

Investigating Teacher's Views and Perceptions About How to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to investigate teachers' views about improving reading comprehension skills. The study adopted the analytical descriptive method, the researcher collected data by using a questionnaire for (30) Sudanese University teachers. To analyze the data the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese university students encounter reading comprehension difficulties.

In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that students should be aware of cognitive strategies of reading skills to become effective readers, moreover, teachers should expose the students to socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language

Key words: reading comprehension, cognitive strategies.

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة لتقصي تطوير مهارات القراءة من وجهة نظر المعلمين, يستخدم الباحث طريقة الوصف التحليلي و جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاستبانة الذي اجريت لعدد (30) معلما للغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات السودانية. استخدمت الباحثه برنامج التحليل الإحصائي SPSS لتحليل البيانات.

أظهرت نتائج دراسته ان هنالك صعوبات تواجه الطلاب في الإستيعاب عند القراءة بللغه الإنجليزية. بناء علي تلك النتائج فان الباحث توصي بان علي الطلاب إدراك الإستراتيجيات الإدراكية لمهارات القراءة ليكونو قراء فعالين, علاوة علي ذلك يجب علي المعلمين تعريض الطلاب للثقافة الإجتماعيه المتعلقه باللغه الهدف.

INTRODUCTION:

The question of reading comprehension can be a very challenging issue especially if the language is mostly unfamiliar technical or complex. Some readers can work out the meaning of individual word but linking them together for full meaning often does not happen as it ought to be. These readers have the ability to decode single or individual words however they have not developed sufficient skills to work to grasp the underlying deeper meaning of stretches of words or sentences or full paragraphs. Comprehension refers to the ability to go beyond the words, to understand the ideas and the relationships between ideas conveyed in a text (Greene, 1978).

According to Manzo (1968) students' cultural background should not be neglected and has to be pinpointed as an important tool that helps maximize the process of comprehension. So the focus is on reading comprehension strategies. No doubt that using appropriate techniques or reading comprehension strategies shall have the effect of improving learners' understanding of the texts to be approached.

There is a great deal of evidence for the importance of reading strategies. One source of evidence is that successful readers know when and how to use deliberate strategies to repair comprehension.

One implication from that finding is that teaching reading strategies to struggling readers may be a key toward helping them to improve comprehension. Teaching struggling comprehenders to use strategies improves their comprehension and their ability to learn from challenging text. Therefore, it is a fundamental part of reading comprehension is the use of strategies (Markman, 1985).

2. Statement of the Problem:

The researcher has noticed that many EFL learners (university students) face numerous serious deficiencies in reading comprehension; they find it difficult to grasp the intended message due to limited vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on reading, they are observed to be very poor performers, resulting in comparatively poor achievement, too. So, the researcher finds it important to explore these problems and propose some suitable solutions to overcome them.

3. Research Objectives:

1. To help tutors to opt for the type of authentic vocabulary that will enrich their students' word power.
2. Help students plan for increasing their vocabulary knowledge through suggesting certain types of reading material and advising them to use the internet.

4. Questions of the Study:

1. How can EFL Sudanese university students improve their reading comprehension skills?
2. How can teachers help students to enrich their vocabulary knowledge?

5. Hypotheses of the Study:

1. EFL Sudanese University students can improve their vocabulary knowledge and

reading comprehension by applying reading comprehension techniques and strategies.

2. Teachers can raise the students' awareness about the importance of vocabulary building in enhancing reading comprehension.

6. Significance of the Study:

This study derives its importance from the fact of handling a very important issue that of vocabulary and its relevance to increase of overall knowledge. Reading comprehension and vocabulary development seem to be the most important and useful activities in any language class, especially for the students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Sudan. In fact, most students learning English in such poor input contexts compensate their lack of exposure to spoken English by engaging in reading comprehension activities. Studies on these two aspects can be of great value for education administration and even for universities.

Moreover, students' vocabulary knowledge allows teachers to set the language goals for the course within communicative language teaching. This study would be helpful because of the insights it offers for the cognitive processes involved in reading and vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, any research in line with these points may broaden our understanding of the nature of vocabulary knowledge and its relation to reading comprehension. With regard to the crucial role of vocabulary knowledge, little is known about how and what aspect of vocabulary knowledge can affect reading comprehension more effectively in Sudan as an EFL context.

The findings of this study may prove to be an asset for the Sudanese ministry of education and tertiary level instructors. This study also attempts to make suggestions in the field of text and techniques selection. These suggestions give teachers a new and real insight into the ways by which they can help students.

7. Limits of the Study:

This study is limited to expert EFL Sudanese university teachers during the academic year (2018-2019) in order to investigate and propose some suitable solutions to overcome them.

