AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFL SECONDARY READING CURRICULUM AND READING THEORIES IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

Hamsa Hameed Ahmed

UNIVERSITI SAIS ISLAM MALAYSIA
AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFL SECONDARY READING CURRICULUM AND READING THEORIES IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

Hamsa Hameed Ahmed
(Matric No. 4110112)

Thesis submitted in fulfillment for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN EDUCATION

FACULTY OF MAJOR LANGUAGE STUDIES
UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA
Nilai

August 2016
DECLARATION

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

I hereby declare that the work has been done by myself and no portion of the work contained in this Thesis has been submitted in support of any application for any other degree or qualification on this or any other university or institution of learning.

Date: 22nd August 2016

Signature:

Name: Hamsa Hammed Ahmed

Matric No.: 4110112

Address: Kajang
COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the Copyright Act 1987 as qualified by Regulation 4(1) of the University Science Islamic Malaysia Intellectual Property Regulations. Due acknowledgement shall always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

© Hamsa Hameed Ahmed, 2015  All rights reserved
Hamsa Hameed Ahmed was born in 1985. She earned her Bachelor of English Language from University of Baghdad in 2007, Iraq. She got Master in English Language Studies from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2011, Malaysia. Currently, she is on leave to study PhD in Education, at Faculty of Major Language Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Nilai, Malaysia.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Almighty Allah for his mercy, grace and blessings.

The past three years have been thus far the most challenging, interesting, and rewarding part of my life. I am very thankful and grateful that I have crossed paths with many wonderful people who have helped me in many ways in my pursuit of a PhD at Faculty of Major Languages, University Science Islamic Malaysia.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Fariza Puteh - Behak for her supervision, guidance, patience and support in this research. And for Dr. Harison Mohd Sidek for her guidance and support. Without their guidance and consistent help, this thesis would not have been possible.

Special thanks to my mother and my sisters, who have helped and supported me over these years. And for my great husband. Thank you so much to all of you.
ABSTRAK


Dapatan-dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan petikan pembacaan Bahasa Inggeris serta aktivitinya telah dipengaruhi oleh proses bawah-atas (bottom-up) dan tidak dari proses atas-bawah (top-down) atau proses meta-cognitive. Tambah pula analisa menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan petikan pembacaan (67%) dalam buku teks adalah berunsur cerita (narrative), sedangkan petikan pembacaan di peringkat universiti adalah berunsur penjelasan (expository). Perbincangan berdasarkan dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahwa hanya 31% daripada jumlah soalan berkaitan dengan penyatuan semula (reorganization) dan kemahiran membaca secara inferensi (inferential). Ini bermakna lebih kurang 77% soalan pemahaman di dalam buku teks ‘Sunrise Student’s Book 12’ adalah soalan pemahaman yang tidak melibatkan pemikiran kritikal. Maka perubahan yang besar diperlukan pada kurikulum Tingkatan Enam yang sedia ada supaya ia dapat membantu perkembangan pemikiran yang lebih mendalam. Kajian ini juga penting kerana dapatan-dapatan ini boleh digunapakai di negara-negara di Timur Tengah.
ABSTRACT

