

Improving the Students' Reading Ability via Eclectic Method

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Abstract

Reading literacy is not only a foundation of basic learning but also a pre requisite for successful participation in most areas of student's life. The future success of students lies in the ability to read fluently and understand what is read. Studies have showed that at least one out of five students has significant difficulty in reading as a result of poor reading ability, they commit more mistakes. This study examined the effectiveness of eclectic method on reading ability. The researcher has adopted descriptive analytical method via questionnaire and interview as main tools for gathering the data of the study. The sample of the study is consisted of 104 English language teachers. The data yield from the questionnaire has been computationally processed with SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) program to check the truth of the hypotheses of the study. The results of the questionnaire have shown that eclectic method has positive effect on improving students reading ability.

Keyword: Improve, reading ability, eclectic method, and Secondary school.

1. Introduction

It has been generally observed that English has become the medium of all relevant social interactions and the ability to use English effectively is considered an absolute essential for honorable Existence (Khattak, et al 2011) in the long history of English teaching, people have tried various approaches to facilitate language learning. With the increasing development of economy, people throughout the world get in touch with each other more frequently than ever. As a result, learning a foreign language has become more and more important especially English which is almost the international language. In the history of teaching profession several teaching methods strategies have been developed by renowned experts and scholars in education which have been proven effective as compared to traditional teaching method.

The eclectic approach was proposed as a reaction to the profusion of teaching methods in the 1970s and 1980s and the inflexibility often found in the application of these methods. The idea of choosing from different methods to suit for one's teaching purposes and situations is not a new one. For example, memorandum on the teaching of modern language published in 1929 on the basis of a British study by incorporated association of assistant masters in secondary schools recommended the eclectic "compromise method" as a solution to the language teaching. Eclectic method of teaching and learning is an activity, in which teachers can easily adapt to the needs of teaching so that teaching objective or goals can be achieved.

According to main proponent of the eclectic approach Rivers (1981) an eclectic approach allows language teachers "to absorb the best techniques of all the well-known language teaching methods into their classroom procedure using them for the purposes for which they are most appropriate". This is necessary and important because teachers faced with the daily task of helping students to learn a new language cannot afford the luxury of complete dedication to each new method or approach that comes into vogue "the main criticism of the eclecticism is that" it does not offer any guidance on what basis and by what principles aspects of different methods can be selected and combined.

Eclectic means not following any one system, but selecting and using what are considered the best elements of all systems. Remedial students are taught by whatever means seen most suitable to their individual needs.

An eclectic method needs not be composed of all possible approaches, methods, techniques and variations. A teacher may choose two or three approaches that provide broad-range remedial instruction that can offer a basis for teaching almost any aspect of reading such as sight words recognition, words analysis, use of context clues, comprehension- fluency and so on.

Aims and scope of the study

This study aims to investigate the improvement of secondary school students' reading ability via the use of eclectic method. The scope of the study is limited to third year students who encountered problems in reading skill. The study was carried out in Sudan University of science and technology (SUST) Khartoum state, Sudan in the academic year 2018 – 2019. The sample of the questionnaire is composed of 104 teachers.

2. Literature Review

Definition of eclectic method

Kumar (2010:3:1) notes that the eclectic method is a combination of different methods of teaching and learning approaches. It can also be viewed as principled eclecticism implying that the approach is characteristically desirable, coherent and pluralistic to language teaching. It also involves the use of a variety of language learning activities which are mostly different characteristically and may be motivated by different underlying assumptions of language

teaching) Al Hamash 1985; Larsen –Freeman 2000; Mellow 2000, 2000). Gao (2011) states that principled eclecticism challenges the teacher to ensure that every decision about classroom instruction and activities is based on a thorough and holistic understanding of all learning theories and related pedagogies, terms of the purpose and context of language teaching and learning, the needs of the learners, materials available, how language is learnt and what teaching is all. In addition, Gao (2011:1) describe the eclectic approach as not a concrete, single method, but a method, which combines listening, speaking, reading, and writing and includes some practice in the classroom. He adds that the current preferred teaching methods are an integration of Grammar translation, structural method and CLT and advises teachers to take advantage of all other methods whilst avoiding their disadvantages. Wali (2009:40) summarizes this proposition when he stated the following:

- One of the premises of eclecticism is that teaching should serve learners not methods. Thus, teachers should feel free in choosing techniques and procedures inside the classroom. These are no ideal approach in language learning. Each one has its merits and demerits. There is no royalty to certain methods. Teachers should know that they have the right to choose the best methods and techniques in any method according to learner's needs and learning situation. Teachers can adopt a flexible method and technique so as to achieve their goals. They may choose whatever works best at a particular time in a particular situation.

