

Original Research Article

Investigating Reading Proficiency: A Case Study of a Moroccan High School

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores students' primary concerns, perceptions, difficulties and attitudes characterized by a sheer lack of motivation towards reading. It also demonstrates how a language teacher can prosper in his/her own undertaking to bring about a community of readers with a want to read. This study covers an important comparison between students of three different levels, namely Common Core, First and Second year Baccalaureate. Likewise, it tries to explore the extent to which unmotivated readers are prone to meet the challenges all along the assigned reading tasks. A questionnaire was designed for analyzing the barriers towards attaining reading proficiency. It was also geared to determine the things that should be done to overcome the obstacles towards achieving the aspired reading competence. The results from this study imply that there is reason to suggest the need to develop a want in students to read via breathing life into comprehension texts presented to students. This can be done through integrating more illustrations and key vocabulary rubrics. Equally important, reading texts in students' textbooks need to be given due importance, and dedicated efforts are to be considered on the part of textbook designers to help students attain and boost their reading skills. Reading, if done extensively, helps develop the reader's reading competence and ultimately becomes an essential tool for academic success.

Introduction

More than ever before, today's youths exhibit a lack of interest and a lethargic behavior towards learning. This apathetic attitude is clearly manifested in students' low proficiency in reading. For instance, in various reading comprehension lessons, a high estimated number of learners show reluctance to the simple act of reading. This is clearly shown in students' reactions when asked to read. When asked to read, they feel embarrassed and unwilling to carry out the task. As far as the Moroccan EFL context is concerned, an overwhelming number of students have critical difficulties in the mere act of reading. Given the fact that reading is the primary gateway to learning any language, probing into this phenomenon is a prerequisite.

Achieving proficiency in reading is a key threshold towards a good mastery of English. It goes without saying that reading helps learners to acquire vocabulary items that they can use in the writing and speaking skills. Hence, this study derives its importance mainly from a lack of ample literature on this issue in the Moroccan EFL context.

Although previous studies (Gashaye & Alem, 2018; Najadat & Azmi, 2019; Mahdavidrad & Mokhtari, 2019; Telaumbanua, 2019; Taha & Alhameem, 2019; Dhanapal, 2019; Kulo, Kibui & Odundo, 2020; Valerozo & Aggabao, 2020; Daradkeh, 2020) conducted on reading have revealed interesting findings, little attention so far has been paid to the Moroccan EFL students' perception and attitudes towards reading skill. Thus, this research aims to attain several objectives. It is mainly carried out to probe into the reasons behind students' low proficiency in reading. Furthermore, it will suggest ways and strategies to develop

students' proficiency in reading. However, the ultimate purpose of the present study is to contribute to the existing literature about the issue of low proficiency in reading in Moroccan EFL classes.

It is a postulate that any research addresses certain questions to investigate and answer. This study will address two major questions: First, why do EFL students demonstrate low proficiency in reading? Second, how can English teachers contribute to the improvement of students' reading skills? In other words, what are the possible strategies that teachers should employ in their classes so as to enhance learners' reading abilities?

Before setting foot on data collection tools, it is hypothesized that learners' low proficiency is ascribed to their lack of motivation to read.

Literature Review

Given that this study investigates low reading proficiency, the focus will be on some studies that dealt with this issue in previous research. Likewise, the researcher will shed light on three major elements, namely the definition of terminology, the different approaches to reading and the teacher's role in shaping the readers' attitudes towards reading.

Definition of Terminology

It is more enlightening to shed laser light on the key terms that make up the core of this research. Accordingly, the term reading has been given a wide range of definitions according to different researchers. However, Romero et al, (1985) state that reading educators define it as the process of "(a) decoding written symbols (b) getting meaning from the printed page (c) interpreting the written symbols (d) communication between author and reader" (p. 2). The reader who masters these strategies is labeled a proficient reader. Thus, proficiency in reading, according to Endress and Nygren (1998, cited in Tallery, 2017), is distinguishable by certain qualities displayed and applied by the reader. These qualities are purpose, prior knowledge, structures, self-monitoring, strategies, and love of reading. A proficient reader is, therefore, the reader who understands the purpose of his/her reading, has a goal, develops a high level of comprehension, applies his/her prior knowledge to the text, has a strong ability to process the structures of the text and enjoys reading a variety of meaningful texts.

Different Approaches of Reading

Before probing into the relevant body of literature written about reading in relation to the variable of proficiency, it would be more appropriate to look at how the concept of reading was independently approached. It is crystal clear that reading is a very essential skill and a primary gateway toward personal development and self-growth. This idea is strongly asserted in Kuo et al's article entitled *A Left-lateralized Network for Reading Chinese Words* (2001) wherein these scholars argue that through reading, knowledge has greatly contributed to the growth of mankind and that reading is the fastest and simplest way to raise people's educational level.

The previous attempts to approach the issue of reading were markedly concerned with highlighting the importance of reading in the acquisition of knowledge about the world. However, advances in academic research pushed scholars to adopt a more scientific approach to the issue of reading. This brought about two major trends in the ways researchers viewed the process of reading. Some conceived of it as an active process while others regarded it as a passive process. In this respect, Gebhard (1999, cited in Kusri, 2017) maintain that: "Reading was traditionally viewed as a passive process in which the readers simply decode the written symbols without bringing their own knowledge to interact with the text." (p. 99). In a parallel fashion, Anderson (2000) approved that: "Readers are passive decoders of sequential graphic-phonemic-syntactic-semantic systems." (p. 17)

As far as reading proficiency is concerned, researchers associated it with comprehension. This is clearly illustrated in Thomas G. Gunning's book entitled *Creating Reading Instruction for All Children*. This scholar explains that: "Comprehension is the main purpose of reading. In fact, without it, there is no reading, since reading is the process of constructing meaning from print" (Gunning, 1996, p. 193). This idea is beautifully elaborated in Duffy (1994)'s book, *Explaining Reading*, where he argues that "real readers do something with what they read. So students think reading is important when they use reading to achieve a goal important to them, to achieve a purpose of theirs, or to answer questions they want answered. In short, they are motivated to read when reading empowers or enriches them" (p. 5).

