



The Linguistic Factors That Affect Poor Reading Comprehension Among Libyan Students

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Article Info

Article History:
Accepted 20 January
2018
Approved 01 March
2018
Published 20 June
2018

Keywords:
linguistic factors,
reading
comprehension

Abstract

Reading may be one of the most important skills a person may have. The National Reading Panel has stated that there are five specific practices teachers should use when teaching children to read or while helping them improve their reading skills. Reading comprehension requires readers to really know and understand what they read. This research used quantitative research. Instrument for collecting data in this study is test instruments. It will use test items with numerical data. The data used on improving students' reading comprehension were obtained by observing to Libyan's students in Semarang. The worksheet was spread to Libyan students and they did the worksheet. The data about reading comprehension and worksheet will be in the form of numerical data. Data analysis in this study used descriptive analysis techniques, which serves to provide an overview of the data of the study variables. Based on these results, the answer that often appears on all items of reading comprehension can be interpreted that respondents usually try to understand the text being read. Factor that affects reading comprehension ability is spelling. The three linguistic factors studied, the most influential factor on reading comprehension is spelling.

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p-ISSN 2087-0108
e-ISSN 2502-4566

INTRODUCTION

Reading may be one of the most important skills a person may have. The National Reading Panel has stated that there are five specific practices teachers should use when teaching children to read or while helping them improve their reading skills. These practices are phonemic awareness, teaching in phonetics, guided oral reading practice with feedback, vocabulary instruction, and understanding strategy instruction (Prado & Plourde, 2005). Of these five practices, the most important is reading comprehension. Reading comprehension requires readers to really know and understand what they read. If people have a good decoding ability, but do not fully understand what they are reading, it means they only speak with words and do not actually read.

It is easy to see why the ability to read in a second language or a foreign language can be regarded as one of the most important skills for people in an international environment. Reading is probably the most studied language skill (Bachman, 2000); That is, research on reading in a second or foreign language situation is mainly started in 1970 with the main article written by Goodman (1967) entitled *Reading: The game of psycholinguistic guessing*. Since then many studies have been conducted that lead to a number of findings (Brown, 2000).

Reading experts such as Anderson and Pearson (1984) and Aebersold and Field (1997) argue that the best way to teach reading is through a bottom-up methodology where readings take place by matching sounds and letters. Students are taught to focus on the language knowledge, vocabulary, and structure of a passage while reading. Ferhan (1999) states that the topdown process is more effective (now known as the psycholinguistic theory of learning where prior knowledge of the reader is considered very important). However, other experts such as Kintsch (2005), Eskey and Grabe (1988), and Grabe and Stoller (2002) propose an interactive approach to reading that involves bottom-up and top-down processing. Proponents

of this approach believe that based on the situation, the reader determines which approach is more favorable. More specifically, if the required background knowledge about the text is available to readers, they will benefit from a top-down approach. Conversely, if they lack the specific knowledge of this field necessary to understand this section, then the bottom-up approach will be more helpful (Hedge, 2008; Harmer, 2001; Brown, 2000; Dubin & Bycina, 1991).

Later, however, the teaching-learning approach focuses on the importance of acquiring strategies that help students become strategic readers while addressing difficult passages (Alderson, 2005). Researchers have found that successful L2 learners use more learning strategies and use them more often than their less successful classmates; The use of this strategy has been shown to occur before, during, and after the L2 assignment (Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Kaplan, 2002; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). Kaplan (2002) asserted that one of the most important reading features is a strategy, that is, when reading, the reader assesses whether he or she has achieved the goal of reading or not. If not, he or she should adjust the different monitoring activities, which are typical of a good reader.

However, it is important to emphasize that inputs are different from the improperly taught intake and strategy that the student will use. In addition to teaching strategies, teachers should help them pay attention to what they do (Robinson, 2005). Since reading comprehension is not an observable phenomenon, assessing the understanding and development of one's skills through the use of strategies that describe understanding seems important (Brown, 2000). Therefore, teacher responsibilities also change and are not enough just to teach strategy, but also practice and use it in every lesson continuously to influence achievement. In fact, the main purpose is to develop strategic readers who can use this strategy automatically to improve their performance in comprehension

and recall tests (Farrel, 2001; Grabe & Stoller, 2001).

