



An Overview of Endorsing Early Reading Culture in English with Arab Students in Oman

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ABSTRACT

The article is initiated to identify the classical base of reading of Arab students in Oman. As teachers we experienced different barriers in class rooms to initiate and promote the reading habits of Arab students. When we wanted to identify the exact location of the issues and the remedies for the same this write up initiated. Many previous studies referred and our own ideas framed. Triggering students to start reading, allowing their guesses, visualization, verbal usages, key word identifications, framework clues connectivity, association with real time issues, short time simple evaluations are the arguments we foot forwarded

KEYWORDS : Reading, Guesses, visualization, verbal usages, clues connectivity

INTRODUCTION

Education is always considered as a primary resource for the development of every country, in the world. When human started to be educated, his social movements and the personal life style also getting civilized. This change leads him in the self-realization and that promotes them to stand for their own actualization. Every individuals growth prime the family's growth, every family's growth leads society's development. As a known fact Oman also upholding this strategy and developing the education as well, related aspects of education for the younger generation. Coughlan (2015) cites the OECD estimation that Oman could experience GDP growth of more than 1400% over the lifetime of current school students if all learners are enrolled in schools and manage to achieve at least basic academic skills. In addition to the potential for significant economic growth, the development of basic math, science, and reading skills also offers a number of societal and personal benefits. The government policies are framed to stimulate and forward the younger generation for the same. In case of this, the education and to be educated is the process and it consumes many factors as time, practice, plans, curriculum, teaching methodology, understanding capability of the students, supporting facilities and so on. Here this work is the start up for the long journey to get the appropriate strategy for the students to develop their reading skills.

WHAT IS READING?

Academic enlightening starts with hearing and leads with reading. Reading is the route for new thoughts and stimulates the skills in a human. Reading is a process shaped partly by the text, partly by the reader's background, and partly by the situation the reading occurs in (Hunt, 2004, p.137). Reading an academic text does not simply involve finding information on the text itself. Rather, it is a process of working with the text. When reading an academic text, the reader recreates the meaning of the text, together with the author. In other words, readers negotiate the meaning with the author by applying their prior knowledge to it (Maleki & Heerman, 1992). But this process is only possible if the reader uses a series of categories of analysis, some of which are specific to each academic discipline. Thus, working with a text and recreating its meaning entail both non disciplines specific and specific strategies. The expert reader has incorporated these categories and applies them almost intuitively (Bain, 2004). It is dependent upon a number of factors including a child's world knowledge, vocabulary and memory skills. Of all the skills children must acquire in their lives reading is the most critical one for future success in school as well as throughout life. (Cathy Healy, 2002.).

STATUS OF READING

The objective of this article depends on the status of the students closer to reading. In the Arab world, it is often reported that reading cultures largely do not exist. For example, as stated above, it has been claimed that the average European reads around 35 books a year while the average Arab reads only a small fraction of one (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016). Moreover, Western children generally read for around 12,000 minutes a year while Arab children read for around

6 minutes (Al-Yacoub, 2012). Of the studies that have been conducted to examine reading habits among Arabs, similar trends to those claimed here have been reported. Coughlan (2015) cites the OECD estimation that Oman could experience GDP growth of more than 1400% over the lifetime of current school students if all learners are enrolled in schools and manage to achieve at least basic academic skills. In addition to the potential for significant economic growth, the development of basic math, science, and reading skills also offers a number of societal and personal benefits. Focusing on reading skills in both English and Arabic, a highly literate population tends to be more creative, more involved in community and social matters, better connected with the globalized world, and, ultimately, more likely to take an informed and active role in society thereby contributing to social cohesion and development. This is an especially important concern considering the events of the Arab Spring and their destabilizing effects on a number of nations of the Arab world (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016). On the individual level, enhanced literacy skills can also help make people better rounded individuals who are empathic, have fewer prejudices, and are open to experiences that continue to nurture and shape their identities and their understandings of their place in the world (see Abu Russ, 2010; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Amer, 2003; Whiteley, 2011).

