

CHALLENGES FACED BY LIBYAN TEACHERS IN SELECTING MATERIALS IN EFL READING CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Selecting effective materials in EFL classroom is the backbone of having a meaningful reading lesson. Despite the endless range of materials available and teaching trainings received, adapting and adopting the right reading material have always been a challenge for EFL teachers. With different proficiency, abilities and interests that the students possess, it further makes the material selection process becomes daunting. This paper aims to discover the main concerns on the issues of selecting materials faced by Libyan teachers in EFL classroom. This article also intends to highlight their perceptions on ELT materials in reading lessons and to find out the resolutions the teachers have in dealing with such issues. The participants of this study are a group of Libyan teachers teaching in Libyan international schools in Malaysia. The data collection for this study is done based on a qualitative study which an individual interview is done. This article provides a better understanding on the issues faced by the teachers in ensuring a meaningful EFL reading lesson.

Introduction

Reading is a main skill to acquire in order to reach excellent proficiency in leaning a foreign language. To speak a foreign language is important in the first stage but, to learn a foreign language completely is dependent on developing reading abilities (Yazar, 2013). Reading comprehension is actually an interaction of the reader's expectations with the textual information (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Hence, readers bring meaning to print and take meaning from print (Burns, 1978). Reading without understanding is a sign of escalating future failures and perpetuates a compounded inability to make sense of the printed world around us. Reading comprehension occurs when total meaning of a passage is fitted

into the network of information, organized in ways that are meaningful to society (Carrell&Eisterhold, 1990). Reading materials are often devised as a medium in delivering instructions in reading lessons. This is because instructional resources facilitate the understanding of difficult concepts as well as the teaching and learning of the reading skills (Omuna, Onchera and Kimutai, 2016).

In selecting reading materials, teachers need to pay a close heed to avoid jeopardizing students' understanding and process in gaining reading abilities. Some teachers have the passion in preparing an effective reading lesson; however, lacking in experience and professional training detains them in accomplishing their duties. In addition to that, teachers may also not be able to match the right materials with the specific needs of students or their different levels of proficiency (Rahimi, n. d.; Incecay, 2011). On the contrary, some educators who merely take the lesson for granted. Reading is often misunderstood as the easiest skill to be taught. Essentially, teachers come to class with empty hands and convey lengthy discourse on the content rather than caring whether the material is fitting and applicable to the learners. Students who have difficulty in reading, choose neither to read nor to engage in other tasks involving reading (Stanovich, 1986, as cited in Ahmad, 2006& Al-Issa, 2006). Therefore, this article carries the objectives to comprehend the issues that the teachers faced in selecting materials for their EFL reading classroom and their perceptions on reading materials used in the classroom.

Effective reading materials

Various researches were done to determine the credibility of reading materials selected. The first renowned formula done was a readability formula which have been expansively scrutinized for developing reading texts or materials in general. Schemes developed for grading materials in second language publications have generally been based on vocabulary size and difficulty of grammatical structures and in some, sentence length and the number and type of complex sentences is also measured (Harrington, 1985). Vocabulary measures revolve around words difficulty or vocabulary load. Most teachers and students agree that vocabulary is the major aspect in comprehending reading materials. They coincide that difficult words or not having enough vocabulary of certain context can impair reading

comprehension. Subsequently, sentence length is measured in due to its complexity. The premise that long sentences offer high complexity influences teachers to find reading texts with short sentences. However, this readability formula induced debates among theorist and researchers. They questioned the reliability of word frequency lists and separation of sentences cause the causal link between them to disappear.

Undoubtedly vocabulary and sentence complexity are factors to be well-thought in selecting reading materials, but they fail to consider reading as an interactive process. Teachers need to take students' interest into account when material selection is done. Many teachers feel that linguistic difficulty of material has less influence on comprehension than relevance (Niles, 1975). Apart from that, students' background knowledge is also important as it helps them to allocate understanding of the context. A good reading material must provide purposes to students. Reading without purpose does not leave any significant impact on students.

Teachers' cognition on reading materials

It is not prominently known that teachers' perceptions on reading materials can affect reading lessons. It can be easily deciphered to their students. When teachers are interested and excited about a topic, it is often carried over in their teaching practice (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Thus, the teacher's job signifies providing learners with the applicable mental tools in their potential reading situations in and out of L2 classrooms, moreover, the teacher needs to be a reading guide in the learners' process of becoming thriving independent readers (Josephine, 2015). By viewing reading instruction primarily in terms of the teaching process involved, and by relying on the informal and often incidental assessment of pupil progress, teachers are in danger of becoming preoccupied with the multitude of activities concerned with teaching reading at the expense of determining the true extent of pupil achievement (Harker, 1978). There has been a common perception among teachers that being a skilled reader is a qualification enough to be a skilled teacher of reading (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013). They further claimed that being a skilled reader does not ensure that you are capable of delivering an effective reading lesson. Teachers' knowledge and application of reading strategies instruction is important to improve learners' reading proficiency (Cekiso & Madikiza, 2014).