8. Methodology of the Study:

The purpose of this research is to investigate teacher's views and perceptions about improving reading comprehension.

To achieve this goal and in an attempt to answer the research questions, data has been collected through using a questionnaire which was administered to (30) expert Sudanese university teachers who have long experience in teaching English and doing research in English. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using Statistical Package for Social Science.

9. Process and product of reading:

According to Morrow (1986) it is ordinary to make a distinction between the *process* of reading and the outcome of that process, the *product*. The process is what we mean by reading proper: the interaction between a reader and the text. During that process, presumably, many things are happening. Not only is the reader looking at the text, deciphering in some sense the marks on the page deciding what they mean and how they relate to each other. The reader is presumably also 'thinking' about what he is reading: what it means to him, how it relates to other things he has read, to things he knows, to what he expects to

come next in texts like this. He is presumably thinking about how useful, entertaining, boring, crazy, the text is. He may be consciously reflecting on the difficulties or ease he is experiencing when reading, and on ways of overcoming the difficulties or of continuing the pleasure. He may be completely unconscious of how he is reading, and of what is happening around him: he may be fully absorbed in 'reading' (Perez, 1998).

10. Eye movement:

Research has focused on examining the eye movements of readers, and interesting insights have been gained from eye movement photography. Watching what the eyes are doing, however, may not tell us what the brain is doing if, in Smith's (1971) terms, 'What the Brain Tells the Eye is More Important than What the Eye Tells the Brain. Asking the reader to read aloud is an alternative to eye movement photography as a means of externalizing the reading process, and miscue analysis (which analyses the mistakes readers make when reading aloud for details see Goodman, 1969) is one method of investigating the reading-aloud process. Yet reading aloud is not the 'normal' way in which people read, and the process of reading aloud may be very different from reading silently. Externalizing the private process of reading may be the only way to inspect it, yet such externalizing risks distorting and changing the nature of the process.

Perfetti (1985) stated that introspection, through think-aloud protocols or verbal retrospection in interviews, is an increasingly frequently used method of investigating the reading process, and researchers have identified different strategies that good and poor

readers appear to use when reading; they have investigated the parts of text that cause problems when reading; and they have also looked at the affective issues that arise when readers are processing particular texts.

An alternative approach to examining the process of reading is to inspect the product of reading and, often, to compare that product with the text originally read. It is sometimes said that, although different readers may engage in very different reading processes, the understandings they end up with will be similar.

11. Bloom's taxonomy

Bloom's 'Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in the Cognitive Domain' (Bloom *et al.* 1956) appeals to similar theorizing about the components of educational achievement, and his taxonomy has been enormously influential in the devising of curricula, instructional material and tests. In second-language education, Munby's taxonomy of micro-skills has been influential in syllabus and materials design as well as the design of language tests. Munby (1978) distinguishes the following reading 'micro-skills':

- Recognizing the script of a language
- Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
- Understanding explicitly stated information
- Understanding information when not explicitly stated
- Understanding conceptual meaning
- Understanding the communicative value of sentences
- Understanding relations within the

sentence

- Understanding relations between parts of text through lexical cohesion devices
- Understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- Interpreting text by going outside it
- Recognizing indicators in discourse
- Identifying the main point or important information in discourse
- Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
- Extracting salient details to summarize (the text, an idea)
- Extracting relevant points from a text selectively
- Using basic reference skills
- Skimming
- Scanning to locate specifically required information
- Trans-coding information to diagrammatic display

Such lists or taxonomies are seductive because they offer an apparently theoretically justified means of devising test tasks or items, and of isolating reading skills to be tested. They also suggest the possibility of diagnosing a reader's problems, with a view to identifying remediation.

12. Levels of understanding:

It is commonplace in theories of reading as well as in everyday talk about reading to distinguish different levels of understanding of a text. Thus, some may distinguish between a literal understanding of text, an understanding of meanings that are not directly stated in text, or an understanding of the main implications of text.

Similarly the distinction between understanding details and understanding the main idea of a text is familiar enough to teachers of reading, as is Gray's (1960) distinction between reading 'the lines', reading 'between the lines', and reading 'beyond the lines'. The first refers to the literal meaning of text, the second to inferred meanings, and the third to readers' critical evaluations of text.

Such distinctions clearly relate to the product of reading, and enable us to describe some of the observed differences in understanding among readers. They also enable the evaluation of such differences, since it is believed that inferred meanings are somehow 'deeper' than literal meanings, and that a critical understanding of a text is more highly valued by society than a 'mere' literal understanding. Such value judgments lead to an implicit (at times explicit) hierarchy of levels of understanding: the literal level being considered somehow 'lower' than critical understanding. This in turn leads to an assumption that it is more 'difficult' to reach a critical understanding of text than it is to infer meanings, and that both of these are more difficult than 'merely' understanding the literal meaning. Thus the notion of levels of understanding becomes over-laden with an ordered hierarchy of increasingly valued and increasingly difficult 'meanings'. The next logical leap is from this ordered hierarchy of difficulty and value to a hierarchy of acquisition.

