emphasis according to punctuation marks.	4.68	0.81
7	Engaging with the text by asking questions and predicting upcoming events.	4.65	0.72
8	Connecting images to text to build simple stories.	4.62	0.84
9	Distinguishing between similarly sounding words to improve comprehension.	4.59	0.78
10	Constructing simple sentences using words and phrases acquired through reading.	4.55	0.70
11	Understanding word meanings within sentences and explaining them.	4.50	0.75
12	Participating in discussions and dialogues about the read texts.	4.48	0.69
13	Recognizing the use of pronouns in sentences.	4.40	0.62
14	Differentiating between singular, plural, masculine, and feminine word forms.	4.35	0.79
15	Distinguishing demonstrative pronouns like "this" and "that."	4.30	0.81
16	Using appropriate intonation to differentiate between questions, statements, and exclamations.	4.25	0.83
17	Differentiating between past, present, and future tenses in simple sentences.	4.20	0.90
18	Correct pronunciation of common letters and words.	4.18	0.88
19	Following basic grammar rules such as subject-verb agreement.	4.10	0.95
20	Writing short stories or sentences inspired by reading materials.	4.05	0.72
21	Recognizing and correctly using punctuation marks in reading and writing.	4.00	0.85
22	Understanding the function of conjunctions like "and," "but," and "because."	3.95	0.79
23	Identifying different types and forms of letters in the Arabic alphabet.	3.90	0.76
24	Inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words from context.	3.85	0.81
25	Differentiating between sentence types such as questions and declarative sentences.	3.80	0.77
26	Achieving fluency and smoothness during oral reading.	3.75	0.88
27	Applying reading skills to relate texts to personal experiences.	3.70	0.68
28	Predicting the story's ending based on textual clues.	3.65	0.72
29	Using context to select the correct meaning of words with multiple meanings.	3.60	0.83
30	Recognizing the difference between formal and informal language in texts.	3.55	0.90
31	Awareness of simple rhetorical devices and similes within texts.	3.50	0.75
32	Applying critical thinking to texts by asking questions and making constructive comments.	3.45	0.80

* Maximum weight for each item = 5.

As shown in Table 1, the arithmetic mean scores for early childhood educators' evaluations of the importance of foundational reading skills for children at the end of early childhood ranged between 3.45 and 4.98. This wide range indicates notable variation in teachers' perceptions regarding the significance of each skill, which may reflect differences in pedagogical priorities, developmental appropriateness, and practical classroom experience.

Skills ranked at the top of the list were those directly related to comprehension and meaning-making, such as *"recalling basic details from simplified texts"*, *"using newly acquired vocabulary from stories in daily life"*, and *"identifying main ideas and themes in short texts"*. Mean scores reflected a tendency toward the higher end of the scale. It can be indicated that, in the opinion of the educators, the abilities from this set of component skills are considered fundamental and are of primary importance in teaching reading. These skills are regarded as the prerequisites for creating a reader who can think and reflect, and who possesses the ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply information constructively.

Furthermore, skills involving the intersection of comprehension and oral communication, as well as interactive skills, were placed as highly important. These include the abilities to *"express opinions about illustrated characters and events", "integrate images and text to narrate a story in a simple manner", and "read with expression and proper pacing to convey meaning".* These responses portray a sophisticated pedagogy that surpasses the level of teaching reading as a simple ability and includes the dimension of involving students in a sophisticated interactive and high-level cognitive process that requires them to deeply engage with the text and go beyond mere oral reading to meaningfully reflect upon and respond to the text.

A few of the received skills with the lowest ratings, about lack of ability included such complex abstract grammatical knowledge and advanced linguistic concepts such as the capacity to differentiate formal and informal language and identify the use of elementary rhetorical devices and the ability to apply critical thinking by questioning or providing commentary and so forth. Such skills deal with the language learning process fundamentally. However, in the context of early childhood education and pedagogy, they seem far too advanced and lack grounded cognitive practicality. Still, the inclusion of these skills in the list of competencies educators must have broadened the vision of these educators and the administrators providing such training as to the Integrated or Holistic Teaching framework, showing an equally valid appreciation for the value of skills that may have little to no relevance in the short term. It reflects an appreciation of the process of learning to read as something that starts from the simple and basic skills of decoding and comprehension and grows into the multiphase advanced skills of reflection and analysis.

Preschool teachers, in the balanced consideration, are extremely reflective practitioners. The domain of meaning making, language, and interaction and the attention they turn to learning how children understand and get involved in literacy, goes to further evidence of changing conceptual frameworks. Children are not simply receivers of knowledge anymore. They get involved and take part in learning, and in doing so, they learn. These insights call for alignment and realignment of the curricula, teaching strategies, and pre-service and in-service teacher training to the complexity and appropriateness of reading skills to the children.

The study offers, as the first contribution, a prioritized list of essential reading skills and, as the second contribution, a pedagogically sounding roadmap to teachers and policy makers for empowering the young reader. Identifying these skills as the most fundamental at this level enables the stakeholders to support children to become confident, expressive, and critical readers early in their learning life.

