

Investigating Iraqi EFL Teachers' Perception towards Using Multiple Choice Cloze in Reading Skills

استقصاء إدراك معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق تجاه استخدام الفعاليات
المتعددة الخيارات في مهارات القراءة

Karrar Adil Abdullah (M.A. Student)

Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon, Iraq

kk87rr@gmail.com

Asst. Prof. Mais Flaieh Al-Jabbawi (Ph.D)

Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon, Iraq

Mais.Aljabbawi@uobabylon.edu.iq

Abstract

The ability to read is considered to be a fundamental and crucial skill in all languages. When a student attains advanced levels of reading comprehension, they get access to opportunities for achievement in several domains of life. This study explored how Iraqi EFL teachers perceived the use of multiple choice cloze (MCC) as a technique for improving reading skills. MCC is a type of gap-filling activity that requires students to choose the correct word from a list of options to complete a text. The study used a quantitative approach and a survey as the data collection and analysis methods. The sample consisted of 162 EFL teachers who taught at preparatory schools in Al-Najaf, Iraq. The results indicated that the teachers had a positive perception of MCC and its effectiveness for improving reading skills. The results also confirmed the previous research that supported the use of MCC in reading skills assessment and improvement, and validated the reliability and validity

of MCC as an instrument for developing reading comprehension and enhancing vocabulary. The results suggested that MCC can be used as a beneficial tool for teaching reading skills. The study concluded with some recommendations for future research and practice.

Keywords: multiple choice cloze, reading skills, EFL teachers, perception.

المستخلص

تمثل القراءة واحدة من أهم المهارات في أي لغة. عندما يطور الطالب مستويات عالية من استيعاب القراءة، يفتح بابًا للنجاح في مجالات مختلفة من الحياة. تستكشف الدراسة الحالية كيف ينظر مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق إلى استخدام الفعاليات المتعددة الخيارات (MCC) كتقنية لتطوير مهارات القراءة. إن الفعاليات المتعددة الخيارات نوع من التدريبات التي تتطلب من الطالب اختيار الكلمة الصحيحة من قائمة من الخيارات لإكمال النص. استخدمت الدراسة الحالية منهجًا كميًا واستبيانيًا كأداة لجمع وتحليل البيانات. تألفت عينة الدراسة من ١٦٢ م مدرسًا للغة الإنجليزية يعملون في المدارس الإعدادية في النجف، العراق. أشارت نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى أن المدرسين لديهم تصور إيجابي للفعاليات المتعددة الخيارات وفعاليتها في تطوير مهارات القراءة. كما أكدت نتائج هذه الدراسة على أبحاث سابقة دعمت استخدام هذا النوع في تطوير وتحسين مهارات القراءة، وصادقت على موثوقيتها وصحتها لتطوير استيعاب القراءة وتعزيز المفردات. اقترحت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الفعاليات المتعددة الخيارات يمكن استخدامها كأداة مفيدة لتعليم مهارات القراءة بين الطلبة. واختتمت هذه الدراسة ببعض التوصيات للأبحاث والممارسات المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاختبارات المتعددة الخيارات، مهارات القراءة، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التصور.

1. Introduction

The word "cloze," which is pronounced similarly to the verb "close," was introduced by Wilson Taylor in 1953 (Taylor, 1953). The concept he proposed was influenced by Gestalt psychology, a school believed posits people possess an innate tendency to perceive a complete whole from incomplete patterns and figures. A

reputable corpus of literature on the cloze test was published shortly after it was created, measuring readability and evaluating reading comprehension in the first-language classroom. Since then, few studies (Jongsma, 1971, 1980 and Schoenfeld, 1980) have used experimental cloze for instruction. During the early 1970s, the use of cloze exercises became prevalent in the field of second-language instruction, serving as both a reading activity and an assessment tool (Steinman, 2002 and Wu, 1994). When cloze was initially established, the majority of the research focused on standard blank-filling cloze exams. They generally attempted to answer three questions: 1) Can the cloze process be used to assess general reading comprehension, or is it limited to testing a single linguistic point? 2) Which method of blank elimination is superior: fixed-ratio or rational deletion? 3) Which technique is better for scoring, the exact word or the permitted word (s)?. Fixed-ratio deletion refers to the process of randomly eliminating the blank spaces occurring at regular intervals of every nth word. Rational deletion refers to the deliberate removal of certain linguistic elements based on a rational decision. After 1980, a modified multiple-choice version of cloze procedure (MCC in the present study) was introduced (Bensoussan and Ramraz, 1983, 1984; Saeedi, 2016 and Scholz and Scholz, 1981). In (MCC) activity, students are required to choose the most appropriate response option instead of completing the sentence by inserting words. The occurrence of blanks often does not exhibit a consistent or predetermined ratio. Instead, these materials are specifically created for the purpose of teaching linguistic and contextual aspects. While there have been several research conducted on the use of MCC activities as measurement instruments, less attention has been given to their potential as teaching tools.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cloze Activity as Teaching Instrument

