

An Investigation into the Reading Difficulties

Encountered by EFL Students at Gharyan

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مستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على صعوبات القراءة التي يواجهها الطلاب الليبيون الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ويهدف أيضاً إلى معرفة بعض الحلول لهذه الصعوبات. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف قام الباحث بإجراء هذه الدراسة وتطبيقها على طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب جامعة غريان، وقد شارك في هذه الدراسة 25 طالباً. استبيان مكون من 16 فقرة يغطيها سؤالان. كشف تحليل البيانات أن صعوبة القراءة ترجع إلى حد كبير إلى العوامل التعليمية، ولا يوجد سبب واحد لصعوبة القراءة، بل ترجع الصعوبة إلى مجموعة من الحالات ذات الصلة. وذكر الباحث طرقاً مختلفة يمكن أن يكون علاجها فعالاً لصعوبة القراءة. معظم هذه الطرق يمكن أن يبتكرها مدرس اللغة الإنجليزية والطلاب في عملية التعلم بناءً على نتائج هذه الدراسة.

Abstract

The aim of this study was conducted to highlight the reading difficulties encountered by Libyan students studying EFL. It is also aimed to find out some remedies for these difficulties. To accomplish this purpose, the researcher carried out this study and applied it to the students of English in the English Language Department, Faculty of Arts, Gharyan University. 25 students took part in this study. A questionnaire of 16 items covered by 2 questions a. The data analysis revealed that

reading difficulty is due largely to educational factors and there is no single cause for reading difficulty, the difficulty is due to a combination of related conditions. The researcher mentioned different ways that can be effective remedies for reading difficulty. Most of these ways can be created by the teacher of English and the students in the learning process based on the findings of this study.

Introduction

It is undeniable that reading helps in mental development and is known to stimulate the muscles of the eyes. Reading is an activity that involves greater levels of concentration and adds to the conversational skills of the reader. It is an indulgence that enhances the knowledge acquired consistently. The habit of reading also helps readers to discover new words and phrases that they come across in every day conversations. That habit can be a healthy addiction and adds to the information available on various topics. It helps us to stay in-touch with contemporary writers and makes us sensible to global issues (Van 2009).

Of all the skills students learn, reading is arguably one of the most important learning skills. Today, especially in the developed world, it is considered a fundamental skill required for success. However, for many students with reading difficulties, learning to read is one of the most frustrating activities they will ever face. All too often, the barriers they face over shadow their desire to read, without proper guidance, they never overcome them (Smith, 1994: 26).

Statement of the problem

The importance of this research arising from the importance of finding remedies for reading problems because most of the students and the

teachers of English complain about reading difficulties such as comprehension difficulties, coding and decoding among other difficulties. The researcher believe that the results of this study will be beneficial to teachers as well as students who learn English as a foreign language.

Aims of the study

The purpose of this current study is to highlight the reading difficulties that face Libyan students studying EFL and find some remedies for these difficulties. To achieve this purpose, the researcher carried out this study and applied it to the fourth year students of English in the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University.

Research questions

This study intend to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the reading difficulties that students face?
- 2- What are the proposed remedies for the reading difficulties?

Significance of the study

It is expected that the findings of this study would provide a great benefits to the instructors of the English language and curriculum designers to address the reading difficulties that might be encountered by learners of English. The results can also help English students to realize the difficulties they may encounter so they can deal with them as effectively as possible.

Literature Review

Difficulties with reading

In fact, many students want to know where and why the reading process breaks down. Although problems may occur in any area and there are

many difficulties with reading, namely decoding, comprehension and retention are the roots of reading problems in the view of many experts.

Decoding difficulties

Decoding is the process by which a word is broken into individual phonemes and recognized based on those phonemes. For example, proficient decoders separate the sounds "buh", "aah" and "guh" in the word "bag". A student who has reading difficulty especially (decoding difficulty), may not differentiate these phonemes. "Buh", "guh" might be meaningless to them in relation to the word "bag" on the page. There are many signs of decoding difficulty; for example, reading without expression, confusion between letters and the sounds they represent, slow oral reading rate (reading word – by – word), ignoring punctuation while reading and trouble sounding out words and recognizing words out of context (Klinger, 2000).

Comprehension difficulties

Comprehension depends on mastery of decoding; children who struggle to decode find difficult to understand and remember what has been read, because their efforts to grasp individual words are so exhausting. They have many signs; for instance, inability to connect ideas in a passage, lack of concentration during reading, confusion about the meaning of words and sentences, omission of, or glossing over detail and difficulty distinguishing significant information from minor details.

