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**Developing Reading Comprehension Skill for EFL Students:
A Case Study of Jazan University**

ASMA TAHA ALHUSSIEN & Dr. MAHMOUD ALI AHMED

Sudan University of Science and Technology
Sudan



ABSTRACT

Reading is an integral part of academic affairs and it is equally important outside academic contexts. It plays a significant role in improving readers' language proficiency, especially in a foreign language setting. Reading comprehension is the ability of the readers to understand written materials. Most of students at university level have ability to read but unfortunately they have poor comprehension skill. This paper aims at explore the development of reading comprehension skill in university level EFL students. Comprehension skills are essential to learners to understand the meaning of the text and understand the meaning of the text and content as well. Students can be assisted in the development of comprehension skills in various ways, including, helping them to ask questions of the text, making predictions, the development of background knowledge, interpreting charts and other illustration. In this research students are tested on reading material as pre-test and post-test. The researcher conducted some lectures to experimental group in which the development of comprehension skills is emphasized; while the control group hasn't received any lectures. The sample of this study was 150 students level one at Medical College female section preparatory year at Jazan University. The sample was selected randomly. The instrument used for this study was achievement tests. For analyzing data the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. The result of the study revealed that the methods to improve comprehension skill that used by the researcher affected the students' performance in experimental group, which means there is development in students' reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: reading .reading comprehension skill, reading strategies

Introduction

Reading is an integral part of academic affairs and it is equally important outside academic contexts. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are regarded as the four fundamental skills to acquire/learn a foreign language. The reading skill is a necessary skill for a language acquisition because it has positive effects on vocabulary knowledge, spelling as well as the learners' writings.

Reading is viewed as an interactive process between the reader and the writer in which the former has to understand the message of the passage and then to decode it. Moreover, it is a dynamic process in

which information from the text and knowledge possessed by the reader interact to enable him to construct meaning before, during and after reading. In this respect, Goodman (1973, p. 162) states that the learner:

...interacts with a message encoded by the writer. He concentrates his total prior experience and concepts he has attained, as well as the language competence he has achieved.

Similarly, Dubin (1982, p.125) assumes that the task reading is a complex skill that contains a number of psychological, physical and social elements.

Therefore, reading is considered as the most difficult language skill, which involves the interaction of multiple cognitive, meta-cognitive, linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects. i.e.; some other sub-Skills operate all together in order to perform the task. Reading is not a passive task, but rather an active one. In fact, reading requires both the learner's mental and experimental inputs of who is expected to comprehend the written message. In highlighting the importance of reading comprehension, Rivers (1981,p.147) stated that *"reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language"*. Reading is composed of two parts; the written form, and the meaning of the conveyed message.

Literature review

Reading is a complex cognitive ability that is considered one of the basic language skills which can help students in learning foreign language; however, it is used more by most of EFL learners who always need to read various printed materials such as: Books, stories, articles, poems and so on. Reading Comprehension is the ability of the readers to understand written materials. According to Seyed et al (2010, p.376-380), the word comprehension refers to "the ability to go beyond the words, to understand the ideas conveyed in the entire text". Furthermore, Snow (2002, p.11) sees that reading comprehension refers to "the simultaneous ability used by a reader to construct and extract meaning through interaction and involvement with written materials". Another view was given by Katherine Maria (1990) who defined reading comprehension as holistic process of constructing meaning from written text through the interaction of (1) the knowledge reader brings to the text i.e. word recognition ability, word knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic conventions; (2) readers interpretation of the language that the writer used in constructing the text; and (3) the situation in which the text is read.

There are different types of learning strategies which help learners to solve their problems and improve their language competency. Many research works have been done on learning strategies and studied the effectiveness of using them in the learning process. To start with, Oxford (1990) gives a definition to the concept of *reading strategies* as actions that make the learning task easier, enjoyable, effective and self – directed. The term strategy refers to learning techniques that help learners solve the problems they face whenever they read. For Anderson (2000) *reading strategies* mean cognitive steps which readers can take into account in order to acquire, store and retrieve data. In reading comprehension, there exist four major categories of strategies: skimming, scanning, careful-reading and predicting. These are considered at the same time as the sub-skills of reading. In this sense

Teachers can help improve student comprehension through instruction of reading strategies. Such as predicting, making connections, visualizing, inferring, questioning, and summarizing are strategies shown by research to improve reading comprehension (Block & Israel, 2005). It is important to teach the strategies by naming the strategy and how it should be used, modeling through the think-aloud process, group practice, partner practice, and independent use of the strategy.(Pani:2004) defines reading strategies as the mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively to make sense of what they read. Good readers apply more strategies more frequently, and more effectively than poor readers. Among the learning strategies cited in the literature, the metacognitive and cognitive strategies are most relevant to reading. Metacognition is concerned with monitoring, or watching, and evaluating the success of the learning process. Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, relate to the specific contexts and learning tasks. Note that these strategies are part of our overall capacity in dealing with problems and tricky situations. The impact of these strategies on reading is conceived to be of utmost importance in any act of reading.