With the advent of psycholinguistic research, reading is viewed as an active process by which readers dynamically interact with the text. In this regard, Goodman (1967) affirms that "reading is actually an active process, in which the reader creates meaning from the printed words" (p. 22). He also describes the process of reading as 'a psycholinguistic guessing game' in which the reader actively interacts with the text to construct meaning. Simply put, while reading a text, the reader might adopt a top-

down or a bottom-up approach to understand the text. That is to say, the reader might either use his/her background knowledge or rely on text clues and structures to construct meaning.

It is undisputable that reading is an integral part of the learning process as a whole. Hence, it has been approached from different angles and looked at from different standpoints in the foregoing studies. This research, as mentioned earlier, is an attempt to investigate the issue of reading in its relation to proficiency. According to Baumann & Duffy (1997), the proficient reader is “mentally engaged, motivated to read and to learn, socially active around reading tasks and strategic in monitoring the interactive processes that assist comprehension” (p. 3).

Reading proficiency has also been studied in relation to attitudes learners might have about the act or the process of reading. The individual learner’s displayed attitude towards reading is the main factor that determines whether they are motivated or not. In other words, learners who have a positive attitude towards reading show a keen interest and a sheer desire to read while those who possess a negative attitude do not. Such a reading attitude has been defined as “a system of feelings related to reading, which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (Alexander & Filler, 1976, p. 215). It has also been defined as “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions that make reading more or less probable” (Smith, 1990, p. 25). In his study about ‘pleasure reading’, Krashen (2004) found out that the “reading proficiency can be improved by free voluntary reading, not only in the learners’ first language, but also in their second or foreign language” (p. 122). That is to say, when a desire to read stems from within the learner, it becomes easy for them to attain the desired reading habits.

Within the same vein, Deci and Ryan (1991) place a lot of emphasis on the importance of the learners’ self-determination in learning. They argue that “it has become ever more apparent that self-determination, in the forms of intrinsic motivation and autonomous internalization, leads to the types of outcomes that are beneficial both to individuals and to society” (p. 341). Simply put, learners need to have more freedom to choose what best suits their interests and needs. This implies that teachers should be flexible and employ motivational strategies to develop in students an eager desire to read.

It goes without saying that achieving a certain objective depends greatly on a very important factor, namely love. This is well expressed in Steve Jobs’ words: “The only way to do GREAT WORK is to LOVE WHAT YOU DO”. This idea perfectly applies to the learning context in the sense that “when intrinsically motivated, people engage in activities that interest them, and they do so freely, with a full sense of volition and without the necessity of material rewards or constraints” (Deci and Ryan, 1991, p. 328). The same idea is well articulated by Deci et al., (1991, p. 328), as they put it: “The child who reads a book for the inherent pleasure of doing so is intrinsically motivated for that activity. Intrinsically motivated behaviors represent the prototype of self-determination. They emanate from the self and are fully endorsed”. Therefore, teachers should focus on what students want “as basic wants give rise to interests, values, and goals...” (Higgins and Kruglanski, 2000, p. 1).

The Teacher’s Role

It is worth noting that the teacher’s role is a decisive factor in shaping the learners’ perception and attitude towards reading. In a research about the teacher’s impact on students’ motivation, Skinner and Belmont (1991) found out that “the affection, attunement, dedication of resources and dependability expressed by the teacher shape the extent to which the students feel their needs are met. When teachers are less involved with students, students also miss the involvement” (p. 7).

In fact, there are different ways and strategies that educators can employ to promote learners’ reading proficiency. Significantly, they can select authentic reading materials which are related to their own surrounding environment. This makes the reading act meaningful to the students. Equally important, educators need to provide as many opportunities as possible for their students to read. The more opportunities students have to read the more they can use and further develop their reading skills and increase their comprehension.

Overall, it is clear from the afore-mentioned body of literature about reading that there are different variables that determine reading proficiency. Some researchers relate it to motivation whereas others link it to comprehension and understanding.

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed for analyzing students’ perceptions and attitudes towards reading. It is also geared to determine the things that should be done to overcome the obstacles towards attaining reading proficiency. The respondents are primarily defined as current male and female students of three different High School levels, namely Common Core, First and Second Year Baccalaureate.

The aim behind following such steps is to gather data from the student population and come up with findings on the perplexing issues related to the theme under study. The respondents' views, perceptions and experiences with reading are worthy of exploration. Hence, the focus of this research is to find out how respondents conceive of reading and the barriers that hinder proficiency and therefore self-development.

Data Collection Method

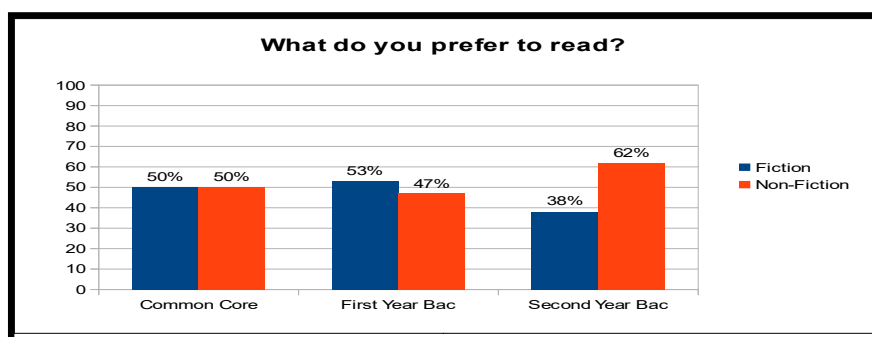
The data for the present research were collected using hard copy questionnaires distributed in the high school. The researcher designed two sorts of questionnaires: one is general and the other is specific. Each of these feedback forms comprises 10 items and addresses specific issues associated with reading: some of these queries relate to students' attitudes towards reading i.e. whether they like to read or not, what motivates them to read and what makes them shun reading. As well, the questionnaire is inspecting students' encountered obstacles while reading (be they grammar, vocabulary or the theme), the activities they prefer to do while reading and what makes the text appear motivating (is it the title, illustrations, pictures or other?)