As English Language is increasingly being used in tertiary education, there is growing concern that students graduating from Form Six classes in Iraqi Kurdistan have poor reading skills in particular higher order thinking skills. Therefore, the students entering university are ill prepared to follow courses where the subject matter is taught primarily in English. Little is really known on the reading skills and strategies used in Form 6 and the factors that contribute to poor reading skills. Against this concern, this study was undertaken with the aim to unfold and understand the need for developing critical reading comprehension skills. This study is a content analysis research and qualitative methods were used to collect data. The data used in this research study was obtained through four sources. First, the reading curriculum and the Form Six textbooks were scrutinized in detail and the ensuing comments were documented. Second, two teachers teaching the Form Six classes were observed and this was followed by teacher interviews. Fourth, the first year undergraduate students in universities in Iraqi Kurdistan were interviewed and their feedback were transcribed and carefully coded to find out the difficulties they faced at their respective universities. The findings from this study have shown that most of the reading passages and reading tasks found in the student’s textbook are influenced by bottom-up strategy. There has been a lack of reading passages and reading tasks related to top-down processing and meta-cognitive processing respectively. On the contrary, the findings reflect that most of the passages in the student’s textbook are narrative in nature while at tertiary level more expository type of passages are used. Discussion based on findings, reveal that only a small number of reading comprehension questions refer to reorganization and inferential reading skills. This means that the majority of the reading comprehension questions in the textbook are literal comprehension questions where no critical thinking is involved. The study findings have further shown that most of the reading passages and reading tasks found in Sunrise Student’s Book 12 are influenced by bottom-up strategy. In addition to these, most of the passages in the student’s Book 12 are narrative in nature while at tertiary level more expository type of passages is used. This means that the majority of the reading comprehension questions in the textbook are literal comprehension questions where no critical thinking is involved. Thus, there is a necessity to bring out radical changes to the existing EFL secondary reading curriculum so that new tasks and activities can aid in developing higher order thinking skills. The present study is significant as it can be applicable to other Middle-East countries.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .................................................................................................................. ii
COPYRIGHT ...................................................................................................................... iii
BIO DATA OF AUTHOR ................................................................................................... iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ...................................................................................................... v
ABSTRAK ............................................................................................................................ vi
ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ...................................................................................................... viii
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... xii
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................ xiii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... 1
1.1 Problem Background ................................................................................................. 1
  1.1.1 English Language Teaching in Iraq ................................................................. 5
1.2 Introduction To Iraqi Kurdistan Curriculum ......................................................... 6
  1.2.1 Meaning of Curriculum ..................................................................................... 7
  1.2.2 Changes in Iraqi Kurdistan Curriculum ............................................................. 7
1.3 The English New National Curriculum in Iraq ..................................................... 11
1.4 Problem Statement ................................................................................................... 13
1.5 Purposes of the Study .............................................................................................. 15
1.6 Objectives of the Study .......................................................................................... 16
1.7 Research Questions .................................................................................................. 16
1.8 Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 16
  1.8.1 Curriculum .......................................................................................................... 16
  1.8.2 Reading Theories ............................................................................................... 17
  1.8.3 Higher Order Thinking Skills ............................................................................. 17
1.9 Thesis Organization .................................................................................................. 17

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................... 19
2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................... 19
2.2 Reading Passages ....................................................................................................... 20
  2.2.1 Past Studies on the Length of Reading Passages ............................................... 20
  2.2.2 Past studies on Type of Passages, Why Expository More Important than Narrative. ................................................................. 21
2.2.3 Past Studies on Reading Comprehension Question Types of Higher Order Thinking Skills (Explain Barroom’s Taxonomy) 23

2.3 Inferential Comprehension 24
2.3.1 Inferring Supporting Details 26
2.3.2 Inferring Main Ideas 26
2.3.3 Inferring Sequence 26
2.3.4 Inferring Comparisons 27
2.3.5 Inferring Cause and Effect Relationships 27
2.3.6 Inferring Character Traits 27
2.3.7 Predicting Outcomes 27
2.3.8 Interpreting Figurative Language 28

2.4 Evaluation 28
2.4.1 Judgments of Reality or Fantasy 28
2.4.2 Judgments of Fact or Opinion 28
2.4.3 Judgments of Adequacy and Validity 29
2.4.4 Judgments of Appropriateness 29
2.4.5 Judgments of Worth, Desirability and Acceptability 29

2.5 Appreciation 29
2.5.1 Emotional Response to the Content 30
2.5.2 Identification with Characters or Incidents 30
2.5.3 Reactions to the Author’s Use of Language 30
2.5.4 Imagery 30

2.6 Techniques for Asking More Effective Questions 31

2.7 Reading Theories 31
2.7.1 Traditional Bottom-Up View 32
2.7.2 Top-Down Processing (Cognitive View) 34

2.8 Schema Theory 36

2.9 Content and Formal Schemata 37

2.10 Activating and building schemata 38

2.11 Applying Schema Theory to L2 Reading 39

2.12 Pre-Reading Activities 40
2.12.1 The Meta-Cognitive View 42

2.13 Effective Reading 42

2.14 Critical Review on EFL Secondary Reading Curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan 43

2.15 Past Studies on Curriculum 48
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .......................................... 52
3.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 52
3.2 Research Approach .................................................................... 52
3.3 Content Analysis ........................................................................ 52
  3.3.1 Inductive Content Analysis .................................................... 55
  3.3.2 Deductive Content Analysis .................................................. 55
3.4 Research Procedure ................................................................... 56
3.5 Research Context ........................................................................ 59
  3.5.1 Educational Context of EFL in Iraqi Kurdistan ....................... 59
  3.5.2 The Secondary EFL Educational Framework in Iraq............. 61
  3.5.3 Form Six EFL Educational Framework of the Secondary School in Iraq ............................................................... 62
  3.5.4 The Form Six English Language Curriculum Specifications ... 62
  3.5.5 Participants of the Study .......................................................... 63
  3.5.6 Site of the Study / Location of Study ...................................... 64
3.6 Data Collection ........................................................................... 64
3.7 Data Analysis .............................................................................. 68
3.8 Trustworthiness .......................................................................... 72
3.9 Chapter Summary ....................................................................... 75

