The Assessment of EFL Students in English Reading Comprehension skills and Its Methods Used for Effective Communication at Qassim University

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is one of the best significant abilities for students in English language learning and other courses in the university curriculum. EFL students lack the skill of reading and comprehending in English efficiently, and this remains a difficulty for them, mainly level one students. On the other side, for teachers to discover whether students comprehend what they are reading, assessment needs to be conducted during and after classes. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the methods used to assess EFL students in English reading comprehension abilities for effective communication skills at the Department of English at Qassim University. Moreover, this study is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social interaction and his notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). A descriptive study research design was adopted. The sample of the study was collected through proportional sampling, purposive sampling, and haphazard sampling. The study sample consisted of 14 EFL students from level one in the department of English and 16 teachers from the department of English. Data were obtained by using questionnaires, observation checklist, and interview schedules. Piloting of the tools was conducted. The reliability of the tools was verified by using a test-retest system. A reliability coefficient above 0.8 was attained and measured satisfactory. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Qualitative data was prepared according to study subjects and offered descriptively based on study objectives. Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze quantitative data. Quantitative data were totaled and entered in the program for analysis by using “(SPSS) the Statistical Package for Social Sciences”. The data were analyzed in association with the objectives and summarized in tables. The study revealed that numerous methods were conducted in assessing students. The most common method used was written questions, then oral questions, and silent reading. However, the most efficient method recognized was written answers, followed by silent reading and audibly reading.

Keywords: Assessment methods, EFL students, Instructional Materials, Reading Comprehension Skills,

Introduction
Assessment is an essential part of the educational development in defining the students’ movement. It offers direction for review, comments to both the students and teachers that they may use to develop learning and teaching of reading comprehension skills (Kroll, 2003). Based
on Isaacson’s belief (1996), teachers cannot state that students’ achievement and make essential changes in instruction without engaging in the everyday assessment. He also declares that self-assessment benefits students to take possession of their reading and allows them to adopt the skills they are studying. Assessment is then an essential consideration in development for teaching. Therefore, assessments must carefully look like eloquent learning tasks and assess the acquisition of a high level of thinking and reasoning capabilities as integral to topics matter knowledge.

Chuunga (2013) states that assessment shows two essential parts of education. Initially, it is devoted to estimating learning and teaching. Furthermore, it can be used to assist students to know their difficulties. Therefore, assessment is a vital core part of the teaching and learning progression. Spiller (2009) supports this thought and states that assessing students is an element of the teaching sequence and gives importance to the students’ outcome. Furthermore, the assessment information helps in understanding, observing student growth, giving productive comments, and cultivating both student teaching approaches.

In English, reading comprehension skills and their assessment will show the parts where students determine their strong points and faults. It also displays how sound they are capable of removing information and analyzing what they are reading (Cullingfold, 2001). Conversely, on assessment, Blair-Larsen, and W. (2004) “call attention to the significance of assessing reading comprehension skills. In their assessment method, students read one or two sections of rating level materials out loud for one or two minutes. These full numbers of words read in one or two minutes are used as a core, and the total of errors are deducted from this total. Several of the errors to be listed as the students read are mispronunciation, omissions, and substitution. If students do not effectively read words after four seconds, the word is completed by the teacher and calculated as an error, place in words/errors that are self-corrected are not measured as errors. The last score is considered by the number of words correct per minute”.

According to Cullingford’s statement (2001), “teachers must continually analyze students’ capabilities: not letting an initial impression affect their attitudes, but must be considered with the students’ attitudes and abilities. Teachers are requested to find out ways of assessing the student by student by making standards reference marks with standards being dissimilar for each student’s needs”. The aim of conducting an assessment is to check whether the learning process and objectives come across (N’Namdi, 2005). He further clarified that “procedures of assessment must be based on consideration of what is taught in the classroom as well as be different and related to the classes. Haley and Austin (2004) highlight that the assessment technique is not the only means of deciding students’ improvement but is also implemented to make the learning and teaching more interconnected and cooperative. Assessment requires to be as a reflection, and teachers require to act according to the case. It assists in reflecting the strategy of the English reading programs. It can improve further improvement, adjustments, changes, and implementation to outfit the needs and the stages of the developing students”.

K.I.E (2002) mentions reading comprehension manuscripts, responding multiple-choice questions on manuscripts, reading excerpts, and cuttings from journals and newspapers as some of the approaches of assessing English reading comprehension. Herbert (2003) states that reading assessment can be completed by a method of text comprehension. Text comprehension is frequently assessed via questions. Comprehension questions should concentrate on key ideas and perspectives, not slight details. Hempenstall (2009) claims that the aim of reading comprehension assessment comprises comparing one student's development to that of their peers, showing students for unusual help, measuring student’s development over some time, identifying specific areas of strong point or weakness, using information for choices about teaching, and determining assignment in reading comprehension. From the previous review, it is evident that related assessment methods are a prerequisite in the instruction and learning of English reading comprehension. This study sought to investigate the commonly used and real assessment methods for English reading comprehension in the Department of English at Qassim University.

