

The Teaching of Reading Skills in Arabic and English Textbooks in Iraq

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Introduction

Abstract :

The present paper deals with the problems of teaching reading skills as they are presented in the materials used for teaching Arabic and English in Iraqi secondary schools. The researcher finds out that those materials do not teach reading skills in the proper sense of the word which is common in the literature on the subject and he advocates some alternatives for dealing with those skills.

The Problem :

There is a general weakness in reading skills in Iraqi schools. The researcher and many ELT specialists visited schools, interviewed teachers and received reports that indicate a general weakness in reading skills. The researcher wants to explore the literature on teaching reading and to see whether the present materials used in Iraqi schools respond to the developments and findings that are reported and reflected in the literature, particularly the holistic top-down approach as opposed to the old bottom-up approach which concentrates on the linguistic and grammatical aspects of language.

The Method and Limitations of the Study:

The present study is very limited in nature. It is not an experimental, but rather a descriptive and analytical one; therefore, it suffers from the limitations of descriptive studies, and leaves the door open for further, maybe experimental, research, to support or invalidate its conclusions.

The Terminology :

In the present study we are going to use the term “reading” to refer to silent reading and we will be mostly concerned not with reading at early elementary stages that deal with identifying words and pronouncing them, but with silent reading and reading comprehension in later more advanced stages.

Review of the Literature

Many authorities on the subject (e.g. Nuttall, 1988, Grellet, 1986, Widdowson, 1979, 1984) subscribe to most of the following assumptions about the teaching of reading:

1. Teaching materials have concentrated for a very long time on the smaller units (e.g. sentences, words) in teaching reading, ignoring the longer units (e.g. paragraphs, complete texts). Texts have been studied as if they were series of independent sentences; and attention was paid exclusively to the

structure and meaning of sentences. One consequence of this is that students would insist on understanding every single sentence (or word) in the text, when this is not necessary. Students tend to get lost between the trees and lose sight of the complete forest. In other words, teaching materials should deal with complete discourse or texts and not with smaller discrete units.

2. Overall or global understanding should be given priority. We should start with global tasks and overall meaning and function of the text, and then gradually move towards detailed questions concerning the vocabulary and specific information. Among the reasons for this approach are the following:
 - a) It helps to increase students' confidence especially when faced with linguistically difficult texts: students, at least, know what the text is about or what the general attitude of the writer is.
 - b) It will help the students' awareness of the structure and organization of the text.
 - c) It will help the students develop their inferential and anticipatory skills: according to Goodman (1967), reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game.
3. Authentic texts are preferable to simplified ones. Sometimes simplifying a text makes it more difficult because discourse particles and redundancy, which are a help to understanding, are removed. The difficulty of a reading task often lies in the exercise not the text itself. Even the layout and typeface of the original text should be retained.
4. Reading should be integrated into other skills. In everyday life language skills do not come discretely: we often combine reading with writing, listening or speaking.
5. We should stress the use of reading as an active skill which demands inference and anticipation. The exercises that follow reading should be used communicatively for a purpose: if the reading passage is a letter, the letter can be answered, if it is a recipe, the directions can be followed, etc. The exercises should be flexible, varied and motivating.

Nuttall (1988:4) defines reading as "the extraction of meaning from writing." Thus it is a question of how the reader gets a message from a text. But the problem is that meaning is not something fixed awaiting to be uncovered or extracted from the text; the reader often brings his assumptions to the reading process, and uses the text to create meaning and reconstruct the writer's presuppositions. The reader is not a passive recipient or decoder, as some models of reading portray him. This means that understanding a written text is not a failsafe algorithm, but is a non- guaranteed process, and the interpretation will depend on the background of the reader and his assumptions about the world. Thus a text that is easy to one person may be difficult to another. Munby (1970: xiii) gives an exhaustive list of the main areas of difficulty and errors in reading comprehension.

The sources of the difficulty of a text are varied. The difficulty might lie in the amount of previous knowledge that the reader is supposed to bring to the text. It might alternatively lie in the complexity of the concepts expressed or in the vocabulary. Another common source of difficulty is the mismatch between the shared assumptions or presuppositions of the writer and those of the reader.

Linguistic difficulty ought to be the commonest type in an FL (foreign language) reading situation. We assume that the learner brings to the FL learning situation his experience of learning to read in his mother tongue; thus presumably, in learning an FL, he does not need to be trained to deal with difficulties that require inferential abilities, schemata, shared knowledge, prediction, evaluation and discursal skills.