Current reading research suggests that some key factors hinder students' reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Torgeson, 2002). One of the most important is phonemic awareness, the ability to process the sound of each letter, which is required for word recognition. For example, when a reader hears the word "bug", he must distinguish three different phonemes in the word. The reader then combines sounds to decode words. Phonemic abilities and undeveloped phonemic abilities, as well as poor working memory, interfere with students' ability to read words fluently (ie, with automaticity), associated with reading comprehension deficits (National Reading Panel, 2000; Torgeson, 2002). During the first years of school, reading teaching focuses on decoding and fluency, requiring strong phonemic and phonetic skills in accordance with the 2000 National Reading Panel (NRP) report. Further adding to this reading problem, the emphasis on reading instructions shifts away from Phonetic teaching up to reading comprehension around the third grade. Few studies, however, focus on the secondary reading instruction included by the NRP because the main research focus centers on early identification of students at risk of reading failure, evidence-based instruction, and the teacher's role in reading teaching. It should be noted that since its launch in 2000, this report has garnered criticisms of how the effect size is calculated and subsequent recommendations made by the panel based on this effect size (Almasi, Garas-York, & Shanahan, 2006; Garan, 2001).

Many cognitive processes are used when reading the understanding of the aid. Strong vocabulary skills are needed to help students read proficiently (Taylor et al., 2009). Unfortunately, as students struggle to read, they often avoid reading. According to Cain and Oakhill (2011), reading affects vocabulary development; However, when students do not read fluently or regularly, their vocabulary skills are affected. In addition, Caccamise and Snyder

(2005) report that vocabulary knowledge positively affects reading comprehension and academic performance. During reading, students constantly process words to create meaning, and without a solid vocabulary base, students will struggle to understand what they have read.

Other factors related to reading difficulties are the low prior knowledge (ie, poor general knowledge) and the lack of vocabulary as in English as the second language. Previous knowledge is directly related to reading comprehension and is a strong predictor of reading ability (Elbro & Buch-Iversen, 2013). When a student has no prior knowledge of a topic, reading comprehension will be affected (Kintsch, 2013, Tarchi, 2010). Students who have a basic understanding of what they read can connect new information with what they already know. Prior knowledge is formed through experience, by reading or hearing a topic, or through family habits. The general cognitive abilities of a student are also contributors of prior knowledge. A student who reads, or who has read, can access this knowledge when reading related topics, which can improve understanding. However, currently unknown, are there any intermediate factors (eg, work memory, motivation, decoding) that may hamper prior knowledge and understanding impact readings.

When students struggle to read, reading becomes motivation and students avoid reading. Understanding of reading is hampered when students lose interest and separation of reading (Guthrie, 2008). Many students start not liking to read because they struggle to get meaning from what they read. While research supports a strong correlation between reading engagement and reading ability, students often do not read well because they do not spend time reading. An apathetic reading cycle begins, which makes it more challenging to support the struggling readers (Bohn-Gettler & Rapp, 2011; Katzir, Lesaux, & Kim, 2009).

METHODOS

This research uses experimental research as a form of quantitative research to determine the linguistic factors that affect the low reading comprehension in Libyan students. In this research, the researcher will not choose the subjects. Research subjects in this research are Libyan students studying in Semarang. Data in this research will be obtained from worksheet. Worksheets were used to check errors and weak areas of reading comprehension. The instrument used in this study are: questionnaire about reading comprehension, worksheet about grammatical test, vocabulary test, spelling error test and reading test. Questionnaire is about reading comprehension about how the student tries to make reading comprehension. The worksheet about grammatical, vocabulary, spelling errors and reading test consist of 20 items.

The data used on improving students' reading comprehension were obtained by observing to Libyan student in Semarang. The questionnaire and worksheet will be spread to Libyan students and they will do the worksheet and questionnaire. The data about reading comprehension and worksheet will be in the form of numerical data.

Data analysis in this study used descriptive analysis techniques, which serves to provide an overview of the data of the study variables. Descriptive analysis includes the average (mean), the middle value (median), a figure that often appears (mode), standard deviation. There are several factors that affect the reading comprehension; therefore, to determine the extent to which independent variables affect the dependent variable is used multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis is an analysis to see how far the influence of linguistic factors and reading comprehension. The data obtained processed using computer data processing program SPSS 21 on the production value of the coefficient of determination more accurate.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reading Comprehension

Table 1 is the result of the description of the reading comprehension test. Based on these results, the answer that often appears on all items of reading comprehension statement is code 4 where the code can be interpreted that respondents usually try to understand the text being read. From these results, it can be obtained the description of reading comprehension, that is, some respondents usually try to understand the reading they read, although there are still some respondents who said rarely or never tried to understand the text reading that appears from the minimum score for each statement that shows sometimes, rarely and never.

