Historical Text Comprehension Skills Among History Department Students from the Perspective of Faculty Members

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to identify: 1. The historical text comprehension skills of students in the Department of History from the perspective of faculty members. 2. The statistically significant differences in historical text comprehension skills among students in the Department of History according to the variable of gender (male–female). To achieve the objectives of the research, the descriptive method was adopted. A special scale was constructed based on theoretical frameworks and previous studies, consisting of thirty items distributed across five main domains: logical reasoning, sequence of events, drawing conclusions, deriving implicit meanings, and understanding the historical context. After verifying its validity, reliability, and discriminative power, the scale was applied to a sample of 200 faculty members from the History Departments of universities in the Middle Euphrates region. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with a five-point Likert scale employed. The results revealed that history students possess good skills in comprehending historical texts from the perspective of faculty members.

Keywords: (Historical text comprehension skills, faculty members).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The researcher believes that the skills of understanding historical texts are among the essential abilities that help students grasp history through experiencing the historical period addressed in the text, discovering the relationship between the causes and consequences of historical events, distinguishing differences in ideas, values, behaviors, customs, and traditions, comparing different historical narratives, searching for the influences of the past on the present, and observing the developments that have occurred in the lives of nations and societies.

This issue is centered on the weakness in the ability to properly comprehend, as many students find it difficult to learn and understand social studies. They are often unable to grasp the ideas presented by the teacher or to benefit from these texts in their academic journey.

The research problem is manifested in answering the following question:
What is the level of historical text comprehension skills among history department students from the perspective of faculty members?

RESEARCH IMPORTANCE:

The skills of understanding historical texts are the result of curriculum development based on standards that have spread during the last decades of the previous century. These skills provide answers to questions raised in the minds of all those involved in the educational process. Historical texts require a process of cognitive reconstruction that enables students to comprehend the nature of historical events, particularly those that may have been subjected to inaccurate interpretations by historians in expressing their viewpoints and conclusions. Therefore, the skills of understanding historical texts help students acquire cognitive frameworks and build a knowledge base about their ancestors, thus enabling them to better understand, analyze, and critically evaluate historical events. (Kharbashah, 2004: 151)

In addition, acquiring skills in understanding historical texts includes gaining historical knowledge, organizing it, raising key questions, analyzing them, solving problems, and making decisions. The subject of history aims to enable students to practice skills of historical text comprehension through active participation rather than merely providing them with information. Historical understanding involves collecting historical data in a sequential manner, analyzing it, drawing conclusions,

distinguishing between facts and opinions, identifying the relevance of evidence to historical events, and applying it in new contexts. (Jabr & Qura'an, 2004: 3)

Furthermore, recognizing the nature of the patterns that students use in acquiring skills of historical text comprehension helps us enhance the educational process for university students, particularly those in the Department of History. Since these skills are essential to understanding how students comprehend historical texts, the relationship between historical text comprehension skills and methods of teaching history requires focusing primarily on analyzing the links between historical facts and the use of abstract concepts to develop hypotheses related to cause and effect. These hypotheses should then be supported by evidence. Historical thinking involves avoiding bias and prejudice, moving away from competitiveness, reaching independent judgments supported by evidence, and recognizing that every conclusion is a hypothesis subject to acceptance or rejection in light of new evidence and arguments.
 (Jamel, 2002: 57)

Aims of Research:
The present research aims to:
- Identify the skills of historical text comprehension among students of the History Department from the perspective of faculty members.
- Examine the statistically significant differences in historical text comprehension skills among History Department students according to the variable of gender (male–female).

Limits of Research:
This research is defined by the following limits:
- Spatial Limit: The study was conducted in the College of Education for Human Sciences at the University of Karbala.
- Human Limit: The study sample consisted of faculty members from the Department of History in the universities of the Middle Euphrates region (Karbala, Najaf, Babylon, Al-Qadisiyah, and Al-Muthanna).
- Temporal Limit: The study was conducted during the academic year (2024–2025).
- Scientific Limit: The research is limited to the skills of historical text comprehension.

