

## The Impact of Students' Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge in Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills

Tayseer Mohamed Awad El zain Ibrahim<sup>1</sup> and Mahmoud Ali Ahmed<sup>2</sup>.

### ABSTRACT:

This study aims to investigate the impact of the depth of vocabulary knowledge in improving reading skills; the study took place at Sudan University of Science and Technology, at the Faculty of Languages, English Department. The study adopted the analytical descriptive method, the researcher has collected data by using a diagnostic test for (30) EFL second year university students. To analyze the data the researcher has used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

The findings of the study revealed that depth vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in enhancing reading skills. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that university textbooks need to give more attention to reading skills and strategies. Moreover, teachers need to raise the students' awareness about the importance of vocabulary knowledge in enhancing reading skills.

Key words: reading skills, reading strategies, reading comprehension.

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة لتقصي أثر المعرفة العميقة للمفردات اللغوية علي تطوير مهارات القراءة , اجريت هذه الدراسة بجامعة السودان للعلوم و التكنولوجيا بكلية اللغات قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في العام الجامعي (2019-2020) . استخدم الباحث طريقة الوصف التحليلي و جمع البيانات بواسطة الاختبار التشخيصي و الذي اجري لعدد (30) طالبا و طالبة بالفرقة الثانية, استخدمت الباحثة برنامج التحليل الاحصائي SPSS لتحليل البيانات . أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن المعرفة العميقة للمفردات اللغوية تعزز مهارات القراءة. بناء علي تلك النتائج فان الباحثه توصي بأن علي ادارة مناهج الجامعات زيادة الاهتمام بمهارات وإستراتيجيات القراءة. علاوة علي ذلك يجب علي المعلمين زيادة وعي الطلاب بأهمية المفردات اللغوية في تعزيز مهارات القراءة.

### INTRODUCTION:

As the basic function of language is to convey meaning through sharing information, ideas and perspectives. When written message are carefully written in a way that they can be read and understood easily, the sheer reading operation becomes highly enjoyable and wonderfully inspiring (Hedge , 2000). This is because the message has to convey information and transform experience. According to Bygat (1987) texts can provide escapism and offer alternative perspectives on the world, they can also 'kindle' our imaginations to create rich

mental images that may stay with us forever. In the Sudanese EFL context, the efficiency in reading comprehension is becoming increasingly significant to the students. The ability to read and understand textbooks written in English is needed to the tertiary level students to learn professional knowledge as well as strengthen their English proficiency. However, reading textbook written in English in the Sudanese tertiary level context has been considered a challenge for many undergraduates, especially those who are specialized in disciplines other than

English. Many students have difficulty in decoding and understanding English words in different context.

In this paper the researcher investigates the impact of vocabulary knowledge in improving reading comprehension among EFL Sudanese university students.

## 2. Statement of the Problem:

There is a direct correlation between the depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, for the students to proceed with their overall learning across the different disciplines, they should have good grasp of reading and good vocabulary ( Fitzgerald, 1995).

Reading comprehension is one of the important components in the language and literacy development of ES\FL students, and has a profound effect on their overall academic achievement and language proficiency; it is observed that the standard of English language proficiency among the Sudanese tertiary level students is rather weak, despite the fact that English is learned for seven years in the basic and secondary school levels. They seem to have problems in all aspects of English skills, specially their reading skills. Their proficiency in reading skills is very poor; a large majority of them cannot access English textbooks prescribed in their syllabus due to lack of the required proficiency of reading skills in English. Despite the importance of reading comprehension in EFL learning, most of students fail to learn to read adequately. Very frequently, students reading in a foreign language seem to read with less understanding than one might expect from them, and read considerably slower than they reportedly read in their first language (Alhosni,2014).

This issue has been a source of concern for researchers, teachers and parents for a long

time without having a solution. While Sudanese ES\FL learners are suffering from such a problem, there is a need to investigate the variables that may affect their reading comprehension proficiency.

