

Interpretive Reading as a Strategy to Construct Meaning in EFL Reading Comprehension: A Case Study at King Khalid University

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate interpretive reading; as a strategy to construct meaning among English as a foreign language (EFL) beginner level students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University (KKU). It will also suggest ways in which instructors can incorporate this strategy into their teaching. Reading appears to be one of the challenging skills for EFL Saudi students for various reasons; among them, the primary one can be that students are usually less motivated towards self-reading. The Interpretive reading strategy could go a long way to bridge the gaps in understanding comprehension passages, as it is a performance/rhetoric-related strategy and lies at a more intuitive level. Engaging and motivating students in learning requires a few essential factors, such as exciting tasks, the sociocultural background of the learners, and people who manage the delivery of the course (Marshall, 1992). An experimental and control group of students will be selected, enrolled in the reading course, at level 1. The test group will get training in the interpretive reading techniques through their EFL instructors, having excellent in-depth knowledge of the skill of interpretive reading techniques. After teaching for more than eight weeks, a proficiency test will gauge student's performance. The obtained results are compared using SPSS software to see the significant achievements and suggestions, and necessary recommendations are made.

Key Words: EFL Reading comprehension, ESL interpretive reading, self-reading, Saudi beginner level

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Introduction:

Most Saudi students have difficulty in extracting the meaning of written texts for several reasons. There are many contributing factors, such as student's; lack of English vocabulary, lack of training in English phonics, unfamiliar documents, different grammatical constructions in English, and above all, lower interpretive techniques required to unravel the hidden meanings of literary texts. To overcome this hindrance, they need training in a more practical reading skill technique called Interpretive Reading. Most of the research; on the interpretive reading technique took place outside the Saudi context, emphasizing on second language learners or native speakers of the English language. For this reason, we can say it would be unprecedented research in the Saudi context. We also assume that it will be an assisting tool, for both the learners and the instructors, which should make the reading task not only enjoyable, but would also develop an excellent self-reading habit. It will show that interpretive reading techniques eventually leads to higher achievement in their English course at large.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to investigate interpretive reading; as a strategy to construct meaning among EFL beginner level students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University. It will also suggest ways in which instructors can incorporate this strategy into their teaching. Interpretive reading strategy techniques investigated in this research; mean loud reading; by the instructor in such a manner, that it should help students understand the text. Students will eventually achieve higher-level thinking through building fluency and freedom in their interactions with books; this, in turn, will facilitate teaching students navigational skills, which will enable them to extract essential information with greater ease. The interpretive reading approach will have several practical implications not only for the students but faculty members too. It will have a width rather than depth. Instructors will focus on breadth, rather than intensity-covering more books, without treating each one in-depth. Secondly, texts don't; need to be complicated and broad but somewhat relevant. It will help to avoid over-detailed explanations. It will cut down on introductory material in the textbooks, sometimes skipping it altogether and coming up with own one by the instructors.

Objectives:

1. To determine whether interpretive reading; has a significant impact on the student's reading comprehension.
2. To investigate the efficacy of interpretive reading; in various types of texts.
3. To compare the effect of interpretive reading; with that of silent reading and loud reading, respectively.
4. To suggest ways in which teachers can go about using interpretive reading; in their teaching.

Literature Review:

In one of the studies conducted about exploring context closely related to reading instructions and reading strategies, indicated that non-proficient first language(L1) and second language(L2) readers either do not possess knowledge about approaches or mainly engage in bottom-up strategies as referred by Alsamadani (2009). In other related studies on reading speed, the researchers concluded that reading comprehension is one of the core areas for EFL learners. Reading skills can be described as a process of identifying written symbols and follow the intended

message according to Siddiqui and Rab, 2014, beginner level students must develop the ability to identify written letters, group of words, and read simple sentences. The articulation of the interpretive reading technique teaching style of texts in classroom contexts is the aim of this research. Among the necessary skills of English, both second and foreign language learners have often shared their experience that, reading is the most essential skills to acquire. Reading helps in building learner's vocabulary, which eventually leads to improvement in other language skills.