The use of cloze activity as an instructional tool has the potential to enhance the language proficiency of learners. Numerous academics and educators have effectively used it to enhance learners' linguistic proficiency. This paper will address the intentional applications of cloze activities in educational instruction. According to Helfeldt, Henk, and etal. (1986:216), the use of cloze activity is referred to as a "passage-completion" strategy, serving as an informal tool for assessing learners' instructional reading level. By ascertaining the learners' current reading proficiency, educators are able to effectively tailor their instruction and provide appropriate advice to enhance the learning experience. Lombard (1990:24-25) elucidates the use of cloze exercises within her English as a second language instructional sessions targeting both junior and senior students. The author demonstrates the efficacy of using cloze tasks as a means to address reading difficulties among learners, while also bolstering their self-assurance via the provision of prompt and gratifying feedback. According to Legenza and Elijah (2001:354), the use of the cloze activity in teaching has been shown to be beneficial, particularly when instruction is tailored to address specific mistake profiles. One strategy that may be used is the utilization of teacher-created cloze assignments to address certain sorts of errors. This involves the deliberate removal of a single element of speech from sentences, which students are afterwards required to replace in order to ensure semantic accuracy. According to Steinman (2002:292-293), the cloze exercise was used as an instructional tool to facilitate students' development of context clue utilization as a reading technique and to foster vocabulary enhancement in the teaching process. The

instructor integrated teacher-created cloze texts, rational deletion, and standard word scoring techniques in her pedagogy. This approach was complemented by engaging students in negotiating their understanding of the text and facilitating discussions on word choices after the completion of the cloze texts.

2.2 Definition of Reading

Reading is an essential language skill that is essential for all individuals to possess. One can interact with emotions and thoughts, gain knowledge, and expand scientific understanding by reading. As stated by Tarigan (1998:7), reading is a cognitive process through which the reader deduces the writer's intent from the text. As pointed out by Thronhadi in Nurhadi (2016:13), reading is a mental process. It indicates that the reader engages in critical thinking and reasoning while reading a text.

2.3 The Importance of Reading

The acquisition of English language skills is greatly facilitated by the practice of reading, making it a crucial component in the educational development of pupils. Ramelan (1990:1) asserts that reading is an essential activity for kids due to its critical role in determining their academic achievement. The act of reading plays a significant influence in the lives of individuals. By engaging in the act of reading, individuals are able to delve into the vast expanse of human knowledge, gaining access to the thoughts, perspectives, and concepts of notable figures from bygone eras. This process serves to enhance our understanding and broaden our intellectual horizons.

2.4 The Ways of Reading

By engaging in the act of reading, students have the opportunity to encounter and familiarize themselves with the contemporary framework of synchronic linguistics, so potentially expanding their vocabulary. According to Grellet (1984:4), a number of essential reading strategies

were suggested in order to enhance students' capacity to comprehend complex information. These strategies are:

a. Skimming

Skimming is a reading technique that involves visually skimming a written text in order to quickly identify and grasp the key points or crucial information. The main purpose of skimming is to quickly get an overview of a text. Readers engage in skimming as a means to fulfill their inherent inclination for obtaining a broad understanding of a given material. Furthermore, this practice aids the reader in discerning the ideas and identifying the specific information that may be derived from a book, so enhancing the efficacy of subsequent reading endeavors.

b. Scanning

Scanning occurs when a reader scans text to find specific information. It comprises the following steps: 1. Decide what keywords to search for. 2. Find these words in the text. 3. After finding each word, read the whole sentences to see if it contains the information you are looking for. 4. If so, don't read any further. If not, continue scanning.

c. Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is the practice of reading lengthy works for one's personal pleasure. The goal of this endeavor is to improve humanity's comprehension of the world. This category of learners may choose their own readings at will. Students in this class are responsible for practically all of their reading outside of class time and without instructor guidance. The goal of reading a text should be to grasp its central message, not to parse its every word.

d. Focused Reading

Focused reading refers to the practice of reading concise materials with the purpose of extracting precise information. This action specifically entails the act of thoroughly examining and analyzing the provided information. In this course, students engage in a meticulous examination of each text with the aim of achieving comprehensive comprehension.