To state that methods should serve learners and not methods means those teachers should focus on helping learners to learn and not on fulfilling the prescriptions of the methods. When teaching, the goal is learning and that learners should grasp the content. Cognizant that different learners learn differently and have different references on those factors and methods promote effective learning, the teachers should consider learner characteristics before choosing the method/s of teaching. In other words, methods should respond to the needs of the learners and not learners responding to the needs or demands of the methods. It is common knowledge that each individual method has suggestions on what learning and teaching is and how therefore, teachers should teach. The problem is that the suggestions made by individual methods are bracket prescriptions which do not consider the actual differences which exist from classroom to classroom and from one learning context to the other.

According to Weidman(2001), the justification for the use of eclecticism as an approach to language of critical pedagogy. Kunaravavelu (2006) actually warns against relying on methods in their specifications because they do not provide all solutions to language teaching. She instead proposes a post methodic approach to language teaching. Discussion pedagogical parameters of practicality and possibility as well pedagogic indicators of the post-method teacher and learner, she suggests that a language teacher should adopt a context – sensitive pedagogic framework which will be able to respond to special characteristics of a particular learning and teaching context. As implied above, within the framework of principled eclecticism, a teacher is not bound or confined to the prescriptions of a particular method but is free to draw from a vast range of methods and resources to teach a particular topic.

Infact, Weidman (2001:2) notes that the eclectic approach has been so widely accepted that "today", many good teachers use it proudly as a tag to describe their teaching, wearing it almost like a badge of honor". This means that since learners are different and have different ways of learning, it is helpful to use the eclectic approach because it strives to responds to the diversities and exigencies which normally exist in the classroom. Thus, effective teaching is about flexibility through the use of the eclectic approach. Kumar (2013:2) actually states that "the purpose of advocating eclectic methods is to connect life experiences to the ideas

presented in learning of the language. The types of learning activities teachers select are often directly related to their experiences in real world". As mentioned above, this helps learners not to look at learning and the classroom as threats but as an extension of the home environment.

Ruth (2008) eclectic means deriving things from a variety of sources the word eclectic is based on Greek elegant, to select. The eclectic approach would be one using a variety of approaches. The eclectic approach is the label given to a teacher use of techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies. Band and Dykstrain Alexander (1979) said Eclectic approach is the combining of the best elements of several programs that can be selected to meet the goals of the instructional situation and the needs of the learner. There are many instruction techniques that can effectively teach the five big ideas and develop excellent readers. The first and probably the most used in reading specialist classrooms is the basal reading approach.

This approach can be seen in classroom where teachers do reading activities in small groups and in a specified area of the classroom.

The based readers approach is "based on the assumption that students learn to read by reading, writing, and talking about meaningful topic." (Vacca, 2006) many different genres of literature are able to be covered through expository and narrative text. This approach is eclectic and follow suit with the button-up approach because it "presents skill to be though in a sequence or an interactive program, featuring unedited children literature selection, strategy instruction, and writing approaches" (Vacca, 2006).

Another approach in reading instruction is the language experience approach. This approach combines many different approaches, which is obviously a characteristic of balanced literacy. This strategy is "based in the idea that language should be used to communicate thoughts, ideas and meaning." Vacca (2006) a great example of this approach is story dictation. Students are able to create lessons using their own language. Other popular pieces of the language experience approach include, "planned and continuous activities such as individual and group dictated stories, the building of work banks of known words, creative writing activities, oral reading of prose and poetry by teachers and students, directed reading-thinking lessons, the investigation of interests using multiple materials, and keeping records of students' progress." Vacca (2006). Since the basal reading program is the most widely used approach, it was compared to several other methods or language experience approaches. Many teachers think that combination of the two is very useful.