## 3. Research Objectives:

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To state the relationship between the students' vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension.
2. To propose some suitable solutions to overcome reading comprehension difficulties among EFL Sudanese university students.

## 4. Questions of the Study:

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. To what extent does the depth of vocabulary knowledge correlate with good reading comprehension?
2. How do EFL Sudanese university students perform when they are asked to do exercises based on reading comprehension?

## 5. Hypotheses of the Study:

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. The depth of vocabulary knowledge correlates with good reading comprehension.
2. EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on reading.

## 6. Significance of the Study:

This study is significant for a number of reasons:

It contributes to the existing literature in the field of reading comprehension.

Teachers will have a better understanding of the influence of vocabulary in enhancing reading comprehension and examine their own teaching methods and materials, accordingly.

Learners can identify their problems and be aware of the factors that contribute to their difficulties and can apply the right strategies and techniques of reading.

The study shall also form a point of departure for syllabus designers and educators in the field of vocabulary learning and reading comprehension.

#### **7. Limits of the Study:**

This study is limited to EFL Sudanese university second students at Sudan University in the Faculty of Languages, English Department who study English as a foreign language and possess approximately the same English abilities during the academic year (2019-2020).

#### **8. Methodology of the Study:**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of students' in-depth vocabulary knowledge in enhancing reading

Comprehension among EFL Sudanese university students, to achieve this goal, and in an attempt to answer the research questions, the data has been collected through using a diagnostic test which was administered to (30) EFL second year students. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using the Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

#### **9. Nature and Importance of Reading:**

According to Carrell (1984) reading is the process through which we can access world of ideas and feelings, as well as the knowledge of the ages and visions of the future, is at once the most extensively researched and the most enigmatic of the so-called language skills. Reading has been investigated from numerous perspectives by linguists, psychologists, educators and second language researchers and a huge volume of research is now available.

Hawarth(2001) stated that reading also plays a critical role in applied linguistics

research and in the day-to-day professional life of the language teacher. Similarly, the assessment of reading ability is of critical importance in a wide range of educational and professional settings, and the need for expertise in this area is widespread.

Most preceding studies have considered that the nature of reading comprehension is impossible. The sheer volume of research on the topic believes any individual's ability to process, much less to synthesize, everything that is written. Similarly, the number of different theories of reading is simply overwhelming: what it is, how it is acquired and taught, how reading in a second language differs from reading in a first language, how reading relates to other cognitive and perceptual abilities, how it interfaces with memory. All these aspects of reading are important, but will probably never be brought together into a coherent and comprehensive account of what it is we do when we read. Added to this are the inevitable complications when we consider the complexities of analyzing texts: since the nature of *what* we read must have some relation to *how* we read, then text analysis must be relevant to theories of reading and to research into reading. Yet the simple phrase 'text analysis' covers an enormous range of study within linguistics, which again no individual can hope to overview (Ahmadi, 2017).

Any review, therefore, of 'the nature of reading' is bound to be somewhat. How can we possibly test whether somebody has understood a text if we do not know what we mean by 'understand'? How can we possibly diagnose somebody's 'reading problems' if we have no idea what might constitute a problem, and what the possible 'causes' might be?

How can we possibly decide on what 'level' a reader is 'at' if we have no idea what 'levels of reading' might exist, and what it means to be 'reading at a particular level'? In short, those who need to test reading clearly need to develop some idea of what reading is, and yet that is an enormous task( Clifford ,1987).

### 11. Types of Reading Comprehension:

Smith(1971) stated that the process of reading comprehension is a multi-component, complex process involving many interactions between the reader and what they bring to the text (previous knowledge, strategy use), not to mention the variables interspersed in the text itself and which are inseparable from it and essential for fuller understanding(interest in the text, understanding of the types of texts).

While many middle school, high school, college students –and even adults have learned to read, some will struggle with reading for meaning. To be able to read effectively, these students have to have a good grasp of explicit strategies to use during the process of reading. The strategies are essential for gaining and remembering information from the texts. Good readers are capable of identifying the right types of strategies that readily work with them and know how to apply them to different types of texts. The unfortunate group of those still battling with reading can improve their reading comprehension skills by being exposed and taught strategies, as well as when and how to use them with different types of texts. Consider the following list of strategies which can produce a positive effect on the students' reading comprehension having been taught adequately.

