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EFFECTS OF READING SKILLS ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS' ARABIC STUDENTS IN LEARNING OF ARABIC READING COMPREHENSION IN KWARA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a part of our daily lives. It is performed both for pleasure and information. Reading skills are important for the individual since they facilitate faster comprehension in reading. If the students do not have knowledge of reading skills, they cannot be expected to be successful readers. Thus, they cannot achieve the level of comprehension required to pass exams in their departments; for this reason, reading skills should be taught in Senior Secondary Schools for the students to be able to cope with comprehension problems. This case study aims to find out whether or not reading skills have an effect on Arabic Reading comprehension of senior secondary students in Kwara State. This study is both a qualitative and quantitative study, which lasted for a duration of weeks. Two groups were selected (experiment and control) among SSS1 and SSS2 classes of some selected senior secondary schools in Kwara State. Both groups were administered a pre-test and questionnaire at the beginning of the study to find out if they were aware of Arabic reading skills. In addition, 10 students were chosen randomly for an interview. During the study, Arabic reading skills were infused into the curriculum through designing lesson plans by the Arabic language contents and topics for Arabic Students as determined by the curriculum planners of Nigeria. The lessons required the students to use reading skills before, during and post reading. At the end of the study the same question was re-administered. The students of Arabic were given the post-test and then interviewed. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics. The obtained data revealed that the students of Arabic enhanced their Arabic reading comprehension ability, provided that they were taught to use reading skills

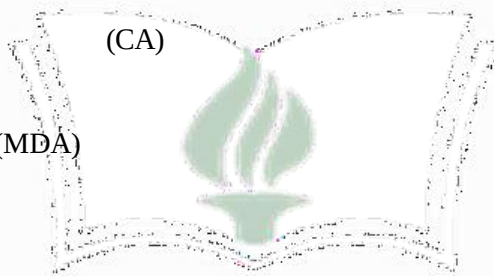
Introduction

Teaching is the educational practice implemented by a teaching instructor aimed at transmitting ideas, attitudes, and educational information to a student/learner in the context of an educational setup. And this action is also an inter-relationship between the giver and receiver of educational information to achieve a certain goal, which is “newly useful information”. The teaching comprises both the intricacy of the performance required and in the shifting nature of the cognitive activity that generates it, and it requires some level of selection and limitation be made by silencing specify classes of goals and ignoring some incoming information, (Gaea, 2019).

Arabic is known as major language to the Arab world, i.e. Egypt, Sudan, Libya, the North African countries – like(Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria- Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, the Gulf Countries,etc., and it is also the major language of non-Arab countries such as the Republic of Chad in Central Africa. And also this Arabic is a minority language in some other countries such as Nigeria, Iran and former Soviet Central Asia. It is also in wide use throughout the Muslim world as a second language (e.g Somalia, Pakistan, India, Indonesia) (Kaye, 2017).

Arabic is recognised as the fourth most used language on the internet, and this language has three main varieties:

- a. Classical Arabic- (CA)
- b. Modern Dialect Arabic(MDA)
- c. Arabic Dialect(AD)



So, the MSA and AD could be written either in Arabic or in Roman Script (Arabic),which corresponds to Arabic written with Latin letters, numerals and Punctuation (Imane, Hauda, Faical, Billel and Damien, 2021).

The introduction of the 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system of education in Nigeria was embodied by the Nigerian government in the National Policy on Education (NPE). It was published in 1977 but became effective in September 1981. The first six years of a child are spent in primary school. The first three years are spent in the Junior Secondary school, while the last three years are spent in the Senior Secondary, and the last four yearsare spent in the University or other Institutions of higher learning. In the education system, Arabic is directly learnt as the language of Art. It (Arabic) was also included in the curriculum for primary education, stated out by the government in the National Policy on Education (2004), and it is the goal of inculcating in Pupils permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively and giving them citizenship education as basis for effective participation and contribution to the life of the

society. It also says that the state government shall ensure the integration of the formal basic education curriculum in the Quran and Islamic Schools.