Retention difficulties

Retention requires both decoding and comprehending what is written. It depends on high level cognitive skills, including memory and the ability to group and retrieve related idea. Students are expected to retain more and more of what they read as they become in higher levels. From low levels, reading to learn is basic in classroom, by high school it is an important

task. Difficulty connecting what is read to prior knowledge is one of retention difficulty signs. Moreover, there is the difficulty in applying content of a text to personal experience and trouble remembering or summarizing what is read (David, 2007).

Reasons behind these difficulties

There are many educational factors that caused reading difficulty, which may and often do contribute as parts of a complex pattern of causes.

These may include immaturity in various aspects of reading readiness, associated sometime with low socioeconomic status, emotional instability, physical deficiencies and social pressures at home or at school as well as other factors. There seldom is a single factor that causes reading difficulty, but one factor may be relatively more important than others (Pigada and schmitt, 2009).

Without appropriate guidance or proper instruction given at the right time, the student will fail to acquire the skills needed to develop normal reading ability.

The causes of reading difficulty are multiple and tend to be complex. In the more difficult cases, there usually be a pattern of interacting factors operating, each factor contributing its part to the difficulty and each impeding future growth.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to discover the main causes of reading difficulties and the possible remedies for such causes. The questionnaire is modified from Wimmer (2010), Pigada & Schmitt (2009) and David Hopkins (2008). The questions are what are the reading difficulties that students face? As well as what are the possible remedies for these reading difficulties?

Participants

The population of this study consisted of fourth year English Language Department students in the Faculty of Arts. The total numbers of the students was 25 students; 3 of them were males and 22 were females.

Data collection

The researcher distributed a questionnaire of 16 items covered by 2 questions. The questions are: What are the reading difficulties that students face?

What are the possible remedies for the reading difficulties?

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data, the researcher used statistical techniques, namely the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS), i.e. standard deviations and percentages. For data analysis, the researcher used the following percentages:

- 80 – 100% is very high degree of response.
- 70 – 79.9% is high degree of response.
- 60 – 69.9% is moderate degree of response.
- 50 – 59.9% is low degree of response.
- Less than 50% is very low degree of response.

Questionnaire Results:

Results related to the first question:

What are the reading difficulties that you face?

	Difficulties	Appropriate Difficulty Centred		
		Appropriate	Inappropriate	No response
1	I don't have self-motivation.	34.2% very low	63% moderate	2.7%

2	I am unable to pronounce the letters correctly.	39.72% very low	56.16% low	4.10%
3	I am unable to distinguish sounds.	36.98% Low	60.27% moderate	2.73%
4	I forgot the forms of words that have already been learned.	49.31% very low	49.31% very low	1.36%
5	I am unable to correct the errors.	45.20% very low	53.42% low	1.36%
6	I read in an intermittent way.	46.57% very Low	49.31% very low	4.10%
7	I stutter in the pronunciation of words.	34.24% very low	58.90% low	6.84%
8	I have little knowledge of English vocabulary.	52.05% Low	42.46% very low	5.47%
9	I write the pronunciation of the English words in Arabic.	24.65% very low	68.49% moderate	6.84%
10	I ignore practice reading English at home.	27.39% very low	65.75% moderate	6.84%
11	I feel shame during practice reading.	42.46% very low	90.14 % low very	34.61%

Other difficulties you want to add:

- Difficult vocabulary, the paragraphs are very long.

- Unable to express about new topics that confront me in exam.
- The pronunciation tell of a word.
- There are no mistakes.
- The new words.
- I have not got a lot of experience in translating English to Arabic work.
- I have difficulties because of the environment. We have no college, the lack of books or references and the library being closed most of the time .
- Sometimes I cannot learn something correctly.
- Pronounce the difficult words.
- Some strange and academic words in text book.
- I do not have self-confidence.
- Nothing, I read very good, and I love reading.
- When I read a passage during the class, I feel that.
- I do not understand the material very well.
- Sometimes I've got confused because the size of letters and sometimes use the specific.

To sum up:

When students were provided 11 possible reading difficulties that they may face, the majority of them thought that the following three reading difficulties affect them the most, namely I forgot the forms of words that have already been learned, I read in an intermittent way and I have little knowledge of English vocabulary.

On the other hand, the majority of students thought that the following three reading difficulties affect them the least, namely I don't have self-motivation, I write the pronunciation of the English words in Arabic and I ignore practice reading English at home.

When students were asked to add any other reading difficulties (other than the 11 possible reading difficulties listed in this question) that they may face, some of them mentioned the paragraphs being very long, the new complicated academic vocabulary, the small size of the font of the orthography and the lack of a wide range of books and references in the library due to the low infrastructure in the college.