2.5 Principles of Reading

Harmer (2007:101,102) outlines fundamental concepts pertaining to the act of reading. The first concept encourages pupils to engage in frequent reading. It is important that pupils cultivate a habit of reading. Another important aspect is the need for students to engage in active interaction with the stuff they are perusing. This implies that it is important for students to actively participate in reading activities that they find pleasurable. The most important objective is to persuade individuals to direct their focus on the textual material. This suggests that students may be granted permission to engage in text message exchanges and articulate their emotions and sentiments. One important aspect in the process of reading is the recognition of intuition as a crucial influence. This observation suggests that students possess the ability to anticipate the subject matter of a book by using contextual clues provided within the text prior to being presented with the whole reading material. Another step involves aligning the job with the subject matter while using intense reading texts. This implies the teacher must design a reading assignment that is impactful for pupils. One crucial aspect is that effective educators fully capitalize on the use of reading materials. This implies that a successful teacher should provide instruction to students in a manner that facilitates their comprehension and meaningful interpretation of the content they encounter.

3. The Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate Iraqi EFL teachers' perceptions towards using multiple choice cloze (MCC) as a technique to improve reading skills. The research question was: How do Iraqi EFL teachers perceive the use of MCC in reading skills assessment?

4. Methodology

To answer the study question, the researcher adopted a quantitative approach that focused on measuring the teachers' opinions, beliefs, and experiences regarding MCC using numerical scales. The quantitative approach was suitable for this study because it allowed the researchers to obtain objective and generalizable data from a large sample of teachers. The data collection method used in this study was a survey, based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey was designed by the researchers based on a review of the literature and their own teaching experience. The sample of this study consisted of 162 EFL teachers who taught at preparatory schools in Al-Najaf, Iraq. The teachers were selected using random sampling, the data analysis method used in this study was descriptive statistics and one sample t-test. The SPSS software was used to perform them. The researchers chose this methodology because it enabled them to answer their research question in a simple and straightforward manner. They also considered the ethical issues involved in conducting this study, such as obtaining informed consent from the participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and respecting cultural diversity.

5. Results

To examine the Multiple-Choice Cloze (MCC) activity among the research sample, which included (162) teachers, the results showed that the mean score was (15.77) with a standard deviation of (2.244), while the assumed mean of the scale was 12. To test the statistical difference between them, the one-sample t-test was applied and revealed a statistically significant difference in favor of the mean score, with a computed t-value of (21.395), which is higher than the t-table value of (1.98) at a significance level of (0.05) and a degree of freedom of (161). This suggests that this instructional activity was effective according to the view of the research sample as shown in Table (1).

Table (1) T-test Results of identifying the sample perception towards the Multiple –Choice Cloze (MCC) in reading skill.

N	D.F	Mean	S.D	Test Value	T-test		Sig.
					Calculated	Tab	
162	١٦١	15.77	2.244	١٢	21.395	١.٩٨	0.000

D.F: degree of freedom, SD= Standard Deviation, Tab: table

The results showed that the teachers' mean was substantially higher than the expected value, indicating a high level of performance on the test. The standard deviation of (2.244) suggested that there was little variation in the scores and that most of the teachers achieved similar outcomes. The t-value of (21.395) exceeded the t-table value of (1.98) at a (0.05) significance level and (161) degrees of freedom, implying that the difference was not due to random error and that there was a robust support for the positive impact of the MCC activity on the students' reading comprehension and vocabulary abilities.

The Multiple-Choice Cloze (MCC) activity is a type of reading comprehension that requires the reader to choose the correct answer from a list of options based on a given passage and question. The MCC method can be used to measure and improve reading comprehension and vocabulary skills by testing the reader's ability to recall, understand, and apply information from the text. The MCC method can also provide feedback on the reader's strengths and weaknesses in reading comprehension (Traub, 2010;29; Collins et al., 2019).

The present finding corroborates previous research that has demonstrated the efficacy of MCC activities in assessing and improving reading comprehension and vocabulary abilities across diverse populations of learners (Ajideh and Mozaffarzadeh, 2012). It also supports the view that MCC activities are valid and reliable measures of reading comprehension and vocabulary skills that can assess different levels of cognitive processes and linguistic knowledge (Dong et al., 2023).

The implication of this result is that the MCC activity can be used as a valid and useful tool for teaching and testing reading comprehension and vocabulary skills by teachers. It can also help students develop their own reading proficiency and awareness of language structures and meanings. The MCC method can be applied to different types of texts and levels of difficulty, depending on the needs and goals of the learners and teachers.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study confirmed the previous studies that supported the use of MCC in reading skills assessment and improvement. The findings also validated

the reliability and validity of MCC as a teaching instrument for improving reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. The findings suggested that MCC can be used as a beneficial tool for teaching and testing reading skills among teachers. Based on the conclusions of this study, the researchers suggest the sample size can be increased and diversified to include teachers from different regions, backgrounds, and levels of education. As well as the data collection method should be complemented with other methods such as interviews, observations, or experiments to obtain more in-depth and triangulated data.

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