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ........................................ 76
4.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 76
4.2 Research Question One ............................................................... 77
4.3 Research Question Two ............................................................... 112
4.4 Research Question Three ............................................................ 117
4.5 Research Question Four ............................................................... 122
4.6 Summary ..................................................................................... 138

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION ................................................................. 139
5.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 139
5.2 Findings of the Research Study .................................................... 139
5.3 EFL Reading Tasks at Tertiary Level ............................................. 143
5.4 Conclusion ................................................................................... 147
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Iraqi education scenario ................................................................. 59
Table 3.2: Data display matrix for analyzing patterns of responses for Miss May (1) and Mr. Ibrahim (2) ................................................................. 71
Table 3.3: Summary of teacher interviews ..................................................... 72
Table 3.4: Guba’s four criteria for trustworthiness (shenton, 2004) .................. 73
Table 4.1: Analysis of reading theories and strategies in EFL reading text .......... 82
Table 4.2: Getting organized ........................................................................ 88
Table 4.3: Analysis on types and length of reading passages in sunrise student’s book 12 ........................................................................................................ 113
Table 4.4: Comprehension question based on Unit 2 ..................................... 118
Table 4.5: Distribution of questions ............................................................... 121
Table 4.6: Analysis of reading passages and their relationship with language learning theories ................................................................. 126
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Aligning Curriculum with Teaching Learning and Assessment ............... 9
Figure 1.2: Curriculum Dimensions ................................................................. 10
Figure 2.1: Framework ....................................................................................... 19
Figure 2.2: Barrett Taxonomy ............................................................................ 25
Figure 2.3: Sample Reading Passage from Sunrise 12 Student’s Book Page 20 ...... 45
Figure 2.4: Comprehension Questions 1 ........................................................... 46
Figure 2.5: Second Reading Passage on Erbil’s Ancient Citadel ....................... 47
Figure 2.6: Comprehension Questions .............................................................. 47
Figure 3.1: Preparation, Organizing and Resulting Phases in the Content Analysis Process ................................................................................................. 54
Figure 3.2: The Research Methodology That Used by the Researcher .................. 58
Figure 3.3: Data Collection Steps ....................................................................... 64
Figure 3.4: Data analysis Steps ......................................................................... 68
Figure 4.1: Iraqi Curriculum Framework: Learner Key Competencies ............... 78
Figure 4.2: Languages, Literature and Communication (Page 35) ....................... 79
Figure 4.3: Iraqi Curriculum Framework: Teaching and Learning Strategies (Page 45) ........................................................................................................... 81
Figure 4.4: They Wanted a Better Life (Unit 1 – Lesson 3 & 4) ......................... 86
Figure 4.5: Reading Comprehension Questions Based on Unit 1 ......................... 87
Figure 4.6: Getting Organized (Unit 2 – Lesson 3 & 4) ........................................ 90
Figure 4.7: Saving the Past for the Future (Unit 3 Lesson 1 & 2) ......................... 91
Figure 4.8: Comprehension Questions for Unit 3 (Lesson 1 & 2) ....................... 91
Figure 4.9: Saving the Past for the Future (Unit 3 – Lesson 3 & 4) ....................... 93
Figure 4.10: Comprehension Questions for Unit 3 (Lesson 3 & 4) ...................... 93
Figure 4.11: It Couldn’t Have Gone Better! (Unit 4 – Lesson 1 & 2) .................... 96
Figure 4.12: Reading Comprehension Questions Based on Unit 4 ....................... 97
Figure 4.13: Feeding Nine Billion (Unit 5 – Lesson 3 & 4) .................................. 98
Figure 4.14: Reading Comprehension Questions Based on Unit 5 ....................... 99
Figure 4.15: Into the Information Age (Unit 6 – Lesson 3 & 4) ......................... 100
Figure 4.16: Reading comprehension questions based on Unit 6 ....................... 101
Figure 4.17: Working Together for a Better World (Unit 7 – Lesson 3 & 4) ......... 103
Figure 4.18: Reading Comprehension Questions Based On Unit 7 - Lesson 3 & 4) 103
Figure 4.19: They are the people working with us (Unit 8 – Lesson 1 & 2) ............ 105
Figure 4.20: Reading Comprehension Questions Based on Unit 7 - Lesson 3 & 4 ... 106
Figure 4.21: Observation Transcript for Unit 3 ................................................................. 109
Figure 4.22: Observation Transcript based on the Literary Reader ......................... 110
Figure 4.23: Observation Transcript Based on Unit 7 (Lesson 3 & 4) ....................... 111
Figure 4.24: Pattern Reflecting the Length of Reading Passages ............................... 115
Figure 4.25: Part of Teacher Interview Transcript ......................................................... 116
Figure 4.26: Teacher Interview Transcript on Higher Order Thinking Skills ........... 120
Figure 5.1: Developing Critical Thinking Skills (Page 26) ........................................... 140
Figure 5.2: Summary of the Findings of the Present Study .......................................... 140
Figure 5.3: Insight into Teaching Approaches and Methodologies - Page 46 of Iraqi Curriculum Framework ................................................................. 142
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Background

