

Developing EFL Reading Comprehension Skills through a suggested program based on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach among second year Faculty of Specific Education Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to develop EFL reading comprehension skills among Faculty of Specific Education students through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach in the light of academic standards. The quasi-experimental design was used. The participants were 80 students who were randomly divided into two groups : experimental (40) and control (40) from the Faculty of Specific Education , Zagazig University in the first term of the academic year 2019/2020. The instruments and the materials of the study were : a) reading comprehension skills checklist , b) reading comprehension test , c) Rubric for grading the reading comprehension test , and the program based on the communicative language teaching approach was taught for two months . The experimental group was taught through the program . On the other hand , the control group was taught using the regular method . The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of both groups in the reading comprehension skills, in favor of the experimental group . It was concluded that the present study proved that the program based on the communicative language teaching approach had a positive effect on developing reading comprehension skills for the second year Faculty of Specific Education students.

Key words: reading comprehension – communicative teaching

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I. Introduction

To Liu (2010) , the reading comprehension skill can be described as " a cognitive ability used by the student-readers when communicating with texts " .He explained that reading comprehension includes some sub-skills such as ;scanning , skimming , making predictions , guessing the meaning of new words , inferring , understanding text structure ,reading for gist , reading for details , making summaries ,etc. He also showed that college students need to practice all these reading sub skills to perform English and achieve academic success.

On the other hand ,Grabe (2009) asserted that fundamental skills required in efficient reading comprehension are : knowing meaning of words , ability to understand meaning of a word from discourse context, ability to follow organization of a passage and to identify antecedents and references .It is also the ability to draw inferences from a passage about its contents , ability to identify the main thought of a passage , the ability to answer questions answered in a passage , and the ability to recognize the literary devices or propositional structures used in a passage.

Amasha (2019) stated that reading comprehension is important to the development of students' learning skills and therefore their ability to obtain an education. Developing reading skills should be a priority of teaching. According to Amasha's observations, most students do not use reading strategies while reading and processing a text. They also do not have met cognitive awareness in terms of the selectivity and flexibility of using appropriate reading strategies that can enhance their comprehension of the text. For example, they do not often set goals of their reading before they start to read. Most students also rarely relate their prior knowledge with the textual content. During reading, they often have problems in decoding and recognizing words. Moreover, they do not monitor their own comprehension and seldom use fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks.

For making sure that the student-readers comprehend the text, Tompkins (2011) pointed out that there are specific characteristics that determine how successfully an individual will comprehend the text including prior knowledge about the subject, the ability to infer the new idioms, the main ideas and the supporting details .Thus, the previous skills of reading comprehension are important to help the student-readers overcome the problems that they face in reading a text.

Radojevic (2009) stressed the importance of reading comprehension as it relies on two kinds of information: One is received from the text and the other is retrieved from readers' memory .It is an interactive mental process between readers' previous knowledge and knowledge about a given topic. The knowledge of past experiences and prior knowledge in readers' memory are critical in assisting readers to construct meaning from the text. By relating new ideas encountered in the text to familiar ideas and mental constructions, readers can be engaged in reading different materials successfully and learn new information that is required for success in the EFL setting. Besides, according to Kim and Anderson (2011:30), college students who are more proficient readers are most likely to experience more in their courses.

To shed light on the importance of the reading comprehension skills, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a group of fifteen students selected randomly from the second year Faculty of Specific Education, English section at Zagazig University, where he designed a test related to EFL reading comprehension. The

findings showed that there is alack in the following sub-skills of EFL reading comprehension as shown in table (1).

Table (1) Pilot Study Results of EFL Reading Comprehension Test

The EFL Reading Comprehension Skills	The piloted students' number	Percentage of Frequency errors (%)
A-Determining the main idea	13	87%
B-inferring cause and effect relationships	12	80%
C-Providing supporting details that develop the main idea	13	87%
D-Inferring the meaning of unknown words and the new idioms mentioned in the text	12	80%

It was concluded that the EFL students lacked the sub-skills of reading comprehension; therefore the present study was an attempt to develop the level of these students in the reading comprehension skills through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach .This approach is believed to enhance students' performance in the sub-skills of reading comprehension and overcoming the difficulties they face.

Communicative language teaching is a recognized theoretical model in English language teaching .It is considered the most effective and widely used approach in EFL/ESL teaching .It has many definitions which differs from one researcher to another. According to Harmer (2001:85), the communicative approach is closely linked to the notion that "language learning can take care of itself" through ample practice. The communicative method emphasizes the interaction in both language learning technique and purpose. It is more important to produce language and communicate effectively than to be correct.

Cross (2005) also viewed that communicative language teaching approach is the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audio-lingual method and grammar-translation methods of EFL instruction.

The use of communicative language teaching approach created a good case among the students for communicating with each other. They should recognize the activities that help them enhance their communication skills.

Celce -Murcia (1997) examined the classroom activities used in CLT that help learners develop their communication skills as follows:

1-participation activities:In participation activities, students take part in some communicative activities in natural settings .Guided discussions, interviews, and dialogs exemplify these types of activities.

2-Information –gap activities:In a CLT classroom, the concept of information gap is an important aspect of communication. It is essentially focused on the fact that people usually interact in their daily lives in order to acquire knowledge they do not have. This is referred to as an information gap.

3-communication games:These games involve mainly information-gap activities which aimed to stimulate communication in the classroom. These games are generally in the form of puzzles, drawing pictures and placing items given in the right order.

4-Role plays:In role plays, the students will rely on themselves in their roles. The simplicity of role plays is a matter of student proficiency .The teacher should attach importance to the format of the role play. In the situation, the teacher clearly explains the scene and the plot of the role play which is followed by the description of the task and the action to be accomplished. Then, the teacher assigns the roles, the list of characters to make sure that the roles are not too elaborate for the students to carry out. Useful expressions part such as the linguistic information and phrases facilitate the acting out of the roles.