Now the question is: are these non-verbal requirements attended to in our teaching materials whether in the mother tongue or in the FL? Before we answer and give examples from our teaching materials, let us give an inventory of the reading skills or sub-skills that are involved in the reading process, and the types of reading comprehension exercises.

Munby (1970 & 1985) gives a very long list of reading skills ranging from initial skills like letter reading through understanding implicit and explicit meaning to skimming, scanning and transcoding. Widdowson criticised Munby's taxonomy as merely a tabulation of reading skills in a list without grading, prioritization or indication of the relationship between them.

Grellet (1986: 12-13), on the other hand, provides us with a more systematic grouping of reading exercises that embody reading skills:

Reading techniques

1. SENSITIZING

1. Inference: through the context
Inference: through word-formation
2. Understanding relations within the sentence
3. Linking sentences and ideas:
reference
Linking sentences and ideas:
link-words

2. IMPROVING READING SPEED

3. FROM SKIMMING TO SCANNING

- 1 Predicting
- 2 Previewing
- 3 Anticipation
- 4 Skimming
- 5 Scanning

How the aim is conveyed

1. AIM AND FUNCTION OF THE TEXT

1. Function of the text
2. Functions within the text

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT: DIFFERENT THEMATIC PATTERNS

1. Main idea and supporting details
2. Chronological sequence
3. Descriptions
4. Analogy and contrast
5. Classification
6. Argumentative and logical organization

3. THEMATIZATION

Understanding meaning

1. NON-LINGUISTIC RESPONSE TO THE

- 1 Ordering a sequence of pictures
- 2 Comparing texts and pictures
- 3 Matching
- 4 Using illustrations
- 5 Completing a document
- 6 Mapping it out
- 7 Using the information in the text
- 8 Jigsaw reading

2. LINGUISTIC RESPONSE TO THE TEXT

- 1 Reorganizing the information:
reordering events
Reorganizing the information:
using grids
- 2 Comparing several texts
- 3 Completing a document
- 4 Question- types
- 5 Study skills: summarizing
Study skills: note- taking

The above types of exercises are divided into four groups. The first is concerned with strategies that are essential to acquiring a basic reading comprehension. The other three parts help for a better understanding of a text, starting from global comprehension (function and organization of the passage) moving towards a more detailed one (understanding meaning) and ending with some guidelines to help students evaluate the text.

A Sample of Activities and Question- types

We have chosen a list of exercises and activities on a text (The Unicorn in the Garden) taken from Grellet (1986: 215), for the purpose of illustration. The following list is not exhaustive, but is intended to give a flavour of the type of exercises that may be included in the materials.

1. Anticipation

- Look at the title and at the drawing that accompanies the story. What can you infer from the two? What is a unicorn? What do you think the story is about?

2. Predicting:

To train the students to guess as they read on:

- We can provide the students with an unpunctuated version of the story and ask them to punctuate it.
- We can omit the last paragraph of the story and ask the students to suggest a suitable end.
- We can divide the text into sentences and ask the students to choose the next sentence from a number of alternatives.

3. Organization:

- Is the text organized in a logical way?
 argumentative
 chronological

- What link- words or expressions reflect this organization?

4. Jigsaw Reading:

To help the students practise predicting, summarizing a text, recognizing discourse indicators and relations between parts of a text.

- The students are divided into groups and each group is given only one passage from the text. They should pay attention to anaphoric and cataphoric discourse indicators. Groups have to question each other constantly and check with their passage for significant details giving them a clue to the development of the whole text. The groups are asked to sum up what their passage is about for the other groups, and to try to guess how it is situated in the whole text (e.g. does it come before or after the passage summed up by one of the other groups? Why? What words, expressions or ideas can help you to justify your opinion?). The students are then asked to discuss with the other groups until they can reconstruct the whole story, from beginning to end.

5. Questions about Genre:

To raise the students' awareness of text- types.

- In what "literary genre" would you classify the story

short story

fairy tale

legend

tale

In addition to the above types of activities, there are the well- known question- types of multiple choice and true/false statements and other types that are used in our schools, but not in a thought- provoking way because the answer is often already there in the passage.

Here are some of the interesting types of questions:

1. Can you tell?

Example:

Can you tell:

- whether the unicorn is real?
- what the wife told the police and the psychiatrist on the telephone?
- why the unicorn went away?

2. Find the reason

The answer is not often given in the text and must be inferred.

Example:

How would you explain the following statements (particularly the underlined expressions).