Discovering Main Idea  
Identifying Detail  
Sequencing Events  
Using Context  
Getting Facts  
Drawing  
Conclusions/Predicting Outcomes  
Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion  
Understanding Cause and Effect  
Identifying Figurative Language  
Identifying Bias and Prejudice  
Using Prior Knowledge  
Identifying Bias and Prejudice  
Using Prior Knowledge  
Comparing and Contrasting Ideas  
Generating and Answering Questions  
Identifying Inferences  
Summarizing Concepts  
Understanding Vocabulary  
Visualizing Ideas  
Determining Author's Purpose  
Understanding Point of View

### 13. Skills involved in Reading Process:

What do we do when we read? If theorists have not (yet) agreed on what skills are involved in the reading process, is it at least possible to find some consensus on what happens when we read? What kinds of tasks characterize the activity involved in reading?

Clearly, reading involves perceiving the written form of language, either visually or kinesthetically (using Braille). Here we already encounter the first problem: do readers then relate the printed form of language to the spoken form? If so, then once that translation has taken place, reading is the same sort of activity as listening, and the only specific aspect of reading that we need to concern ourselves with as testers is the process of transformation from print to speech.

One argument, put forward by theorists like Smith (1971), is that readers proceed directly to meaning, and do not go via sound. They claim that readers can process print much faster than sounds, and so there would be an upper limit on the speed with which we read if we had to go from print to sound. Fluent reading is frequently done at speeds up to three times as fast as many people speak in everyday conversation.

Recent accounts of the fluent reading process tend to emphasize that it is rapid, purposeful, motivated, interactive (in terms of component skills as well as in the relation between knowledge and the printed word), it is comprehending (readers expect to understand), it is flexible, and it develops gradually (it is the product of long-term effort and gradual improvement).

When we are reading, we are clearly engaged in a great deal of mental activity, some of it automatic, some of it conscious. For example, we may consciously decide to skip a page or two in a rather boring text, we may decide just to focus on the headlines in a news- paper, or to read the end of the detective story first before reading the introduction (Dil,2009).

We may scan through a telephone directory ignoring all names except the one we are looking for; or we may read every letter and word of a memorandum we are writing to our boss, in which we want to be sure we have made no spelling mistakes, and have ex- pressed ourselves diplomatically but clearly.

These conscious strategies involve a deliberate choice of process or task, each of which may involve different constellations of skill and knowledge (being able to spell words in English, for example, or knowing the order of the alphabet). Such strategies

may be semi- conscious, or at least recoverable to consciousness, as when we try to figure out the meaning of a word we have never met before by thinking about the context in which it comes, its form, the sort of word it is (noun, verb and so on) and the sort of meaning it is likely to have. We may consciously decide to look the word up in a dictionary, or not to worry about its 'exact meaning', since we have sufficient idea of what it must mean to be able to continue reading without disruption (Flavell, 1979).

Other activities are not amenable to consciousness - hence the use of the term automaticity. We are not normally conscious of processing the distinctive features in each letter in English text, for example, yet word recognition for the normal reader must involve some process of discriminating visual shapes. When we are absorbed in a novel we are not normally conscious that we are visualizing the setting - the faces, dress, voices of the characters, the location of the action, the surrounding scenery yet evidence suggests that we do precisely this, and that what we visualize becomes part of our meaning for what we are reading. Researchers seek to identify and characterize these processes and strategies, and useful lists have been developed in recent years (see for example Harri-Augstein and Thomas, 1984; Nevo, 1989; Storey, 1994).

Efrizal(2012) pointed out that there are two broad approaches available for assessment for those who feel that the view of reading as a series of strategies and activities is correct, or at least relevant to their purposes. One is the analytic approach: to seek to test whether readers successfully engage in, or master, those aspects of the process which testers consider to be important.