13. Cognitive Reading Strategies:

According to Morrow (1986) cognitive strategies are so powerfully linked with mnemonics. Mnemonics are simply reminders that help people remember things such as list of things a line of poetry or prose. One example of a mnemonic to

aid memory of a list of items is to imagine a well known spatial route and visually place each item in a particular location along the route. Then, to recall the items, the person imagines traveling the route and *picking up* each item along the way. Another mnemonic, called *chaining*, is to create sentences out of the words in the lists. For example, with the words, *table*, *helicopter*, *saxophone*, and *leg* a sentence such as 'the table inside the helicopter had a saxophone for a leg' would link the words visually, and thus the words would become more memorable.

The kind of reading strategies to be discussed here are somewhat different from those handled by other writers in a couple of ways. First, there is a heavy focus throughout on theories of reading comprehension: How well do current models of reading comprehension account for the importance of reading strategies? And most important, how do theories of reading comprehension motivate and support reading comprehension interventions?

Second, there is a focus on how current technologies can aid in helping teachers to provide reading strategy training to their students. One-on-one strategy training, and even focused group training is challenging for many teachers who are not specifically trained in reading and who don't have time to divert energy away from the teaching of critical content. New technologies are described that help the teacher be better prepared to engage their students in reading strategies in the classroom. And, computer-based tutoring technologies are described that offer further solutions to teachers' challenges by providing students with strategy training that can interact with and engage the student, and adapt to their individual needs.



14. SQ3R

According to Wikipedia, **SQRRR** or **SQ3R** is a [reading comprehension](#) method named for its five steps: **survey, question, read, retrieve, and review**. The method was introduced by Francis P. Robinson. It offers a more efficient and active approach to reading textbook material. It was created for college students, but is extremely useful for young students as well. Classrooms all over the world have begun using this method to better understand what they are reading

15. KWL table

A **KWL table**, or **KWL chart**, is a [graphical organizer](#) designed to help in [learning](#). The letters KWL are an [acronym](#), for what students, in the course of a lesson, already **know**, **want to know**, and ultimately **learn**. It is a part of the [constructivist teaching method](#) where students move away from what are considered traditional methods of teaching and learning. In this particular methodology the students are given the space to learn by constructing their own learning pace and their own style of understanding a given topic or idea.

16. Construction-Integration Model

Kintsch's (1998) CI model is currently regarded as the most comprehensive model of reading comprehension. It's remarkably simple computational architecture accounts for a large body of psychological data, including reading times, activation of concepts at different phases of comprehension, sentence recognition, text recall, and text summarization. As will soon be apparent, strategies take a back seat in the CI model. Strategies exist, but they do not drive the comprehension engine.

Like most models in discourse psychology, the CI model assumes that multiple levels of representation get constructed during comprehension. Four of these levels are (a) the surface code, (b) the propositional text base, (c) the situation model, and (d) the text genre.

The *surface code* preserves the exact wording and syntax of the sentences. The *text base* contains explicit propositions in the text in a stripped-down, logical form that preserves the meaning but not the surface code. The *situation model* (sometimes called the *mental model*) is the referential content or micro world that the text is describing. This would include the people, objects, spatial setting, actions, events, plans, thoughts, and emotions of people and other referential content in a news story, as well as the world knowledge recruited to interpret this contextually specific content. The *text genre* is the type of discourse, such as a news story, a folk tale, or an encyclopedia article. When comprehension succeeds, the representations at all of these levels are harmoniously integrated, yet there is no intentional strategy on the part of the reader to make this happen. It simply falls out naturally from the CI mechanism (Swanson, 2001).

17. Previous Related Studies:

The following are some important studies that are related to the present study:

Abbas Abdel Rahman Babiker Al Ansari made a study entitled "The Impact of Strategies on Reading Comprehension. It is unpublished PhD thesis, Omdurman Islamic University 2005 with the aim to investigate the impact of reading comprehension strategies of Sudanese University students. It also aimed at investigating the relationship between

these strategies and efficient silent reading comprehension of English at the first international language of science and technology. The data of the study were gathered by two measuring instrument:

- a) Test designed for two hundred seventy five (257) first year university entrants at different faculties and universities.
- b) Questionnaire given to one hundred and fifty (150) teachers from basic and secondary levels.

The results have revealed that teachers both levels of education (basic and secondary) are unaware of the significant impact of reading strategies. This study is very important since attempts to analyze the impact of strategies on reading comprehension.