Table 1. Descriptive Reading Comprehension Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Y1	8	3.00	5.00	4.1250
Y2	8	2.00	5.00	3.3750
Y3	8	4.00	5.00	4.3750
Y4	8	3.00	5.00	4.2500
Y5	8	2.00	5.00	3.8750
Y6	8	2.00	5.00	3.7500
Y7	8	1.00	5.00	2.8750
Y8	8	1.00	5.00	3.7500
Y9	8	1.00	5.00	3.1250
Y10	8	3.00	5.00	4.0000
Y11	8	1.00	5.00	4.0000
Y12	8	1.00	5.00	3.0000
Y13	8	1.00	4.00	2.6250
Valid (listwise)	N 8			

Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors are the factors that influence the language. Table 2 is a table that presents scores for grammatical tests, vocabulary, spelling errors and reading tests. Based on the table below, it can be seen that the respondent has a low score below the average of the maximum value of 10 and the minimum value 0.

Grammatical test results are known that of all respondents have an average score of 4.68 with a maximum value of 8 and a minimum value of 3.5. It is concluded that for the ability of grammatical respondents are still below the average. Vocabulary test results are known that of all respondents have an average score of 5.06 with a maximum value of 7 and a minimum value of 2. It is concluded that for the ability of vocabulary respondents are still in the average class. The results of spelling error test known that of all respondents have an average score of 5.81 with a maximum value of 8.5 and a minimum value of 3. It is concluded that for the ability of spelling error respondents are above the average, although only a little. The results of the reading test is known that of all respondents have an average score of 5.13 with a maximum value of 9.5 and a minimum value of 1.5. It is concluded that for the vocabulary ability of respondents are still in the average class.

Table 2. Descriptive Linguistic Factors Test Score

	Mean	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
Grammatical Test	4.6875	3.50 ^a	3.50	8.00
Vocabulary Test	5.0625	6.50	2.00	7.00
Spelling Error Test	5.8125	5.00 ^a	3.00	8.50
Reading Test	5.1250	1.50	1.50	9.50

The Influence of Linguistic Factors to Reading Comprehension

Table 3 is the result analysis influence linguistic factor on reading comprehension ability of Libyan students. In the table it can be seen that factor that affects reading comprehension ability is spelling. However, of the three most influential factors of reading comprehension is the spelling error with the largest beta value of 0.919.

Table 3. Influence of Linguistic Factors to Reading Comprehension

Coefficients ^a	Unstandardized		Standardized		t	Sig.
	B	Error Std.	Beta	Coefficients		
l(Constant)	-2.488	2.498			-.996	.376
Grammatical Test	-.806	.554	-.376		1.454	.220
Vocabulary Test	.737	.425	.399		1.736	.158
Spelling Error Test	1.318	.338	.919		3.904	.017

a. Dependent Variable: Reading Test

Discussion

Reading comprehension can be defined as the ability to understand the information in the text and interpret it appropriately. Grabe and Stoller (2002) define reading comprehension according to a series of necessary processes. The last but not least process is reading comprehension as a linguistic process. The role of grammar in reading L2 has not received much attention from researchers (Nassaji, 2007; Shiotsu & Weir, 2007). On the one hand, this may be due to the nature of reading as a receptive language skill to understanding text messages. Thus, knowledge of structures is considered to have little to do with textual understanding rather than other component levels such as vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading strategies. On the other hand, the dominance of Communicative Language Teaching for 30 years that gives almost exclusive emphasis on macrolanguage skills and communicative functions has decreased a little need to address the problem of grammatical roles in L2 readings (Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Han & D'Angelo, 2009). This is in accordance with the results of this study which states that grammatical does not affect reading comprehension.

There are pros and cons as far as the role of grammar in reading comprehension is concerned. The Structural Hypothesis Deficit (SDH) links the difficulty in obtaining readings of syntactic processing deficiencies (Stein, Cairns & Zurif, 1984). SDH claims that the absence of grammatical knowledge or lack of processing ability interferes with higher level text understanding. It also believes that syntactic awareness helps the reader in completing the task of understanding their readings effectively. Koda (2005) shows that all the difficulties experienced by L2 readers are caused by inadequate linguistic knowledge.

