

The Effects of *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing) Level 2* on Improving EFL University Students' Reading Skills

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Abstract—The study aimed to identify the effect of the *Q: Skills For Success Level 2* course book on students learning, elicit the good merits of the book, and discover whether the reading strategies improved the students' reading skills. The data of the experimental study was collected from both pretests and posttests administered to three groups of students: 14 engineering students in the first group and 22 health students in the second and third groups. Results showed that there was a very slight difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the group of engineering students ($t_{13} = -7.214$, $p > 0.005$). Likewise, there was also a slight difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the group of health students ($t_{21} = -13.153$, $p < 0.005$). However, there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the third group of health students ($t_{14} = -19.255$, $p < 0.005$). The findings indicated that there were positive effects on students taught from the *Q: Skills for Success Level 2* course book. All in all, students benefitted from learning from the *Q: Skills for Success Level 2* course book. Moreover, the reading strategies taken from the *Q: Skills for Success Level 2* course book moderately improved students learning.

Index Terms—*Q: Skills for Success*, syllabus features, reading strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Like learning any language, the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are very essential in learning the English language for both the sake of communication and academic study. "The four language skills are at the heart of current practice in English Language teaching. This focus on skills is the result of a confluence of factors, including communicative competence as the primary goal of language instruction" (Burns, 2018, p. XIII). Possessing reading skills in English is very important in developing students' overall English skills because, along with listening, it is a receptive skill (Widdowson, 1978). The present study tried to investigate the efficacy of learning the different reading skills taught in the *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing) Level 2* course book (hereafter known simply as *Q: Skills for Success*) for one semester by assessing the students' reading proficiency skills both before and after studying the book. At the end of the semester, the students sat for achievement tests to determine whether or not they had shown any improvement in their reading skills after using the methods taught from *Q: Skills for Success*.

Textbooks play important roles in developing students' English language skills, and perhaps the most important of those skills are reading skills because they are receptive skills and have a great effect on other language skills. *Q: Skills for Success* provides students with different merits in reading skills, vocabulary skills, critical thinking strategies and ample textual and online activities. For these reasons, it is important to address the effect of the *Q: Skills for Success* series on developing the student's reading abilities and the presentation of these materials through pretests and posttests for three different groups of EFL university students in Saudi Arabia.

The study aimed to identify the effect of one of the books in the series – the *Q: Skills for Success (Reading and Writing) Level 2* course book - on developing learners' reading comprehension. It also attempted to elicit the good merits of the book and measure the extent to which improvement in the English reading skills of the three participating groups was made. The study is important to English language instructors, syllabus designers, and materials developers who may wish to use the same material.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What effect does the book *Q: Skills for Success* have on students' reading comprehension skills?
2. What are the characteristics of the book *Q: Skills for Success* in presenting reading skills?
3. How do the reading strategies in *Q: Skills for Success* book improve the students' learning of reading?

To answer the research questions, the researcher hypothesized that there are certain effects of the *Q: Skills for Success* book on the students' learning, there are many merits in the book *Q: Skills for Success* in presenting reading skills to students and reading strategies in *Q: Skills for Success* book improve the students' learning of reading adequately.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

“Curriculum” is a rather broad term, while “syllabus” is a narrower one. “Curricula” is often used to make common statements about the learning of a language, the purpose of learning, assessment, experience and the relationships between the roles of instructors and students. On the other hand, “Syllabus design is seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content” (Nunan, 1988, p. 6). However, Richards (2013) mentions that “curriculum” is the word used “to refer to the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved.” Richards (2001, p. 2) also states that “a syllabus is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested.” Moreover, Harmer (1991, p. 295) states that “curriculum is the planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programs...while syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence”.

Brumfit (1984) defines the functions syllabuses have to play in that a syllabus should be linked to a larger curriculum. Furthermore, it is a device for public planning and control, and it must be administratively workable. In addition, it consists of a group of practical sections and includes certain methods. It also carries primary requirements with separate items which are to be chosen, defined, and sequenced with a goal both at the start and at the end. Finally, it should be negotiable both during and after use.

Richards (1990) presents various types and examples of syllabuses used in language teaching including those currently used in modern English courses, namely structural, functional, notional, topical, situational, skills, and tasks. Harmer (1991, p. 297) adds lexical syllabus and multi-syllabus to the list of syllabi.

Moreover, the evaluation of textbooks plays a vital role in English Language Teaching (ELT). Thus, various textbook evaluation checklists have been proposed to evaluate ELT textbooks. Harmer (1991, p. 301) posits that the price of the course book and its components along with its availability, layout and design, instructions, methodology, syllabus types, selection and grading, language study activities, language skill activities, topics, cultural acceptability, usability, and teacher's guide should be included on those checklists.