**Literature review**

Hunt & Beglar (2005) indicates that reading materials, comprehension exercises, and vocabulary input help students be more aware of the grammatical structure and use of lexical variety. There is a similar study which also resulted that the students need to be engaged in language instructional exercises for writing intervention and need to have comprehensible input (Krashen, 1984). Moreover, many studies have concluded that having the right input of reading is essential when teaching a second language or foreign language is concerned (Hyland, 2003; Renandya, 2007; Zainal & Husin, 2011). In addition, regular reading and writing exercises have a positive effect on writing outcomes (Tsang, 1996). By reading before writing can make students easier to face vocabulary and grammatical problems. By reading, the students know comprehending not only the meaning of the words but also the grammatical structure. Therefore, one technique of improving the grammatical and lexical mastery is by reading, a notion that provides importance to the effect of extensive reading (Renandya, 2007; Tsang, 1996).

In acquiring a second language, writing skill is recognized to post the highest challenge to both the learners and the teachers. In a writing task, the learners are compulsory to provide their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences into text (Grabe, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Zainal & Husin, 2011). Similarly, the teachers need to deliver and convey the content of the material that will be taught and how they will start writing. It offers an effect on the teacher’s performance if the students’ performance is good in that practice. Consequently, the teacher certainly needs the expertise and capability to teach the students to write (Hyland, 2003). Richards and Renandya (2002: 30) noted that “There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for EFL learners to master. The difficulty lies in generating and organizing ideas and translating these ideas into readable texts. They found that lower-level students used their L1 more than the advanced students, and obvious pitfall was caused by several factors such as lack of vocabulary acquisition and interest”.

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Research questions

1. What is the level of reading comprehension in EFL students in the Department of English at Qassim University?
2. What are the commonly used and effective methods for EFL Students at the department of English?
3. What is the best used method for teaching English reading comprehension for beginner EFL students at the Department of English at Qassim University?

Objectives of the study

This study aims at assessing the following:

1. The English reading comprehension in level one EFL students at the Department of English at Qassim University.
2. The commonly used and effective methods for EFL Students in level one at the department of English.
3. The best used method for English reading comprehension for beginner EFL students for level one students at Qassim University.

Significance of the Study

As there are no vast studies investigated the assessment of the process of learning in the EFL context, mainly on the assessment of reading comprehension and its used method for EFL Saudi students context yet. The researcher conducted this study with hopes to be one of these first studies in this area. It is also hoped that this study's findings may help instructors become more aware of the difficulties of English reading comprehension and its used methods by EFL students. Finally, it is hoped that the findings will help students be aware of these difficulties and overcome such difficulties in effectively improving their English reading skills.

Study Design and Methodology

This study is conducted on the EFL students of level one in the Department of English at Qassim University. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory, the study is based upon its idea, which states that social interaction and his notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). A descriptive study research design was adopted. The sample for the study was collected through proportional sampling, purposive sampling, and simple haphazard sampling. The study sample consisted of 14 EFL students from level one in the department of English and 16 teachers from the department of English. Data were obtained by using questionnaires, observation checklist, and interview schedules. Qualitative data were prepared based on the study subjects and offered.
descriptively on the line of the study objectives. Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze quantitative data. Quantitative data was totaled and entered into the program for analysis using (SPSS) the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

For teachers and classroom observation list of data was gathered by using questionnaires. These research tools were planned by the researchers so to be in line with the research objectives. The teachers’ questionnaires comprised two sections; A and B. Section A took fact-based information that was used to get teachers' top academic qualifications, qualified in teaching the course, and training education.

Section B comprises questions on the obtainability and use of instructional means used to teach English reading comprehension abilities. The observation list was used to get up to date instructional resources accessible in the classroom and how they are used. The researcher noticed that one English lesson for each student lasted for 20 minutes.

To certify the test objects, the questionnaire was discussed with instructive research specialists for their contribution and confirmation. A pilot study was carried in level one to remove objects that will have likely provoked no response. The tool was then edited accordingly after piloting. A test-retest strategy was to found the reliability of the tools. The questionnaires were managed within three weeks. The answers to the questionnaires were distributed by numeral values. To test the reliability of the tools, the researcher used Cronbach’s Alpha. A Cronbach’s alpha of 0.86 was attained, representing that the research tools were reliable and then adopted for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Study Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results and Discussions

The data used to be in line with the objective were gathered using Students’ interview schedules, teachers’ questionnaires, and the observation schedule.