Results related to the second question:

What are the proposed remedies for the above reading difficulties?

	Remedies	Appropriate Remedies Centred		No response
		Appropriate	Inappropriate	
1	Students read texts repeatedly.	83.56% very high	6.84% very low	9.58%
2	Students read texts loudly to overcome shame during reading.	78.08% high	15.06% very low	6.84%
3	Teachers should write words on the board to overcome students forgetting the forms of words.	79.45% high	13.69% very low	6.84%
4	Teachers should give students assignment that involves reading English at home.	83.56% very high	9.58% very low	6.84%
5	Teachers should improve students self-motivation.	80.82% very high	10.95% very low	8.21%
6	Teachers should increase students English vocabulary.	84.93% very high	6.84% very low	8.12%

Other remedies you suggest :

- Often we do not take enough information to help us in study and I think it is very problem.
- Teachers use some activities during the class like video and data show.
- The teacher gives new vocabulary for students to memorize it, especially when we take a new lesson and if I found new words, you will start this words more than on lecture, and use it in your speech even the student forget it.
- Making contests inside the class between the students and encouraging them to try to read.
- Students should read short stories and novels to improve these reading skills, memorize a lot of words helping reading skills.
- Teachers should give exams for students to give motivation for studying.
- We must read short stories at home.
- Watch movies to listen to the new vocabulary because if you faced them through text can read them.
- Teacher should make the students more interested and just speak English then the students will be more unable to remember.
- Teachers should learn how to read complex vocabularies and practice more and more by true way.
- The teachers read text and students.
- Students can practice at home and get new vocabulary if they want to improve their reading.
- Read with friends in college and read story and novel help them reading fast.
- Practice more and more and learn new vocabulary.

To sum up:

When students were provided 6 proposed possible remedies for the reading difficulties that were mentioned in the first question, the majority of them thought that the following three remedies are the most effective, namely students read texts repeatedly, teachers should give students assignment that involves reading English at home and teachers should increase students English vocabulary

On the other hand, the majority of students thought that the following three remedies are the least effective, namely students read texts loudly to overcome shame during reading, teachers should write words on the board to overcome students forgetting the forms of words and teachers should improve students self-motivation.

When students were asked to add any other possible remedies for the reading difficulties (other than the 6 possible remedies listed in this question) that they think are essential, some of them mentioned teachers should use new different teaching aids inside the class such as videos and data show, teachers should do reading contests inside the class between the students to encourage them to read, teachers should motivate the students by doing more reading exams, teachers should make reading more fun and speak English only and teachers should concentrate on pronouncing complex vocabulary. In addition, students should practice more and learn new vocabulary, students should read with friends outside the class as well as read in groups in the class or the library, students should read short stories and novels and also watch films to improve their reading skills and students should learn and memorize new words all the time since this helps improving their reading skills.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to point out the reading difficulties that face Libyan students studying EFL and find some remedies for these difficulties. To

accomplish this aim, the researcher carried out this study and applied it to the fourth year students of English in the English Language Department, College of Arts, Gharyan University. The significance of this study arising from the importance of finding remedies for reading problems because most of the students and the teachers of English complain about reading difficulties

Findings of the questionnaire clarified that reading difficulty is due largely to educational factors and there is no single cause for reading difficulty, the difficulty is due to a combination of related conditions. Based on the results that are obtained from the questionnaire, students thought that the following reading difficulties affect them the most:

- I forgot the forms of words that have already been learned.
- I read in an intermittent way.
- I have little knowledge of English vocabulary.

Students thought that the following remedies (for their reading difficulties) are the most effective:

- Students read texts repeatedly.
- Teachers should give students assignment that involves reading English at home.
- Teachers should increase students English vocabulary.

The researcher mentioned different ways that can be effective remedies for reading difficulty. Most of these ways can be created by the teacher of English and the student in the learning process.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Training courses for the teachers to implement effective modern teaching strategies to promote the reading skill by them, such as group

communication, narration, storytelling, self-questioning and activating background knowledge.

- Enriching and reinforcing the English language curricula with different types of reading that include group communication, narration, storytelling, self-questioning and activating background knowledge.
- Supplying the college with English language laboratories and learning center, for accomplishing the different reading tasks from native sources.
- Research should be conducted to determine the most appropriate teaching methods to revoke the reading problems.
- Further research should be conducted to study the reading difficulties in English from the perspective of the students, their teachers and their parents.
- The Ministry of Education should support teachers with all materials, aids, sources they may need to avoid reading difficulty.

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