However, despite the way reading can contribute to individual and social well-being and economic development, it is widely claimed that Oman, like most other Arab nations, lacks a reading culture. For example, the Arab Thought Foundation Fikr (cited in Al-Yacoub, 2012) maintains that the average Arab child only reads around 6 minutes a year compared to the average Western child's 12,000 minutes. The situation for adults is little better. For example, Ayish (2010) claims that the average European reads around 35 books every year, while the equivalent of only one book is read by every 80 Arabs in the same period.

SIGNIFICANCE OF READING HABITS

Reading activates a human personally and socially a civilized person. Capwell (2012) claims that an emotional and physical bonding experience occurs which offers a range of psychological and physical benefits, while these positive early reading experiences also increase children's chances of success, achievement and future happiness both during their school days and in the future. Moreover, Terlitsky and Wilkins (2015) discussed that reading can improve children's levels of happiness and confidence while also decreasing emotional and conduct problems. Reading presents human nature – the best, the worst, the in-between for inspection and study. The great range of diverse, diffuse and divergent ways in which we human beings have acted and thought, and are capable of acting and thinking, are laid bare. Perhaps it even exceeds the personal example in shaping character.

On the other hand, Emam et al. (2014) associated that those children who have a delayed or disordered acquisition of reading skills – such as could be argued to exist for many learners across Oman - continue to struggle with their reading skills later in life. They also have less

exposure to content knowledge, vocabulary, and other reading and academic skills. Moreover, Emam et al. continue, those learners who are poor readers by the end of the first grade may not be able to develop even average-level reading skills by the end of their elementary schooling without substantial remediation efforts and intervention.

Noor (2011) adds that, through reading, students gain the new information and knowledge that is at the heart of their education. Loan (2009) also emphasizes the importance of reading by claiming that it can expand students' perceptions and choices. According to Shoebottom (2015), reading helps students to perceive ideas and understand sentences and arguments – a supposition he supports by the claim that educational researchers have found a strong relationship between reading, vocabulary levels, and academic success. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education (2005, cited in Afterschool Alliance, 2013) states that reading helps students improve their learning skills and, subsequently, achieve higher scores and grades. According to Guthrie (2008), those who read regularly and widely tend to be "higher achievers" than those who do not. Further, Palani (2012) believes that comprehension skills, which are largely developed through reading, contribute directly to educational success in addition to improving thinking skills and the ability to generate new ideas – an essential component of critical thinking and creativity. Miller (2013, cited in Afterschool Alliance, 2013, p. 6) supports this supposition by stating that students who read frequently tend to be better spellers, writers and thinkers. Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2014) also highlight the poor exam performance of students who are not interested in reading and cite several studies that link students' reading habits to academic performance.

CAUSES OF POOR READING HABITS

Every habit leads its own influence in human life, enlightened habits lead positive aspects and prejudiced habit leads negative impacts. Important and meaningful aspects of the reading experience that often take place when reading in one's native language are missing. What is conspicuously absent is a communicative reason for reading. The essential experience of asking questions or sharing our feelings and ideas regarding the texts that we read is missing, (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Arab readers have been characterized as generally slow readers who often have insufficient levels of comprehension, a lack of word recognition, and limited vocabulary (Bell, 2001). Arab readers of English have also been reported as being overly dependent on textual information and to be unable to locate a passage's main ideas. While insufficient linguistic ability plays a part in this, a lack of world knowledge and specific cultural knowledge also plays a major role (Cobb, 1999; Mourtaga, 2006; O Sullivan, 2010). Underlying all these problems is the absence of a reading culture in most Arab societies (Al-Mahrooqi, Asante, & Abbar-ul-Hassan, 2010; Bouzenirh, 2010; O Sullivan, 2010; Shannon, 2003).

Al-Musalli (2014) adds that reading in either Arabic or English is often not appreciated by Omani students due to a number of reasons including the lack of libraries, still relatively high levels of parental illiteracy, and the excessive amount of homework they receive. Despite this, Al-Musalli notes that some people believe that reading in general in Oman is not the issue, but rather the reading of printed books as students are more likely to prefer e-books and other on-line sources. However, a number of authors, such as Emeyeonu (2012) argue that the lack of reading culture, in both Arabic and English, is one of the most serious challenges associated with the introduction of more effective teaching and learning in the sultanate.