The objective behind these questions is to elicit from the students their feedback and attitudes towards reading. Equally important, this research is trying to analyze the reasons which render students unmotivated to read. The objective behind our deliberate question regarding the encountered barriers that hinder comprehensibility is to delimit students' concerns and detect the key impediments to attaining reading proficiency. The researcher's ultimate goal, therefore, is to find ways that would make students take up reading as a daily pleasure activity.

Findings

The questionnaire data have revealed important issues worthy of exploration. The forthcoming graphs illustrate well students' perceptions and attitudes toward reading.

Students' preferences, in terms of text genres, play a decisive role in selecting their reading materials. To investigate students' penchants concerning the types of texts they like to read, the following question was designed "do you like to read fiction or non-fiction?" to gather data on whether high school students in the targeted EFL classes like fiction or non-fiction. The graph below represents data gathered as far as this question is considered.



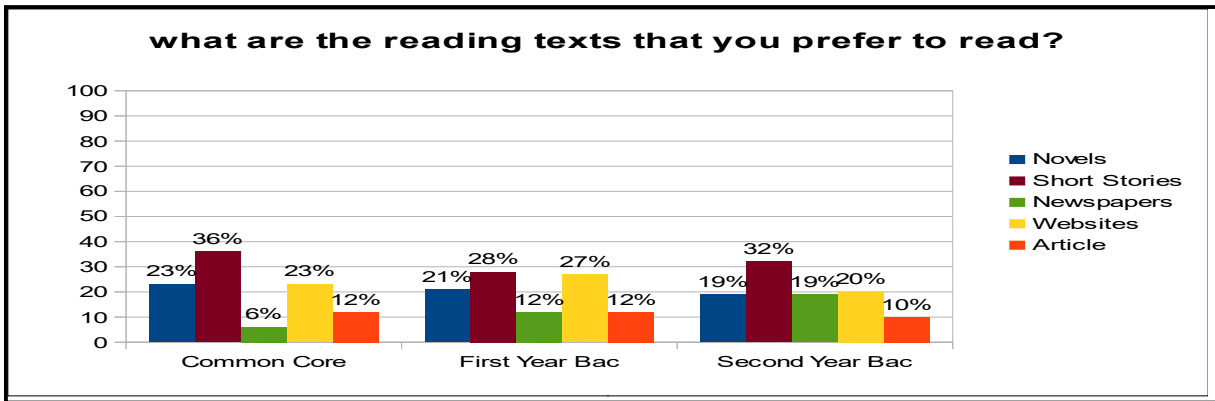
Graphic 1: Students' Reading Preferences.

This graph shows students' preferences concerning reading genres. The two left bars represent what Common Core respondents prefer. The middle bars represent the opinions of First Year students, while the bars on the right display whether Second Year Bacallaureate students prefer fiction or non-fiction texts.

As it is obvious from the graph above, students' preferences concerning texts' genres differ considerably among all the three targeted levels. In Common Core classes, there is a kind of balance between respondents who like fiction and those who like non-fiction. This is well evidenced in that 50% (35) like fiction and the other 50% (35) opt for non-fiction. On the other hand, there is a slight difference in First Year Bacallaureate penchants as the data shows that 53% (69) of the informants like fiction, while 47% (61) go for non-fiction texts. In contrast to the afore-mentioned levels, there is a remarkable difference in Second Year Bacallaureate students' likings: 62% (62) of the informants like non-fiction and 38% (38) prefer fiction texts.

These findings imply that students' penchants concerning the texts' genres are different. This means that syllabi designers should take into consideration this fact and diversify the nature of the reading materials included in the textbooks. In this way, all students' preferences will be catered for, and thus boost students' interests for reading.

After investigating students' preferred text genres, the researcher dug deeper to see into their specific reading preferences at the level of reading materials. For this reason, the following question was designed: "what types of reading materials do you prefer to read?" Informants were presented with a scale of five reading materials, namely: Novels, short stories, newspapers, websites and articles. The graph below shows the findings gathered regarding this question.



Graphic 2: Students' Reading Material Preferences.

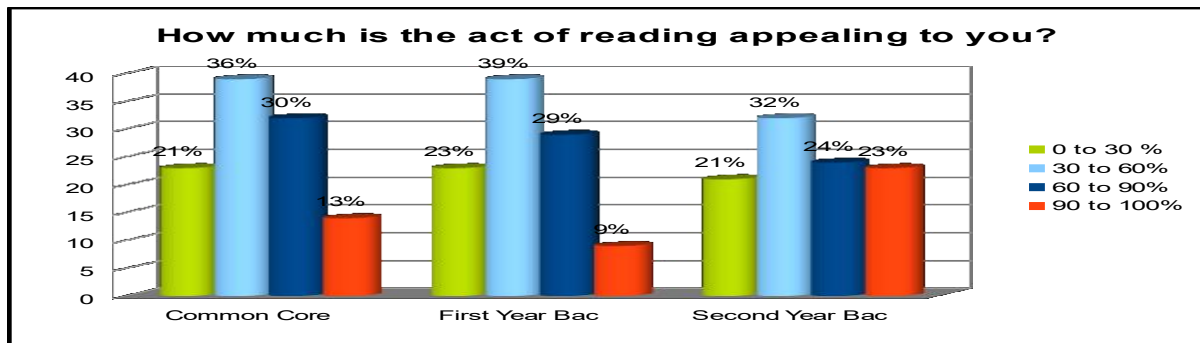
The graph contains three sets of bars; each set represents the responses of a specific level of the three targeted High School levels. The left set displays Common Core respondents' responses to the question. It shows that 38 % (27) like to read short stories, 23% (16) like novels and websites, while only 5% (4) of them stated that they like newspapers. Likewise, both First Year and Second Year students show a keen interest in reading short stories and websites. However, the only inconsistency in the reading materials that exists among the targeted levels is that the Bacallaureate classes differ from the Common Core students in that they show more interest in reading newspaper articles with a percentage of 19% (19) of Second Year and 12% (16) of First Year students.

