

Reading Difficulties Faced by ESL Undergraduate Learners: The Case of King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Reading is one of the important language learning skills in English. The purpose of this research is to find out the difficulties in reading skill among undergraduate Arab undergraduate students of. Widely, English is the preferred language for communication and job sector so it is important to accomplish the difficulties in learning the language. Reading is one of the important skills when learning the language. There are some factors and strategies to achieve success in reading. This paper tried to find out those problems and strategies to overcome the difficulties. For the data, a survey was conducted among 77 undergraduate English department students of level-3 from King Khalid University, Almajardha campus. The results from the survey help to find out the difficulties and strategies to overcome the problem.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language is a skill-based subject. There are four fundamental skills namely LSRW (listening, Speaking, reading and writing). As an ESL learner should must acquire all of these skills to be successful in the language, each skill is important when learning the language. Reading is considered as a significant skill, which needs the active mind. This research paper is mainly focused on reading skill and difficulties in acquiring it. There are some factors: English language is only learned for the purpose of getting marks in the exam not for the real-life communication. Other factors are the lack of self-motivation, lack of interest in reading and learners give less attention to the practices in learning process. Problems occur in learning process specifically in reading skill due to memory problem, limited understanding of phonics, difficulty in comprehending and showing lack of attention. Even a small barrier in reading will prevent pupils from achieving the goal.

To avoid these barriers, a learner should follow some strategies to get successful in learning the language. Learners should identify what is the major problem in

acquiring the skill and what they can do to avoid such barriers.

1.1 Objectives and significance of the study

This study targeted on the problems and difficulties in reading skill among the undergraduate Arab students. In Saudi Arabian schools, English has been taught as a foreign language from class six but in the past few years, English was introduced as one of the subjects from class four to improve the skills. Also, these students study other subjects in mother language, Arabic. Giving attention to reading skill is important because standard education depends on learners reading proficiency. So, this is the main reason to do study on this area; also, this research tried to investigate the problems faced by the students in acquiring ESL (English as a Second Language).

2.1 Strategies in reading skill

Reading strategies help the learner to understand the text quickly. Skimming and scanning are the two ways one can use to understand the text ideas. Scanning is used to find out the specific information and is

normally used to find out numbers, names, bolded items or key words. Skimming method is used for the purpose of understanding the main idea or general view of the text. Skimming lets the learner glide through a text as to read quickly. A reader can skim a text when she or he wants to get a general idea about the information contained in the text but does not need to know full information. Other methods to understand the main idea is that the learner should find out the idea which is close to the topic or text and should not focus on the general ideas or specific point of information.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Acquisition

The acquisition of vocabulary at first sight seems straightforward; we all know we need a large number of words to speak a language (Vivian Cook, , p46). So, it is a must for an ESL learner to know and memorize more vocabulary.

Dechant (1982) defines reading as a conceptual and thinking process which is interpretive. Reading skill needs the active mind of the reader and should give self interest in developing the process of learning.

Reading Skills

The ability to think critically about the information that is presented in the text is the crucial part of being an active reader (Mindy Pasternak, 2008).

Reading like speaking occurs in a context rather than in isolation. The meaning of a text is not found just in the sentences themselves, but is derived from the previous knowledge stored in the reader's mind and

the process through which the reader tackles it. (Vivian Cook, p121).

Reading Difficulties

Reading is a complex process which involves eye movement, decoding, encoding and utilizing linguistic awareness (Fisher,1981). Complex process will make the learner to have difficulties in the process of learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

Reading is considered to be an important skill for ESL learners. They face lot of difficulties in acquiring the process. In this research quantitative data were used to find out the causes. A survey was conducted directly from the students during their class times. Undergraduate English department seventy-seven students of level-3 from King Khalid University, Almajardha campus were asked to give their opinion on the questionnaire. They were asked to answer yes or no questions in the survey.