Terms Definition:
- Historical Text Comprehension Skills / Definitions by Researchers Abu Ammah (1997):
- He defined it as "the learner's ability to formulate a part of the historical material in their own style, interpret certain historical facts and concepts, present them in diagrams, or perceive the relationships between facts, concepts, and generalizations." (Abu Ammah, 1997: 17)
- Al-Laqani & Al-Jamal (1999):

- They defined it as "the learner's ability to give meaning to a historical situation or event they encounter, inferred from a set of mental behaviors exhibited by the student, which surpass mere memorization. These behaviors include translating, interpreting, completing, explaining, giving, deducing, or expressing something." (Al-Laqani & Al-Jamal, 1999: 17)

Theoretical Definition:
"Based on a review of the relevant literature and previous studies related to the current research topic, the researcher prepared the following theoretical definition: It is the ability of students to formulate the historical text in their own style, interpret certain facts and concepts, perceive the relationships among them, provide historical evidence supporting their viewpoints based on ideas presented in the historical text, and present them according to their own learning patterns.

Operational Definition:
The researcher defines historical text comprehension skills as the variable whose level she aims to measure among students of the History Department from the perspective of faculty members in the College of Education for Human Sciences at the universities of the Middle Euphrates region, through the responses of the study sample to the items of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale prepared by the researcher for this purpose.

Theoretical Framework
Historical Text Comprehension Skills:
Understanding historical texts is considered one of the essential competencies that should be developed among History Department students. A historical text is not merely a narrative of past events or facts; rather, it is a complex cognitive construct that requires awareness of contexts, analysis of meanings, understanding causal relationships, and distinguishing between facts and interpretations. From this perspective, true comprehension of historical texts is not achieved simply by reading the content; it requires possessing a set of cognitive and intellectual skills that enable learners to engage critically and consciously with what they read.
Based on the analysis of the requirements for understanding historical texts and a review of modern educational literature and studies focused on teaching historical text comprehension skills and given the absence of a specific, direct list of such skills in the educational literature the researcher relied on concepts related to historical understanding and text analysis from reliable scientific sources. She reconstructed and formulated the skills to align with the study's objectives. This process was based on the concepts of historical understanding as presented by Seixas & Morton (2013), in addition to other relevant literature.

In consideration of the functional interconnection of the selected skills with historical text comprehension, the researcher identified five core skills that are most closely related to understanding educational historical texts and

most influential in achieving deep comprehension. These skills were selected based on their integration and their coverage of the mental, analytical, and interpretive aspects required by historical texts.

These skills are represented as follows:
Logical Inference Skill: This is a core skill based on analyzing historical data, linking causes with consequences, and constructing rational conclusions supported by historical evidence. It enables students to move beyond superficial understanding to deeper deductive comprehension.

Chronological Sequencing Skill: This skill is crucial for understanding the temporal sequence and logical order of events, as well as the development of historical incidents within their timelines, which helps connect the past with the present.

Result Derivation Skill: This skill is considered an outcome of higher-level historical text comprehension processes. It indicates the learner's ability to analyze information, interpret it, and infer the effects and consequences of historical events.

Implicit Meaning Extraction Skill: This skill is essential for understanding the hidden dimensions in historical texts, such as unspoken motivations, embedded values, or cultural and political references that are not explicitly stated.

Historical Context Comprehension Skill: This skill ensures that the text is read within its temporal, spatial, and cultural context, preventing the projection of the present onto the past and supporting the interpretation of events within their real circumstances. (Seixas & Morton, 2013: 2)

Research Procedures

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
The descriptive-analytical method is considered the most appropriate approach for the current study in order to achieve its objectives.

Research Population:
The research population includes all faculty members in the Colleges of Education at the Middle Euphrates universities in the Department of History, for both morning and evening study programs. The research population consists of 408 faculty members. Table (1) illustrates the distribution of the research population according to governorate and gender.

Table (1): Distribution of the Research Population by Governorate and Gender

| Total | Gender | | Governorate | ت |
	Female	Male		
82	31	51	Karbala	1
94	53	41	Babylon	2
87	45	42	Najaf	3
85	39	46	Al-Qadisiyah	4
60	28	32	Al-Muthanna	5
408	196	212	Total	

Research Sample
The sample for statistical analysis of all items was selected using a stratified random method, after excluding the participants of the preliminary exploratory sample based on the researcher's annotated list of names. The statistical analysis sample consisted of 200 faculty members, representing 39% of the total population of the study.

Research Instrument
Historical Text Comprehension Skills:
The researcher reviewed studies and research related to the variable "historical text comprehension skills" and found no existing instrument suitable for her research sample. Therefore, she developed a scale (Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale) appropriate for the current study and its objectives, according to the following steps:

Open-ended Questionnaire to a Pilot Sample:
The researcher reviewed previous literature and studies on historical text comprehension skills and met with a sample of faculty members from the History Department. She provided them with an open-ended questionnaire containing two questions and analyzed the responses of the exploratory random sample. This feedback was instrumental in preparing the items of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale.