Arabic is also categorized as a non-prevocational elective under the modern Junior Secondary School Curriculum of the National Policy on Education. It is also among non-vocational electives in the Senior Secondary School core curriculum (FRN, 2013). Oladosu (2008) explains that, in Nigeria, a significant segment of the population accepts Islam as a faith and tends to abide by its principles. This group of Nigerians goes through the Arabic and Islamic systems of education in one way or the other. The researcher states further that Arabic is an elective subject at both the Junior and Senior levels. As a result of these developments, some colleges of education, polytechnics and Universities offer courses, diplomas, and graduate degree courses respectively, in Arabic language and literature and Islamic studies.

Even though Arabic is not a core subject, vibrant Arabic programs exist in some Nigerian Colleges of Education and Universities where students specialise in Arabic.

They are admitted every year. Employees who hold certificates in the Arabic language are also found in industries, large-scale businesses, local, state and national security officers, companies, hospitals for keeping records, advertisement and communication (Oladosu, 2012). It also aids communication across borders. It (Arabic) is among the languages of diplomacy as well as that of inter-ethnic communication; people who share some ethnic background use Arabic on formal occasions such as inaugural ceremonies, gatherings on Islamic issues, among others.

The reading is selected for practical and academic drill. This reading method is also suitable for teaching Arabic comprehension as an academic reason, for specific uses of the Arabic language. It is also selected as a method for teaching Arabic language comprehension as an academic reason, for specific uses of the Arabic language. It is also selected as a method for teaching Arabic comprehension for Arabic learners who do not have any opportunity (Jill Kerppr, 2006).

Comprehension plays an important role in learning a foreign language, and it is clear that Arabic is a foreign language and a subject in the Nigerian educational system. Comprehension is the ability to understand the meaning or importance of the knowledge acquired. The comprehension can be listening/oral comprehension or reading comprehension.

The listening/ oral comprehension is the way of listening to some passages that will be read to the listener or foreign students, and at the end of some questions will be asked based on the passage. One is expected to give correct answers to show that the learner listened to the passage and understood it (Ibiley, Oreoluwa, Ocheful, Attah & Ifeoma, 2018). There exist numerous studies on reading skills and comprehension. Alderson (2000)

Explains that the readers' knowledge affects what they understand through their reading. There are other factors which affect reading comprehension. Comprehension is a problem for many

learners/students when they read in Arabic; they tend to attribute the comprehension difficulties to the Arabic language. They may also feel that the problem is their own lack of ability. The problem may also be about their approach to a text. If the students understand how the information is presented in Arabic texts and are also aware of the cognitive processes, they will be better at Arabic reading comprehension.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the skills that students employ to interpret what they read using clues, and reflect on what the text does by making such remarks. It also looks into discovering how students look for clues in a text, understand the writer's meaning, and how their reading skills affect their comprehension ability. The scope of this study is based on schema theory. According to this theory, reading is an active process which cannot be achieved without background knowledge.

Research Questions

1. Can the students be trained and guided in terms of Arabic reading skills?
2. Are Students who are trained and guided on Arabic reading skills better at Arabic reading comprehension than those who are not?

Methodology

This study was designed as a case study, and the aim was to enhance the reading skills of the 150 Students in the Senior Secondary Schools in Kwara State. Qualitative and quantitative research designs were both used in the study. It presents data about the growth of Arabic reading skills of the Arabic Students and their perceptions and attitudes towards Arabic reading. The data was gathered through pretest and post-test, and an Arabic reading skills questionnaire, which was supported by oral interviews.

The respondents of the study were 250 Senior Secondary School Arabic Students in five Local Government Areas of Kwara State. The Arabic students are those in SSS one and SSS two classes from each school. Arabic students in SSS 1 were set as the control group, and SSS 2 Arabic Students as the experimental group. There were 100 Arabic Students in SSS 1 and 150 Arabic Students in SSS 2 at the time of study.

The Arabic Students were informed about the study at the beginning of the first term. The study lasted for 12 weeks. The experiment group received the treatment. The control group did reading classes as determined by the department of Arabic at each school. The experiment group received training for two hours a week. The researcher was the instructor of both groups.

The lesson plans were prepared by the researcher and checked by two other teachers of Arabic teachers. The classes included three stages: pre-reading, during reading and post-reading. The Arabic reading skills were involved, especially in the pre-reading and during reading stages.

