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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Examining EFL Secondary Reading Curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan: A Review

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ABSTRACT

At the university level in Arab world in general and in Iraq in particular, many students faced a lot of problems with their studying because of their low English proficiency, students face problems while trying to understand texts written in English. Form six is last form before university and in spite of that the students doing incessant efforts to master the English language through studying the curriculum at the sixth year in Iraq, some students still complain that they have a lot of difficulties in achieving this goal. An analysis of the EFL secondary reading curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan (Form Six): Approaches to reading are considered as a challenge area of study. Thus, the aim of this study provides a comprehensive field survey on the various stages of the various reading approaches in EFL secondary reading curriculum. Next, the reading theories and reading strategies are given focus followed by some significant pointers to achieve effective reading. A critical review on EFL secondary reading curriculum is done at the end of the study.

Key words: Reading strategies, EFL secondary reading curriculum, low english proficiency

INTRODUCTION

When one examines the existing curriculum in Iraqi Kurdistan, there is a need to define the meaning of curriculum and look at the changes that had taken place in terms of content and teaching methodology. There is further a need to look at the body of knowledge that surrounds Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and relate it with teaching approaches. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the emphasis now is on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approaches. Closely related to Communicative Language Teaching are other concepts on learning and this includes Task-based Language Learning, Content-Based Instruction, Cooperative Language Learning, Audio-Lingual Method, Direct Method, The Structural Approach and Reading theories. Through Fig. 1 that provides a flowchart of the various stages in the review of the study.

MEANING OF CURRICULUM

Different people define curriculum differently. Pratt (1994) said that curriculum is the syllabus design for teaching and training. According to Kelly (1983) curriculum is all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, within or outside the school. In other words, curriculum has four components i.e., it is a body of knowledge to be transmitted; it is an attempt to achieve certain ends in students-product; it is a process and has praxis (Kelly, 1999).

People generally think that a curriculum is same as a syllabus. A syllabus usually will not sequence the topics in their order of importance to be studied. Curzon (1985) explains that some follow the traditional textbook approach of ordering the contents. Education in this sense is the process by which the contents are imparted through effective methods (Blenkin *et al.*, 1992). A curriculum is drawn based on formal guidelines set by the Ministry of Education. Based on the guidelines set on content, textbooks and teacher-student resources are produced. The Ministry of Education further suggests that appropriate teaching methodology be used to achieve the desired outcomes.

Changes in Iraqi Kurdistan Curriculum: The Iraq war which started on 20 March 2003 by an invasion force led by United States and officially ended by the withdrawal of military personnel in December 2011. The eight
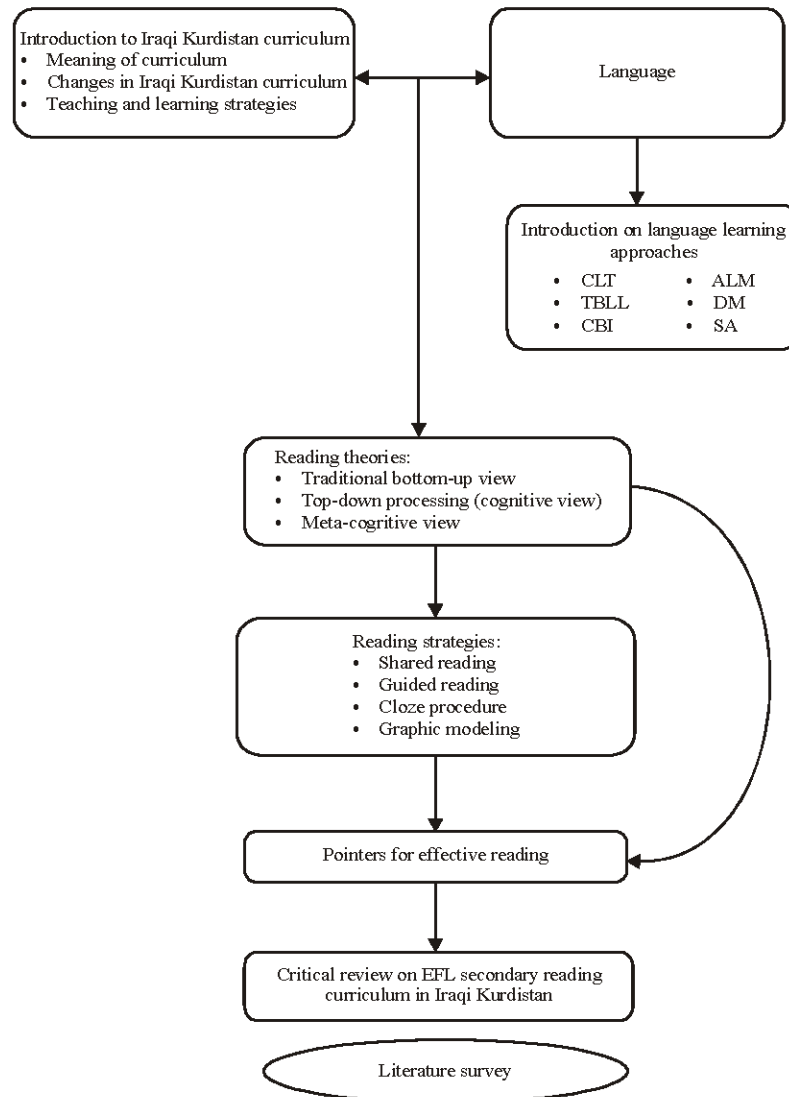
Fig. 1: A flowchart of the various stages in the review of the research

and half years of war had devastated much of the schools and colleges and now there was a need to rebuild the schools and its curriculum for both Baghdad and Kurdistan Regions of Iraq. A Curriculum Framework was therefore drawn by the Iraqi curriculum specialists and decision makers from both Baghdad and Kurdistan Regions. This large project was initiated by UNESCO Iraq Office in 2011 based on the support of Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, First Lady of Qatar and with the technical support of UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE). This framework new curriculum framework was necessary as the world is changing rapidly in terms of research methodologies, communication technologies, increasing need to learn to live together and acquire up-to-date knowledge. There was further a dire need to ensure that the Iraqi curriculum meets international standards and be in line with up-to-date teaching methodologies and provide Iraqi children with the same opportunities or better learning

opportunities as children in other countries. This framework represents the first footstep in creating a clear philosophy and vision in accomplishing learning objectives and subject content which incorporates the national Kurdish identity. In other words, the Iraqi Curriculum Framework was developed in line with the requirements of the Iraqi Educational Philosophy and the Iraqi National Education Strategy.

