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**Menoufiya University
Faculty of Education
Department of Curricula &
Methods of Teaching**

**The Effects of Literary and Non-literary
Texts on the Reading Comprehension,
Vocabulary Knowledge and Attitude
towards Reading of EFL Students
(Methods of Teaching EFL)**

**A Ph.D. Thesis
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 3

THE PROBLEM OF THE STUDY	6
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	6
RESEARCH HYPOTHESES	7
THE SAMPLE	7
THE PROCEDURES	7
LIMITATION OF THE STUDY	8
TOOLS OF THE STUDY	8
CONTENT VARIABLES	9
PROGRAMME OF THE STUDY: DESIGN AND TREATMENT	9
TEACHING THE PROGRAMME:	9
TERMS	10

CHAPTER 2: TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION, VOCABULARY, AND ATTITUDE TOWARD READING 9

FACTORS OF SILENT READING	10
I. LITERARY TEXTS: (A) MATERIAL	21
I. LITERARY TEXTS: (B) STRATEGIES	31
II. NON- LITERARY TEXTS: (A) MATERIAL	41
II. NON- LITERARY TEXTS: (B) STRATEGIES	52
III. VOCABULARY: (A) MATERIAL	59
III. VOCABULARY: (B) STRATEGIES	62
IV. ATTITUDES	69
(A) ATTITUDE CONCERNING CONTENT	73
(B) ATTITUDE CONCERNING STRATEGIES	74
(C) ATTITUDE CONCERNING ETHOS	78

CHAPTER 3: ORGANISATION OF THE COURSE

83

(1) SYLLABUS DESIGN	83
(2) GOALS IN SYLLABUS DESIGN: EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT	84
(3) SYLLABUS TYPES	86
(4) CONTROL OVER THE SYLLABUS	87
(5) MULTI-DIMENSIONAL SYLLABUS DESIGN	88
(6) BASES OF SYLLABUS DESIGN	90
(7) IMPLEMENTATIONAL ISSUES	91
(8) EVALUATION	92
(9) APPLICATION OF SYLLABUS THEORY	92
(10) READING AS A THINKING PROCESS	92
I. LITERARY TEXTS	97
II. NON-LITERARY TEXTS	121

CHAPTER 4: EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

132

(1) A SCALE FOR MARKING COMPREHENSION.	132
(2) THE RESEARCH METHOD	142
(3) TEST VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	149
(4) PRE-TESTING THE SAMPLE	150

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

180

RECOMMENDATIONS	181
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	183

BIBLIOGRAPHY

184**SUMMARY**

Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

Reading is of great importance for those who learn language, as it develops language vocabulary and culture. In the curriculum of the faculties of education students study texts to increase their opportunities of reading. A current trend in second language teaching is to make reading an independent lesson to give students the chance to study different subjects in different fields. The main goal in the classroom is to let students read literature using the suitable literary strategies. Reading here does not mean to gain knowledge only, but to infer, evaluate, interpret, connect the familiar with the unfamiliar, and also to analyse.

According to Munro, the primary concern of a teacher of English as a foreign language is to “concentrate on the literary texts themselves, clarifying their meaning and assisting students to perceive the precision and vitality of the language the author has employed”, (cited in İçöz, 1992, p. 10). The assumption underlying this approach is that as literature provides the students with an abundance of examples of subtle and complex uses of the grammar and vocabulary of English, the students develop a better feel for the language and improve their overall proficiency in it through reading literature; therefore, literature can be used effectively to produce language consciousness.

It is difficult to separate language and the culture of its native speakers, and because the text contains this culture it should be studied through cultural background. Historical, social and cultural backgrounds are an essential part in learning foreign languages. Literature gives a clear image of the life and culture of its people. In this respect, Coady (1979:7) points out that “background knowledge becomes an important variable when we notice, as many have, that students with a Western background of some kind learn English faster on the average than those without such a background”. Coady also suggests that background knowledge may be able to compensate for certain syntactic deficiencies.

The subjects of reading materials should be of high interest and relate well to the background of the reader, since strong semantic input can help compensate when syntactic control is weak. The interest and background knowledge will enable the student to comprehend at a reasonable rate and keep him involved in the material in spite of its syntactic difficulty (Coady, 1979:12). Widdowson's (1983:91) remarks seem to touch the heart of the issue:

The language learner's interest is an intrinsic part of the language-using process itself, not a state of mind, it is desirable for learners to be in so as to make them more receptive to teaching.