Description of the Scale Items:

The Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale consists of five main skills: Logical Inference Skill: 6 items, Chronological Sequencing Skill: 6 items, Result Derivation Skill: 6 items, Implicit Meaning Extraction Skill: 6 items, Historical Context Comprehension Skill: 6 items, The total number of items in the scale is 30 items.

Discrimination Power of Items

After administering the scale to the 200 faculty members and correcting their response forms, the researcher calculated the discrimination power of each item. Scores of the participants were arranged from highest to lowest total score for each component. Two extreme groups were identified, representing 27% of the total score in each group, with 54 participants in the upper group and 54 participants in the lower group.

An independent-samples t-test was used to calculate the statistical significance of the differences between the mean scores of the two groups for each item. The calculated t-value was considered the discrimination power of the item. It was found that all items were discriminative and statistically significant, as their t-values exceeded the tabulated t-value of 1.98 with 106 degrees of freedom at a significance level of 0.05.

Table (2): Discrimination Power of the Items of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale

	Significance Level 0,05	Calculated t-value	Lower Group		Upper Group		items
			Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean	
ChatGPT said: Logical Inferences	Logical Inferences						
	Significant	5.912	1.042	2.167	1.106	3.389	1
	Significant	3.903	1.132	2.037	1.280	2.944	2
	Significant	9.350	1.069	2.630	0.705	4.259	3
	Significant	7.240	0.930	2.759	0.763	3.944	4
	Significant	5.262	1.260	3.130	0.861	4.222	5
	Significant	4.561	1.075	3.426	0.805	4.259	6
	Chronological Sequencing						
	Significant	10.297	0.776	2.963	0.718	4.444	7
	Significant	8.589	0.908	3.074	0.716	4.426	8
	Significant	12.368	0.792	2.426	0.666	4.167	9
	Significant	3.925	0.998	3.148	0.912	3.870	10
	Significant	9.746	0.851	2.741	0.787	4.278	11
	Significant	13.023	0.685	2.611	0.705	4.352	12
	Result Derivation						
	Significant	10.026	0.964	2.574	0.816	4.296	13
	Significant	8.975	1.081	2.792	0.708	4.370	14
	Significant	7.403	1.035	2.796	0.825	4.130	15
	Significant	7.084	1.116	2.667	1.029	4.130	16
	Significant	6.743	1.246	2.648	0.929	4.074	17
	Significant	9.635	1.031	2.741	0.767	4.426	18
Implicit Meaning Extraction	Implicit Meaning Extraction						
	Significant	10.814	1.022	2.111	0.777	4.000	19
	Significant	5.197	1.158	2.407	1.023	3.500	20
	Significant	6.934	1.071	2.278	1.009	3.667	21
	Significant	10.517	0.529	1.278	1.209	3.167	22
	Significant	3.321	1.011	3.185	0.898	3.796	23
	Significant	14.396	0.797	1.685	0.821	3.926	24
	Historical Context Comprehension						
	Significant	5.623	0.838	2.296	1.156	3.389	25
	Significant	12.050	0.834	2.278	0.795	4.167	26
	Significant	9.098	0.824	1.887	1.123	3.611	27
	Significant	9.753	1.132	3.037	0.476	4.667	28
	Significant	7.398	1.133	3.130	0.720	4.481	29

Significant	6.380	1.096	2.926	1.045	4.241	30

Relationship Between Item Score and the Skill Score It Belongs To:

The researcher used this method to determine the correlation coefficient between the score of each item and the total score of the skill it belongs to. This was done to verify the validity of the items of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale in each domain, using the total domain score as an internal criterion. After applying the Pearson correlation coefficient, it was found that all correlation coefficients were statistically significant when compared with the critical value of 0.139 at a significance level of 0.05 with 198 degrees of freedom. This indicator confirmed that the scale items accurately represent their respective skills.

Psychometric Properties of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale:

- Validity of the Scale:
- Two types of validity were extracted for the current scale: face validity and construct validity, as explained below:

Face Validity:

The items of the scale were presented to 20 experts. Based on their opinions, the items achieved an agreement rate of more than 80%, with some minor modifications made to a few items.

Construct Validity:

- The researcher verified construct validity using the following indicators:
- Discrimination Coefficient: By finding the differences between the two extreme groups.
- Item-Total Correlation: By examining the correlation between each item and the total score of its respective skill.

