

Investigating difficulties encountered by secondary school students in reading English comprehension

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Abstract:

This study attempts to shed light on the main difficulties facing Sudanese secondary schools students in developing their reading skill comprehension, and tries to find solutions. The researcher adopted a descriptive, analytical method of investigation. The main tool of this study is a test for secondary school students. Data has been calculated statistically. The research population of this study consists of students of first year of secondary schools. The sample of the study is (20) students in the White Nile state. AlGitaina locality. It is noticed that most of secondary schools students face difficulties in reading English comprehension in addition, the current syllabus is not enough to develop student's reading. In the lights of the findings the researcher recommends that teachers need continuous training so as to be able to teach reading comprehension efficiently. Also teachers must use different techniques in teaching reading according to their student's level. Therefore, students should be provided with additional reading materials beside the text book to develop their reading skills. From all that mentioned above secondary school students need much effort from the educationalists, in order to facilitate, encourage and develop their students' reading skill. To do that, they have to plan and select suitable strategies and techniques that lead to achieving the learning goals.

Key words: secondary school students, reading English comprehension

INTRODUCTION

The reading skill is one of the most important elements of English language, as a matter of fact it is essential for English

learners in general, and particularly for those who are going to specialize in this field.

Reading is a cognitive process that involves an interaction between the reader and the text. In this process, the reader uses his expectations and his knowledge of the language and the world around to get the message. Reading comprehension is one of the most difficult language skills to teach. However, we can train our students in the use of appropriate strategies to develop their reading comprehension skills. The task of the teacher is to help his students change their reading habits by teaching them efficient reading skills. The teacher's role, therefore, should be to give students the chance to read and to provide a purpose for reading.

Moreover, through this skills, you can deliver some articles or messages, to those who depend on reading to catch up information, and even for most of mass media channels which rely commonly on reading to send their projects or messages, for these reasons the reading skill become vital in any language in the world and every person wants to know any kind of language, he should have to know first how to write and read as a key of learning.

The majorities of the students especially English language learners in secondary schools are not able to read as well as expected to be, for this reason the researcher wants to investigate how to develop this skills according to his experience in language teaching. In order to help students and English language learners in particular.

IMPROVING ORAL READING SKILLS

Oral reading skills is one of the most important skills that teachers must try to concentrate on it, by giving students more oral practice in order to encourage them to read and improve their oral reading.

Ander son, (1979:124) argues that a good oral reader is eager to share with his listeners something that seems important, it may be new information, an experience, an interesting character, a bit of humor, or a pithy phrase without a motive of this kind. Oral reading is impersonal and lifeless. The reader should know his audiences' interests and needs. The reader must have mastered the skills of perception. So that he recognizes words quickly and accurately. Equally important is the ability to group words together in thought units and to read smoothly to help his listeners grasp the author's meaning, the reader uses various devices.

At the same point Anderson (1979:125) argues that the skills of oral reading are most naturally developed in the reading of plays. The reading of plays adds many values to reading, it enlists the delight in dramatization that appears in the everyday life of students; it enriches students' reading of fiction; it provides disciplines not found in other types of reading; it enhances comprehension, vocabulary development, phrase reading, expression and general speech skills.

In addition to the above speech about oral reading skills Anderson (1979:125), adds that the motivating power of the true audience situation is always found in play reading comprehension is assured, the student cannot interpret his lines unless he understands them, and phrase reading is improved by play reading. The student who inclines to read a word at a time or ignores commas and periods in oral reading will lose a complete phrase and attend to punctuation when he interprets his role. Also improvement of expression through emphasis, pauses and interpretation of mood and feeling is the main outcome of play reading.

In addition to the play reading, there are several materials that help students develop their reading skills, they can enrich their minds with vocabulary and new approaches which can lead them to good reading from early time, that happens by practicing reading literature and simplified stories,

if students do that they can improve their reading and fulfill their purposes.

LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING

It is common in theories of reading as well as in every day talk about reading to distinguish different levels of understanding of a text. Some may distinguish between a literal understanding of texts, and understanding of meaning that are not directly stated in text, similarly the distinction between understanding details and understanding the main idea of a text is familiar enough to teachers of reading.

According to Alderson (2000:8), such distinctions clearly relate to the product of reading, and enable teachers to describe some of the observed differences in understanding among readers, they also, enable the evaluation of such differences, since it believed that inferred of meanings are some hos deeper than literal meanings, and that a critical understanding of a text is more highly valued by society. This in turn leads to an assumption that it is more difficult to reach critical understanding of text than it is to infer meaning.

In summary, a consideration of the nature of reading must include recognition of teaching reading and distinctions among levels of meaning and understanding it. Test constructors must also consider the level of meaning that they believe readers can be able to get out from a particular text.

DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

The basic topic teachers are talking about nowadays is how to develop students' reading comprehension. It is the teachers' role to select the suitable techniques and strategies that enable them to improve and develop their students' reading comprehension.