One of the most frequently mentioned needs for the effective teaching of EFL reading is that reading materials should hold the attention of the readers. This means that reading passages should have two qualities, if at all possible. They should be both *current* and of *appropriate interest to the students* in order to form a positive attitude towards reading.

It is said that literary texts create enjoyment. This positively affects the learning process. The students also may find the aesthetic experience and discover the world around them. Michael H. Short and Christopher N. Candlin, as cited in Brumfit (1984a, p. 83), remark:

Many students enjoy reading literature. As enjoyment plays an important factor in many learning processes, literature is a potentially useful aid to the language teacher.

Literary texts often contain within them a number of different varieties of English. They can thus be extremely useful in sensitising more advanced learners of English to linguistic variation and the values associated with different varieties.

If a student is taught language and literature by the same person, it is possible for the lessons to be materially enforcing. Literary texts, or extracts from them, can be used to break up language classes and to identify difficulties that students experience in reading in general and reading imaginative texts in particular.

Literary texts assume that literature can provide a lesson for extending language usage. Many of these texts focus on those particular grammar points that are salient in the text. Furthermore, vocabulary expansion is dealt with by paying attention to word forms and common expressions. Povey (1972:187) in summarising the aim of using literature in ESL classes argues that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage and complex and exact syntax".

There is no clear evidence to show that there is a direct causal link between vocabulary and successful reading, but the relationship between the two has been strongly suggested in research or theorising by reading experts. Abdellah (1993, p. 10) presents the relevant views in this respect. Davis (1968) found that the factor that correlated most highly with comprehension is knowledge of word meaning. Daneman (1988) suggests that since words are the building blocks of a connected text, constructed meaning texts depend in part on the success of searching for individual word meanings. Other researchers such as Deck *et al* (1982) and Anderson and Freebody (1981) have also attested to the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension. Daneman, however, goes further to suggest that simply improving a reader's vocabulary is not sufficient, for comprehension depends not only on the sheer size of the reader's vocabulary but also on the facility with which he can access the known word meanings represented in memory. Such a stand is supported by La Berge and Samuels (1974), who postulate that fluent readers automatically recognise most of the words they read. It appears that lexical and comprehension processing share the same limited resource, and automatic access frees cognitive space for constructing meaning from the text. In other words, good readers are also good decoders. Such a view is echoed by Eskey (1988:94):

Rapid and accurate decoding of language is important to any kind of reading. . . . Good readers know the language. They can decode for the most part, not by guessing from the context or prior knowledge of the world, but by a kind of automatic identification that requires no conscious cognitive

effort. It is precisely this automaticity that frees the minds of fluent readers of a language to think about and interpret what they are reading. (cited in Abdallah, 1993, p. 10).

The Problem of the Study

In spite of what has been said about the results of using literary texts in teaching reading, there is no comparative study about the effects of teaching literary and non-literary texts on improving students' comprehension. Therefore, this study aims to deal with the use of literary and non-literary texts in developing the reading comprehension skill, vocabulary knowledge and students' attitude towards reading both types of texts.

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of literary and non-literary texts on developing the comprehension skill of EFL students?
2. What is the effect of literary and non-literary texts on developing the vocabulary knowledge of EFL students?
3. What is the effect of literary and non-literary texts on developing students' attitude towards reading?

The Significance of the Study

The importance of the study lies in the following:

1. The study may specify the kinds of texts which are more effective for EFL students and which may help develop their reading and comprehension skills.
2. The study may improve students' attitude towards reading.
3. The study may help students to gain more vocabulary.
4. The study helps to develop a reading curriculum and to put into consideration students' trends and attitudes.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the experimental group main score gain in the post-test and the control group in reading comprehension.
2. There is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the experimental group main score gain in the post-test and the control group in vocabulary knowledge.
3. There is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the experimental group main score gain in the post-test and the control group in measuring students' attitudes towards reading.

The Sample

The sample has been chosen among first year students of English at the Faculty of Education, Menoufiya University. There has been a random selection due to the large number of the first year students, which is normally about 350 students.

The researcher has chosen 150 students divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group, 75 students each. The experimental group have studied literary texts (short stories), while the control group have studied non-literary texts of different subjects. These texts have been studied first by the students of the first year in order to be able to deal with them later. This sample contains male and female students of the same cultural, social and economic background. The study took place in the 1995-96 academic year.

The Procedures

To tackle the research problem, the following steps have been followed:

1. The sample is chosen randomly and divided into two groups, one of which is the experimental group and the other the control group. It consists of 150 students, 75 for the experimental group and 75 for the control group.
2. A pre-test is administered for both groups.