The Arabic reading skills questionnaire was designed by the researcher, considering the skills used while reading by Lagan (1992) and Pirozzi (1995). It was conducted at the beginning of the study (before the training started) in order to find out if the respondents are aware of Arabic reading skills, and it so what Arabic reading skills they have. This questionnaire was also conducted at the end of the study to check if any difference occurred in the respondents' Arabic reading skills during the study. The questionnaire consisted of 18 Statements. The statements in the questionnaire were closed and scaled. And, there were five items: "Always", "Usually", "Sometimes", "Rarely", and "Never". Each item was rated from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

The other instrument employed to collect data for this study was the interview. The questions of the interview were prepared by the teacher. It was conducted both at the beginning. And at the end of the study, to find out whether or not the respondents used the Arabic reading skill efficiently.

The last instrument used in this study was the pre-test and the post-test. They were given to the respondents at the beginning and at the end of the study. The questions included Arabic comprehension questions and multiple-choice questions, as suggested by Alderson (2000).

The data collected for this study were analysed through a statistical program, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows, version 15.0. The respondents' responses to the Arabic reading skills questionnaire were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The pre-test and post-test were conducted in order to find out whether any meaningful difference occurred before and after the training. The data gathered from the related groups, experimental pre and post, for example, were analysed through t-test Statistics. The qualitative data (data from the interviews) were analysed qualitatively.

Findings

This section indicates research findings gathered from the pre-test and post-test, questionnaires, interviews and tests, respectively. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were administered in the analysis of the data collected by means of Pre-test and post-test, questionnaires, and quizzes. The pre-test administered at the beginning of the study consisted of 25 questions prepared to assess the predetermined reading skills. The skills were selected among those shown by Lagan (1992), Pirozzi (1995) and Alderson (2000). The respondents were expected to display their knowledge of the reading skills. The post-test administered at the end of the study also consisted of 25 questions. The aim was to look into

whether or not a change occurred in the comprehension ability of the Respondents. The data gathered from the related groups, for example, experimental pre and post, were analysed through t-test Statistics.

Findings from the Arabic Reading Skills Questionnaire

The Arabic Reading Skills Questionnaire administered at the beginning of the study consisted of 20 items. The Arabic Students were directed to show their preferences on a five-point scale questionnaire as “Always”, “Usually”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely”, and “Never”. The same questionnaire was also administered at the end of the study in order to figure out whether or not there existed any changes in the preferences of the Table 3 shows the data obtained from the pre- and post-questionnaire of the experimental group.

Findings from the interviews

The interview questions were developed by the researcher. It was a semi-structured interview that consisted of 17 questions. The questions of the interview were developed with respect to the Arabic Reading skills mentioned in the study.

From the first interview

Excerpt 1

T: Does your background knowledge affect your understanding of an Arabic text?

S1: I mean, it does. There can be words related to it. It affects positively. It makes the Arabic text easier to understand.

From the Second Interview,

Except 2

T: Does your background knowledge affect your understanding of an Arabic text?

S1: It does if I know something about the Arabic subject beforehand.

In both interviews, the respondents reacted in a way that they recognised the role of background knowledge, or schemata, in affecting the level of understanding of an Arabic text.

From the First Interview Excerpt

2

T: Does your background knowledge affect your understanding of an Arabic text?

s1: It does if I know something about the Arabic subject beforehand.

In both interviews, the respondents reacted in a way that they recognised the role of background knowledge, or schemata, in affecting the level of understanding of an Arabic text from the first interview.

Excerpt3

T: Can you find out the main and supporting ideas in the Arabic text you read? S5: Generally, I can find them out.

In this interview, the respondent is not sure about the main and supporting ideas in the Arabic text. However, in the second interview, the respondent is aware of the importance of main and supporting ideas in a text.

From the Second Interview

Excerpt 4

T: Can you find out the main and supporting ideas in an Arabic text you read?

S4: I can find them out. The main idea is important. If you do not understand it, you read in vain from the first interview.

Excerpt5

T: Do you understand the information in an Arabic text that is not stated clearly? S9: I sometimes understand them

From the Second Interview:

Excerpt6

T: Do you understand the information in an Arabic text that is not stated clearly?