In this topic Croft (1980: 347), point out that: Teachers need to make a distinction between the introduction to reading and the development of reading skills even though they are arbitrary divisions in developing reading competence, that initial introduction to reading has mainly to do with helping learners, sense relationship between the spoken language they know and the letters, words, sentences and paragraphs on the printed page. There is a correspondence between what is written and what is thought or spoken and that this system of correspondence is learnable. Most specially it starts the learner searching for meaning from the writing that he encounters.

In addition to above opinion Croft (1980) considers:

"The search for meaning necessarily involves guessing and hypothesizing, followed by revision and sometimes frustration and confusion on the word recognition level, on the sound correspondence level and phrase or sentence structure level and on level of meaning of larger units".

Also Croft (1980: 348), suggests some steps in teaching reading lesson includes, selecting a passage for the students to read, introduce the reading selection to the students, have the students read it, and then questions them to see if they have understood it, he clarifies them as:

1 Choice of Reading Material

First, when teachers select passages they make an effort to have them within the comprehension range of most of the students, but at the same time they try to select passages so that, each of them is a little more demanding, a little more difficult than the previous one, in an attempt to force the student to gradually extend his reading skills, texts that at the beginning of the book are expected to be easier to read and comprehend than those of the end, and suggests that the students are developing their skills.

This practice seems quite well adapted to help students develop reading comprehension skills by giving graduated

practices teachers have techniques such as cloze testing to be sure that their selections are, in fact at the instructional level for most students rather than at the frustration levels. Also teacher have to choose materials that have high interest for students, or materials about areas that students are already well back grounded on.

2 Introduction (Motivation)

The second step in a conventional reading lesson is to introduce the reading selection to the students, something teachers can do on various levels, usually, if they have elementary school training. Teacher prepare the students to read the passage by interesting them in the subject, perhaps developing some back ground for the ideas in the selection, or even quickly going over the content of the passage and perhaps setting some purpose for reading or some questions to be answered.

There are several other ways teachers conventionally prepare students for their reading practice. In most cases teachers go over the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases which will be encountered in the passage. Occasionally teachers review particular structures that might be new or confusing.

3 Reading Practice

The third step in a conventional reading lesson would be to have the students read the passage; it is the time when the student is actually practicing his reading comprehension skills. Although there are possibilities of fruitful intervention by the teacher as the students are reading short, confirming summary statements or questions about what is to come next. For example, most often teachers prefer to stand aside so as not to interfere with the students' reading. And perhaps most often, in order to save class time, students are told to do their reading at home and be ready to answer questions on it the next day.

4 Questioning

The final step in most of conventional reading lessons is the comprehension check. Here the teacher asks questions about the information in the reading selection, judging the degree to which the students understood the reading passage by their ability to recall the details with precision. The assumption is that a skilled reader would be able to recall any detail accurately (Croft, 1980: 348-49).

READING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A group of writers discussed and illustrated reading English as a second language and the effects of first language (L₁) on the students reading and understanding, but Croft (1982:355) argues that reading is a process which involves perception. No one is prepared to say exactly how the process operates; therefore, to attempt to discuss reading in a second language without any real understanding of the reading process in the first language may very difficult. However, enough has been written recently to make us believe that teachers can identify some of the factors what might perhaps be called obstacles in developing efficient skills in reading English as a second language.

Teacher should use Ronald ward Hough's (1969:80) description of reading, which is an expansion of the usual definition of reading as the visual recognition of Graphic symbols and an understanding of their meaning ward Hough describes reading in this way:

"When a person reads a text, he is attempting to discover the meaning of what he is reading by using the visual clues of spelling his knowledge of probabilities of occurrence his contextual pragmatic knowledge and his syntactic and semantic competence to give a meaningful interpretation to the text".

According to (ward Hough (1969)), the difference between reading in a first and in a second language depends upon, among other things at what point in a person's life a second language reading experience is introduced. If a student is taught to read first in his native language, he has the advantages of knowing the oral signals of that language. For the most part he can attribute to the visual symbols the meaning of what he already reacts to as language. If, however a student is taught to read a second language before he has learned to read his first language, he must learn not only a different medium of communication, but he has to do this within an unfamiliar linguistic frame work. He will not be able to rely upon his native language competence to help in the decoding process.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

The researcher as a teacher noticed that many secondary schools' students face difficulties in reading English comprehension. So the study is trying to shed light on the main problems that face students in their English reading skill, in addition to some recommendation so as to help in improving reading skill.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a- To suggest some techniques for developing Sudanese secondary schools reading comprehension.

QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

- a- Do secondary schools' students face difficulties in reading English comprehension?

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- a- Secondary schools' students face real difficulties in developing English reading comprehension.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the descriptive analytical approach aims at focusing on the main difficulties face Sudanese secondary schools students in developing their reading comprehension.

INSTRUMENTS OF THE STUDY

The researcher used a reading comprehension test for the students to collect the data of this study. The test was for twenty students in White Nile State- Algitaina locality.