Changes had been made in the school curriculum so that every learner will have knowledge in various fields. This is in line with the changing environment in the field of education and industry and hence students have to acquire the latest technologies. Iraqi Curriculum Framework states that in order to flourish as a nation, students should be successful life-long learners. They should be able to operate confidently in a knowledge-based economy and a rapidly changing environment. They should be confident and productive individuals able to work with others and contribute to society.
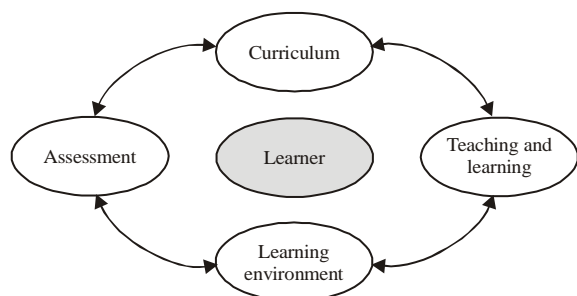
Fig. 2: Alignment of curriculum with teaching learning and assessment (UNESCO, 2012)

They should also be responsible citizens of Iraq who e proud of their rich heritage and able to take their place effectively in the world at large.

The Iraqi Curriculum Framework is the main regulatory document of the education system in Iraq. It constitutes the basis of and reference for all the other curriculum documents and materials, including syllabi, textbooks and other learning resources. At the same time, it represents the main reference for aligning curricula, teaching and learning strategies and assessment. This is shown diagrammatically in Fig. 2.

The Curriculum Framework replicates up-to-date global developments curriculum development and it links education to fulfilling one's educational needs, develops creative and constructive thinking, problem-solving, communication and decision making. The general framework has also taken into consideration regional sensitivities and needs especially for the Kurdish Region's specificities.

Figure 2 reflects the four different components in a curriculum. It shows the written, intended and official curriculum as outlined by the education ministry's specialists. Next, it shows the implemented curriculum where the actual teaching in classroom is taking place followed by the effective or achieved curriculum which reflects the students' outcome. Lastly, it reflects the hidden curriculum which consists of values and beliefs of individuals, groups and communities in Iraq. Figure 3 shows diagrammatically the different dimensions in a curriculum.

The Curriculum Framework is also a competency and standards-based curriculum model. Key competencies as outlined in the framework are the sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes that young people will need if the aims of the curriculum are to be achieved. It is significant at this point to mention the key competencies that students need to possess. These key competencies would include 'Thinking and Learning competencies, Personal and Social Competencies, Citizenship and Work Competencies'. In other words, students ought to develop their creative and critical thinking skills, develop their own decision making skills, develop self-confidence and appreciate their rich heritage. This diagram present the four anchor of this study that leads to the findings, first one is the framework of the syllabus, second is the implementing of this curriculum in the classroom and this
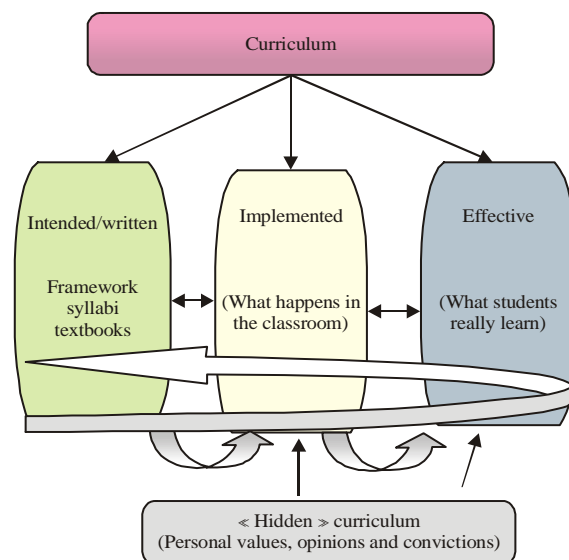

Fig. 3: Curriculum Dimensions (UNESCO, 2012)

will happen through classroom observation that the researcher going to do, third one is the effective step that help the researcher to know what is the students learn and that will be through teachers' interview and classroom observation. That last step is hidden which it the analysis and reflection of the researcher point of view.

Teaching and learning approaches: In terms of teaching and learning approaches, the Iraqi Curriculum Framework recommends that whole class teaching which the traditional approach is be used for imparting information and explaining new material. It further suggests that group work be used frequently as it gives students the chance to co-operate and take some responsibility of their own learning and have more opportunities for participation.

Open ended situations are suggested too where students have to cooperate with each other to solve problems. Other strategies outline in the Iraqi Curriculum Framework includes field-work, first-hand experiences, coaching and mentoring. Mentoring enables teachers to interact with individual students and give those help and advice to overcome problems and understand things they find challenging. The underpinning principles of teaching and learning as recommended by the Iraqi Curriculum Framework are learner-centeredness, interactive teaching and learning, connecting theory and practice as well as new things with the learner's experience and environment.

LANGUAGE

Language is essential for communicating with others in and out of school. Every student needs to develop his skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing so that they can gain employment. Literature is another component which portrays the experience of other people from other countries and it is

dramatically narrated. By reading literary texts, one not only has a sense of cultural identity but also learns to be creative in expressing thoughts and criticize texts. In relation to second language learning or teaching English as a foreign language, teachers need to give exposure to students on phonetics, difficult vocabulary, grammar structures, literature text, non-literary texts, rhetoric and debate and writing for different purposes including creative writing. Overall the teacher is recommended to use the communicative approach in teaching and learning. At the same time where necessary, old teaching methods which promotes learning need to be used. The language competencies outlined in the Iraqi Curriculum Framework include reading and writing, oral communication, listening and speaking and engaging in civil dialogue. In relation to personal and social competencies, students should be able to express their ideas and get self-confidence, have the capacity to listen and engage in a civil dialogue, have a critical approach top media reports and manage their emotions.

INTRODUCTION ON LANGUAGE LEARNING APPROACHES

Over the years, there had been many language learning approaches and methods used in attempting to improve the proficiency level of learners of English as a second language or as a foreign language. Some approaches stand on their own while others are a combination of different approaches and methods and are in fact a hybrid in nature. Even though the approaches have different characteristics and features, the final focus however is to improve English language teaching and learning. Page 34 of the Iraqi Curriculum Framework stipulates that in studying languages, students develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing that they will need to participate in society and employment.