- The man walked slowly downstairs.
- The wife got up and dressed as fast as she could.
- They sat down in chairs and looked at her with great interest.

A variation of the exercise is to give a list of adjectives and ask the students to find out who/ what they refer to, when and why.

Adjective	Who?	When?	Why?
cold			
excited			
happy			
quiet			

Collective Guessing and Other Techniques:

Critical reading, which involves the inferential skills of anticipation and prediction, can be practised collectively. Christopher Walker (1978) gives an example, where a text is divided into sections to be uncovered one by one, and the students go on making predictions about the text and its topic after the display of each section, until the discussions about all the sections are finished. Some writers call this the “striptease” technique.

There are many other interesting techniques sensitizing the students to different ways of conveying the information in the text such as the differentiation between the main idea and the supporting details in a paragraph, or identifying the topic sentence, or identifying the function of a sentence: whether it is a summary of the main point, an example, an anecdote or a question to hold the reader’s attention.

Another interesting reading exercise type is transcoding,` i.e. reorganizing the information using tables or graphs and vice versa, extracting information from them.

An interesting technique at the evaluation level is the exercise-type aiming at training students to be able to discriminate fact from opinion. This is a very important skill: readers often are so influenced by the writer’s opinion that they take it for a fact. We should raise our students’ awareness of this important aspect of reading.

Example:

Read the following statements and decide whether they are facts or the writer’s opinions, and then show which words influenced your decision:

The statement	Fact or opinion	the words that turned it into an opinion
1. Al- Mutanabbi is the greatest poet in the Arab world.		
2. He lived during the Abbasid second period; he met Sayfudawla and Kafoor.		
3. Although he was very proud, Al-Mutanabbi had to flatter kings and princes.		
4. But Al- Maarri admired Al-Mutanabbi and he disagreed with Shareef Murtadha because of that.		
5. Al- Mutanabbi should not have left Sayfuddawla to join Kafoor.		
6. But other poets were envious of Al- Mutanabbi because he was a better poet.		
7. His rivals wrote about him. One of them, Sahib- bin- Abbad wrote a book with the title “Plagiarisms of Mutanabbi”.		
8. Taha Hussein did not do Mutanabbi justice in his books because Mutanabbi criticised Egyptians.		
9. Al- Mutanabbi was in love with Sayfuddawla’s sister.		

The Status of Reading in Our Arabic Textbooks:

Reading skills, whether in Arabic or English, are dealt with at the micro level only. The approach adopted is purely micro- linguistic.

As an illustration, below are the kinds of exercises and question types that follow a passage on (the Construction of Basra) in the Arabic Reader for the sixth classes in preparatory schools:

1. Recite to your fellow students some classical or modern poetry on Basra; you should aesthetically justify the selection of the poem.
2. Try to find in the passage three nouns debarred from 'tenween' or 'sarf', and explain why they are so debarred.
3. Read aloud Asha'ri's answer to Caliph Omar, paying special attention to the pronunciation of the two kinds of 'hamza: wasl and qati'.
4. Basra was built in the fourth year A. H.
 1. Baghdad was built in -----.
 2. Kufa was built in -----.
 3. Al- Azher Mosque was built in the year-----.

The above question- types are a far cry from what is called 'reading skills' in the literature. Most of the questions are concerned with grammar, morphology, spelling and pronunciation. These are what Widdowson (1984) calls 'lower- level skills,' or the 'micro skills' as we prefer to call them, as opposed to the 'high-order abilities', as Widdowson calls them, which we have exemplified above. Question (1) involves a recitation task and a literary appreciation task. Question(2) is a purely grammatical exercise about nouns. The third task is a pronunciation practice related to the pronunciation of the "hamza". Finally, the last question is a general knowledge question which is loosely related to the comprehension of the text. In what follows we are going to give examples of alternative tasks and activities making use of the Grellet model which we surveyed above. From these samples we can see very clearly what is wrong with the reading tasks in the Arabic Reader and what is missing there: tasks demanding global understanding(function & organization of the text), inference and the linguistic and non-linguistic responses to the text, and finally evaluating the text.

An Inventory of Alternative Tasks

As an alternative to the above- mentioned exercises on the passage on the building of Basra, below are some suggestions for alternative practice.

1. What can you infer from the title of the text? What is it about?
2. In what text type would you classify it?
 - a) argumentative
 - b) descriptive
 - c) narrative
 - d) instructive(it can be a combination of more than one type.)