TOOLS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher used Statistical Analytical Method and (SPSS) program to analyze the data of this study.

THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE TEST

The test validity and reliability is checked by long experienced teachers who gave comments on the test which were considered by the researcher to be more accurate. The test was analyzed statistically as it shown in table No (3.4)

Table (1) Reliability and Validity of the Test

	Reliability	Validity
Test	0.53	0.73

It is noted from the results of the table above that all reliability and validity coefficient for the test are greater than (50).This indicates to the high validity and reliability of the test, so the study test is valid and reliable, and that will give correct and acceptable statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The hypotheses:

Secondary schools' students face real difficulties in developing English reading comprehension.

The test aims to investigate difficulties encountered by secondary school students in reading English comprehension.

The test is divided into two questions, question (A) includes short answer question and question (B) is multiple choice question distributed to (20) students of the first year secondary school students to test their reading comprehension. The researcher used the t-test to analyze the student's test.

Table (2) Different Between Question (A) and Question (B)

Question	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-value
A	2.90	3.09	0.001**
B	6.30	2.66	

(**) there are statistical differences at (1%) level.

The p-value of t-test(0.001) is less than the significant value level (1%), this indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (1%) between answers of student In question (A) and question (B).That means the answers of students in question (B) is better than question (A).

Table (3) Frequency Distribution for Grades

Grade	Question	
	A	B
0	7	0
1	0	2
2	6	0
3	0	2
4	1	0
5	1	1
6	2	4
7	1	6
8	1	1
9	1	0
10	1	3

It is clear from table above that the answers of question (B) is better than the answer of question (A) because the grade of students in question (B)is higher than question (A).

The degree of question (A) is 10 grades which include short answer questions .there are seven students who obtained (Zero) grades and six students who obtained (2) grades in

addition to the other lower grades .except one students who obtained the full grade (10).this indicates that most of the students were not able to read and comprehend the passage, because this question requires students to read and understand the passage then answer the question.

In question (B) which is also (10) grades requires students to select the best answer among the given options .there is no one obtained (zero) grade .there are four students obtained (6) grades and six students obtained (7) grades. In addition there are three students obtained the full grade which is (10) grades.

This reveals that the answer of this question is better than the answer of question (A).

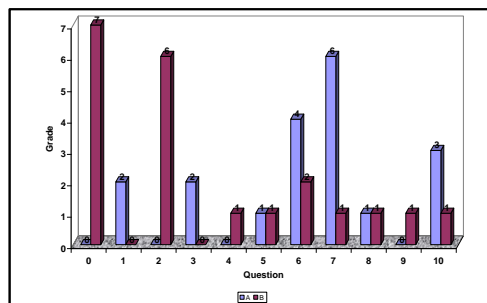


Figure (1) The Frequency Distribution for Question (A) and Question (B)

It is clear from table (3) that the answers of question (B) are better than the answers of question (A) because the grades of students in question (B) are higher than question (A).

Table (4) Descriptive for Overall Test

Overall test	Mean	Std. Deviation	Maximum	Minimum
	9.20	5.17	20	1

From above table, it is shown that most grade of student is (9) grade and minimum grade is(1) and maximum grade is (20). That mean the same level of student is excellent.

According to the result of the test and its relation with the hypothesis of the study appears that the hypothesis “Secondary schools’ students face real difficulties in developing English reading comprehension” is accepted and that secondary schools students face real difficulties in reading English comprehension.

Eventually, from the result of the test appears that students need much effort to overcome the difficulties that face them in reading English comprehension.

DISCUSSION

The grades of students in question (A) and question (B) reveal that there is a real difficulties face the students of secondary school in reading English comprehension, because most of the student obtained lower grade in the two questions specially question (A) which includes short answer questions, this question requires students to read and understand the passage carefully then they can answer their question, unlike question (B) that includes multiple choice questions which introduce options to the students to select the answer.

Generally from the two questions of the test which discussed in this research appears that most of the students are not able to answer the question carefully and they need much effort to help overcome the difficulties.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The researcher has come out with the following endings:

- 1- Sudanese secondary schools’ SPINE syllabus is not enough for developing students’ reading comprehension.

- 2- Students need extra motivation and encouragement so as to develop their reading skill.
- 3- Students face real difficulties in reading English comprehension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has come out with the following recommendations:

- 1- Teachers should use various techniques in teaching reading in order to improve and develop their students' reading.
- 2- Teachers' training is one of the most important elements in developing students' reading comprehension.
- 3- There should be using for different visual aids so as to motivate students to overcome some difficulties.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that secondary schools' students face real difficulties in reading comprehension skills and they need much effort so as to help them develop their reading comprehension skill. Students also need different visual aids so as to motivate them acquire new information and ideas, as well as to encourage them. From the researcher's experience in teaching, it is noticed that many secondary schools teachers need pre and in service training programs so as to develop their teaching performance and help students improve their reading comprehension skills.

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