4.2 Results of the Second Question

The main goal of this study is to find out the extent to which early childhood educators' perceptions of the essential reading skills a child should possess by the end of early childhood differ based on their levels of education (Community College Diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree and higher). In order to evaluate this goal, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the degrees of reading skills based on the different qualifications. The goal of this statistical examination was to find out whether the educators' levels of academic preparation correlate with their perceptions towards the degree of importance of reading skills. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA for testing the significance of differences in study sample responses by educational qualification

Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	Degrees of Freedom	F Value	Significance Level
Academic Qualification	Between Groups	1.53	0.51	2	1.57	0.61*
	Within Groups	78.48	0.41	687		

Not statistically significant at a significance level (p ≥ 0.05).

From analyzing the data in Table 2, the ANOVA results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences regarding the perceptions of reading skills among the educators according to their academic qualifications (F = 1.57, p = 0.61). The difference among the groups was small in comparison to the difference within the groups which means that regardless of whether the educators had attained a Community College Diploma, bachelor's degree, or master's degree and higher, their assessments of the essential reading skills were more or less the same.

This finding implies a shared consensus among early childhood educators about the critical reading skills children should develop by the end of early childhood education, regardless of formal academic training level. It suggests

that professional experiences and practical engagement with early literacy may play a more decisive role in shaping educators' perspectives than their highest academic credential alone.

5. Discussion
5.1 Discussion of the First Question
The findings of the study indicated that early childhood educators value the reading skills that emphasize meaning-making and comprehension. The abilities to recall some basic details from simple texts, use newly learned words in conversation a few days later, as well as noting the main ideas and themes were all rated highest. The teacher's understanding of the child's cognitive and language development in this critical early stage, enables these skills in this most formative stage is crucial. Children need to engage in reading and learn to read beyond acquiring information.

In addition, the findings illustrate the value received from tasks that measure thoughtful skills alongside expressive ones - a value that was given to sharing one's thoughts about characters and events presented in the drawings, relating images to texts to form basic narrative, and performing a reading with proper voice modulation given to the punctuation marks voiced. This shows that the teachers are trying to implement a modern instructional strategy, one that treats reading as an interactive, as an active, and as a constructive skill, including critical thinking, verbal communication, and emotional engagement with texts, and not just word calling, and as something that involves thinking, speaking, and feeling about the readings.

These results are similar to the findings of Al-Barakat et al. (2023), and AlAli et al. (2025) regarding the importance of comprehension and expression skills in emerging literate children. Furthermore, these findings are in consensus with holistic educational research that advocates a comprehensive approach to reading, which incorporates sound and systems awareness, constructive thinking, and oral and written expression that advances the child's learning abilities and the language skills (Fatyela et al., 2021; Guimarães et al., 2020; Head et al., 2018; Khudair & Abu Ghazal, 2016).

Theoretical relevance to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development shows the necessity to provide learning experiences at the level of the child and support growth at the child's level of cognitive and linguistic development (Bataineh et al., 2025; Hawamdeh et al., 2025; Khasawneh et al., 2022). Educators and peers assist children with understanding and articulation of skills at levels of advanced and more complex knowledge so that knowledge is not only attained at a surface level.

Moreover, the findings provide a rationale for the constructivist approach to knowledge acquisition and retention whereby knowledge is developed through interaction with one's environment. Reading is not a passive act of receiving, but an active process of meaning making and meaning retention, so much so that it calls for the articulation of an individual view and the teachers encourage this.

By contrast, skills such as grammatical knowledge and awareness, as well as the ability to distinguish between formal and informal language, to recognize and use some basic rhetorical strategies and devices, and to engage in some level of critical reasoning, were assessed as being of relatively lower priority. This is probably because these skills are more advanced and have a greater level of cognitive demand, which is more appropriate to be studied in later developmental stages. Nevertheless, the simple fact that such skills are included means that the teachers do recognize the relevance of such skills, even if they may not be paramount in the context of early childhood education.

Such a change in the emphasis of skills is an indication of a systematic and appropriate educational approach for growth, which focuses, in the first instance, on reading skills which facilitate the comprehension and the expression of ideas, while more advanced skills in language and grammar, especially the abstract, are postponed until the child is more advanced, cognitively and in language. This is consistent with the principles of education which are developmental, with particular focus on reading and language skills in relation to the different levels of the text from the practical to the formal (Asadi & Khateb, 2017; Asadi et al., 2017).

Considering the captured information, the research points to the fact that there is a need to build reading programs and pre-service teacher training to concentrate on those reading skills that make it possible to understand and facilitate engagement and expression at a higher level. These skills are essential to the creation of a self-reliant reader who is actively engaged and is a critical thinker. These results also indicate the need to make changes to the early childhood teacher education curriculum in ways that help to prepare teachers to support literacy development in children appropriately to the children's level of development and that support the development of higher-level language skills when the children are ready.