These findings illustrate clearly that students have different likings at the level of the reading materials they prefer. Thus, syllabi designers as well as teachers should enrich textbooks with various reading texts to respond to the needs of different learners.

One of the major variables that are subject to investigation and analysis, while dealing with students' reading proficiency, is the extent to which students love reading. This is very important because seeing into how much learners love reading will serve as a critical background for investigating the difficulties that students face while reading.

The findings, as far as this point is considered, showed differences in the amount of interest students display towards reading among the different targeted levels. The gathered data is clearly presented in the following graph.

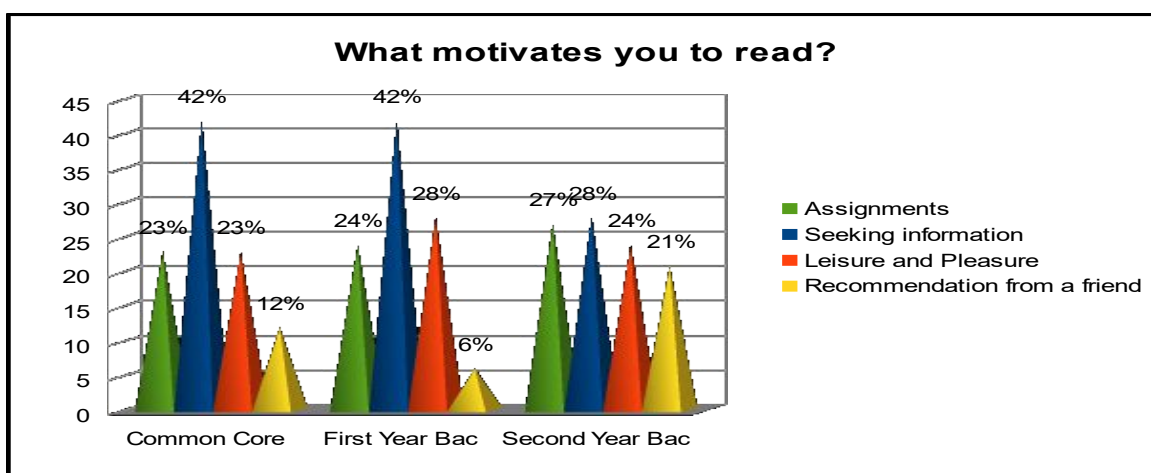
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Graphic 3: The extent to which reading is appealing to EFL students.

As it is shown in the above data, a considerable number of students, at all the targeted high school levels, affirm that the act of reading is generally appealing to them. This is well illustrated in their response to the question “how much is the act of reading appealing to you?” as 36% (25), 39% (51) and 32% (32) of Common Core, First and Second Year informants, respectively, showed that they find reading fairly appealing (30 to 60%), whereas 30% (21), 29% (37) and 24% (24) of the targeted levels, in that order, stated that reading is but appealing (60 to 90%). Less interestingly, a limited number of the respondents in Common Core (13%, 9) and First Year Bacculaureate (9%, 11) are fond of reading to the full as opposed to the relatively considerable number of Second Year Bacculaureate students who enjoy reading (23%, 23). On the other hand, the students who do not find reading appealing constitute a significant percentage of the targeted population as a whole. This indifference to reading is embodied in the fact that 23% (30) of First Year and 21% of both Common Core (14) and Second Year students (21) stated that they do not find reading that appealing (0 to 30%).

From these findings, it is clear that an overwhelming number of the respondents, of the three high school levels, generally love reading. The fact that these students quantitatively show that they love reading is a ground on which another question is put forward to investigate what it is exactly that makes students motivated to read. The question was worded as follows: “what motivates you to read?” It is a Closed-Ended Leading Question wherein the informants are presented with a set of choices arranged in a scale containing the different motives that push them to read such as assignments, seeking information, leisure and recommendations from a friend. The data gathered, as far as this question is considered, is presented in the following graph.

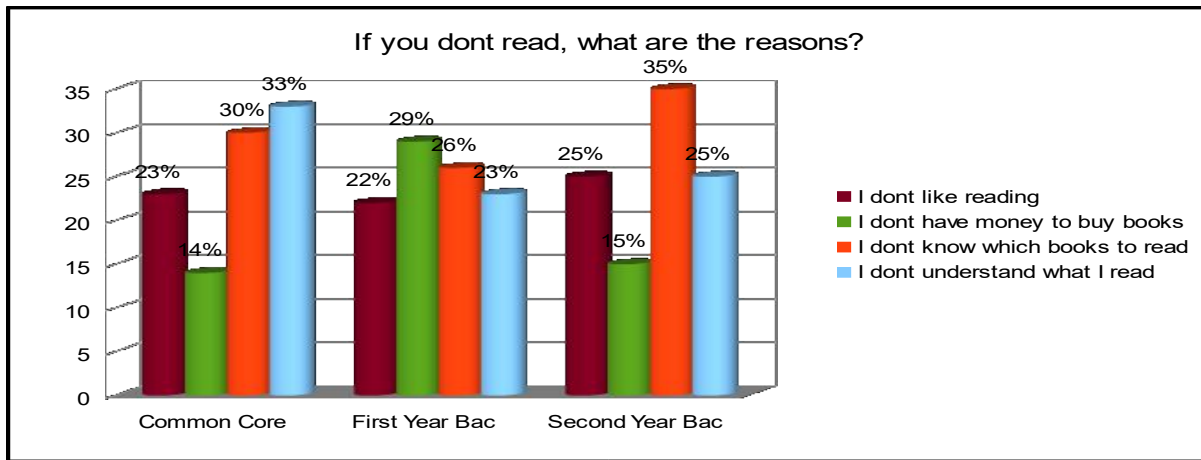


Graphic 4: The motivations that push students to read.