In the two Regions of Baghdad and Kurdistan the underpinning principles of teaching and learning (Page 46 of Iraqi Curriculum Framework) states that learning should be learner-centered and there should be interactive teaching and learning using learner's experience and environment. The traditional method of whole class teaching together with group activities must to be used. The Framework does not state categorically that communicative approach or methodology should be used. In other words, old and new teaching approaches and methodologies need to be used and in fact it is a mixture of the old and new methods. Iraqi Curriculum Framework states that it is the responsibility of the teachers to find local contexts and examples to enhance students' learning. In relation to teaching and learning strategies, there is now a shift of emphasis from teaching to learning and towards more active and personalized learning.

The new Iraqi Curriculum Framework together with the Sunrise Teacher's and Student's Book appear to use communicative and at times structural approaches and methodologies in the design of the English language curriculum in Kurdistan from 2012 (www.sunrisekurdistan. com/sunrise-secondary). There is thus a dire need therefore to

examine both the teacher and student textbook to find out the extent of communicative strategies that are being used. In this literature review besides the reading theories, all teaching learning approaches, methodologies and techniques used in second language teaching and learning would be examined. The communicative approach to language teaching and learning would be reviewed first before other approaches and methodologies are examined.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches: Communicative language teaching started in England in the early 1960s to replace the structural method which was also called the situational method of language teaching. Richards and Schmidt (2002) stated that communicative language learning is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence and it seeks to make meaningful communication in all classroom activities. It stresses that the goal of language learning is interaction and problem solving through role play, pair work and group activities (Berns, 1984). In contrast to grammar style of teaching, communicative language teaching and learning is learner-centred (Nunan, 1988) and it makes use of real language. Resources too, play an important role in communicative language teaching. They provide the basis for communication among the learners. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), there are three basic types of material and these are text-based materials, task-based materials and regalia. Berns (1984) further elaborated that language is interaction and it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this regard, the study of language looks at the function of language in context. The functional use is both in terms of its linguistic context and its situational context or social context.

As regards the types of learning techniques and activities, communicative language teaching uses almost any activity that engages learners in authentic communication. One of the central ideas in the communicative approach is that students should attain communicative competence. Communicative Competence then is not only the ability to use grammatically correct sentences or utterances, but also to know when and where to use these utterances and to whom. It requires knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of the language (Canale and Swain, 1980). Classroom tasks that promote learners to ask for more information, seek more detail and use other resources to make meaning clear are considered communicative activities (Savignon, 1991).

Task-based Language Learning (TBLL): Another branch of communicative learning is Task-Based Instruction (TBI) which centers on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. Such tasks can include visiting a doctor, conducting an interview or calling customer service for help (Prabhu, 1987). In other words, learners play the role of problem solvers in task based learning activities (Crookes, 1986). Assessment is

primarily based on task rather than on accuracy of prescribed language forms. This makes TBLL especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence. Another pertinent point is that if communicative activities are based on reading texts, then there is collaboration and co-operation to mediate and discuss for text meaning. This process helps to build a mental representation of the text and develop critical analysis (Oxford *et al.*, 1989). Shehadeh (2005) affirmed through research that TBI encourages real-time communication and there is meaning centered learning.

There is now increasing evidence to show that there is a correlation between Task-Based Learning activities and development of reading ability in relation to teaching English as a second language teaching and learning. A significant contribution now is that the students' reading ability can be improved by using Task-Based Learning method (Yuliana, 2006).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI): More recently content-based instruction has become increasingly important in developing English proficiency. The CBI has close associations with project work and task-based learning. Basically CBI is focused on subject matter and students read on things that interest them (Brinton *et al.*, 1989). They learn about this subject using the language they are trying to learn, rather than their native language as a tool for developing knowledge and so they develop their linguistic ability in the target language. This appears to be a natural way of learning and this approach is somewhat similar to the way one learns one's first language. This is thought to be a more natural way of developing language ability and one that corresponds more to the way we originally learn our first language. CBI also builds on Socio-cognitive and socio-cultural theories are involved in CBI (Swain, 1985). In many ways CBI has CLT features as there is communicative interaction during group discussions and there is thinking involved. During the reading process learners' psychological aspects are brought in play (Bloor, 1985).

In a lesson where the teacher is using CBI, the class is divided into small groups and each group is asked to do a small research task on an area that interest them or given a passage that is related to their interest. Group members are given the liberty to refer to reference books or refer to relevant websites to source for further information. Once the research had been completed, the class is regrouped with students who had the same topic and now they share and compare information. Finally, a group representative does a presentation or a report to the whole class. The primary advantage is that it makes learning a language more interesting and motivating. It further helps students to develop valuable study skills such as note taking, summarizing and extracting key information from texts.

Cooperative Language Learning (CLL): Cooperative learning is a process where students with a variety of abilities, gender, nationalities and different level of social skills to carry out their learning process by working in small groups and helping each other (Slavin, 1988). In other words, cooperative language learning is centered on the optimum use of cooperative activities and interactions. Cooperative language learning fundamentals were pioneered Vygotski and Piaget (Saville-Troike, 2006). In CLL the weaker students are not separated but rather they work with one another to give support and raise the level of the class. Proponents of CLL strongly believe that learning can be best done in heterogeneous groups and all learners work and study collaboratively and cooperatively for one common goal. There is no place for working competitively against one another. In CLL, social interaction provides an environment for learning a language sufficiently with peers (Saville-Troike, 2006). The CLL is similar to Collaborative Learning (CL) as the socio-cultural aspects of language are used to foster interaction and language learning development.

CLL is learner-centered and focus is given to social interaction between members of a group in relation to language instruction. The learner centered feature provided through engaging communicative activities based on texts help to improve reading skills in second language teaching and learning (Lili, 2009). Slavin (1988) and Ghaith and El-Malak (2004) carried out researches to show that cooperative learning activities play a positive role in improving reading comprehension skills of learners.

Audio-Lingual Method (ALM): The audio-lingual method which is based on the behaviorist theory is one of the methods used in teaching a foreign language. This method is based on the theory that language learning is a question of habit formation. It has its origins in Skinner's principles of behavior theory i.e., stimulus response and reinforcement (Castagnaro, 2006). Since learning is thought to be a question of habit formation, errors are considered to be bad and to be avoided. Dialogue memorization and pattern practice is the common feature of ALM (Oebel, 2001). Students are asked to repeat and memorize a correct structure and expansion drills are used for difficult sentences. The language teacher provides students with a native-speaker-like model and students to mimic the model. Grammar is taught only by examples and this method assumes that second language learning is very much like first language learning. This method focuses on listening and speaking and the goal of language learning is to acquire the structures of the target language.