5.2 Discussion of the Second Question

With respect to the formal qualifications of early childhood educators (i.e., community college diploma; bachelor's, masters or higher), outcomes of the one-way ANOVA analysis indicate that there is no statistically meaningful difference (at $p=0.05$) in the difference in reading skills that should be mastered by children at the completion of the early childhood education program. This indicates that the educational qualifications of the educators do not considerably differ in terms of the understanding of reading skills that children ought to acquire at the end of the stage in the development continuum. These results can be explained by two considerations. First, early childhood educators, irrespective of the degrees that they hold, undergo professional education of a certain kind which is informal, with a focus on early reading skills. This professional training, along with substantial teaching practice, aids in developing a common understanding and professional outlook on essential reading skills and enhances basic reading instructional techniques.

Second, these results further indicate that a combination of teaching experience and continuous professional training may be stronger faculty determinants in comparison to the educator's academic qualifications as the factors that influence the educator's beliefs and practices. Advanced education courses and actual teaching provide opportunities to most educators to fine-tune their practices in response to the children, educational trends, and curriculum demands.

The research findings match the results of previous studies (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2024; Hawamdeh et al., 2025), which demonstrated that early childhood educators maintain similar teaching practices and professional perspectives despite their varying academic backgrounds. The standardization of teacher knowledge and skills depends mainly on professional learning activities and educational course participation and motivation to improve.

The research findings support modern psychological and educational theories which demonstrate that experiential learning combined with continuous professional development leads to better teaching quality. According to constructivist and active learning theories, knowledge emerges from practical experience rather than academic education alone. The combining of effective professional development and experiential approaches allow educators to develop a more refined understanding of the fundamental reading skills that they can implement with greater effectiveness.

The findings of this research illustrate that having teachers provide instruction requires ongoing assistance as they must be treated as ever-evolving scholars. It is recommended that education decision-makers and businesses join forces and design frameworks that integrate theory and practice. This would enable teachers to provide quality instruction in reading that is responsive to the needs of children and ultimately produce the desired outcome of independent readers who think critically and are actively involved in the reading process.

To conclude, the findings stress the need to allocate funds and resources toward the ongoing training of educators through practice and provide less emphasis on their formal qualifications to appropriately inform policy. The design of practice training that is executed and the collaborative understanding of the fundamental reading competencies equips educators with the skills needed to teach the literacy skills that the upcoming generation deserves.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is particularly impactful as it may assist in the realignment of reading instruction for early learners with developmental appropriateness, and thus has valuable insights for curricula, policymakers, and educational institutions. The findings create a clear blueprint for the development of pre-service and in-service educator training programs that equip teachers with the necessary conceptual and experiential frameworks to build reading skills that enable learners to take charge of their learning. Therefore, the study calls for instructional frameworks that foster professional growth focused on comprehension and communication as the primary instruction model to be used beyond decoding and grammar instruction.

Consequently, this research might help in adjusting reading instruction for young children to more appropriate developmental practices, thereby providing necessary information to curriculum developers, policymakers, and educational organizations. The study's results provide a solid foundation for developing training programs for both prospective and currently employed teachers, which would provide teachers with the necessary understanding and experience to teach skills in reading to help learners become autonomous in their educational pursuits. Instructional programs that promote professional development in the areas of comprehension and communication, rather than merely decoding and grammar, as the primary forms of instruction, are needed. Therefore, the study argues that instruction should be built on comprehension and communication.

Also, the results strongly support the arguments of constructivist and active learning theories, particularly Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development model that emphasizes the importance of providing appropriate developmental

challenges, and at the same time, providing the necessary supporting scaffolds. Instruction in reading should focus on understanding the process as meaning construction since it aligns with the contemporary educational perspective, which conceives learners as active knowledge constructors. From the study perspective, educators should encourage children to think and express their ideas and then provide scaffolding to help them develop more sophisticated language and literacy skills.

Nevertheless, the study has its shortcomings. The only respondents were early childhood educators based in the capital city of Amman. This focus was overly narrow. Other areas were left out, so the results cannot be assumed for other areas, which poses a problem. The data was exclusively collected from a structured questionnaire, which poses its own problems. There was no way to fully capture the educators' nuanced practices and beliefs that inform and guide their classroom action, but that was inconsistent as well due to the singular reliance on the questionnaire. Because of this, the study would benefit from the more substantial incorporation of qualitative or mixed methods to be able to purposefully study the actual teaching practices in. Keeping these gaps in mind, the study proposes suggesting the focus of subsequent studies on private institutions and the rural areas of the country for more meaningful comparisons to be made across varied educational settings. Furthermore, for a more rounded research outcome on reading skills development and its environments, the contribution from other educators, the children, and the parents, is more than essential. There is also the importance of considering the skills that children are likely to develop reading-wise and academically in the later years of their schooling, and this can be established through research of this nature.

This study emphasizes that for early childhood educators, the appropriate construction of professional development and the construction of training programs that are meaningful and relevant say a lot more. There should be greater focus given to the enhancement of the collective practitioner conception of reading pedagogy than to the enhancement of the formal qualifications to which educators aspire. The enhancement of the skills of educators to effectively teach the earliest reading skills is essential to the development of a self-sustained, self-reflective, and confident learner who will participate in his/her learning and in society meaningfully.

Conflicts of Interest:
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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