The graph above shows that the majority of students, in the three targeted levels, are motivated to read because they seek information. This is well evidenced in the fact that 42% of both Common Core (29) and First Year (54) and 28% (28) of Second Year Bacculaureate students affirmed that they read to quench their thirst for new information. Besides seeking information, 23% (16), 24% (31) and 27% (27) of Common Core, First Year and Second Year students, respectively, read only to accomplish the assigned tasks. However, the rate of students who read for pleasure is very low as only 23% (16) of Common Core, 28 % (36) of First Year Bacculaureate and 24 % (24) of Second Year Bacculaureate students show that they read for pleasure.

As far as the above question is concerned, the obtained data shows that there are no considerable differences between what motivates students, in the three targeted levels, to read. It is clear from the graph that different students have different motives to read, but a very limited number of them read for pleasure. It goes without saying that students can only reach their potential in reading proficiency when they read for pleasure as it entails being engaged in the reading process.

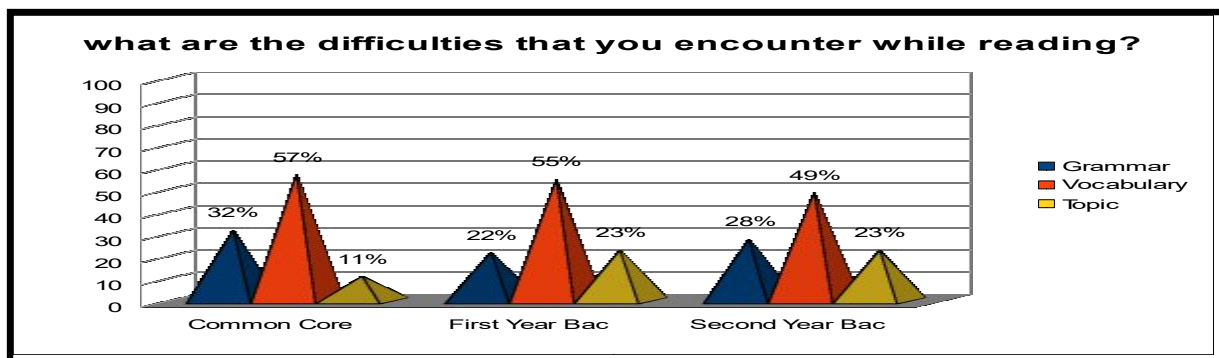
Regarding students who do not read, a question is put forward to see into the reasons behind their reluctance to read. The question is a closed-ended one. It proposes four common reasons that might prevent students from reading.



Graphic 5: Reasons why students don't read

The figures above reveal a very important fact concerning the students' need for guidance and orientation. As it is graphically demonstrated above, a great percentage of the respondents need some assistance in choosing the appropriate reading materials that suit their levels and interests. This idea is well evidenced in students' responses as 30% (21), 26% (34) and 35% (35) of Common Core, First and Second Year Baccalaureate informants respectively stated that they do not know which books to read. That is to say that even if students were motivated and ready to read, they would not because they have no idea about the books or reading materials that might be beneficial to them. Likewise, a significant number of students claim that they do not have money to buy books as the findings show that 14% (10), 29% (37) and 15% (15) of the afore-mentioned levels, in that order, ascribe the reasons of their reluctance to read to a sheer lack of money. In addition to the previously stated reasons, a significant percentage of respondents shown in 33% (23), 23% (39) and 25% (25) of the afore-mentioned classes, in that order, confirm that they do not understand what they read. In contrast, a number of respondents attribute their indifference towards reading to a mere aversion to it. This dislike for reading is clearly displayed in that 23% (16), 22% (37) and 25% (25) of the previously mentioned levels, respectively, said that they do not read simply because they do not like reading.

To investigate more into the difficulties that students face while they read, the following question was formulated and put as "what are the difficulties that you encounter while reading?" The respondents were required to make a choice between three common difficulties, namely vocabulary, grammar and the topic of the text. The findings regarding this question are presented in the following graph.



Graphic 6: Students' Encountered Difficulties While Reading.

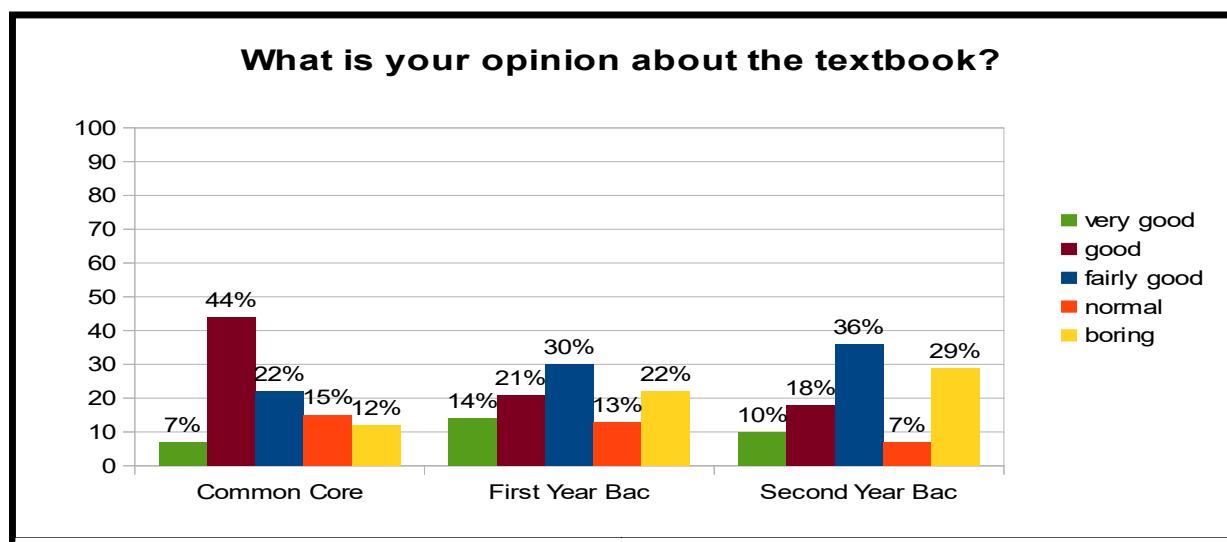
Regarding the difficulties they encounter while reading, 57% (40), 55% (71) and 49% (49) of Common Core, First and Second Year Baccalaureate respondents, respectively, maintain that vocabulary is the major barrier towards comprehension. However, 23% of the First Year (29) and the Second Year (23) respondents assert that the difficulty lies in the topic, while 32% (22), 28% (28) and 22% (36) of the respondents in Common Core, Second Year and First Year students, in the order given, state that grammar is the major obstacle in the reading process. These figures testify that students' vocabulary repertoire is narrow and that vocabulary is one of the major barriers that discourage students to take up reading as part of the daily ritual. This is well