As EFL instructors, we emphasize that forcing students to read is not as effective as teaching them how to develop a passion for reading. We argue that through constant drilling and practice in and outside the classroom; reading can become a habit. Once they develop an interest in it, they tend to explore more themselves and try to read as much as possible since it becomes a part of their love and passion for the language. A competent English language user is one who can comprehend and interpret written texts. Reading text should be systematically introduced to the learners from lower to higher cognitive levels; this may involve empowering the learners to read before introducing them to comprehension (Al-Jarf 2002). Some of the studies stress on the efficient teaching of reading skills that have, in recent times, dwell on the use of computers for the same purposes (MacGregor, 1988; Knaack, 2003; Johnson, Perry & Shamir, 2010) or at times internet can be used as the source of information technology, (Laborda 2007). Similarly, English as a second language (ESL) and EFL learner's, main intention in acquiring competency in the English language is to be successful at the university level. The same is true for EFL and ESL learners as they know that student's; reading ability in English is also of particular importance primarily as much of the available professional and academic materials relevant to their chosen professions are available in English (Alderson, 1984). Thus, if students have an excellent interpretive reading ability, they will be able to fulfill all the tasks mentioned above, with ease and to the satisfaction of their instructors and guide in their respective areas of specialization. If one is competent in reading, it will enable him/her to undergo the process of understanding and to construct meaning from a piece of text (Zhao, 2009).

Language instructors play a significant role in the quality of learning (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Arguably the text is the most essential medium that enables us to see the value of our acts of interpretation, our reading processes. We can argue the difference between product and process, between our conceptualization and separation of knowledge, as fact or artifact and knowing, as a meaning-making process. We can say with confidence that the above discussion leading to our research on interpretive reading techniques finds support, as it relates to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Most of the above researches on interpretive reading techniques took place outside the Saudi context. We believe that conducting a similar investigation in the Saudi context would help both the learners and instructors to make the reading task exciting and would develop a good self-reading habit.

Research Methodology:

The study will have a pre-post control group design. The pre- and post-tests of the interpretive reading performance will be judged in terms of student's; achievement of higher-level thinking, building fluency, facility, and freedom in their interactions with texts, navigational skills, which enable them to extract essential information with greater ease. Such points will be used by the researchers to examine the participants performance in comprehending the given texts. A

proficiency test in English (prepared by the researchers) will assess the student's, level of proficiency in English.

The objective of the proficiency test is to evaluate the English language comprehension ability of the two groups in this study. Developing reading competence among Saudi EFL beginner graduate students has been a matter of concern for most of the faculty members, teaching skill-based courses. Most of them try to incorporate the strategies best suited to their level of students. On our part, we embarked on this research; as we realized that for Level 1 EFL students at the department of English KKU, there were some missing gaps in comprehending a given text, which hindered their self-paced learning of the given English text. We decided to incorporate interpretive reading techniques with the sole purpose of generating enthusiasm in comprehending a given set of reading materials. Our past experiences suggest that the majority of them ignored basic text structures, which could have helped them to understand the text and theme of the assigned documents. We experimented with discussing the possible difficult words that may come across while reading the books, thinking it could facilitate understanding. Some brainstorming techniques like allowing the students to guess the possible vocabularies that may come across by looking at the title and suggestive pictures across the book acted as a warm-up technique. We have noticed that this technique not only generated interest in the text, but it also helped some students to come up with exact words that were included in the book, thereby building their confidence. The researchers used many other techniques like pair work among peers. The researchers and students applauded the student pair with the unique word list as a mark of recognition and to boost their self-confidence. At times students were asked to prepare synonyms and antonyms of the list of words they wrote in their peer work exercise; such, activities served two purposes, picking the expected vocabularies in the text and preparing them for the interpreting reading task that may follow soon. The researchers observed that those peer groups that didn't, pay due attention to the given clues in the text in the form of pictures, ideas, ads, etc. were unable to grasp the vocabulary list and even faced a little difficulty in interpreting the text. The researchers wrote difficult words in bold on the white-board and also on white papers at the beginning of the class. The purpose for this was to help students focus on the captions, graphs, tables, and footnotes that should help them to understand the underlying theme of the text and to pick related words from the book, which, in the long run, will help them to decipher the meaning of the given text. It had a very positive effect on the group at large, as they enthusiastically participated in hunting the correct themes, and ideas they came across. Once the warm-up exercise was over, and the students were ready to take a plunge in the actual reading exercise, they had to have another look at the content of the given text. After that, they answered several open-ended questions about general understanding, sometimes one-liner or true or false statements were put across to check their preparedness for the given exercise. The researchers noticed that the funnier activities generated more interest among the whole group, and even the less involved ones showed positive results. Allotting points for each correct answer during review exercises led to more intense participation in the activity. Such fun activities in the form of a game have shown positive results, as many students asked the researchers to repeat such activities. We have also noticed that the majority of students were able to comprehend the text better through interpretive reading techniques and were able to answer follow up questions with much confidence, primarily through fun-filled exercises. Still, some of those students who were unable to comprehend the theme or central idea of the text, were requested to look for few content words from the book itself that may suggest the central argument or signify