Thus one might seek to devise test items which explore whether a reader can successfully deduce the meaning of unknown words from context. One might devise tasks that require readers to scan rapidly through a number of headlines in order to identify the one(s) that are relevant to a particular need or topic. In other words, one seeks to isolate and identify components of the reading process relevant to the purpose for which one is testing. Some aspects will, however, be easier to test than others: can one for example, successfully test whether readers are visualizing settings 'appropriately' when reading a short story? Can one assess whether readers are fully absorbed in a novel, with no sense of their surroundings, or are just pretending for the sake of the assessor?

The other broad approach is to recognize that the act of assessing itself risks disturbing parts of the process one is wishing to assess, and to acknowledge that individual readers may well not need to engage in a particular activity in order to read 'successfully' (they may already know the meaning of the word, they may find an irrelevant news story interesting). Such an approach would entail seeking to simulate as far as possible the conditions in which one is interested reading newspapers in order to get an overview of the day's events, scanning TV guides in order to plan the evening's viewing and then assess whether the reader had successfully completed the task. The assumption would be made that if the task was successfully completed, then either the reader would of necessity have engaged in the sorts of processes of interest or had not, and such processes were not necessary.

#### 15. Previous Studies:

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

The first study in this juncture is one entitled "Teaching English Reading Skills at the University Level "An unpublished M.A thesis in ELT, University of Gezira, and Faculty of Education 2000. The study aimed at helping students to identify different purposes of reading and master strategies that are suitable to achieve these purposes. It aimed also at helping the learning of English language to understand and read more effectively and become skilled reading.

The population of this study consisted of students that the Faculty of Educational Sciences – El Kamleen University of Gezira. The sample consisted of (40) non specialized student in the faculty of Educational Sciences who have taken part in providing the necessary data, since they don't know the significance of the reading ability. (b) Other (28) specialized student in English Department Faculty of Education Sciences Al Kamleen. They are experienced teacher are involved in the study by considering their views, comments and judges in the questionnaire. The results of this study revealed that mastering reading strategies is crucial to effective reading comprehension.

The second study was conducted by Abd Allah Adam Algazoly is entitled 'Developing University Teaching Method to Improve Reading Skill in English' it is an unpublished M.Ed. thesis in ELT, Sudan University of science and Technology , College of Graduate studies 2008. The study aimed at improving teacher's mode in order to teach EFL reading efficiently. It aimed also at investigating the difficulties, which faced student in teaching reading comprehension in L2.

The population of this study was the teacher of English language department at Sudan University of science and Technology. It consisted also of the teachers of English language department of Alzaiem Al azhari University. The sample of this study consisted of (30) teachers at Sudan University and Alzaiem Al azhari University who have taken English language as a major subject. In this study the researcher used questionnaire to collect data. The main finding of this study as follows:

- a) Teachers of English language find difficulties in teaching reading comprehension.
- b) Teachers of English give less attention to the techniques and strategies of reading skill in the process of teaching compressions.
- c) The majority of teachers agree that teachers must be trained well so as to use the strategies of teaching reading comprehensions.

The third study by Bilal Elimam Hammed is entitled “The Effects of Schema Theory on Understanding Reading Comprehension Texts” It is unpublished PhD thesis, Omdurman Islamic university 2005.

The study aimed to investigating the role of the back knowledge in comprehending

The following table shows the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers of the overall diagnostic reading test.

Answers	Frequencies	Percentage
Pass	9	30
Failure	21	70
Total	30	100

English texts and the effect of age and experience in building up schema.

The population of this study was the English mature students at White Nile Ahlia College and students at Faculty of Medicine and Arts specifically English and History section first level. The sample of this study was (200) subjects. The study adopted two testes for gathering data.

The main finding showed that the medical students were fast and better in test two than in test one, however, the Ahlia students, results are positive in both test one and test tow because of age and experience.