Reliability of the Scale:
A. Test-Retest Method:

To determine the reliability of the current scale, it was applied to a randomly selected sample of 20 faculty members. After 14 days, the scale was administered to the same sample again. Using the Pearson correlation coefficient to calculate the relationship between the first and second administrations the reliability values were obtained as shown in Table (3):

Table (3): Test-Retest Reliability Coefficient for Each Skill of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale:

Test-Retest Reliability	Skill	Test-Retest Reliability	Skill
0,90	Implicit Meaning Extraction	0,94	Chronological Sequencing
0,92	Historical Context Comprehension	0,91	Logical Inference
		0,89	Result Derivation

B. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

To determine reliability using this method, Cronbach's Alpha formula was applied to the responses of the statistical analysis sample, which consisted of 200 faculty members. After applying the formula, the reliability values were obtained as shown in Table (4). These values are acceptable and indicate a high level of internal consistency.

Table (4): Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Each Skill of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale

Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Skill	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Skill
0,88	Implicit Meaning Extraction	0,91	Logical Inference
0,90	Historical Context Comprehension	0,89	Chronological Sequencing
		0,87	Result Derivation

C. Final Description of the Scale:

The Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale in its final form consists of five skills: Logical Inference, Chronological Sequencing, Result Derivation, Implicit Meaning Extraction, and Historical Context Comprehension. Each skill includes

(6) items, and each item has five response alternatives: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. These were assigned weights of (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), respectively. Therefore, the maximum score that a respondent can obtain for each skill is (30), representing the highest level, while the minimum score is (6), representing the lowest level. Accordingly, the theoretical mean for each skill is (18).

Presentation of the Study Results:
First Objective: To identify the historical text comprehension skills among history department students from the perspective of the faculty members.

Results Presentation:
To achieve this objective, the researcher applied the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale, consisting of (30) items, to the research sample of (200) faculty members. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation for each skill were then calculated separately. To determine the significance of the difference between the calculated means and the hypothetical mean for each skill, the researcher used a one-sample t-test. The results are presented in Table (5).

Table (5): Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values of the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale

Significance (0,05)	t-value		Hypothetical Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Sample	Historical Text Comprehension Skills
	Tabulated	Calculated					
Significant	1,96	7,167	18	2,881	19,460	200	Logical Inferences
Significant	1,96	12,262	18	3,523	21,055	200	Chronological Sequencing
Significant	1,96	10,149	18	3,853	20,765	200	Result Derivation
Not significant	1,96	1,842	18	3,723	17,515	200	Implicit Meaning Extraction
Significant	1,96	8,596	18	3,825	20,325	200	Historical Context Comprehension

Second Objective: To identify the statistically significant differences in historical text comprehension skills among History Department students from the perspective of faculty members according to the gender variable (male–female).

Results Presentation:
To achieve this objective, the researcher collected the responses of the research sample, consisting of 200 faculty members, on the Historical Text Comprehension Skills Scale. After processing the data statistically, the researcher calculated the mean scores of the participants on the scale according to the gender variable (male–female) for each skill separately. To determine the differences between the two groups, the researcher used an independent-samples t-test. The results are presented in Table (6).

Table (6): Results of the Independent-Samples t-test for the Significance of Differences in Historical Text Comprehension Skills

Significance (0,05)	t-value		Standard Deviation	Mean	Sample Size	Gender	Historical Text Comprehension Skills
	Tabulated	Calculated					
Not significant	1,96	1,337	3,145	19,721	104	Male	Logical Inferences
			2,550	19,177	96	Female	
Not significant	1,96	0,292	3,641	21,125	104	Male	Chronological Sequencing
			3,409	20,979	96	Female	
Not significant	1,96	0,277	3,839	20,692	104	Male	Result Derivation
			3,886	20,844	96	Female	
Not significant	1,96	1,086	3,972	17,240	104	Male	

			3,428	17,812	96	Female	Implicit Meaning Extraction
Not significant	1,96	0,103	3,926	20,298	104	Male	Historical Context Comprehension

Recommendations:

Organize training courses and workshops for faculty members to enhance teaching methods for historical texts in a way that promotes the development of these skills among students.

Encourage students to use diverse sources (books, documents, articles, digital resources) to expand their ability to analyze historical texts and relate them to different contexts.

Suggestions:

Conduct a comparative study between students of Iraqi universities and students of other universities to identify differences in the level of historical text comprehension skills.

Conduct a study linking the level of historical text comprehension skills among History Department students with other variables, such as critical thinking or problem-solving skills, to examine the nature of their relationship.

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