Teachers’ questionnaire sought information on the regularity of assessing students in English reading comprehension skills. Table 2 below summarizes their answers:
## Table 2: Assessment methods in teaching English reading comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment methods</th>
<th>Never F(%)</th>
<th>Rarely F(%)</th>
<th>Occasionally F(%)</th>
<th>Frequently F(%)</th>
<th>Always F(%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written answers</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>3(18.8)</td>
<td>3(18.8)</td>
<td>10(62.5)</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral questions</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>7(43.8)</td>
<td>8(50)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling in gaps</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>7(43.8)</td>
<td>4(25)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>3(18.8)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading silent</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>3(18.8)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearranging sentences</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>4(25)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of results showed that 3 (18.8%) teachers said that written responses are occasionally used as assessment methods in reading comprehension, 3 (18.8%) said it was frequently used while 10 (62.5%) said it was always used. 1 (6.3%) said oral questions are never used; 7 (43.8%) said it was frequently used while 8 (50%) said it was always used. 7 (43.8%) said that filling in gaps is occasionally used, 4 (25%) said it was frequently used while 5 (31.3%) said it was always used. 1 (6.3%) said that reading aloud is never used, 1 (6.3%) said its rarely used, 6 (37.5%) said its occasionally used, 5 (31.3%) said it is frequently used while 3 (18.8%) said its always used. 1 (6.3%) said that silent reading is rarely used, 3 (18.8%) said it was occasionally used, 6 (37.5%) said it frequently used, and 6 (37.5%) said it is always used. 4 (25%) said rearranging sentences is rarely used, 6 (37.5%) said its occasionally used, 1 (6.3%) is frequently used while 5 (31.3%) said it is always used. From the analysis of data, the written
answer is the most used assessment method of reading comprehension followed by oral questions. Reading aloud and rearranging sentences are least used.

According to Isaacson (1996), self-assessment supports students in taking accountability for their reading and allows them to adopt the skills they are learning. Collingfold (2001) states that assessment displays what students can add information and examine how they are reading.

Teachers’ questionnaire also sought information on the effectiveness of the assessment methods used in teaching English reading comprehension skills. Table 3 summarizes their responses:

Table 3: Effectiveness of the assessment methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment methods</th>
<th>Not effective F(%)</th>
<th>Less effective F(%)</th>
<th>Average effective F(%)</th>
<th>Effective F(%)</th>
<th>Very effective F(%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written answers</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>8(50)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling in gaps</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>3(18.8)</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>0(00)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>4(25)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading silent</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>2(12.5)</td>
<td>5(31.3)</td>
<td>7(43.8)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearranging</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>1(6.3)</td>
<td>6(37.5)</td>
<td>4(25)</td>
<td>4(25)</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of data revealed that 1 (6.3%) teacher said that written answers are not effective, 1(6.3%) said it was average, 8 (50%) said it was effective while 6 (37.5%) said it was very effective. 1 (6.3%) said filling the gaps was not effective, 6 (37.5%) said it was average, 6 (37.5%) said it was effective while 3 (18.8%) said it was very effective. 1 (6.3%) said loud reading was less effective, 4 (25%) said it was average, 5 (31.3%) said it was effective while 6 (37.5%) said it was very effective. 1 (6.3%) said silent reading was not effective, 1 (6.3%) said it
was less effective, 2 (12.5%) said it was average, 5 (31.3%) said it was effective while 7 (43.8%) said it was very effective. 1 (6.3%) said that rearranging sentences said it was not effective, 1 (6.3%) said it was less effective, 6 (37.5%) said it was average, 4 (25%) said it was effective, and 4 (25%) said it was very effective. 1 (6.3%) said completing sentences was not effective, 1 (6.3%) said it was less effective, 3 (18.8%) said it was average, 5 (31.3%) said it was effective while 6 (37.5%) said it was very effective. From the analysis of data, the teachers felt that written answers were the most effective methods used in assessing English reading comprehension, followed by reading aloud and silent reading. Rearranging sentences was the least effective method used.

The below data were obtained from the observations schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of assessment</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>Not used</th>
<th>Effectively/Not effectively used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written comprehension</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Used effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral comprehension answers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Used effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling gaps</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Used effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not used effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading silent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not used effectively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the observation schedule, the most used method of assessment is writing comprehension, writing oral comprehension answers, and silent reading. Filling gaps and reading aloud were less used. Writing comprehension, oral comprehension answers, and filling gaps were effectively used while reading aloud and silent reading was not used effectively.

From the questionnaires and observation schedules, writing answers were identified as the most effective method of assessment. However, there were mixed feelings on reading aloud and reading silently as methods of assessment. Whereas the teachers' questionnaire identified reading
aloud and reading silently as effective, observation schedules identified these two methods as used ineffectively.

Assessment is a way of getting feedback from both the learner and the teacher. This will help both parties to develop necessary strategies for improvement. Chinga (2013) supports this argument and adds that an assessment is used to assess learning and teaching in the class. He also supposed that assessment is used to maintain students with learning problems. N’namdi (2005) declared that the aim of using assessment is to test whether lesson objectives and learning meet each other.

**Conclusion**

There are several methods acknowledged that are used to assess students in English reading comprehension skills. The most commonly used method was written answers, then oral questions, and silent reading. The most effective method recognized is written answers followed by aloud reading and silent reading. Isaacson (1996) believed that self-assessment helps students take concern for their reading, which allows them to internalize the skills they are learning. Chinga (2013) supports this statement and further adds that the assessment is used to estimate teaching and learning in the classroom.

**References**