3. What is the writer's intention in this text?
- Providing us with historical information about Basra.
 - Expressing his opinion about Basra.
 - Entertaining us.
-
(it can be a combination of more than one.)
4. The writer's attitude in the text is one of:
- indifference
 - admiration
 - anxiety
 - criticism
- (it can be a combination of more than one.)
5. The writer's tone is:
- realistic
 - humorous
 - ironic
- (again it can be a combination)
6. A// What kind of link- words does the writer use to link the sentences? Are they link- words that indicate:
- sequence such as (الفاء العاطفة، وكان، ولما، وقد)
 - logical relationship such as contradiction, cause and effect e.g. (الفاء السببية، لأن، لهذا، لكن)
 - description and classification e.g. (..هناك انواع من، يقسم الى)
- B// Are the link- words related to the type of the text? Explain.
7. Make a comparison between this text and the passage 'Basra the City of Cities' which you read in the Reader of last year. This can be done in a table which revolves around the above questions, e.g.. The latter passage is heavy with figurative use and personification, which are characteristic of literary discourse, whereas the former is mainly a narrative of historical events.
8. A// What is the function of the first paragraph in the text?
- Summarising what follows.
 - Preparing the scene for the topic of the text.
 - Alluding to the topic indirectly.
- B// What is the function of the second paragraph in the text?
- Describing the role of Basra in fighting the Zinj.
 - Describing the role of Basra in Arabic history.
 - Giving examples of the strength and patience of Basra.
- What is the relationship between the first sentence in the first paragraph and the rest of the paragraph?
- C// What is the function of the third paragraph?
- Showing that Basra is an 'immortal city'.
 - Asserting that the people mentioned were from Basra.

3. Giving examples of geniuses from Basra.
- What is the relationship between the first sentence and the rest of the paragraph?

D//1. What is the relationship between the question with which the fourth paragraph starts and the first and second paragraphs?

2. What type of question is it?
- a) information seeking question.
 - b) rhetorical question.
 - c) If it is rhetorical, what is the intention of the writer?
9. Make a summary of the history of Basra in the form of a table using the information in the text, e.g.

10.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Action or Event</u>	<u>the Doer</u>
Sha'aban, 14 A.H	liberation of Basra	the Muslims

11. (Before the students see the passage) we can present them with the paragraphs in the wrong order and ask them to put them in the right order. (They should explain the order they choose).

12. Read the following statements, taken from the passage, and decide whether they are facts or the writer's opinions, and then show which words influenced your decision.

Statements

Fact or Opinion

1. Basra was the greatest example of Arabic bravery and patience.
2. Basra faced Zinj and defied them.
3. It was built in the second decade of the first century A.H.
4. The land where it was built used to be called the 'land of India'.
5. Basra stood as a strong fortress in the face of anti- Arab malignancy.

Analysing Samples of Reading Tasks in our English Textbooks

In what follows we are going to analyse some samples of tasks that follow the reading passages in books (6),(7) and (8) of the New English course for Iraq (NECI) . These books are used in the upper secondary (preparatory) stage in Iraqi schools . One may justifiably expect that , unlike the Arabic Readers , the NECI books offer the learner some of the high-order tasks which we find in the literature because English Language Teaching (ELT) is well advanced and informed by disciplines like discourse analysis and pragmatics .

Let us start with a sample from book (7) : the completion task (4.3) on the reading passage "language" in 4.1 :

4.3 Complete the following :

1. Language is
2. Language develops and grows as man's ideas become
3. The language used by the greatest number of speakers as a first language is
4. Arabic is an important language because
5. Unless you learn at least one foreign language , you will not be able to
6. Loan words are
7. The language that's widely used all over the world as a second language is
8. You should be able to use your native language properly in order
9. Words that die out and are forgotten usually refer to concepts that are
10. You cannot use signs to express

Now we quote the complete answer sentences exactly as they occur in the passage without any changes or modifications :

Language is , then , a means of human communication ... Language develops and grows as man's ideas become more complicated ... Words that are borrowed from other languages are ((loan words))... they die out and are forgotten. Such words normally refer to concepts that are no longer accepted ... The language used by the greatest number of speakers as a native language is Chinese. English is widely used all over the world as a second language Arabic is an important language. It is the language in which books on science, philosophy and literature are written You should be able to use your native language properly to communicate with your fellow citizens and to be aware of your national heritage ... Unless you learn at least one foreign language, you will not be able to communicate with other people nor learn about other cultures ...