clarified in their response to the question: “Can you state other difficulties and obstacles that you face when you read?” to which the majority answered by underlining vocabulary. Many of them reveal that they find reading challenging, as one of the respondents put it: “the difficulties I encounter while reading lie in the inability to understand lexical items. If only there were some explanations below the comprehension text as is the case in Arabic or French texts!”

It is self-evident that illustrations play a key role and hence vindicate the necessity of filling comprehension texts with more illustrations. As well, the questionnaire data has revealed an important issue worthy of exploration, namely incorporating definitions of some key vocabulary items below the comprehension texts.

Given that the textbook is the major resource where students have access to reading comprehension tasks, it is of a great necessity to probe into students' attitudes towards the textbook in general, especially taking into account that some activities do not seem to be appealing to learners to be fully engaged in the assigned tasks. The question that was meant to gather data about students' attitudes towards the textbook is a Closed-Ended Leading Question wherein the answers are presented in a scale starting from [very good] to [boring].

The question was addressed to the three different high school levels so as to gather data about how learners conceive of the textbook. It is of paramount importance to investigate students' opinions about the textbook considering the fact that it is the major resource that most teachers focus on to design their lesson plans. The rationale behind devising such a question is the fact that if students do not have positive opinions about the textbook, they automatically would not be motivated and engaged in its activities. The findings related to the students' opinions are presented in the following graph:



Graphic 7: The opinions of high school students about the textbook

The first variable that attracts attention considering this graph is the return rates of the questionnaires that were delivered. It is clear from the graphs that Common Core students did not respond to the questionnaire as much as First Year and Second Year Baccalaureate students did. Therefore, that data presented may not be fully representative, but gives insights about what students generally feel about the textbook. That is to say that, while 30% (21) and 36% of First Year and Second Year informants respectively stated that the book is fairly good, 44% (30) of Common Core respondents agreed that their textbook is good. On the other hand, a considerable number of First Year and Second Baccalaureate students hold the view that the textbook is boring. The results indicate that 22% (28) and 29% (29) of these levels agreed that their textbooks are boring. By contrast, only 12% (8) of Common Core respondents find them boring.

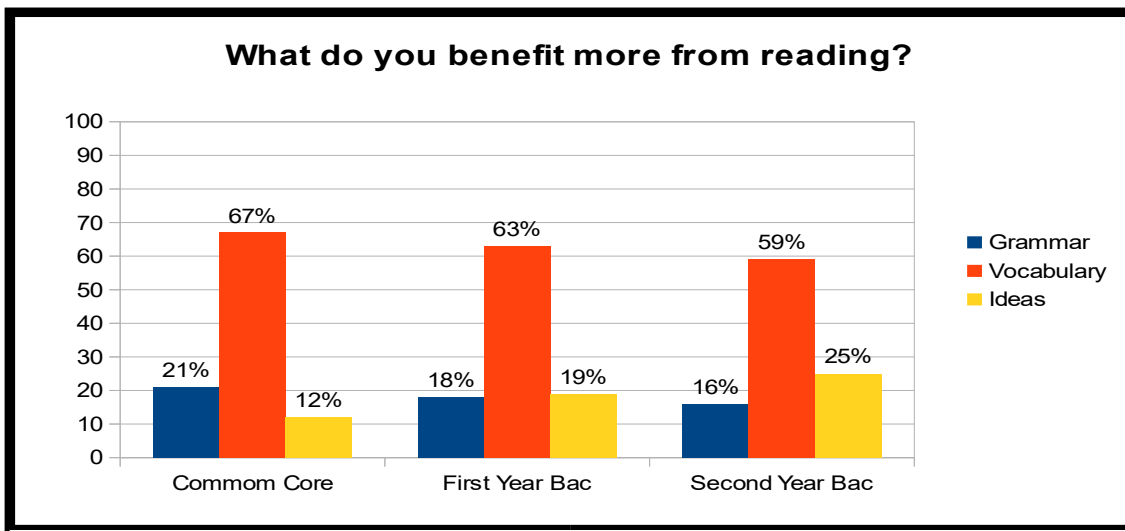
The rationale behind investigating students' opinions about the textbook is to have a clear idea about whether or not students like the textbook. This implies that if students have positive attitudes about the textbook, they are very likely to feel at ease with it and be motivated to engage in its different activities.

From the data gathered about the opinion of students, it is clear that there is a variety of opinions among the three levels. In other words, students' opinions about the textbook differ remarkably. However, it is striking that 22% (29) and 29% (29) of

First and Second Year respectively are of the opinion that the textbook is boring. This implies that not all students are satisfied with its content. For this reason, these findings function as a lead for prospective teachers to have clear ideas about how learners feel about the syllabus. In the case of the Moroccan context, the results imply that teachers should not always use the textbook. It will be of great utility to use materials from other textbooks and other resources in general to not only vary the teaching practices, but also to cater for learners who do not hold positive opinions about the textbook.