The audio-lingual method did make some great contributions to language teaching. It attempted to make language learning accessible to large groups of ordinary learners. It did not demand abstract reasoning to learn a language. Additionally, it stressed structural progression while previously methods had tended to be preoccupied with vocabulary and morphology (Daniel, 1983). The ALM had its drawbacks as students who used this method were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through 'Audio-lingualism' to real communication outside the classroom. It ignored communicative competence.

Direct method: This Direct Method (DM) was established in Germany and France around 1900. In this method teaching is done entirely in the target language. It is also called the Natural Method. The Direct method operates on the idea that second language learning must be an imitation of the first language learning as this is the natural way humans learn any language (Diller, 1978). The learner is not allowed to use his or her mother tongue. Lessons begin with a dialogue using a modern conversational style in the target language and correct pronunciation is emphasized. Material is first presented orally with actions or pictures. Grammar is taught inductively and rules are generalized from the practice and experience with the target language. Advanced students read literature for comprehension and pleasure. Literary texts are not analyzed grammatically. Culture is considered an important aspect of learning the language.

Structural Approach (SA): This approach has its roots in behaviorism (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). It is based on the belief that in the learning of a foreign language, mastery of structures is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary. This approach employs techniques of the Direct method of teaching but the use of translation is sometimes used and teaching is done in situations. It gives due importance to the forming of language habits (Brown, 2000). The learners should acquire the habit of arranging words in English standard sentence patterns through language drills. It regards speech as more important than reading and writing. Speech is the necessary means of fixing firmly all ground work. The stress is on the learning of essential structures of English. It puts more emphasis on pupil's activity than on the teacher's. It is the child who is the learner, so he must be actively involved in the teaching-learning process. This means that speech and oral work is the core of the structural way.

Alternative Approaches to Second Language Learning (AASLL): In addition to audio lingual, direct method, structural approach, cooperative language learning, task based learning, content based instruction and communicative approaches to second language learning, there are a number of other approaches and methods. These would include instruction, Total Physical Response, Community Language Learning, Multiple Intelligences, Competency-Based Language Learning and Project-Based Instruction.

READING THEORIES

In comparison to the four primary language skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing, reading is considered to be the most important and therefore the nature of how people learn to process textual information is extensively and intensively studied. Basically there are three types of reading theories which could be used for improving the techniques of teaching reading. By understanding these theories, teachers would be able to gain insight into the nature and process of reading and then design strategies to improve the reading proficiency of learners of English as a second language or as a foreign language. The three theories are namely the theory of top-down (cognitive view), bottom-up and meta-cognitive view. A detailed understanding of these theories would enhance the teaching of reading.

Traditional bottom-up view: Behaviorist psychology in the 1950s greatly influenced the bottom-up approach to reading. (Foder, 1995) explain that B.F. Skinner, a behaviorist developed the theory of operant conditioning where behavior is decided by its results through reinforcements or punishments. Behaviorist psychologists explain that learning is based upon "habit formation, brought about by the repeated association of a stimulus with a response" and language learning is characterized as a "response system that humans acquire through automatic conditioning processes". Behaviorist psychologists further state that language patterns that are reinforced by a community of language users will persist (Hadley, 1993). The concepts of behaviorism later became the foundation of the audio-lingual method which seeks to form habits through pattern practice.

Phonics is one bottom-up approach to reading which requires the learner to match letters with sounds in a defined sequence. It just treats reading as a word-recognition response to the stimuli of the printed words without explaining the processes that occur in the mind (Samuels and Kamil, 1988). These recognizing and recalling of print or visual stimulus are regarded as lower level reading skills. In other words, language is viewed as a code and the reader's main task is to identify graphemes and convert them into phonemes (Stanovich, 1980). Therefore, readers are regarded as submissive receivers of information in the text. Textbooks promoting ESL and EFL focus only on literal comprehension and give little or no importance to the reader's knowledge or experience on the subject matter.

Top-down processing (cognitive view): In the early 1960's, thoughts began to change and cognitive theory explains that our mind has the innate ability to learn. Meaningful learning occurs when new information is presented in a relevant context and is related to what the learner already knows, so that it can be easily integrated into one's existing cognitive structure. Hence, learning will not become permanent if it is not meaningful. This cognitive view of learning transformed the idea of how students learn to read (Smith, 1994). This implies that reading is not merely taking out meaning from a text but rather it is an active process of associating meaning in a text together with the prior experience that the learner brings to the very act of reading (Tierney and Pearson, 1994). The schema theory is another modified version of the top-down processing. It explains how one's background knowledge and experience (schema) work together in giving meaning to a text (Kucer, 1987). In the schema theory, the learner plays a significant role in the construction of meaning and therefore a reader's age, sex, knowledge and culture are important points

for teachers to consider in the selection of appropriate text. The appropriateness of a selected text can motivate a learner to read.

McDonough (1995) said that to a large extent a student in English as a Second Language (ESL) and a student in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) find it rather difficult to read texts that contain cultural elements of the target culture and therefore find it difficult to process the text in a top-down manner. If learners do not have the required schema in relation to the text, then it is vital for the teacher to build the necessary background knowledge (Carrell *et al.*, 1988). Building the required schema can be done during the pre-reading activity.

Meta-cognitive view: Block (1992) affirmed that meta-cognition involves the thinking process that goes on in one's mind while one is reading. He talks about a three stage process that occurs especially before reading while reading and after reading. Before reading, the reader makes out type of text and the aim of reading. During the while reading stage, the reader identifies the main topic sentence, its supporting details and try to predict what comes next. In the last stage, the reader tries to make a summary, draw conclusions and make inferences of the entire text.

READING STRATEGIES

At Six level in Iraq, there is a need for secondary school students to understand sophisticated text. There is also a need to expose students to different types of text which includes wordless books, predictable text, controlled high-frequency books, decodable text, authentic text and easy-to-read text (Cooper and Kiger, 2001). Just recalling basic details is inadequate this kind of comprehension represents low level of thinking on the hierarchy of thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy or Bareett's Taxonomy. In order to accomplish high level of understanding, the learner has to apply higher order thinking skills like inference, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff under its 'Guidance on the Teaching of higher-order reading skills' has come out with a number of reading strategies that can develop higher-order reading skills (www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills). These strategies involves top down processing and meta-cognitive view processing in the construction of meaning.