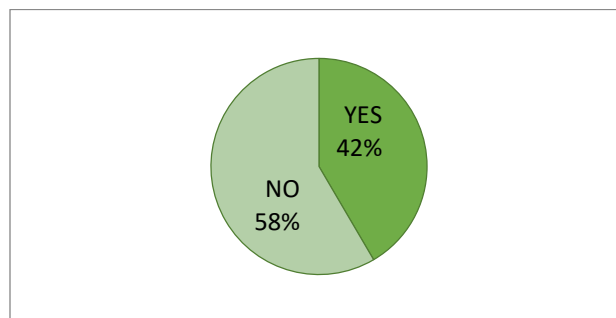
The survey had eight types of questions regarding the problem they face. And after the survey, a discussion was formed with the same students to understand more about the causes and difficulties they face during the learning process. For results from the data, each question was converted as a chart and percentage by using Microsoft Excel software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section deals with each question separately, and is followed by an explanation of the results obtained.

Q1. Are you interested in reading?

Answer type	Number of students	Percentage
Yes	32	42%
No	45	58%

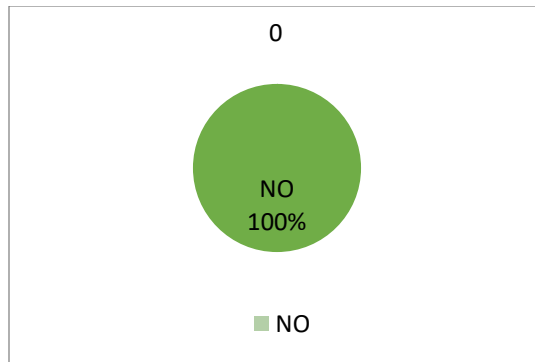


Discussion

For this question out of 77 students, 32 students given their opinion as yes and 45 students said no. The results show part of the learner does not show interest for developing reading skill.

Q2. Did you study in a school where English is the medium of teaching?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
No	77	100%

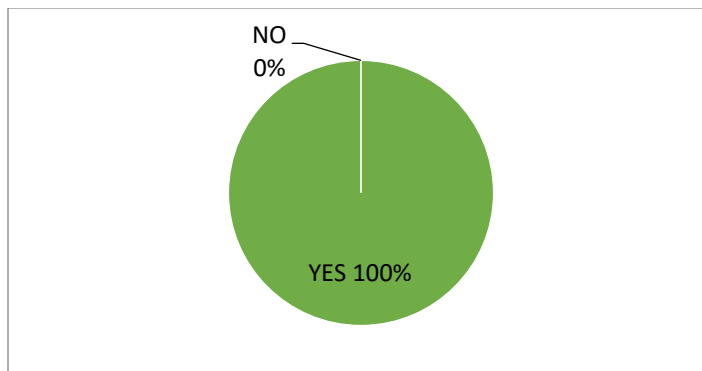


Discussion

All the 77 students said yes to this question, they studied primary and secondary education in their first language. So obviously all the students must give interest in learning new vocabularies and making use of it in real life communication. Also, they should do more practice in English other than the subjects.

Q3. Do you translate in Arabic when you do not understand?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
No	77	100%



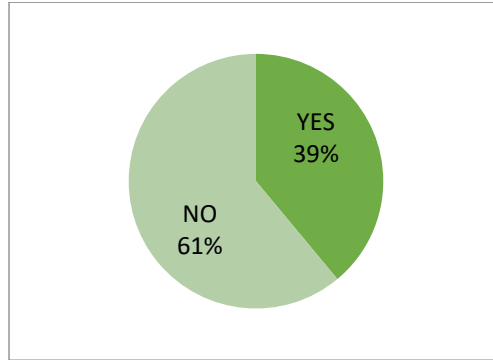
Discussion

All the 77 students said yes for this question. All do translate when they do not understand in English. It is obvious that this has connection with their medium of

education in school. This shows that most of them have problem understanding contextual meaning.

Q4. do you do extensive reading in English? Newspaper, magazine /story book/internet.

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	30	39%
No	47	61%



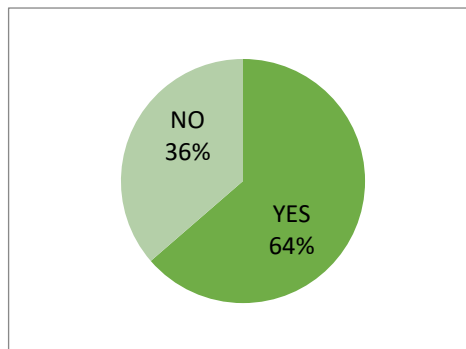
Discussion

Among 77 students 30 students said yes they give reading other than the text book but 47 students said no for this question. Learners should expand their

reading habits in other mediums. They can use social media, e-magazine and story books to learn the language.