Advantages of the eclectic method

Scholars agree that there are a lot of advantages in using the eclectic approach, which opens the language teacher to a range of alternatives and embraces all the four language skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening further, Brown (2002) states that the eclectic approach is important because it gives the teacher freedom to choose what is appropriate in their own dynamic teaching contexts. Kumar (2013) mentions the following advantages:

- a) It is easier for learners to understand the language of the text in its cultural context.
- b) It blends listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- c) Helps teachers to teach effectively by drawing on the strengths of various methods and avoiding their weaknesses.
- d) Learning is easy due to the use of realistic situations in the classroom.

The message coming from the above points is that the eclectic approach is holistic. It does not just consider the theoretical aspects of teaching and learning, but also links teaching and learning to the real life experiences of the learners while the teacher enjoys maximum freedom in using what works best in his teaching context. It also presents language

holistically. As stated, it integrates all the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. There are a lot of other advantages. For example, it is learner centered context sensitive, live, motivating, participatory, variety of classroom activities and tasks. Learners are aware of what is expected of them it is flexible and accommodative to the exigencies of the classroom during the lesson. In addition, it is objective correlative and produce fast results since it responds to the needs of learners of diverse characteristics (Kumar 2013).

Disadvantages of the Eclectic approach

Although eclecticism is idealized as the best approach in teaching English, it is also associated with a number of disadvantages. This is ironic, considered that the eclectic approach itself is based on the weaknesses and strengths of other methods. However, this is not surprising because even the methods that existed before it were developed based on the weakness of the methods that preceded them. This simply shows how complex the practice of teaching is. For example, Brown (1994:74) notes that "theoretical eclecticism is suspicious on logical and theoretical grounds [ad] without principles, eclecticism is likely to fall into a state of arbitrariness". Weidman (2001) notes the following disadvantages of the eclectic approach:

- a) It cuts teachers of from a reconsideration of their professional practices. In a word, it discourages them to reflect upon their teaching. They have made up their minds; they will use anything that works which can obtain results and is safe from ideological excesses.
- b) Adopting the eclectic approach can be unsafe as a teacher may fall victim of the methodological baggage that comes with it.
- c) Mixing all manner of methods and approaches may result in gathering in one's teaching arsenal; but using such a mixed bag can lead to all kinds of conflicts.
- d) When introduced to new methods and techniques, teachers, in their haste to integrate these into their traditional styles of teaching forget about the rationale for the techniques altogether.
- e) If an innovative technique is used only occasionally, and mixed in with other (potentially contradictory ones), the effect of the new is diluted.

Although there are a number of known weaknesses of the eclectic approach, the approach is more advantageous than disadvantageous. In fact, most of the weaknesses mentioned above are only justifiable when teachers are poorly trained and prepared for the classroom. Weidman (2001:6) is possible right when he states that "the argument that emerges [against eclecticism] is perhaps more about the dangers of an unprincipled eclecticism than anything else". This is the reason why eclecticism requires teachers who know their learners, subject content, methods of teaching and what teaching is all about. They need to understand what eclecticism means and be able to give reasons for any choice of the technique or methods they integrate.

(Weidman, 2001) suggests that one falls prey more easily to traditional methods than to current or new methods; perhaps this is not strictly correct. Any method, current or past, may assail us with compelling arguments and captivate us professionally, thus preventing us from considering alternatives. Yet an analysis of successive language teaching methods that I have done seems to imply that the three different directions of the communicative approach to language teaching offer us a greater chance of becoming the beneficiaries of a certain approach to language teaching than any traditional approach. The three directions within the communicative approach I am referring to are (a) the use of authentic texts, which, as the name implies, bring authentic materials in modified or unmodified form into the language classroom for instructional purposes, and constitute an early form of communicative teaching; (b) Mainstream communicative teaching or language teaching with an 'L' emphasis-

for 'language' – such as grew out of Wilkins's (1976) seminal work, is concerned with syllabus design that meets learners functional language needs (cf. Littlewood, 1981:82-84), and is often characterized by a focus on function and the technique of role play.

Indeed, one must consider, secondly, that adopting an 'anything goes' position can have exactly the opposite result of playing it safe. Because one adopts a language teaching practice without much deliberation, one can just as easily fall victim to the methodological baggage that comes with it. In spite of good intentions, as Kunaravadivelu (1994: 30) observes, eclecticism at the classroom level invariably degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy because teachers with very little professional to be eclectic in a principled way have little option but to randomly put together a package of techniques from various methods and label it eclectic.