Shared reading: Shared reading is a powerful strategy that can help learners to develop their reading skills in a supportive, whole-class context whilst simultaneously extending their subject knowledge. In shared reading, the teacher's role is to make clear how good readers approach a text by modeling the process and demonstrating the ways an effective reader thinks as they read a text, so that learners can follow this example. This is done in a whole class where everyone can see the text on a screen. The teacher is the reader and he or she can support the learners to appreciate material that may be slightly harder than that which they could read on their own. Learners can concentrate on the meaning without having to decode every word for themselves. The teacher acts as model, demonstrator and instructor, leading a discussion about the interpretation of the text. The learners listen to the text read aloud, join in and follow the reading and learn from the teacher's example of analyzing the text. Shared reading is a powerful strategy that can help learners to develop their reading skills in a supportive, whole-class context, whilst simultaneously extending their subject knowledge.

Guided reading: In guided reading the teacher is consciously teaching reading to small group of learners, acting as the expert who guides the learner through the text. By working together, assimilating the guidance given to each member of the group, the learners can also learn collaboratively with and from each other, discussing texts and putting their heads together to find information. During the guided reading, the teacher can show ways of clarifying, (What does ...mean?), predicting (What might the writer tell us next?), asking questions (Why does ...happen?) and summarizing (What's the main idea here? What's this passage about?). These two strategies namely shared and guided reading are important elements of the active and specific teaching of reading that are often absent from classrooms. The differences of shared reading and guided reading are tabulated in Table 1.

Cloze procedure: The cloze procedure strategy is a useful strategy in the teaching of language teaching and in the teaching and for the assessment of reading comprehension. It can also be a great help in the development of higher-order reading skills as it forces the reader to look at words in context. In order to implement develop cloze procedure, in pairs the teacher has to ask group members to work through a given cloze procedure passage. Next, the teacher ensures that the word choices are discussed with their partner and the students have to comprehend the strategy used in coming to a decision about which word to choose. By using this strategy, students would be able to understand how contextual clues enable them to predict the appropriate word. Teachers can explain that semantic cues which give information about the meaning or idea and with which the word is associated. Furthermore, syntactic or grammatical cues that help the reader to decide what kind of word is appropriate e.g. noun, verb, adjective, etc.

Graphic modeling: In this reading strategy, group members take part in sequencing exercises which require them to place the events of a narrative or the stages of a process in chronological or logical order in a flow chart or in a storyboard. Presenting facts from a text in a visual form is a useful strategy for checking a learner understands of what they have read.

Interpreting the evidence: In this reading strategy, the teacher has to explore way to help learners to distinguishing

Table 1: Differences between shared reading and guided reading, (Adapted from Introduction to English: Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)

Shared Reading	Guided Reading
Teacher models effective reading: reads the line, between the lines and beyond the lines of the text, extracting meaning and interpreting it in relation to learners' experiences and knowledge	Individual learners read the text to themselves and read aloud to the teacher and the group using strategies they know. The teacher reinforces and extends these strategies, helping learners to understand the text fully
Main focus is on finding meaning by interrogating the text, paying close attention to the words, the sentence structures and the punctuation	The focus is on developing and practicing strategies to cope with unfamiliar text. For example the use of contextual clues to infer meaning. Teaching tailored to specific needs of the group
Most of the reading is oral. Predictions about the text that follows may be made; predictions will be confirmed or rejected as reading continues	Some of the reading is silent as learners tackle a text for themselves and then attempt to read it aloud supported by teachers and peers
Teacher is prepared to do most of the reading and learners are encouraged to come in and out of the reading as they can. Some in the group will read the text with the teacher; others will read very little of the text on their own but will be attending to the text and learning	Learners will do most of the reading, supported by the teacher
Will focus on both new, unfamiliar texts and familiar texts. Shared reading of a new text will have different purposes from shared reading of familiar texts. Each time a text is revisited, the teacher will have a new or additional purpose	Will generally focus on new, unseen text. Learners will test their reading strategies on unfamiliar text, make predictions, check them and either confirm or reject them. Guided reading of familiar texts will have different purposes
Will usually involve a large mixed-ability group/class	Will usually involve a group of learners with similar ability/needs. Each
The teacher and learners work cooperatively to develop meaning from the text	learner is helped to read and understand the text independently, though the rest of the group will be involved. The rest of the class works silently on another task

between fact and opinion and be awareness of the writer's bias. This is done by examining the primary evidence on what is known or what actually happened and the writer's point of view. In order to teach this strategy, students work in pairs and they underline the facts in one color and use a different color to underline any statement which is an opinion. Get students to rewrite the factual content of the passage and subsequently ask them to summarize the writer's viewpoint. Then, with the whole group compare the students' findings.

POINTERS FOR EFFECTIVE READING

Before reading, the teachers need to ensure that the reading passage contain vocabulary and grammar structures that are familiar to the reader or learner. If the level of vocabulary is difficult, then the teacher could introduce other easier words or synonyms to make the text within scope of comprehension. In addition, the teachers need to ensure that the chosen passage is appropriate in terms of age, interest and culture. During the reading stage, encourage the readers to take notes, predict, evaluate the text using the reader's own experience. During the after reading stage, activities should be designed to verify students' comprehension and subsequently lead readers to a deeper analysis of the text (Barnett, 1988). It would be a good idea to have a group discussion to assist learners to concentrate on information that learners did not understand.

CRITICAL REVIEW ON EFL SECONDARY READING CURRICULUM IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

It is significant for teachers to use these reading strategies mentioned above to develop higher thinking skills among Six Form students in the Regions of Baghdad and Kurdistan. In order to ensure that the teachers in upper secondary schools in Kurdistan are moving in the right direction, there is a need to carry out further study on the types of reading tasks that are given by teachers in relation to the EFL secondary reading curriculum. There is further a need to examine the types and length of reading passages used in the classroom and what levels of cognitive demand of the reading tasks are reflected EFL secondary reading curriculum in Iraq. The Sunrise Teacher's and Student's Book which use communicative and structural approaches need to be examined and scrutinized. Form Six students in Kurdistan have to be observed and their feedback documented. Furthermore, the teachers who teach form Six students in Kurdistan have to be interviewed as well as observed.