It is a fact that there is always a plus that students get while reading. However, it is very important for a teacher to have an idea about what it is exactly that benefits learners more while they are reading. For instance, some learners acquire grammar rules; some learn new vocabulary while others learn new ideas while reading a text. Having an idea about what the readers gain from reading will give teachers insights on how to exploit reading texts to efficiently teach other skills concurrently. Equally important, teachers can also adopt texts that go along with the objectives of a given lesson.

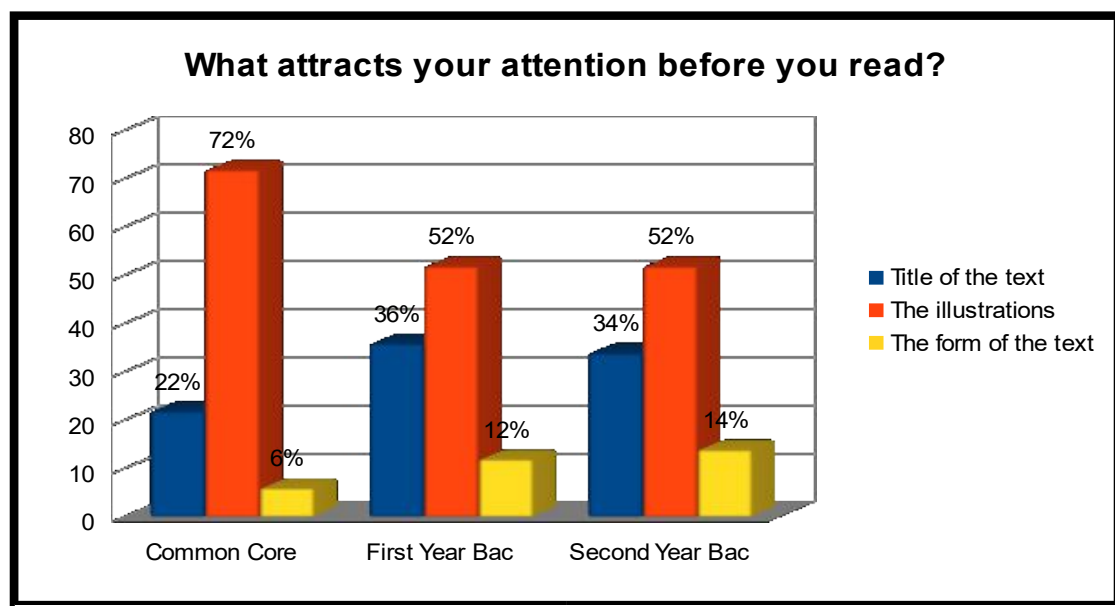
To collect data about what students learning from reading texts, a Closed Format Question was designed to serve such a purpose. It is formulated in such a way to investigate whether students benefit more at the level of grammar, vocabulary or ideas. The findings that were gathered as far as this point is considered are presented in the following illustrative graph.



Graphic 8: What Students Benefit More From Reading.

This graph illustrates students' major gains from reading. As it is clearly shown in the findings presented above, the majority of the respondents, in all the targeted high school levels, approve that their major gain from reading is learning new vocabulary. This is well evidenced in the fact that 67% (46), 63% (82) and 59% (59) of Common Core, First and Second Year Baccalaureate, respectively, stated that they learn new vocabulary while they read. On the other hand, the figures shown in the graph demonstrate that reading comprehension texts do not really function as a means to learn grammar rules and structures as the highest rate among the informants who said that they learn grammar does not exceed 21% (14) in Common Core classes. Besides learning vocabulary, students stated that they benefit from the ideas of the texts. However, the percentage of the learners who profit from the ideas of the texts is not very remarkable.

The pre-reading stage has a great importance in the development of the reading skills of students thanks to its role in activating students' schemata and arousing their interests in reading the text in question. Generally, the texts in the textbooks are accompanied by some elements that teachers use in the pre-reading stage to motivate students and create in them the need to read. The following diagram shows students' responses to the following question: Before reading a text, what attracts your attention most? Is it the title, the form of the text or the illustrations?

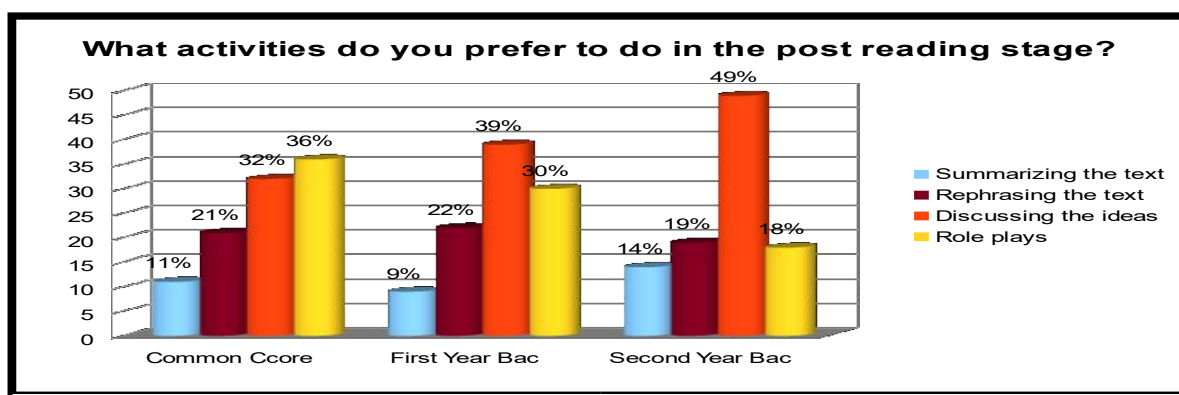


Graphic 9 :The Elements That Attract Students’ Attention before Reading a Text

For an EFL reader, when texts are accompanied by some helping elements, they become accessible and pleasant. The graph above represents students’ responses to what mostly attracts their attention before reading a text. This graph contains three sets of bars; each set represents responses to one of the three variables of the question. The orange bars represent the number of students who are mostly attracted by the illustrations; the blue bars represent the number of students who deem the title of the text appealing and the bars in yellow show the opinion of those who give more importance to the form of the text.