Q5. Do you feel fear when you read loud in class?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	49	64%
No	28	36%



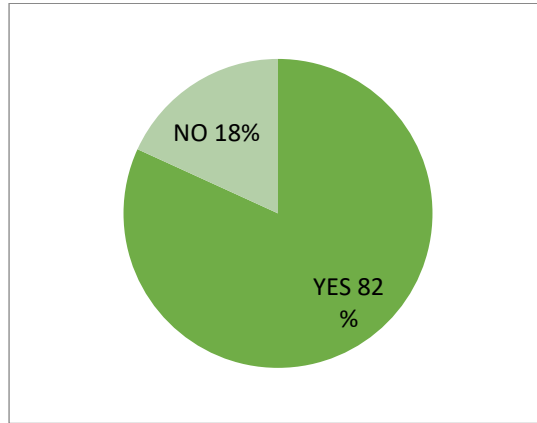
Discussion

For this question 49 students said yes and 28 students said no. Most of the students feel fear because they think that they are weak in phonic and having less confident about the vocabulary they pronounce. Reading and vocabulary have deep connection

because vocabulary is the main element in English language. It helps to express the language skill. So, this shows that this level student must develop their vocabularies.

Q6. Do you have difficulty in understanding large vocabularies?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	63	82%
No	14	18%



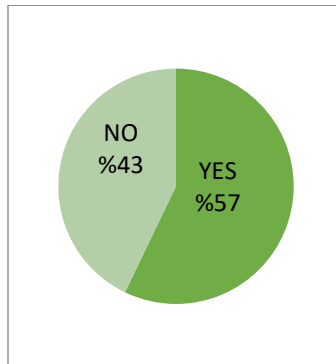
Discussion

Almost 63 students have problems in understanding large words they read. 14 students said no for this question. This again shows that most of the students have poor vocabularies and they often forget the

words quickly after they learn. This is due to the way students use such vocabulary. Most of the ESL learners do not use language outside the classroom.

Q7. Do you have difficulties in understanding the topic?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	44	57%
No	33	43%



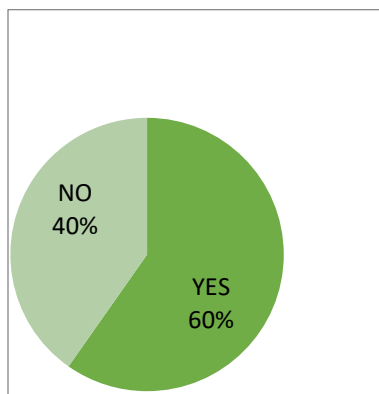
Discussion

Out of 77 students 44 said they have problems in grasping the main idea or topic of a text. 33 students said no for this question. Reading is all about

vocabularies and meaning. This shows that most of them have difficulties in understanding the topic itself.

Q8. Do you have problem in comprehending?

Answer type	Number of Students	Percentage
Yes	50	60%
No	27	40%



Discussion

Among 77 students, 50 students said they have problems in comprehending. 27 students said no for this question. Question number 7 is related to this question, it is divided to understand problems strongly. Most of the students said they have problems in understanding the large text than the smaller one. To overcome this problem, thw learner should use some strategies like skimming and scanning. Also, students should give interest and involvement while reading the text, this will help the learner slowly to overcome this problem.

problem. Also, the learner should use strategies like skimming, scanning and memorizing lot of vocabularies. Above all, the ESL learner should use the English language in real life communication rather than the purpose of examinations and to be successful in English language acquisition. ESL learners need special attention from the teachers and also they must develop self -motivation and more practices in reading skill.

5. CONCLUSION

This study tried to find out the distinct problems that ESL learners have when learning reading. The study revealed many findings. Most of the students are weak in reading skill due to various reasons. The major barrier is their basic education; it's not included with the English language as one of the subjects till class six and this has prominent connection in other distinct problems. Other barriers include poor vocabulary, lack of interest to read in English, struggle in understanding contextual meaning and problems in comprehending. This study suggests that providing solid foundation in reading skill will help the learner to overcome the

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