This remark indeed brings us a third argument against eclecticism. Mixing all manner of methods and approaches may results in gathering in one's teaching arsenal such a mixed bag that all kinds of conflict might arise. Or, to use another analogy, a mixed brew may sometimes be sweet to the taste, but it can just as easily upset one's stomach! Indeed, if there are conflicting approaches in one's instructional techniques, one may have contrary results to those one is striving for.

Another argument is that if an innovative technique is used only occasionally, and mixed in with other (Potentially contradictory) ones, the effect of the new is diluted.

A fourth argument for me against an eclecticism that is not accompanied by deliberate choice, or not backed up by argument as well as by practical and theoretical justification. This is that teachers, when introduced to new methods and techniques, so quickly integrate into their traditional styles of teaching the new 'tricks' they are shown that they forget about the rational for the techniques altogether. It is like cutting the technique off from its theoretical roots, which may have enriched it and allowed it to develop when used deliberately.

3. Materials and methods

This study was carried out at Sudan University of science and Technology with English language teachers at secondary schools. A purposive sample used for this study includes (104) teachers. This is a mixed method research study design employing both qualitative and quantitative method. Cress well (:2003 20) states the following about mixed research study. Mixed method approach involves collection of both quantitative and qualitative data sequentially.

The researcher bases inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of research problem. This study used a mixed research design comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods and techniqueduring data collection analysis because the researcher wanted to come up with rich information which would improve the validity and reliability of the overall finding. Qualitatively, the study used interview with five experts while quantitatively, a questionnaire was administered to 104 secondary school teachers the questionnaire and the interview were the two research instruments used in this study. Interviews were used to collect data on experts understanding of the eclectic method. A questionnaire was also used to further collect data to answer the research question. Data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

4. Results and discussion

The researcher used the questionnaire as the main tool for collecting the data related to this study. The researcher has designed a questionnaire to secondary school teachers to find out

their opinion towards the role of eclectic method in improving the students reading ability. The tables and the percentages below illustrate what has been stated above.

**The analysis of the questionnaire in relation to the hypothesis.
*The Eclectic Method is Effective in Teaching Reading Skills.***

Table No (4.1) the eclectic method enhances learners reading skill.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 56 | 53.8% |
| Agree | 14 | 13.5% |
| Not sure | 20 | 19.2% |
| Disagree | 6 | 5.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 8 | 7.7% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.11) that there are (56) persons in the study's sample with percentage (53.8%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method enhances learner's reading skill..". There are (14) persons with percentage (13.5%) agree with that and (20) persons with percentage (19.2 %) are not sure. and (6) persons with percentage (5.8%) disagree, while (8) persons with percentage (7.7%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.2) the eclectic method enables secondary school teachers to react to various learning needs of the learners.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 51 | 49.0% |
| Agree | 40 | 38.5% |
| Not sure | 3 | 2.9% |
| Disagree | 9 | 8.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1.0% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.12) that there are (51) persons in the study's sample with percentage (49.0%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method enables secondary school teachers to react to various learning needs of the learners". There are (40) persons with percentage (38.5%) agree, and (3) persons with percentage (2.9%) are not sure and (9) persons with percentage (8.7%) disagree, while only one person with percentage (1.0%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4-3) Teaching through eclectic method is interesting.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 53 | 51.0% |
| Agree | 17 | 16.3% |
| Not sure | 9 | 8.7% |
| Disagree | 5 | 4.8% |

| | | |
|-------------------|-----|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 20 | 19.2% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.13) that there are (53) persons in the study's sample with percentage (51.0%) strongly agree with "Teaching through eclectic method is interesting.. ". There are (17) persons with percentage (16.3%) agreed with that and (9) persons with percentage (8.7 %) are not sure. and (5) persons with percentage (4.8%) disagreed, while (20) persons with percentage (19.2%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4-4) Student's background knowledge leads to successful writing.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 3.8% |
| Agree | 59 | 56.7% |
| Not sure | 19 | 18.3% |
| Disagree | 14 | 13.5% |
| Strongly Disagree | 8 | 7.7% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.14) that there are (4) persons in the study's sample with percentage (3.8%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method is flexible because it allows teacher creativity.. ". There are (59) persons with percentage (56.7%) agree with that and (19) persons with percentage (18.3 %) were not sure. and (14) persons with percentage (13.5%) disagree, while (8) persons with percentage (7.7%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.5) the Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of Question No