the main purpose of the text. Students pointed to vocabularies they had no clue of as the content words that may be part of the central theme, clarification from the researchers led to the discovery of new vocabularies and even the primary purpose of the text. Discussing their likes and dislikes about the book that they studied led to very active participation by one and all. Many fun-filled activities in the post-reading activities helped us to involve the class, and student's showed great eagerness to finish the job about their food activities, favorite means of travel, hobbies, and related activities they would love to do in their free time, from the texts they studied. The texts used in these activities come from the Well-Read series by Oxford. One positive thing about this series is that each chapter comprises of four different paragraphs with similar themes and concepts, this has helped the researchers to focus on related ideas and topics for an extended period, thus allowing them to introspect upon the interpretive reading techniques for a longer duration and making the activities more enriching. Following Strategies were adopted by the researchers during interpretive reading class for Visual Impact: More use of body language, gestures and eye contacts, use of graffiti, charts, photos, etc. was encouraged in the classroom, multimedia use representing the essential areas of the text that may help the learners to create their ideas, occasional pictorial representation or drawings by the teachers and even by the students on the *white-board* about the content of the text.

The Instructional language was kept simple, clear, and appropriate to the level of students. The instructors repeated sentences that seemed complicated for the students. Initially, students were encouraged to rephrase or paraphrase as per the need. The literal translation was discouraged; instead, the instructors explained complicated sentences with examples; they would raise their tone of voice during the active lesson to emphasize on the essential messages they wanted to convey with no over-exaggeration.

A Model Lesson had the following features ; / short pause, // longer pause rising, intonation { } different intonation to signify complementary information CAPITALS = words to be stressed for instance ; Restaurants / A HUNDRED years ago / were VERY different / from restaurants.

Results and Discussions:

Reading comprehension in the control group is 67.500. The table below shows that the standard deviation equals 18.3329, which is less than the mean of the data. The skewness of student's; results equals -.749, which is a negative value, indicating a better level of student achievements for the control group.

The correlation coefficient between the pre and post-tests equals .613, which shows a statistically significant relationship between these tests. The correlation coefficient between the pre-and post-tests equals .625, showing a statistically significant relationship between these tests.

Table 1. Control Group Parameter and Value

Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Pre test	Post Test	Minimum	Maximum
67.500	18.3329	.749	.613	.625	27.5	95

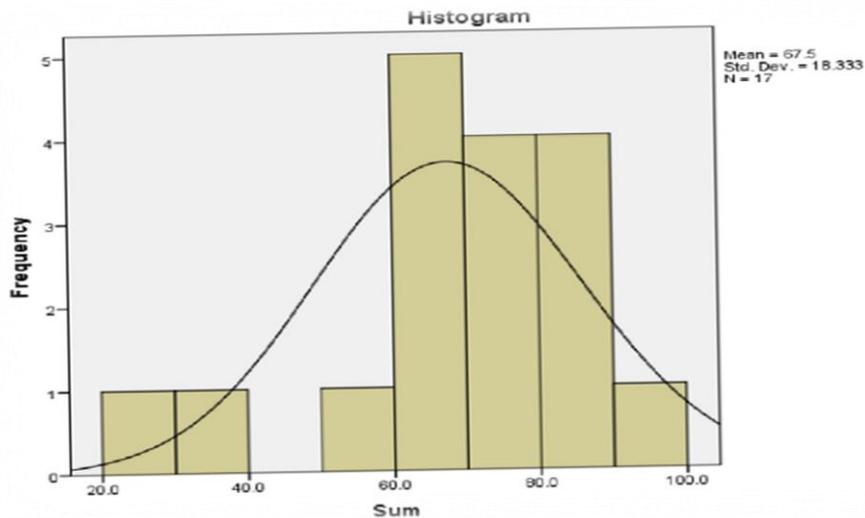


Figure 1. Control Group

Experimental Group of students:

As shown in the table, the mean of experimental group student's; marks is 73.11, and this indicates the right level of achievement for the students who studied this course. The table shows that the standard deviation equals 14.278, which is less than the mean of the data set. The skewness of student's; results equals -.323, which is a negative value, indicating a high level of student achievements. The correlation coefficient between the pre-and post-tests equals .657, showing a statistically significant relationship between these tests.