The teacher's Edition of Sunrise 12 is specifically written to meet the needs of students in their final year of secondary education in Kurdistan. The literary reader which is based on Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson is intended to increase students' extensive reading skills and to introduce them to the habit of reading for pleasure. Special mention is made about reading aloud in Sunrise 12. Students are to practice saying aloud conversations and dialogues given in Sunrise 12. The primary focus of reading aloud is give further practice in pronunciation and intonation. The reading passages are used only for developing reading skills such as reading for gist and locating specific information. Much time is devoted to the teaching of grammar. The structural and situational methods are used to teach grammar. Though the syllabus has communicative intent, grammar forms and structures are used in explanations given by the teacher.

Types of reading tasks are usually related to reading abilities of the students (Beck and McKeown, 2001). In addition, reading tasks may also indicate students' cognitive abilities in foreign language reading comprehension (Alderson and Lukmani, 1989). This question was answered

A **READ, DO AND SPEAK**

1 Say where you think the texts come from.

a) a dictionary   b) an encyclopedia   c) a guidebook   d) a school history book

Stonehenge is an ancient stone circle roughly 4,500 years old that stands 80 miles west of London in southern England. The 80 huge, rectangular blocks of stone stand up to 7.5 metres high, they weigh between 20 and 50 tonnes, and some of them were brought from many miles away. They are placed in an inner group and an outer group, that is circular in shape, with a diameter of 30 metres. Stonehenge was constructed by a long-forgotten people, but we believe that it was used for festivals on the shortest and the longest days of the year. Today, it is still visited by thousands as the sun rises each mid-summer's day.

The Great Pyramid of Khufu is the oldest and largest of the Pyramids, which stand near Egypt's capital, Cairo. It was built approximately 4,600 years ago by Khufu, one of the great Pharaohs.

It stands on a square base that measures 230 by 230 metres, a total area of almost 53,000 square metres, and its triangular sides rise to a height of 146 metres. It contains 2.5 million stone blocks, each with a weight of 2.5 tonnes. The whole structure has a volume of 2.352 million cubic metres. It is still known around the world as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Fig. 4: Sample reading passage from sunrise 12 student's book page 20

by examining the Sunrise 12 Student's Book. The sample reading passage was also examined to find out if higher order skills are taught in Year 12.

The reading passage given above is a historical narration. Students are asked to read the above passage but strangely the two comprehension questions that were asked are from the bottom-up category which reflects low level reading skills. The passage itself was not challenging for students in Form Six. Only two low level comprehension questions were asked and the passage was mostly to teach grammar. Another sample reading passage is exhibited below to see if the type of reading text is suitable and relevant. Figure 4 depicts the reading passage found on page 22 of the Student's Book. The passage was slightly longer and appropriate. There are more comprehension questions but sadly the comprehension questions are still of low level.

The purpose of the present study is to find if second language reading instruction reflected in the Iraq Form Six Secondary Curriculum prepares students for tertiary reading. It is suggested that First language (Ll) reading studies may benefit from reading instruction that resembles the reading demand at university level (Nist and Kirby, 1986). For example, exposing students to reading expository texts might map with the type of texts they may frequently encounter at the tertiary level (Carrell, 1985).

At the tertiary level, students need to have the required level of reading skills that will enable them to achieve information literacy for academic success (Moore *et al.*, 1999).

Therefore, the levels of cognitive demand of the reading tasks in the Sunrise 12 Student's Book were analyzed. Marzano's Cognitive System taxonomy (Marzano, 2000) was used as they describe the cognitive skills that students need to have in order to process information successfully at various levels of cognitive demand. This means that students need to be equipped with both the lower cognitive skills as well as the higher order cognitive skills such as the ability to analyze and utilize information learned. The analysis once again shows that the comprehension questions do not reflect testing of higher order skills (Fig. 5, 6 and 7).

Literature survey on what other researchers say about the development of reading skills: The ten research studies on reading and their related methodologies used had been tabulated and the contributions and findings of each study are given in Table 2.

A detailed analysis of five of the above research studies are discussed in more detail below.

Sa-ngiamwibool (2012): Stern (1992) said that learner awareness is the main factor for language development and this can be done through project work teaching by allowing EFL learners chance to devise responses relevant to their experience in project work, especially ESL projects. In group dynamics, (Williams and Burden, 1997) suggest that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is effective for developing communication skills which are needed for

2 Say what these numbers from the texts refer to.

Dimensions: 7.5 metres   30 metres   230 metres   almost 53,000 square metres
2.352 million cubic metres

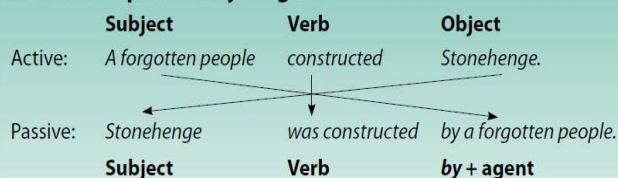Other numbers and measurements: 4,500 years   80   50 tonnes   2.5 million   2.5 tonnes

B GRAMMAR

1 Look.

2 Put this sentence into the active. Explain why the writer preferred to use the passive.

Some of the stones were brought from many miles away.

Active and passive; *by* + agent

	Subject	Verb	Object
Active:	*A forgotten people*	*constructed*	*Stonehenge.*
Passive:	*Stonehenge*	*was constructed*	*by a forgotten people.*
	Subject	**Verb**	***by* + agent**

3 Explain why one sentence includes *by* + agent and the other does not.

It was built approximately 4,600 years ago by Khufu, one of the great Pharaohs.

It is still known around the world as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

C SPEAK

Talk about modern buildings, roads, dams or other construction projects in your area. Say anything you know about them, e.g. when / where / why they were built / constructed / repaired – and who they were built by.

Activity Book Unit 3 pages 18–19 Activities 1–2

Fig. 5: Comprehension questions 1

| Home | About Erbil Citadel | Saving the Citadel | Maps | Contact Us |

Erbil's ancient Citadel stands at the centre of this fast-growing city. Its high walls ring the edge of a mound that already reaches up 30 metres above the modern city below. It can be seen clearly for miles, and it is one of the most dramatic sights anywhere in the Middle East – one that was certainly welcome to the Silk Road merchants who travelled this way for 1,500 years.