As can be clearly seen from these sentences taken from the passage , the task is nothing but a mechanical one and the authors did not bother to modify the sentences in order to involve the students in any efforts . The only exception is the last item (10) which is not as mechanical as the rest of the items because it does not involve copying the complete sentence from the passage as it is .

The other task on the passage in (4.4) is dedicated to the meaning of lexical items and vocabulary asking the student to match synonyms . Both tasks (4.3) and (4.4) fall short of the types we surveyed from the literature as sample of teaching reading skills and reading comprehension .

The same applies to the reading tasks in book (8) of NECI but to a slightly lesser degree . As an example we take the exercises that follow the reading passage on the History of Writing in p.57 unit 5 . The completion task in 5.2 is better than the one we quoted from book (7). Here the exact answer is not already there in the passage ready for copying word by word . The wording of the answer is different and the exact answer is not necessarily found in one sentence in the passage. However, this is a matching task and the rewording or rephrasing of the answer is already done by the authors and all the students need to do is guess the right completion . A good example is item (7) and its completion (b) :

7. The Phoenicians invented

B . alphabetic writing and carried it from the eastern Mediterranean coast to Europe .

The fact that item (7) and its completion refer to is reported in the passage as follows:

It is believed that alphabetic writing was invented at some point during the 18th or 17th century B.C. by the Phoenician

Then towards the end of the next paragraph the passage goes :

.....The Phoenician carried their alphabetic writing through trade to Europe where the Greek and later Roman characters developed .

The fact that the original sentences of the passage are , unlike item 7 , written in the passive voice and that the wording is different and the information is

gathered from more than one paragraph makes this type of item less mechanical than the ones we saw in (4.3) in book (7) .

However , in tasks (5.3),(5.4) and (5.5) we find more or less the same mechanical and microlinguistic attitudes we met in (4.3) and (4.4) of book (7) . Most of the required answers can be copied word by word and in the same order as they occur in the reading passage . Below are some examples taken from (5.3), which is an MCQ task , and from (5.4) , which is a completion task :

5.3 Choose the most appropriate alternative according to the reading passage .

3. Hieroglyphic writing contained _____ .

- (a) pictures . (c) phonetic symbols.
(b) ideograms . (d) pictures, ideograms and phonetic symbols.

6. Cuneiform script was written _____ .

- (a) from right to left. (c) from left to right .
(b) in any direction . (d) from top to bottom .

5.4 Fill in the blanks :

1. The earliest form of writing can be seen in _____ .
2. The earliest system of writing is called _____ .
3. Developed picture writing is called _____ .
4. The Sumerians used _____ as a writing surface .
5. The ancient Egyptians used _____ writing .
6. The word "alphabet" is of _____ origin .

Now here are the answer sentences in the order in which they occurred in the reading passage :

..... The earliest form of writing can be seen in cave paintings ... The Sumerians used clay as a writing surface ... The ancient Egyptians used hieroglyphic writing ... Thus hieroglyphic writing contained three elements : pictures, ideograms and phonetic symbols ... Cuneiform script was written from left to right ... The "alphabet" is of Semitic origin .

Obviously, all the student has to do is to copy the answer word by word from the passage. As for the rest of the items, there are slight formal differences between the answer and the relevant sentences in the passage such as the reference assignment of "it" to "writing" in the case of item (1) in 5.3 , and the change of the passive voice form "The earliest writing system was invented by the Sumerians" into the active voice "The Sumerians invented ...etc." in item (2) in 5.3 . However these slight modifications are insignificant because they are within the limits of the surface meaning and do not go beyond it to involve the student in inferential work or critical reading .

As for task (5.5), it is like (4.4) of book (7) an exercise on finding synonyms of some lexical items and vocabularies from the reading passage using the MCQ technique. Ideally, such microlinguistic tasks should come after the global comprehension task types which we exemplified when we surveyed the top-down or holistic approach to reading .

Coming to book (6) of NECI , we find almost the same technique and approach to reading as those we met in books (7) and (8) . As an example we take the reading passage in (3.10) and the tasks that follow it . Here is the first paragraph of the above passage :

3.10 Reading Comprehension

The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games are sports competitions among many nations of the world . They are held every four years in different countries . They attract a great deal of attention because of the large number of countries that take part . Amateur athletes from all over the world compete for their countries in a variety of events, including track and field athletics, swimming and gymnastics .