The correlation coefficient between the first and second tests equals .712, which shows a statistically significant relationship between these tests.

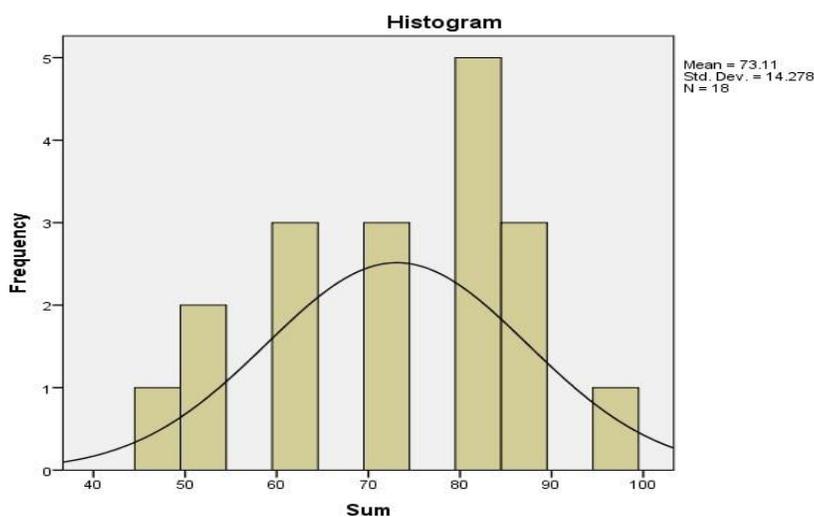


Figure 2. Experimental group

Table 2. *Experimental Group Parameter and Value*

Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Pre test	Post Test	Minimum	Maximum
73.11	14.278	.323	.657	.712	47	99

Conclusion:

Considering the mean of the experimental group students (i.e., 73.11), it clearly shows a right level of achievement for the students who enrolled in this course. The standard deviation for the experimental group is 14.278, whereas that of the control group is 18.3329, which shows less variation. The skewness, is -.323, which is a negative value, and that indicates the high level of student achievements for the experimental group. Also, looking at correlation, minimum, and maximum score, suggests a better result. The above results show significant improvement in the student's achievements in the test group, whose average mean is 73.11, compared to the control group, which has 67.5, as the mean score.

As this study was done over a short period, and included beginner level male students only, we recommend having a more extensive investigation with a more varied group of students to have a better view of the interpretive approach. The above results also show a remarkable improvement in the average test scores of the experimental group students who practiced interpretive reading techniques. The result indicates that interpretive reading; had a very positive effect on student's scores. In the individual survey conducted to observe student's feedback on the interpretive teaching technique majority of students expressed a positive impact on them. Among the control group of students, the faculty members used mostly silent reading techniques to help them to comprehend the given texts. On the contrary, most of the test group students got practice in loud reading techniques. The results obtained indicate that for beginner level students, interpretive, loud, or lively reading techniques are more effective. This study has provided a detailed outline stressing on the ways, which interpretive reading may help the interested faculty members to incorporate them in their reading class. We assume that several limitations should form the basis of future research. First, the experiment was conducted in one environment: in KKU. To strengthen our findings, a similar experiment must be replicated outside KKU. The second limitation concerns the level of EFL students targeted by this experiment (i.e., beginner level). This research can be applied to more advanced students at EFL, KKU, or other Saudi universities. Several in-service teacher training workshops to train instructors on the interpretive reading techniques, will be helpful. The obtained results can be verified by following the interpretive approach in all the reading skill courses at EFL, KKU, and outside. A longitudinal study to track student progress through Level 1 to Level 4 and beyond is necessary to document whether the interpretive approach contributes to student's academic success in the long term. Finally, pedagogical strategies designed to develop EFL student's command and use of academic language will encourage the use of the current approach.

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