It is also one of the most important places in the Middle East. It is said that human beings have lived here continuously for up to 8,000 years – longer than anywhere else in the world. Today, the Citadel contains approximately 500 houses and other buildings, and many of these are wonderful examples of traditional architecture and construction techniques. But much older treasures almost certainly lie deep in the mound below.

This mound is almost perfectly circular. It has an average diameter of approximately 400 metres, and it covers an area of 102,000 square metres. The mound has never been properly investigated by archaeologists, but it is thought that the remains of many cities lie one below another. Some of the most important developments in human history were made in this region by early civilizations like theirs – the start of farming, for example, and the invention of writing. As a result, the mound may hold important secrets about our ancient human past – secrets that are soon going to be discovered!

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In recent times, there has sadly been a lot of damage to the Citadel, which is now nearly empty. Almost all
20 the buildings need urgent repairs and many may soon collapse. It is also believed that the archaeological remains below have been seriously damaged by water. As a result, action is being taken to protect this ancient site and also to give it new life. A Government organization (*HCECR) has been set up, and a detailed conservation and development plan has been prepared with the help of **UNESCO. Both bodies agree that the Citadel must not be allowed to die. It is also being considered for UNESCO's list of World
25 Heritage sites, which includes, for example, the Pyramids and Stonehenge. In early 2010, a $13-million programme of conservation and repairs was agreed with UNESCO, and these plans are now being carried out. In addition to the archaeological and conservation projects, museums, libraries, restaurants, cafes, artists' studios and craft workshops are also going to be provided. Soon, the ancient heart of Erbil is going to be brought back to life again!

Fig. 6: Second reading passage on Erbil's ancient citadel

Table 2: Comments on reading strategies and methods by researchers

Authors	Title of Article	Contribution
Sa-ngiamwibool (2012)	Raising learner awareness of local wisdom in tour-related project teaching in CONAPLIN JOURNAL Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 1 No. 2 (January 2012)	The researcher found that tour related projects using CLT methodology help groups to exchange ideas and promote learner awareness and thereby improve their English proficiency
Sa-ngiamwibool (2011)	The Effects of Different Types of Reading Instructions on Executive Summary Writing and Critical Thinking in International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences- April 2011	The purpose of this study was to empirically examine the effects of the different types of reading instructions - reading with task directions to notice main ideas, reading with questions, reading with key words, and reading with a vocabulary activity and reading with information-sharing activity - on executive summary writing and critical thinking
Kareem (2009)	A Survey Study of the Syllabuses of English used in Iraq (1873 - 2003) in Journal of Research Diyala humanity Volume 34, 2009, pp 36-50	This survey urges that the English language curriculum in Iraq should be changed and no one syllabus should be used for more than ten years. This writer recommends that the CLT methodology should be in the new curriculum as the benefits are many
Mekheimer (2011)	Impact of the Target Culture on Foreign Language Learning: A Case Study in *Cross-cultural Communication* Vol.7 No.1, 2011	Studies by Mekheimer show that there is a close link between the target culture and second language learning/EFL. Hence the reading passages used should reflect the culture of the target language
Sidek (2012)	EFL Textbook Analysis in Language and Literacy Volume 14, Issue 3, 2012 pg27	His study revealed that the reading passages in the Malaysian EFL upper secondary textbook were mostly narrative. In order to develop higher order reading skills, there is a need to include more reading which are expository in nature
Al-Alwan (2008)	The Problems Faced by Sixth-Year Preparatory School Pupils in English as a Result of the Application of the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT) in this Stage in Adab Al-Kufa Journal-Issue (1)	This study aims to investigate the real problems that the students of sixth-year preparatory schools in Iraq faced in learning the new material based on the communicative language approach
Slavin and Cheung (2003)	Effective programs for English language learners: A best-evidence synthesis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.	A bilingual approach where reading is taught in both the native language and English at the same time is beneficial to students
Rababah (2001)	Communication problems facing Arab learners of English: A personal perspective in TEFL Web Journal Volume 2 No 1 2003	This study deals with the communication problems faced by Arab learners of English in general, and the problems specific to Arab world university English language majors/graduates The results of their research showed that even weak learners were good at transmitting comprehensible and successful messages. This is probably a result of the use of communication strategies
Abbas (2012)	"Iraq Opportunities": The New National Curriculum and Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Iraqi Primary Schools in IAMURE: International Journal of Education Curriculum Section Vol. 2 March 2012.	This study aims to investigate some of the problems associated with the implementation of this new curriculum, its nature, an understanding of the curriculum principles and philosophies, and its constituents in the Iraqi contexts. The study highlighted the importance of critical discussion in the curriculum planning process.
Lie (2007)	Education Policy and EFL Curriculum in Indonesia: Between the Commitment to Competence and the Quest for Higher Test Scores in TEFLIN Journal: A publication on the teaching and learning of English, Vol 18, No. 1 (2007).	This research attempts to describe the gap between the commitment to competence as promised in the 2004 Curriculum and the English classroom practices and look into the possibilities of how such an organization as TEFLIN may help shape the language policy and practices.
Hosoki (2011)	English Language education in Japan: Transition and challenges	This study briefly examines the history of English language education in Japan, elaborates on the present situation and controversial issues and suggested several points of improvement for English language education in Japan

promoting group dynamics. In other words, CLT method is a good way to promote group dynamics. Sa-ngiamwibool (2002) in his study explains that getting involved in tour related projects using CLT methodology of teaching and learning help students in their group to read more and exchange ideas. In this research a class is divided into a number of groups and each group is given a task based on local festivals such as Songkran Festival, folk dances, handicraft, traditional Thai food and dessert. The results of the study revealed that all groups interacted well. Furthermore, their theme-centered learning created learner-contributed content materials and covertly improved their English proficiency.

Sa-ngiamwibool (2011) further explains that reading passages followed with appropriate questions would help in the development of critical thinking.