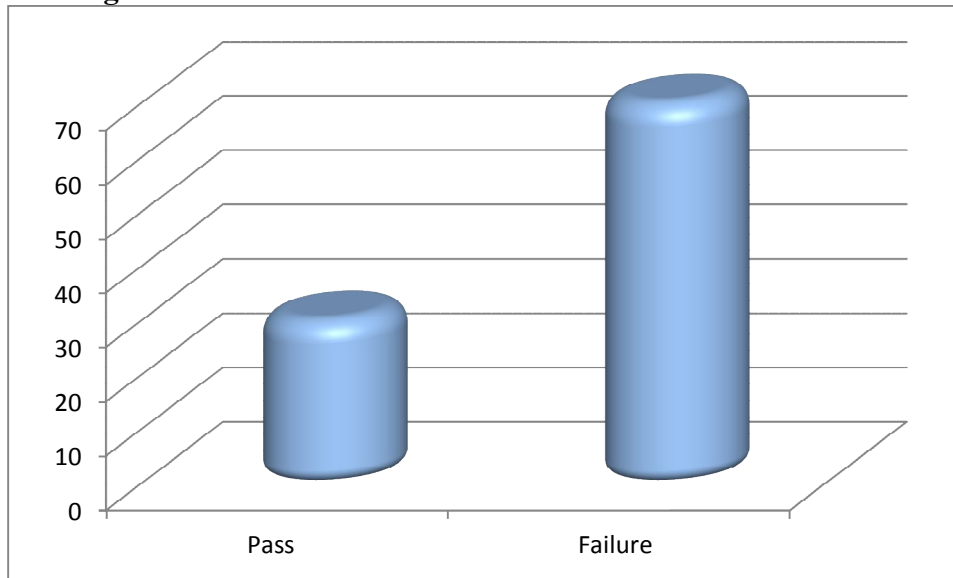
#### 16. Data Analysis and Discussion:

In this study a diagnostic listening test was used in order to collect data, the test consists of two parts, part one contains five questions while part two consist of twelve questions to test reading comprehension. The responses to the listening diagnostic test of the 30 students were tabulated.

Hypotheses of the study:

- 1.The depth of vocabulary knowledge correlates with good reading comprehension.
- 2.EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on listening.

**Table No (1) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of overall listening test.**



From the above table and figure. It is obvious that only (9) students in the study sample with the percentage (30%) have

passed the diagnostic listening test, while (21) students with the percentage (70%) failed the overall listening test.

**Table No (2) The Frequency Distribution and decisions for the Respondent's Answers of all the questions of the diagnostic reading test:**

Sections	Pass		Failure		Decision
	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
<b>Section 1</b>	6	17	25	83	<b>Accept</b>
<b>Section 2</b>	7	23	23	77	<b>Accept</b>
<b>overall</b>	9	30	21	70	<b>Accept</b>

The above table shows the summary of the results of the study. For section one and two, it's clear that the percentage of students who failed in both sections of the

test is greater than the percentage of students who gave correct answers (83%) and (77%) respectively.

**Table (3) one sample T-TEST for the questions of the study:**

Sections	N	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
1	30	7.2	11	29	0.00
2	30	9.81	17	29	0.00
For all	30	8.03	15	29	0.00





The calculated value of T -TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the overall test was (15 ) which is greater than the tabulated value of T -TEST at the degree of freedom (29 ) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (6.54). This indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. On the basis of these findings we can conclude that the two hypotheses of this study are verified.

#### **15. Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The results of the study revealed that the highest percentage of the students faces the following serious reading comprehension problems because of their inability to do the following:

1. Recall word meanings
2. Draw inferences about the meaning of a word in context
3. Find answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase
4. weave together ideas in the content
5. Draw inferences from the content
6. Recognize a writer's purpose, attitude, tone and mood
7. Identifying a writer's technique
8. Follow the structure of a passage.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following points:

- Students should be aware about the importance of speaking comprehension in the process of foreign language learning.
- Students should learn and practice new vocabulary and expressions.
- Teachers should raise the students' awareness about the importance of improving their vocabulary knowledge

as it helps them to enhance their reading comprehension.

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