Methods

This research is conducted in a qualitative manner, and its objective is to highlight the challenges confronted in selecting reading materials. The population of the research consists of 3 teachers from 3 Libyan International Schools in Kuala Lumpur. These teachers are qualified EFL teachers and have been teaching for more than 5 years. These teachers also have experience in teaching EFL reading skills for all levels – elementary, intermediate and advance. The data collection for conducting this study will be using survey method interviews to examine to discover the main concerns on the issues of selecting materials faced by Libyan teachers in EFL classroom and teachers' perceptions upon using instructional materials in reading lessons. Interviews were done as they proven to work well in collecting data for a qualitative research. It is highlighted in a study by Edwards and Holland (2013). Other explanations for the increasing popularity of qualitative interviews offered are recognition of a need for methods that can give insight into the meanings that individuals and groups attach to experiences, social processes, practices and events, for example, by policy decision makers (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Jamshed (2014) in his study also claimed that interview is a type of outline in which the practices and standards be not only recorded, but also accomplished, argued as well as emphasized. It can follow these steps:

- a) Gather the interview.
- b) Analyse each interview and look for insights and meanings.
- c) Compare and contrast different answers; look for interpretations.

Findings and Discussion

According to the findings, it is true that teachers' cognition on reading materials can be easily reflected in their lessons, and it also affects how they deliver the lessons. The first factor is experiences in classroom. All of the participants agree that years of teaching have made them realized on some significant roles in making a reading lesson successful like how important pre reading is to them now compared to before. The second factor is professional coursework. All of them mentioned about the inadequacy of professional training that they have received by further emphasizing that it does not provide them with enough techniques in teaching reading. On the

other hand, they agree with the third factor which is learners and contextual factors. All of them believe that learners and the context of the reading tasks play significant roles in creating effective reading lessons. They also believe given certain circumstances, teachers need to modify their reading materials to suit the learners and the appropriateness of the context.

Two main principles that can be used as mentioned in previous chapter which are by Howard and Major (2004) and Tomlinson (2011) that underlie the teachers' thinking about reading materials are effective reading materials should be able to promote development of new skills and also enhanced the present skills. This is supported by Howard and Major (2004) as they claimed that reading materials should help learners to learn and exploit learning skills strategies. Apart from that, all of them agree that authenticity, motivation, and attractiveness are significant in selecting reading materials. Integration of skills is also equally important.

Because selecting reading materials is just one of teachers, many daily duties, most teachers do this task based on their own criteria with no further considerations. From the analysis of the data collected through the individual interview, the challenges are revealed:

1. Choosing suitable reading passages
2. Non-existent reading culture
3. Developing reading materials
4. Scarcity of schemata stimulation

There are some other disputes disclosed following the interview which are: lack of background knowledge by both teachers and students, challenging vocabulary, the absence of enthusiasm in reading, and inadequate teaching planning.

To solve the issues arise, students' level of proficiency needs to be acknowledged when selecting reading materials. Demanding the students to read text that is slightly further than their level might defeat its productivity since students may feel that they do not have the ability in reading in foreign language. Streamlining the reading process is better rather than simplifying the text. Teachers can supply the students with various reading methods so as to support the reading comprehension practice. They can start by using less complex reading passages and later move to more complicated

reading passages so that they may gradually amplify their reading proficiency.

From the studies done, it is decided that students' interest should also be taken into consideration when selecting materials for EFL reading classroom. Despite the simplicity of the reading materials, it would be dreary and arduous for the students if they cannot seem to be interested in the content. As a reading teacher, teachers should find out what interest their students. It can be done through informal interviews or short discussions. Teachers should boost their students to be a part of the reading process.

Apart from that, teachers also should find out what their students need when choosing reading materials. Teachers must then keep in mind communal requirements along with the personal needs in the procedure of material selection. The discrepancy between students' expectancy regarding to their needs and interests can bring about exasperation within students, which might lead to a fiasco in a reading lesson.

Recommendations

This study delivers the initial step on exploring teachers' decision-making on reading materials. It has highlighted on a number of topics which could benefit further research. Further research on teachers' perception towards teaching materials in other language skills can also be useful. Instead of reading skills, it would also be advantageous to study teachers' decision-making on writing, speaking and listening materials. Rather than just focus one sided opinions, exploring students' views on the teaching materials used in the classroom is also enlightening.

Apart from that, a study that compares experienced teachers and novice teachers' view on ELT materials can also be done. It would be informative to contrast the element of lengthy experiences and updated learning methods in choosing effective ELT materials. It allows you to see how the teaching experience affect teacher's selection of reading materials and how the modern teaching methods affect the materials selections made by the new teachers.

Constructing comprehensible and updated guidelines on selecting ELT materials or teaching materials in general is also beneficial. It would be

so helpful for the teachers especially the novice teachers despite the subjects.

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