Kareem (2009): Prior to 1970, the Oxford English Course for Iraq was used and classroom teaching then was based on the Grammar translational method. From 1970 onwards however book-1-of the New English Course for Iraq (NECI) was first put in use and it was designed on the structural approach and used the audio-lingual method" (Al-Jumaily, 2002). Carel and Tom English Readers and language activity books were introduced for the first time. The readers were limited to reading and answering simple comprehension questions while

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1:      True or false? Correct the false statement
i:      Citadel walls go round the whole of Erbil
ii:     Today's Citadel was built 8,000 years ago
iii:    Volume of the Citadel mound is roughly three millon cubic meters
iv:     Citadel contains lots of buried money
v:      HCECR is part of UNSCO
vi:     Only archaeological work at the Citadel is planned
2:      Explain in your own words
i:      line 6: ...- one that was certainly welcome
ii:     line 23: ... both bodies agree
iii:    line 24: ... must not be allowed to die
```

Fig. 7: Comprehension questions

the language book of NECI had many activities on structure and grammar like dialogues, pronunciation, spelling and writing a paragraph (Al-Hamash and Hammo, 1990). It was found that NECI textbooks were continuously modified and politicized. NECI series had been used in teaching English for over thirty years. In 2003, a new syllabus called "Rafidain English Course for Iraq'' using the communicative approach was successfully implemented in Iraq (Darwesh *et al.*, 2002). Kareem (2009) argues that each new syllabus should not be used for more than ten years Mekheimer (2011).

It was found that there is a close relationship between culture and language (Tochon, 2009). Culture further affects the meanings of words in a language (Perlovsky, 2009). Studies done by Mekheimer (2011) show that culture also affect the attitudes of people who are learning a language. Therefore, according to Citron (1995), foreign or second language learning must not be separated from acculturation. There is a need therefore to promote intra-curricular cultural awareness to encourage positive attitudes towards the learning of English. In other words, it is important for foreign language classroom teachers to use reading passages that reflect features of the target culture (Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004). Studies done in Saudi Arabia (Zaid, 2011; Mekheimer, 2011) reveal that there is the subjective resistance to the target language culture.

Sidek (2012): Sidek (2012) made a research study on how well Malaysian EFL Secondary Curriculum prepares Form Six students for tertiary reading in English. He made a study based on the English textbook used in secondary schools. The EFL textbook was analyzed in detail and it examined the length and type of passages used. Findings from this study show that mostly narrative passages and to a lesser extent expository texts were used. A notable finding was that the texts used were below grade-level. Koda (2005) explained that generally expository texts are used for sharing of knowledge and the content is more varied (Bakken *et al.*, 1997). In addition, the text structures reflect cause and effect or compare and contrast features (Meyer and Freedle, 1984). This implies that if less expository texts are used as reading comprehension passages, it would affect the development of higher order reading skills. Another pertinent skill that expository texts develop is discourse processing skills. A study on students' awareness on the structure of text used in undergraduate programs was done by Ting and Tee (2008). They discovered that most of the undergraduate were unfamiliar with texts discourse and they had no exposure at secondary level. Further studies undertaken by (Kaur and Thiyagarah, 1999) reveal that EFL students at public higher institutions in Malaysia indicated that almost 50% of the respondents rated their EFL reading comprehension ability as not being very efficient when reading materials in English were used. In relation to measurement of text length of the reading passages used in Form six classes Leslie and Caldwell (2004) taxonomy was used. According to this taxonomy, it was found that expository passages fit the grade level for Form six while narrative passages were below the stipulated grade level.

Slavin and Cheung (2003) theory: Paired bilingual models teach children to read in both English and their native language at different time periods each day. After a few years as students develop their skills to succeed in English, their native language reading instructions are stopped (Willig, 1985). This method is called alternative immersion. Evidence from this study show that that children's reading proficiency in their native language is a strong forecaster of their eventual English reading achievement (Garcia, 2000) and bilingualism itself does not hinder with achievement in either language (Yeung *et al.*, 2000). More studies however need to be done to find out if bilingualism helps in enhancing English reading skills.

The researchers mentioned in the Table 2 had made serious study on the learning of English and the strategies used in enhancing reading and improving proficiency skills in a general sense. Sa-ngiamwibool (2012) said that communicative language teaching can be effectively taught through ESL projects while v explained that the language book of NECI (New English Course for Iraq) had many activities on structure and grammar like dialogues, pronunciation, spelling and writing a paragraph. Sa-ngiamwibool (2011) in another study had affirmed that reading passages followed with appropriate questions would help in the development of higher order critical thinking skills.

Other researchers talked about incorporating reading passages that reflected the culture of the target language to promote intra-curricular cultural awareness to encourage positive attitudes towards the learning of English (Mekheimer, 2011). Sidek (2012) on the other hand examined the length and type of passages used in the Malaysian English curriculum.

Other researchers like (Ting and Tee, 2008) discovered that most of the undergraduates in universities in Malaysia were unfamiliar with texts discourse and they had no exposure at secondary level.

Slavin and Cheung (2003) suggested that paired bilingual models to teach reading. The other researchers mentioned in the table above talked about English classroom practices, effective methods in managing the classroom, education system in Iraq, history of English language education in Japan and problems faced by students in learning based on the communicative language approach studied by Hosoki (2011). Research studies done by Rababah (2001) reflect that even weak learners were good at transmitting comprehensible and successful messages. This researcher says that this is probably the result of the use of communication strategies. This finding shows the importance of using appropriate communication strategies in enhancing EFL teaching and learning.

Reading skills are vital in enhancing English Language proficiency. None of the researchers talked about the implementation of the reading curriculum in detail or effective reading strategies that are utilized in Iraq to promote and develop higher order thinking skills. Similarly, none of the researchers mentioned the type of reading passages used at Form Six level in Kurdistan Iraq. Are the reading passages expository or narrative in nature? Are reading passages according to the stipulated grade level and fulfill (Leslie and Caldwell, 2004) taxonomy? Are the existing readings skills of present Form Six students in Kurdistan Iraq enable them to cope with tertiary education? A myriad of questions on developing reading skills need to be asked. A piece of research in this direction is therefore necessary and need to be undertaken by the researcher.

CONCLUSION

Many aspects on teaching approaches were examined and it can be concluded that the communicative way of teaching is one of the best methods in relation to teaching English as a foreign language or English as a Second Language. Group work is emphasized so that students can make use of the language in class. Shared reading and Guided reading can used by teachers to develop reading skills. Group work is reflected in the Sunrise 12 textbook but the methodology is grossly missing. Reading strategies including top down and bottom up reading processing skills have been discussed in detail in this study but when the Sunrise 12 Teacher's Book was examined, no reading strategies were focused. The higher order reading skills were also not taught in a systematic manner and it appears that Form Six Iraq Secondary students have not been exposed to higher order thinking skills. Are the Form Six Iraq Secondary school teachers facing any sort of difficulty in teaching the communicative method of teaching? A qualitative study is vital to seek answers to many questions in relation to development of reading skills in Kurdistan Iraq.

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