However, this is not universally accepted and the vote argues that L2 readers do not require grammatical knowledge for effective reading has also been heard (Alderson, 2000). Bernhardt (2000) reviews the study of adult literacy of the adult language and one of the conclusions he gets is that the understanding of second language text can not always be predicted by the syntactic complexity of the text. There are some fundamental issues that cause a real contradiction in the research findings. First, grammar is a thorny issue primarily because of the overlap between grammatical knowledge and vocabulary (Perfetti, 1999). Thus, a clear grammatical operationalization is essential to isolate the contribution made by grammar from vocabulary, if possible.

Secondly, the findings reported by the study have confirmed that various test formats measure different aspects of language skills (Kobayashi, 2002). In a study by Shiotsu and Weir (2007), examiner test scores on each of the vocabulary and subliminal tests of the TOEFL correlated with the value of their reading comprehension. The results show that grammar produces a greater variety of reading comprehension than vocabulary knowledge. Regarding the format available to test reading comprehension, Koda (2005) emphasizes that increasingly asserting the complexity of the construct of reading comprehension, there are various ways to conceptualize how it can be measured. Therefore, user testing should respect

the basic assumptions underlying alternative assessment techniques.

Third, it is widely believed that because less-successful readers pay immediate attention to the words and structures of the passage while more successful readers focus on global meaning and background knowledge, the former must perform well, if not better than those last, in shape - Discrete-point grammatical activity (Gascoigne, 2005). Kobayashi (2002) argues that a certain degree of ability is required to underlie the overall understanding of the text which, in turn, can confirm the concept of linguistic threshold. So far, the extent of grammatical knowledge required by good L2 readers remains uncertain in current research. As said by Shiotsu and Weir (2007), syntactic knowledge remains one of the decisive factors in the performance of reading comprehension of text especially for learners to some degree.

Fourth, different weights are given to the role of grammar in reading comprehension, depending on the researcher's perspective. For example, Kobayashi (2002) considers that surface-level features such as syntactic or lexical elements are very important although they can affect reading ability. Shiotsu and Weir (2007) also confirm the relative contribution of knowledge about syntax and vocabulary knowledge to L2 readings in two pilot studies in different contexts. There are also studies comparing the importance of grammar with other L2 reading components, such as background knowledge and vocabulary (Shiotsu & Weir, 2007). The Barnett (1986) study explores that relative position is made by grammar and vocabulary for L2 readings. Grammatical knowledge is shown to have a comparable effect on the understanding of L2 on vocabulary knowledge. A number of studies have been conducted to test the reading process in second-language students. Much of this thinking focuses on the competence and strategy of the reader, commonly associated with early and middle school students. Less common, however, has become an empirical study of the role of linguistic knowledge that helps the understanding of reading L2 and even in an

academic context. Much of the research that discusses the role of grammar in L2 readings explores this issue by measuring the correlation between participants' grammatical knowledge and their L2 readings. The ability to grasp while this research examines the role of grammatical science directly in the process of reading comprehension. To control the role of vocabulary and background knowledge to some extent, academic English texts related to the field of study of learners are used for classroom reading.

Based on the findings, it can be said that grammatical knowledge has no effect on better understanding and can not be used as an indicator of success in reading. Explicit knowledge should help them to realize the relationship between sentences (Alavi and Kaivanpanah, 2007). To read better and understand more quickly, it is advisable to increase grammatical knowledge through various ways such as focus on form and explicit instruction. Interactive programs to teach grammar and improve reading comprehension are suggested to generate significant reading comprehension improvements.

In general, teaching materials consisting of readings are substantially developed taking into account the syntactic complexity. The process of reading comprehension focuses more on the literal meaning of reading, ie reading and translating written material and making many attempts to increase the size of their vocabulary. This reading comprehension sometimes requires choosing a tense verb but does not invite to go further and create its own sentence. There is little recycling of grammatical points learned and practiced so that a grammatical point so emphasized in a reading is forgotten. Ultimately, the grammar is considered as a set of rules used to perform grammatical exercises and does not know the role of grammar in developing reading comprehension. In this study, grammar is not used as a tool to develop and facilitate reading comprehension.

Learn the grammar as memorizing set of rules and patterns. The results of this study do not indicate the importance of grammar in

helping understand the text in the reading process. Grammar is just as important, if not more than, as a vocabulary for them. The findings of this study are not in line with Sinclair (1991) and Hunston & Francis (1998). They consider lexis and grammar inseparable in nature and fully interdependent. Just as Willis (1993) notes that grammars and lexica are two ways to describe the same linguistic goals. That is, lexis consists of word-meaning patterns, while grammar consists of structure, and categorizes words according to the structure. He considered language learners to work together with grammars and lexicon. As Granger (2009), argues that in an applied perspective, it is better to see language as grammatical linguistics and lexical grammar.