Recently, in non-native English language speaking countries, there has been growing concern regarding the English proficiency level. English is a language which has great reach and influence; it is a language of establishment and it maintains connection and relationship among people all around the world. English has been widely used in the private sector and it is becoming a significant factor in the development of economics and education (Crystal, 2003). Moreover, English has been used widely in the economic sector, the political bodies and commercial organisations. In addition, according to (Ellis 2005), more than 85% of the scientific, technological and academic materials in the world today are in English. To date, many university students in Middle East in general and in Iraq in particular have learned English for 12 years, but their English proficiency is still poor. Most students cannot express their thoughts or even speak well in the English language despite having learnt Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking for about 12 years (Kareem, 2009). So that the researcher is going to examine reading curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The design of this chapter explained through Figure 2.1 that provides a flowchart of the various stages in literature review. It starts with an introduction followed by explanation about the reading passages. Next, the reading theories are given focus followed by some significant pointers to achieve effective reading. A critical review on EFL secondary reading curriculum was done and at the end of the chapter some past studies on curriculum has been highlighted.

Figure 2.1: Framework
2.2 Reading Passages

One of the more complex tasks facing the English as a foreign language (EFL) reading teacher is the selection of appropriate reading passages. In reading seminars I conduct with EFL teachers, we often exchange views on criteria used to select such passages. Some of the criteria are on everyone list and are obvious; this is important, for it reassures the participants that their insights are valuable.

2.2.1 Past Studies on the Length of Reading Passages

Long reading comprehension passages are between 400-700 words and they usually have between 7-10 questions per passage. Long passages give more scope to set questions that require higher order thinking skills and they usually involve main idea questions in some form. Students usually do not like to read long passages as their focus become less as they progress in reading.

Pearson & Camperell (1981: 33) in their research assert that when complexity of structure and sentence length come together, text comprehension will be reduced. So, one of the factors that can affect text comprehension is text length. Chastain (1988: 234) noted that language teachers usually favour short reading passages. The tendency of short passage use may have its roots in a desire not to overload the students. But it probably is an outgrowth of the idea of reading as a laborious process of deciphering a complex and sometimes unfamiliar linguistic code for which the students were required to know all grammar and vocabulary. Studies have shown that in a long passage, students focus too much attention on language than meaning, and they read
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
This chapter discussed the methodology of the current study. Specifically, the chapter explained the research approach, qualitative paradigm and content analysis, as both are the foundations of the study. Then, it discussed the trustworthiness, research context, data collection, and data analysis.

3.2 Research Approach
This study used a content analysis approach; which is deductive content analysis in analyzing the curriculum of Iraqi Kurdistan for Form Six of the secondary school. The interview sessions and the notes from the teacher observations would later be transcribed and then analyzed using a coding process. Please refer to appendix D for the coding details (Elo & Kynga, 2008).

3.3 Content Analysis
Content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena Krippendorff (2000). According to Babbie (2010) content analysis is a
method of analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages. The researcher mentioned that through content analysis, it is possible to distill words into fewer content related categories and when classified into the same categories, words, phrases and the like shared the same meaning.

There are two approaches or ways to content analysis namely inductive and deductive content analysis based on theoretical knowledge. The aim is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon. The choice of the approach depends on the purpose of the study. If there is not enough knowledge about the phenomenon or if this knowledge is fragmented, the inductive approach is recommended (Lauri & Kynga, 2005). On the other hand, Kynga & Vanhanen (1999) explained that deductive content analysis was used when the structure of analysis was carried out on the basis of previous knowledge and the purpose of the study was theory testing. In inductive approach, the data collected moved from the precise or specific to the general so that particular instances were observed and then combined into a larger whole or general statement (Chinn & Kramer, 1999).