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 39 | 37.5% |
| Agree | 32 | 30.8% |
| Not sure | 6 | 5.8% |
| Disagree | 9 | 8.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 18 | 17.3% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2015

It is clear from the above table No.(4.15) that there are (39) persons in the study's sample with percentage (37.5%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method makes learning easier for learners to understand the language of text in its cultural context. ". There are (32) persons with percentage (30.8%) agree with that, and (6) persons with percentage (5.8 %) are not sure. and (9) persons with percentage (8.7%) disagreed, while (18) persons with percentage (17.3%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.6) the eclectic method helps teachers to teach effectively by drawing on the strength of various methods and avoiding their weakness

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|----------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 40 | 38.5% |
| Agree | 49 | 47.1% |

| | | |
|-------------------|-----|------|
| Not sure | 7 | 6.7% |
| Disagree | 8 | 7.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0.0% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.16) that there are (40) persons in the study's sample with percentage (38.5%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method helps teachers to teach effectively by drawing on the strength of various methods and avoiding their weakness.". There are (49) persons with percentage (37.1%) agreed with that and (7) persons with percentage (6.7 %) were not sure. and (8) persons with percentage (7.7%) disagree, while (0) persons with percentage (0.0%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.7) in eclectic method, learning is innovative due to the unique nature of learning process

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 32 | 30.8% |
| Agree | 57 | 54.8% |
| Not sure | 2 | 1.9% |
| Disagree | 6 | 5.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 7 | 6.7% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.17) and that there are (32) persons in the study's sample with percentage (30.8%) strongly agree with "In eclectic method, learning is innovative due to the unique nature of learning process.". There are (57) persons with percentage (54.8% (agree with that and (2) persons with percentage (1.9 %) are not sure. and (6) persons with percentage (5.8%) disagree, while (7) persons with percentage (6.7% (strongly disagree.

Table No (4.8) the eclectic method effectively works for any kind of learners irrespective of age and standard.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 39 | 37.5% |
| Agree | 54 | 51.9% |
| Not sure | 5 | 4.8% |
| Disagree | 4 | 3.8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1.9% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.18) that there are (39) persons in the study's sample with percentage (37.5%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method effectively works for any kind of learners irrespective of age and standard.". There are (54) persons with percentage (51.9%) agree with that and (5) persons with percentage (4.8 %) are not sure. and (4) persons with percentage (3.8%) disagree, while (2) persons with percentage (1.9%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.9). The eclectic method increases the rate and amount of learning which takes place in the classroom.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 38 | 36.5% |
| Agree | 53 | 51.0% |
| Not sure | 5 | 4.8% |
| Disagree | 7 | 6.7% |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1.0% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

It is clear from the above table No.(4.19) that there are (36.5) persons in the study's sample with percentage (51.0%) strongly agree with "The eclectic method increases the rate and amount of learning which takes place in classroom.". There are (54) persons with percentage (51.0%) agree with that and (5) persons with percentage (4.8 %) were not sure. and (7) persons with percentage (6.7%) disagree, while (1) persons with percentage (1.0%) strongly disagree.

Table No (4.10) A technique of teaching through eclectic method is a rich combination of multiple activities.

| Answer | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 44 | 42.3% |
| Agree | 29 | 27.9% |
| Not sure | 7 | 6.7% |
| Disagree | 15 | 14.4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 8.7% |
| Total | 104 | 100% |

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2015

It is clear from the above table no.(4.20) that there are (36.5) persons in the study's sample with percentage (51.0%) strongly agreed with "Atechnique of teaching through eclectic method is a rich combination of multiple activities". There are (54) persons with percentage (51.0%) agree with that and (5) persons with percentage (4.8 %) are not sure. and (7) persons with percentage (6.7%) disagree, while (1) persons with percentage (1.0%) strongly disagreed.

5. Discussion

The data collected was analyzed in relation to the hypothesis of the study. The data was collected via questionnaire which had been administered to secondary school teachers. Having analyzed and compare the results with the main hypothesis, the results have shown that eclectic method positively affects secondary school students reading ability.

6. Findings

The main findings of this study are: Most of secondary school teachers do not use eclectic method. The findings also indicate that eclectic method is confusing especially for low learners. The responses of both questionnaire and interview show that eclectic method has positive effect on reading ability.

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