5-Performance activities:

These are activities in which students plan something in advance and transmit their message to the class that can be accompanied by a discussion at the classroom. Role plays and dramas are among the examples of performance activities.

Statement of the problem:

The problem of the current study is that EFL students of the second year Faculty of Specific Education are inefficient in reading comprehension skills;therefore the present study was an attempt to develop the level of these students in reading comprehension skills through a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach.

Questions of the study

The present study attempted to answer the following main question:

What is the effect of a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach on developing reading comprehension skills among Faculty of Specific Education students?

The following sub-questions were derived from the above main question:

1-What are the appropriate academic standards required for the second year Faculty of Specific Education EFL students?

2-What are the EFL reading comprehension skills required for the Faculty of Specific Education EFL students?

4-How far do the EFL students have adequate reading comprehension skills?

6-How can the suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach be used to develop EFL reading comprehension skills?

II. Purpose of the study:

This study aimed at developing EFL reading comprehension skills through designing a suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach.

-Delimitations of the Study:

This study was delimited to:

1. A group of the second year Faculty of Specific Education students in the English section, Zagazig University.
2. Some EFL Reading Comprehension skills required for the second year, Faculty of Specific Education students, Zagazig University, that were approved by the jury members.
3. The First semester of the academic year 2019 /2020.

-Definition of terms:

-Reading comprehension:

Paris and Hamilton (2009) defined reading comprehension as " a set of knowledge that reflects the communicative interactions among the intentions of the author, the content of the text/message, the abilities and purpose of the reader, and the context/situation of the interaction" .

Reading comprehension skill can be operationally viewed as a process in which second year of Faculty of Specific Education students have the ability to determine the main ideas, infer the implied meaning of the text, provide the supporting details that support the main ideas and detect the new concepts.

Communicative language teaching approach:

Fariya (2016) reports that communicative language teaching approach is a set of principles about teaching including recommendations about method and syllabus where the focus is on meaningful communication not structure. In this, students are given tasks to accomplish using language instead of studying the language.

Communicative language teaching approach can be operationally viewed as an approach which aims at developing procedures for the teaching of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It aims to make students communicatively competent in language use and usage.

The procedures of the study

To prove the homogeneity between the experimental and control groups in reading comprehension before the experimentation, the reading comprehension tests were pre administered to both groups in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020.They were equivalent before carrying out the experiment . t-test for independent samples was used. (See table 1).

Table (1): Comparing both groups before treatment in the reading comprehension pre – test.

Group	N	Mean	SD	D.F	<i>t-value</i>	Sig
control	40	19.6	1.62	78	0.97	0.34
experimental	40	20	1.60			

As indicated in table (1), there was no statistically significant difference between both groups on the pre-administration of the reading comprehension test. *t*-value is (0.97) with significance (0.34). This value is not significant. Thus, both groups were homogeneous in the reading comprehension.

III. Results of the study:

The results of the study are presented in the order of the hypotheses of the study:

Hypothesis one:

It was hypothesized that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-post administrations of the reading comprehension skills test, in favor of the post-administration".

The results of the pre-post administrations of the reading comprehension test were analyzed statistically for the experimental group. *t*-test was used for paired-samples to identify the differences between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre - post administrations of the reading comprehension skills test as shown in table 2.

Table (2): Comparing the pre to post administrations results of the experimental group on the reading comprehension test

Administration	N	Mean	SD	D.F	<i>t-value</i>	Sig
pre	40	20	1.60	39	44.7	0.05
post	40	44.27	2.63			

As indicated in table (2), the estimated *t*-value for reading comprehension test is (44.7). It is significant at (0.05) level in favor of the post administration of the experimental group. This means that the level of participants in reading comprehension was improved. Thus, the first hypothesis has been supported.

-Hypothesis two:

It was hypothesized that "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post-administration of the reading comprehension skills test, in favor of the experimental group". *t*-test for paired-samples was used to identify the differences between the mean scores

of the performance of both groups on the post administration of the reading comprehension skills test as shown in table 3.

Table (3): Comparing the reading comprehension post results of both groups

Group	N	Mean	S.D	D.F	t-value	Sig
Exp	40	44.27	2.63	78	52.85	0.05
Cont.	40	18.8	1.53			

Table (3) shows that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level of significance in the reading comprehension test between the mean scores of both groups on the post administration of the reading comprehension test , in favor of the experimental group, t-value being 52.85. This value is significant at 0.05 level of significance in favor of the post administration of the experimental group. Therefore, this provides enough evidence to support the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis three:It was hypothesized that "The suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach has a positive effect on developing EFL reading comprehension of the experimental group".

The named formula was used to identify the effect size for the test of reading comprehension skills as follows:

$$(n | 2) = \frac{(t | 2)}{(t^2) + df}$$

Table (4): The Effect Size of improving the performance of the experimental group in reading comprehension skills.

<i>Item</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>t²</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>η²</i>	<i>Effect size</i>
Reading comprehension	44.7	19.8	39	0.98	high

Results in table (4) shows that the effect size in developing reading comprehension skills of the experimental group is high (0.98).Therefore, the suggested program based on the communicative language teaching approach had a positive effect on developing reading comprehension skills of the experimental group .So, the fifth hypothesis has been accepted.

Suggestions for Further Research:In the light of the study results, and out of its delimitations, the following research areas can be suggested:

1-The relation between communicative language teaching approach and creative reading among secondary stage students.

2-The relation between communicative language teaching approach and reading comprehension among secondary stage students.

3-The relation between communicative language teaching approach and listening skills among university stage students.

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