S9: I understand them, and I think they prettify the Arabic text. Irony, for example, is very interesting. It makes us think in both ways.

From the first Interview

Excerpt7

T: Can you find the meanings of unknown words in the Arabic text?

S4: It is difficult to understand an Arabic text if I do not know the meaning of unknown words, but I make guesses.

In the first Interview, it is obvious that the respondents are not aware of how to figure out the meaning of unknown words in an Arabic text. Conversely, the respondent is aware of the skill in the second interview.

From the Second Interview:

Excerpt 8

T: Can you find the meanings of unknown words in Arabic texts? S4:

Yes, I can, especially in the exams.

T: How?

S4: I read the Arabic text and try to find synonyms, antonyms or examples for the unknown words. It usually works.

From the first interview:

Excerpt9

T: Does the genre of an Arabic text affect your understanding?

S8: Teacher, it depends on the Arabic subject and the style of the Arabic writer.

From the Second interview:

Excerpt 10

T: Does the genre of an Arabic text affect your understanding?

S8: I can figure out the genre. It can be easily understood through the use of certain keywords. It says “Once upon a time” for example, and it uses the past tense in Arabic.

Above are some excerpts selected from the interviews that we conducted with some respondents of the study. The responses of respondents show the level of their achievement in Arabic reading skills throughout the study.

Discussion

The aim of this study was twofold: (a) to find out whether or not Kwara State Students of Arabic were aware of Arabic reading skills, and (b) whether or not they could use appropriate Arabic reading skills if gained through Arabic reading comprehension.

The first research question of this study aims to find out whether or not the students of Arabic can be trained through teaching or Arabic reading comprehension. The data obtained from the pre- and post-test, Arabic Reading Skills Questionnaire, and interviews have shown that the students can be trained through teaching Arabic reading comprehension. And, before the students of Arabic used to complain about inadequate comprehension of reading text in the quizzes and exams, having been equipped with the Arabic reading skills and achieving proficiency, they have indicated that they enhanced their Arabic reading Comprehension Ability.

The second research question of this study seeks to answer the question of whether

students of Arabic who are taught through Arabic reading comprehension and better at reading skills than those who are not. Bedir (2000), Yilmaz (2013) and Ebru (2015) State that readers who do not possess the knowledge of the reading skills are more likely to fail when they read a text. Some other researchers, such as Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto (1989) and Nuttal(1996) and Canli (2013) also share this view. Similarly, Pani (2004) contends.

Students need training in terms of strategies so that they can become competent readers. According to Istifci (2009) and Celik, Akin, and Saricam (2014), the students understand more if they participate actively in the reading lesson by applying strategies.

From the findings, it is seen that the students of Arabic who are taught Arabic reading skills are better at reading comprehension than those who are not. For example, many of them lacked of reading skill required to find the main idea and supporting ideas in an Arabic text, but in the end, they gained the skill and accomplished the test. They realised that they did not have to decode every single word in a text to comprehend it.

Moreover, the data gathered through the interviews revealed that students of Arabic Started to feel more confident towards the end of the study. There was a meaningful change in the respondents' attitudes towards Arabic reading comprehension, being aware of Arabic reading skills and knowing how to use them correctly while dealing with Arabic texts; the respondents seemed to be more comfortable with the texts at the end of the study.

It is well known that there exists a relationship between language skills. A well-written Arabic text can be a good model for the students, for example, it can help the students to improve their Arabic writing skills. So, reading and writing are related to each other. Similarly, reading and writing are complementary acts. Students must become better at reading to become better at writing.

Conclusion

From the research questions of this study, a number of results revealed that the students of Arabic were not aware of their Arabic reading skills, and they could be taught Arabic reading comprehension to enhance their ability in Arabic reading. The trained students of Arabic (experimental group) performed better than the untrained (control group). So, the reading skills have positive effects on writing skills. Briefly, this study reveals that if the students are trained to gain the appropriate strategies which facilitate are trained to gain the appropriate strategies which facilitate understanding, they are likely to be more successful in Arabic reading comprehension. Thus, Arabic reading comprehension can be facilitated by enabling students to gain and use reading skills.

Further research could be conducted on the effect of gender, level or age on Arabic reading comprehension, or whether or not Arabic reading skills can be transferred to other language skills.

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