Hajer Alamin Youssef Alamin conducted a study under the title "Teaching English Reading Skills at Upgraduate Level". It is unpublished M.A. thesis at El Neelain University, Graduate College, and English Department 2005.

The study aimed at enabling university students to improve their reading comprehension with special emphasis on reading skills, the researcher has adopted a descriptive method using oral and written tests and questionnaire. The sample of this study was randomly chosen. It consisted of (100) subjects divided into two groups:

- a) University of Khartoum, faculty of education group, consisted of (58) students (36) males and (14) female, third year.
- b) Islamic university, faculty of education group, this group consisted randomly of (50) student, who were studying English for academic purposes.

The researcher reached up to the following findings:

- a) Students come to university with weak standards.
- b) The materials in reading course relate the students to their culture.
- c) Students don't take reading course seriously that means they don't give it enough care, attention and time.
- d) The results showed that English language teachers' at the universities use and encourage the students to participate the most of the techniques that suit the student's need and interest.

Osman Elamin Abdulgadir Elnur made a study entitled " Reading Speed and Comprehension at Basic and Secondary Levels". It's unpublished M.A thesis, AL Neelain University, faculty of Arts, 2004.

This study aimed at:

- a) Identifying the roots of the problem of reading speed and comprehension.
- b) Finding solutions for improving reading speed and comprehension.
- c) Providing learning and teaching strategies through highlighting the skills of reading speed and comprehension.
- d) Drawing the attention of teacher to the importance of the skill of reading speed.

In this study the following tools were designed to collect data:

- a) Test for the students and questionnaire for teachers. The findings of the study were as follows:
 - a) The skill of reading speed was totally neglected by the teachers of English in all levels.
 - b) Students ignored reading speed because teachers neglected it.
 - c) Fast readers comprehended better than slow ones.

18. Data Analysis and Discussion:

The researcher distributed the questionnaire on the determined study sample (30), and constructed the required tables for collected data. This step consists transformation of the qualitative

(nominal) variables (strongly disagree, disagree, Undetermined, agree, and strongly agree) to quantitative variables (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectively, also the graphical representations were used for this purpose

The following table shows the mean and standard deviation and chi-square values for the study Hypotheses :

Nom.	Statement	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	Good readers are distinguished from bad readers through the automaticity of word recognition process	3.6	0.8	29	0.023
2	Cognitive strategies are so important to apply when reading effectively.	2.4	0.5	28	0.010
3	The most effective theories of reading is SQ3R.	3.3	0.7	23	0.006
4	The question of reading comprehension can be a very challenging issue.	2.5	3.8	15	0.046
5	KWL chart, is a graphical organizer designed to help in learning in general but can be used in reading particularly.	3.4	2.5	22	0.000
6	It is ordinary to make a distinction between the <i>process</i> of reading and the outcome of that process, the <i>product</i> .	2.8	1.7	12	0.000
7	Insights that enriched the field of reading have been gained from eye movement photography	2.9	4.8	34	0.000
8	It is commonplace in theories of reading as well as in everyday talk about reading to distinguish different levels of understanding of a text.	2.7	0.5	22	0.000
9	Bloom's taxonomy is useful in devising curricula, designing teaching materials and tests	2.9	0.7	32	0.023
10	In the last few years the phonological awareness and decoding skills of students with reading disabilities have been identified as serious inhibitors to successful reading	2.6	0.5	22	0.036
11	Unfamiliar words can cause serious reading comprehension problems.	3.6	0.8	22	0.023

12	Teachers should raise students' attention to the importance of reading in language development and that it is a complex task that requires many skills such as attention, perception, recognition and memory.	3.4	0.5	28	0.010
13	Lack of socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can cause some difficulties in reading comprehension. .	3.6	0.8	29	0.023
14	Construction-Integration Model of Kintsch(1998) CI is currently regarded as the most comprehensive model of reading comprehension that EFL learners need to apply.	2.4	0.5	28	0.010
15	The process of reading comprehension is a multi-component, complex process involving many interactions between the reader and what they bring to the text	3.3	0.7	23	0.006

Source: The researcher from applied study, SPSS 24

It is clear from the above table that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the (15) statements are greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents. According to the above findings, we can say that EFL Sudanese university students face some problems in listening comprehension because of the above factors, so the two hypotheses of the study are verified.

19. Conclusion and Recommendations:

According to the findings of the questionnaire which conveys the views of

teachers about the problem of the study the researcher recommends the following points:

- Students should be aware of cognitive strategies of reading skills to become effective readers.
- Teachers should expose the students to socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language.
- Teachers should use Bloom's taxonomy to devise curricula, design teaching materials and tests.
- Teachers should use KWL chart to help their students in learning in general and in reading particularly.
- Teachers should use Construction-Integration Model of Kintsch since it is most comprehensive model of reading comprehension



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