Each discipline has also its own specific categories of analysis, which need to be taught alongside these general categories. The socio-cultural background of a student plays a vital role in learning the second language. His culture is totally different from the culture of the language which he is learning (Julian, 2009)

STEPS TO IMPROVE READING HABIT

1. Parents and teachers have a vital role to initiate the reading habit. Reading academic texts published by those disciplinary experts permits students to immerse in the culture of the discipline and facilitates learning its conventions, discourse, skills, and knowledge (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006, p.122). But, this is only possible if students take a deep approach to reading.
2. Creating interest is a significant task in cultivating reading cul-

ture. Carter-Jones (2015) offers reading to be both an individual and imaginative act that takes place in the learner's inner world. Teachers can use stories, small passages, pictures and posters to create the students' interests.

3. Students should understand the needs of the reading and why, what, how questions have to be answered in their mind towards reading for their professional development. Marton and Saljo (1976) reported that while reading the text, some students simply identified some isolated facts mentioned in the text, which they believed the researchers would ask them about during the interview, and then memorized those facts. General categories of analysis to interact with academic texts include the following: (i) reading purpose; (ii) context; (iii) author's thesis; (iv) deconstruction of assumptions; (v) evaluation of author's arguments; and (vi) consequences of author's arguments. The expert reader approaches an academic text with a specific purpose, e.g., to get ideas about activities that promote deep learning, to compare Kelsen's and Austin's notion of law, to analyze the use of swimming pool images in Lucrecia Martel's films, or to examine the characteristics of dysfunctional families in Alejandro Casavalle's dramaturgy.
4. Any task cannot be taken generally and it can be divided and completed into sub tasks. Jenkins (1967) highlights the ways in which reading is central to pleasure and personal development. The author claims that people read at four levels. That is, they associate words with sounds, read for the literal meaning of the text, interpret what is read, and encounter new ideas and experiences. While Jenkins claims that very young readers will derive pleasure from the recognition of words and that those who are reading for a specific purpose will enjoy encountering the facts they seek, it is the emotional investment in the text and the broadening of experiences that will help readers enjoy the text most. Here, Jenkins offers the belief that:
 5. Students have to practice the easier strategies with the help of teachers when they are starting their reading practice.
 - Beginning and establishing for reading has to be triggered.
 - Students have to allow make guesses, which will help them to continue furthermore.
 - Those guesses will allow them to visualise the concepts and being attached with that internally.
 - That visualisation leads them to think aloud towards the theme of the conceptions.
 - The students thought process and verbal usages will proceed infer learning.
 - Infer learning will locate the key words and that motivate the readers for their new knowledge in vocabulary.
 - The key words will connect the uses of framework clues and make them to assume and understand the context.
 - Real time instances can be connected to their present reading context.
 - Short time simple evaluations of the students reading context will help them to understand their progression in their day-to-day reading practices.

Reading journals are logs where students record their comments on the assigned readings. They may react, question, argue, provide additional examples, or write about what the readings mean to them personally. Some teachers prefer to use more structured reading journals where they ask specific questions to their students to answer in the journals (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006, p. 125).

CONCLUSION

Versatility is the universal cultural base, people differs from birth, community, social setup, languages, education base, etc., In case of students in Arab countries differ with their uniqueness. Clark and Rumbold continue that readers also generally participate more in their communities and understand other cultures better than those who do not read. In terms of culture, Holte (1998) maintains that reading can increase an understanding of life's value while also promoting the maintenance of cultural heritage.

(Carter- Jones 2015)In addition, the act of reading allows readers to develop their knowledge base and to create value – essential elements for living what the author describes as a fulfilling life. In this way, reading can both guide and shape students as people who are capable of moving beyond their own boundaries which, the author contends, often consist of stereotypes, prejudices and other biases.

Jenkins (1967), Reading also allows people to find beauty and fantasy in environments which they may never experience and to obtain what the author describes as “vicarious stability” even in those situations where such stability may be lacking in their own lives. A fine art of reading is already initiated in Arab students and the middle barriers also getting analysed and started to be removed by the expertise teachers in class rooms now a days. This climate will be improved in coming days with more support of psychological approaches and researches on it.

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