Vocabulary knowledge and its role in reading comprehension has been one of the main areas of focus in second language research over the past twenty years. Both vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and this relationship is not one-way, because vocabulary knowledge can help learners to understand texts and written reading may contribute to the growth of vocabulary (Maher Salah, 2008). Of the three major components of language, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, the knowledge of words, because the building blocks of language have a very important role. Actually, without acknowledging the meaning of the words, it is impossible to produce or understand the language. Although sometimes the reader managed to solve code and read fluently, knowing the meaning of words contained in the text is very important for reading comprehension (Mehrpour, et al., 2011). The second language research (L2) has highlighted the importance of vocabulary knowledge.

Some researchers suggest that vocabulary is the most important factor in reading comprehension. Cooper (1984) describes vocabulary as a key ingredient for successful readings while other researchers argue that no textual understanding is possible, either in a person's or a foreign language's mother tongue, without understanding the vocabulary of the text

(Maher Salah, 2008). They maintain that when the percentage of unknown vocabulary in a particular text increases, it is likely to understand the text decreasing (Maher Salah, 2008). Laufer (1989), claims that readers whose vocabulary is insufficient to cover at least 95% of words in a passage will not guarantee understanding. This is different from the results in this study where the vocabulary has no effect on reading comprehension. It is possible that the reader himself considers the science of vocabulary to be the main obstacle to reading second language reading. Yorio (1971) surveyed second-language students, stating that vocabulary was their most important problem in reading comprehension. Many researchers emphasize the crucial effect of vocabulary knowledge on reading comprehension. Over the past ten to fifteen years, vocabulary has been considered a component of language skills, both in L1 and L2. Knowledge of words is now regarded as the most important factor in language proficiency and school success, in part because of its close relationship to textual understanding (Bernhardt, 2005; Wang, 2009).

Reading comprehension is very important in reading, the reader must be able to spell accurately so that the spelling does not negatively affect their fluency and understanding. The relationship between spelling development and reading comprehension has been shown to exist in individuals, beginning at a young age and in adulthood (Robinson, 1990). The correlation between spelling and reading comprehension is higher than the correlation between decoding speed and reading comprehension (Katzir, et al., 2006). This is in accordance with the results of this study that spelling effect on reading comprehension.

The relationship between spelling and reading is so close that researchers believe that learning about spelling tends to improve students' reading ability. Learning about spelling contributes to the development of reading, including the child's ability to pronounce words correctly and decode unknown words (Adams, 1990). Spelling contributes to the development

of reading by shaping the child's knowledge of phonemic awareness, strengthening their understanding of the alphabetic principles, and making visionary words more memorable (Ehri, 1989).

Spelling is an important component of reading. Spelling is an important and complex skill that involves many components, including visual memory, awareness of phonemes, as well as orthographic and morphophonemic knowledge (van Hell, Bosman, & Bartelings, 2003; Alber & Walshe, 2004). The perception of spelling practice is uninteresting, creating a potentially critical situation in the classroom, because learning difficulties in spelling performance can affect (a) clarity in writing, (b) verb morphology, (c) fluency of writing, (d) initial reading of development, e) perceptions of writing ability, and (f) written expression (Alber & Walshe, 2004; Boynton Hauerwas & Walker, 2003; Graham, Harris; & Fink-Chorzempa, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the above research, it can be concluded that the highest score is 5, where respondents always try to understand the reading. The results of linguistic factors are grammar that does not affect reading comprehension. Then, vocabulary has no effect on reading comprehension and spelling has an effect on reading comprehension. Of the three linguistic factors studied, the most influential factor on reading comprehension is spelling.

Important linguistic factors in reading comprehension especially the factors are studied in this study. To read better and understand more quickly, it is advisable to increase grammatical knowledge through various means such as focus on form and explicit instruction. Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and this relationship is not one-way, because vocabulary knowledge can help learners to understand texts and written reading can contribute to the growth of vocabulary. The relationship between spelling and reading is so close that researchers believe

that learning about spelling tends to improve students' reading ability. Spelling contributes to the development of readings by shaping the child's knowledge of phonemic awareness, strengthening their understanding of alphabetical principles, and making the visionary words more memorable.

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