Conversely according to Burns & Grove (2005), a deductive approach is based on an earlier theory or model and therefore it moves from the general to the specific. Both the inductive and deductive analysis processes go through three main phases namely preparation, organizing and reporting. Figure 3.1 diagrammatically represents these three phases.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to analyze the reading comprehension passages and seek answers to the research questions. This chapter is divided into five sections and each section discussed a particular research question. The First Section looked at research question one and examine how reading theories and strategies underpin the English Curriculum of Iraqis' Kurdistan secondary school form six). The Second Section of this chapter looked at the second research question and examine the type of reading passages that are currently being used in the English language curriculum at Form Six level in Iraqi Kurdistan. It addressed the different types of reading passages are discussed in detail. In addition, the passages are examined to find out if the passages are narrative or expository. The length and scope of the passages was also examined. Next, the Third Section of this chapter looked at the third research question and find out if the reading passages used in Form Six classes in Iraqi Kurdistan help in developing higher order reading and thinking skills it further discussed in detail, the reasons for incorporating higher order thinking skills into reading passages. In the Fourth Section of this chapter which relates to research question four would look at language learning theories that are reflected in the Iraqi reading curriculum. The last section outlines the summary of this chapter.
4.2 Research Question One

This section answer research question one, what are the reading theories underpinning the English Curriculum of Iraqis' Kurdistan secondary school (form six)? The reading theories and strategies which are directly or indirectly implied in the English Curriculum of Iraqis' Kurdistan secondary school would become clearer when one examines the Iraqi Curriculum Framework which was developed in 2012. The new Iraqi Curriculum Framework as outlined in Page 27 of Iraqi Curriculum Framework and depicted in Figure 4.1 outlines the Key Learner Competencies which includes critical and independent thinking, inquiry and information processing, creative thinking and problem solving, evaluation and decision making and finally communication.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the entire research study and its findings. It provides explanations on the research process and the ways in which the study contributes to knowledge about teaching and learning in Iraqi Kurdistan secondary schools at Form Six Level. The first part discusses the research findings and this is followed by EFL reading tasks in institutions of higher learning. This chapter concludes by outlining the gist of this study and it is followed by studies on future work.

5.2 Findings of the Research Study

Research studies have found that many undergraduate students at university level face problems in following their professional studies in the arts and sciences primarily due to not only low English proficiency but also due to poor development of higher order thinking skills in relation to reading (Kareem, 2009). He suggested that the roots of the problems were related to poor reading information processing strategies being used in class. On the one hand, the foreword by the Minister of Education in Baghdad on Page 7 of the Curriculum Framework says that the Curriculum Framework “supports the attainment of learner’s competencies such as creative thinking,
constructive criticism, problem-solving, sound communication and correct decision making”. In addition, Page 7 of the Iraqi Curriculum Framework mentions the same point of developing creative and critical thinking skills. This is depicted in Figure 5.1. Figure 5.2 on the other hand provides the summary of the findings of the present study.

**Figure 5.1: Developing Critical Thinking Skills (Page 26)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and curriculum aims</th>
<th>Learners' Key competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful life-long learners</td>
<td>Thinking and Learning competencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.2: Summary of the Findings of the Present Study**

- Investigate issues faced by students at Form Six Level in learning reading
- **RQ1:** Findings on reading theories and strategies, No separate English Syllabus or ESL Curriculum Specification.
  - No explicit mention of reading theories or types of processing such as top-down processing, bottom-up processing, and meta-cognitive theories.
  - Questions asked reflect the use of top-down strategy.
  - No mention of the questions are to be done individually or in groups.

- **RQ2:** Findings on reading passages for Form Six Level in Iraq Education.
  - Out of a total of 32 pages, 6 are narrative (18.75%) and 3 are expository (9.37%).
  - Mean length of narrative passages = 676.
  - Mean passage length of expository = 527.
  - Irregular pattern of reading passage length.

- **RQ3:** Findings on development of reading skills.
  - **L1** (Linguistic Comprehension): 89%.
  - **L2** (Language Organization): 71%.
  - **L3** (Inference): 57%.
  - **L4** (Evaluation): 37%.
  - **L5** (Appreciation): 20%.

- **RQ4:** Findings on language learning theories effective in Iraq among students learning reading Curriculum.
  - Comprehensive language teaching and learning theory.
  - Cognitive Theory.
  - Socio-cognitive Theory.
  - Structural Approach to Language Teaching and Learning.
  - Audio-Linguistic Approach and Method.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Sa-ngiamwibool. 2011b. “The Effects of Different Types of Reading Instructions on Executive Summary Writing and Critical Thinking”. *Proceedings of the 3rd international conference on humanities and social sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand*.


Zelander, E. 2006. “English as a Global Language - Good or Bad?”. Mid Sweden University.