At first glance, it is clear that the majority of the participants are attracted by the illustrations. 72% (50) of Common Core and 52 % (67) of First Year and Second Year students claimed that the first thing they look at before reading a text is the illustrations, while only 6% (4) to 14 % (14) of the respondents from all the classes cared about the form of the text. It is quite obvious from this information that the illustrations are the most important elements that attract students’ attention before reading a text. Therefore, more attention should be given to the choice of the illustrations that go with the text.

Given that pre-reading is a vital stage that puts the students into the mood and prepares their minds to receive new input, the post-reading stage is also important in making students reflect upon what they have learnt and helping them to do better. The following question sees into the activities that students prefer to do after reading a text. The question proposes four of the most common activities that are presented in the textbooks. Students had to choose one of the suggested activities: Summarizing the text, rephrasing it, discussing its ideas or doing role-plays based on its content. The graph below shows students’ choices.



Graphic 10 : Activities Students Prefer to Do in the Post Reading Stage

As the figures above indicate, most of the respondents in all classes stated that they like discussing the ideas of the text after reading it. This is to say that 32% (22), 39% (50) and 49% (49) of Common Core, First and Second Year informants, respectively,

stated that they like discussing the ideas of the reading text as a post reading activity. Besides discussing the ideas of the text, a considerable number of students prefer role-plays as a post-reading activity: This is well clarified in the figures presented above: 36% (25), 30% (39) and 18 % (18) of the levels mentioned before, in the given order, stated that they like role-plays. However, summarizing the text as a post- reading activity is not favored by the targeted levels; as only 9% (6), 14% (18) and 11% (11) of the afore-mentioned levels stated that they like summarizing texts.

Implications and Recommendations

The examination of the whole findings above leads to the conclusion that the results elicited from students' responses displayed a variety of attitudes, perceptions and difficulties associated with reading. Most importantly, the general finding that this study has uncovered is a profound insight of the reading proficiency level and mindset of the high school students.

According to the survey data, we can deduce that the benefits of reading are substantially rewarding; and therefore, the need to make amendments to the student's reading material such as incorporating more illustrations or vocabulary definitions, is a top priority. These are conclusively helpful devices that would bridge a smooth channel between students and the reading material. It is worth noting that a good number of students expressed their aversion at first sight to the reading material especially when the latter is long and void of pictures or key term definitions. To put it differently, dry texts often trigger disenchanted responses. Given that English is the second foreign language for Moroccan students and that their exposure to it is limited to the classroom with English teachers, collective efforts should be invested on the part of teachers in developing a sheer desire and a real want in students to read. That is -as the old saying goes- : 'the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing'; and the main thing in reading is to build a literate environment; an environment where learners enjoy reading and take it as part of the daily ritual. With this goal in mind, EFL teachers will be able to attain immensurate results; we will end up having a community of well-oriented readers with different assets and competencies; real assets to their communities and to the entire world. Reading is undoubtedly a primary gateway toward self-development, self-growth and self-actualization.

We can also deduce that students' initial perceptions of the handy reading material is a key building block for a smooth start and hence a fruitful interaction with it. It provides good insight into employed strategies leading to build and maintain a good relationship between students and the reading material. The existing abyss in student-text relationship is highly recommended to be bridged through shaping reading-oriented mindsets. The individual student can then rely on his or her inherent or latent potentialities, competences and skills to meet the learning goals wished for.

Again, amid the general findings this study yields is that the size of the challenge when students are given a reading task is immeasurable and calls for more efforts on the part of teachers and student textbook producers to render them more accessible, lively with more illustrations that would inspire students to read and ultimately ease the path for progress and self-development. Equally important, the content of these textbooks needs to be diversified and devised according to students' penchants. Given the variety of students' majors, the themes of the reading material are highly recommended to cater for their preferences associated with their majors. Simply put, instead of adopting the same textbook for students with different majors -as is the case for all school levels - it would be much better to design a textbook with a content that matches their inclinations, rather than the level. It would be more edifying to note that once we get a community of readers with a genuine desire to read, we would open the door to writing, speaking and other skills expected of us to develop in students.

Significantly, findings from this study carry an unsatisfactory attitude towards the context surrounding the reading material that is typified by dry texts i.e. texts that are void of illustrations and key vocabulary explanations. This is convincing evidence, which shows that textbook designers and education stakeholders are recommended to make more efforts to liaise students with vivid reading materials. They are advised to enliven the reading materials and ultimately develop an inner desire in students to attain various forms of proficiency.

Overall, it is hoped that the findings would add more weight to the pragmatic side of the education stakeholders' solutions provided to build a community of readers, meet the learning goals and ultimately achieve progress, growth and sustainability.

Conclusion

This study spotlighted assorted dimensions of reading proficiency and strategies to enhance and develop a keen interest and a genuine desire to read. It has also covered an important comparison between students of three different levels, namely Common Core, First and Second Year Baccalaureate. It has also demonstrated how a language teacher can prosper in his/her own undertaking to bring about a community of readers with a want to read. Likewise, it has tried to explore the extent to which unmotivated readers are prone to meet the challenges all along the assigned reading tasks.

Moreover, it argued that reading plays a crucial role in student development. Among its primary goals is language proficiency attainment which includes the mastery of speaking and writing skills. Reading proficiency paves the way for productive skills' mastery. Reading is undoubtedly a primary gateway toward language proficiency and a catalyst for self-growth, self-actualization and an indispensable tool towards academic achievement.

Due to the importance of reading, the need to develop a want in students to read is a top priority via breathing life into comprehension texts presented to students. This can either be through integrating more illustrations, key vocabulary rubrics and devising texts which are related to the learners' real-life contexts. Accordingly, reading texts in students' textbooks need to be given due importance and dedicated efforts are to be considered on the part of textbook designers to help students attain and boost their reading proficiency. It is hoped that this study could pave the way to further studies, which could address the main factors that drive change in students' attitudes and perceptions of reading; we aspire for building a community of students who wholeheartedly enjoy reading and take it up as part of the daily ritual.

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