Then the student is asked to show whether the following sentences are true or false :

1. The Olympic Games are held every four years .
2. Many countries take part in the Olympic Games .
3. There are only a few competitions in the Olympic Games .
4. The athletes who take part in the Olympic Games are amateurs .

As can be clearly seen from the above true-false items, they are not different from the exercises that follow the reading passages of books (7) and (8) which we have analysed above . They are mostly comprehension questions that deal superficially with the explicit content of the passage ; often the answers are copied word by word from the text , and sometimes the wording is different , which involves the student in working out synonymous or near synonymous relationships between expressions, as can be seen in item (3) above , which is a false statement . The answer is found in the last sentence of the paragraph. To answer correctly , the student has to be able to know that the expression "a variety of events" has a more or less equivalent meaning to "many competitions" in this context. Hence, the statement that there are only a few competitions is false .

However, we are still in the realm of explicit or surface meaning because , although the task is much better than the word-by-word copying , it is still a far cry from the inferential work that is recommended in the literature.

As for the rest of the exercises that follow the reading passage (3.11__3.17) , they are restricted to dealing with grammatical structures and vocabularies that occur in the passage. However, grammatical structures have their share of practice in the Unit under the heading of Oral practice :Structure Notes (3.7) and (3.8) .

Exercises (3.11) and (3.12) exploit the reading text for teaching the passive voice structure . They go like this :

3.11 Read :

- (a) They hold the sports competition every year .
- (b) The sports competition is held every year .

Now change the following sentences into the passive as in (b) :

3.12 Make responses to the following questions using the passive voice form.

Example :

Questions : Do they hold the Olympic Games every four years ?

Response : Yes, the Olympic Games are held every four years ?

Exercise (3.17) deals with word order using the jumbled sentence technique . It goes like this :

3.17 Re-write the following four groups of words so as to form complete sentences that are based on the reading passage .

The answers to (3.17) can be copied word by word from the passage . They are already there in the right order . This exercise boils down to a copying task .

The objection is not to exploiting the reading passage for teaching grammar ; it is rather to the neglect of reading skills which is unwarranted.

As for exercises (3.15) and (3.16), they are dedicated to vocabulary : (3.16) asks for synonyms from the reading passage , and (3.15) is a gap filling task , using words from the passage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What we have observed and suggested about reading in our Arabic language teaching materials applies more obviously to our ELT materials. From those samples it is obvious that the NECI books ignore the macro skills and sub-skills, and the types of global or top- down tasks, which we have surveyed above. There is not much by way of high- order abilities such as inferential abilities, prediction, identifying the aim and function of the text, organization of the text (the different thematic patterns and relation between parts of the text), linguistic and non- linguistic responses to the text, let alone the evaluation abilities such as distinguishing between facts and writer's opinions. Moreover, from the researcher's experience and his observations of teachers' performance in Iraqi schools, a large number of English teachers themselves do not seem to have any idea what reading skills are and how they should be practised and tested.

Most of the exercises are at the micro level, specifically at the sentential and lexical level. They often consist of true/ false questions, completion questions or multiple choice ones (MCQ) dealing with the meanings of vocabulary and sentences. However, most of MCQs do not test comprehension because the answers are often explicitly stated in the text. Sometimes the answers are even mechanical and do not involve any comprehension. None of the task types we have cited as samples from the literature on reading skills figures in the NECI samples. As we have pointed out above, they are limited to true/false questions, MCQs and completion questions, which are meant to test comprehension and vocabulary. But as can be clearly seen from the samples, they are often weak, mechanical and not valid.

What is worse is that, like the samples we cited from the Arabic Readers, the exercises that follow the reading passages in the NECI books are often dedicated to grammar, structures and vocabulary. This indicates a failure on the part of the authors to realize the importance of reading skills.

The same types of alternatives which we suggested above for the Arabic Readers can be adopted for the English books.

From the above, it is evident that reading skills are not adequately and properly dealt with in the text- books of Arabic and English that are currently used in Iraqi schools at the secondary level. We have surveyed some samples that are representative of the type of tasks and questions that are available in the text- books. We have also suggested alternative activities taken from the literature. Neither the samples nor the alternatives can be exhaustive in a paper of this size.

It is recommended that the materials for teaching reading in Arabic and English should respond to the developments in the field. Arabic Readers and the reading passages in the English books (NECI) should be radically changed to be communicatively oriented. The texts should preferably be authentic, and the reading should be for a clear purpose, and the activities meaningful and communicative following the example of the alternatives which we have surveyed in this paper.

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