Research Methodology

A. Subjects of the study

The participant of the current study were randomly selected from level one at Medical College female section in different departments such as Medical, Dentistry, and Nursing at Jazan University Saudi Arabia. The sample is made up of (150) undergraduates EFL students.

B. Instrument of Data Collection

Achievement tests are employed as instrument for collecting data from undergraduates' students level one at Medical College at Jazan University.

C. Procedure

The sample was divided in to two groups experimental and control group. The former group has received some lectures including the development of background knowledge, helping them to ask questions of the text, making predictions, interpreting charts and other illustrations contained in the text, as well as the way language is used in the text. The researcher conducted two tests as pre-test and post- test for two groups. Each test is photocopied and given to class teachers. It is distributed to the students in normal English classes. The test is given 30 minutes to complete. All students completed the test in the given time..

D. Statistical Analysis

After collecting the exam papers from class teachers, they were scored. A mark was given to each answer. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Data was then entered in the program. Basic statistical tests were then performed which include frequencies, central tendency (mean, median, mode), dispersion (standard deviations), reliability analysis and t-tests.

Result and discussion

The main research question of this study is to find out if there any development in EFL students' university level in reading comprehension skill .The researchers divided the sample in tow groups; experimental group and control group. Additionally two tests were conducted as pre-test and post- test; the result and discussions as follows:

1. Showing the result of students' total marks

Table (1): Student's minimum, maximum, mean, and Standard Deviation

Groups	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Controlled	0	6	3.01	1.736
Experimental	7	13	11.44	1.473

From the above table (1), it is observable that the controlled group has lower marks compared with the experimental group. It is noticed that there are some students in the controlled group achieved zero score, while the case is different in the experimental group and the lowest mark was 7; answers were correct out of 15 questions. Additionally there are differences between the standard deviation and the mean for two groups.

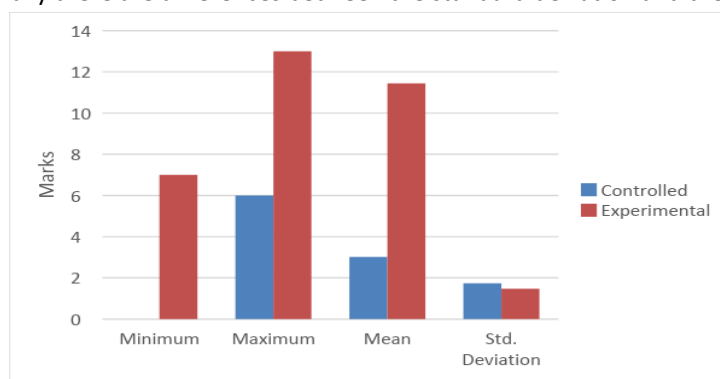


Figure (1): Students' marks for the two groups

The researcher checks if there is a significance difference, the normality is checked. According to Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the p-value (0.013) is less than 0.05, so it can be said that the data does not follow the normal distribution at significant level 0.05. As a result, Mann-Whitney test is used to check the differences between the two groups.

Mann-Whitney Test

Table (2): Test statistics for student's marks

	Reading Marks
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	2850.000
Z	-10.630
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

The above table (2) shows that the p-value (0.00) is extremely less than the significant level (0.05), so the null hypothesis is rejected and indicated that there is a significant difference in the population distributions at significant level 0.05. This means that there is a difference between the students' performance in the control group and the experimental one.

From results table above (1), the Standard deviation (1.736) for control group is bigger than experimental group (1.473). Also there is a difference between the mean (3.01) for control group it is less than the mean (11.44) for experimental group. Additionally it shows that the lectures and instructions that the researcher has given to the experimental group have affected students' performance of that group. On the other hand, the controlled group hasn't received any lectures or instructions which emphasized reading comprehension skill and the results are clear in this group; that their performance is lower than the experimental group.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth pointing that the finding of the study indicates that; the awareness of reading comprehension skill of EFL students' is poor. Researchers have found that teaching reading strategies is a key element in developing students' comprehension skill. The researcher conducted some lectures emphasized reading comprehension strategies. After analyzed students' performance. The result revealed development in reading comprehension skill. This result can be of great value and provide useful information for researchers, syllabus designer, and English language instructors.

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