According to McVeigh and Bixby (2021, p. iv), the *Q: Skills for Success* course book used in this study is a third edition. The book is graded according to the Common Reference of the European Framework for Language (CEFR) as A2. All levels of the (CEFR) are classified as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 or C2. Furthermore, authors McVeigh and Bixby (2021) say that the A2 (or Level 2) provides critical thinking strategies to help learners analyze, synthesize and develop their ideas. It also provides learners with Bloom's Taxonomy activities, enables learners to use videos to enhance their learning, and includes intensive and extensive reading. At A2, the book also uses vocabulary and grammar activities correlated to CEFR along with online IQ activities.

Widdowson (1978, p. 57) states that “Reading and writing is said to relate to language expressed through a visual medium. Reading is said to be a passive or receptive skill”. Hedge (2000) mentions six types of knowledge that help every reader make sense of a text; they are the knowledge of syntax, morphology, common globe, culture of society, issue and field.

Harmer (1991) claims that there are two reasons for reading and listening; instrumental and pleasurable. He further asserts that there are top-down and bottom-up versions of the reasons. A top-down listener/reader understands the common idea of a listening/reading topic. A bottom-up a listener/reader concentrates on specific phrases/words to realize comprehension from a part to the whole.

For general understanding, skimming is running the eyes over a text to quickly grasp the general idea of a text. Scanning, on the other hand, is reading to get specific or detailed information from the text. Other types of reading are intensive and extensive. Nation (2009, p. 25) states that “[i]ntensive study of reading texts can help learners gain a better understanding of language features such as comprehension, spelling sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion”.

Thornbury (2002, p. 70) sees reading aloud as the natural “next step” between writing and speaking. Popp (2005, p. 39) posited that reading aloud has many merits in developing the students' skills and asserts that reading aloud to students is a simple but highly effective way to enrich all learning. Nonetheless, Nation (2009, p. 4) offers a choice by saying that the reading passages can be read either silently or out loud. He goes on to explain that in using independent passages of reading, learners are free to choose the time and place they prefer to read (Nation, 2009, p. 5).

Watkins (2017, p. 47) mentions different activities for developing reading skills such as answering questions about the text using multiple choice, True/False, Yes/No, and interrogative (who, what, when, where, why, and how) questions along with sequencing pictures, inserting sentences/paragraphs into gaps in the text from which they were previously removed, matching pictures to parts of a text, matching sub-headings to parts of a text and correcting errors in a summary of a text.

The researcher reviewed nine previous studies related to this study. According to Yang (2014), most reading skills such as how to deal with unfamiliar words, how to find the main idea, how to read critically, and how to better comprehend can be developed by following techniques such as enlarged vocabulary to help improve comprehension. Furthermore, improving comprehension is done through guessing the meaning from the context, recognizing patterns, distinguishing facts from opinions, and forming good reading habits.

According to Sari (2017), the data analysis revealed that there was an improvement in the reading comprehension of the students with each cycle. It was demonstrated that after applying the above techniques, there was an improvement in

the students' mean of 64.12. After reflection on the first cycle, there was an improvement in the mean of students which was 77.29. Furthermore, 16.67% received a gain of 75 on the pre-test. In posttest one, 27.77% received a gain of 75. In posttest two, 55.55% (20 of 36 students) received a score of 75. The total percentage of development from the pretest to the second posttest was about 55.55%.

Sari et al. (2020) discovered that learning the strategies for reading skills is an important component in improving the understanding of learners. She found that students improved significantly after being tutored on reading strategies. However, a lot of instructors lacked the experience and knowledge to handle teaching the strategies of reading comprehension. Therefore, instructors must be prepared to design effective reading comprehension strategies and teach them to their students.

Elleman and Oslund (2019) explored many forms of comprehension by concentrating on the reading parts explained. To improve the scores of reading, a lot of effort needs to be put in by many different participants in the education process. Improving comprehension needs to develop background knowledge, the learning of vocabulary and increasing the sense of inference among learners.

Kadwa and Sheik (2021) claimed that there was a real requirement to determine the English aptitude of newly registered Saudi Arabian university students on admittance. In evaluating the Q: Skills Placement Test created by the University of Oxford, they critically discussed both the good and bad merits of the test. Though the test provided evidence of validity, it fell short of determining the students' context and was not able to distinguish precisely why some students scored less than 30% out of 100% on the exam.

Wistner et al. (2009) tried to evaluate the degree to which two English as a Second Language (ESL) placement tests using both the Oxford and Michigan placement tests which function as L2 proficiency tests. The findings indicated that the two tests can actually be used in Japan as proficiency tests; however, the Michigan English placement test is not normally used and the reliability is very low.

Farid et al. (2020) discovered that reading strategies were enhanced both inside and outside classes through the use of essential differentiated strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies that presented significant and positive pedagogical values.

Amini et al. (2022) discovered that EFL instructors adopted a massive range of strategies in teaching and reading, whereas learners only used a small number of strategies when answering reading comprehension questions. This study stressed the significance of the accord between the strategies taught and those used by L2 readers. Learners' awareness played a central role in filling in this gap.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was limited to preparatory year engineering and health students taking part in the reading program at Prince Sattam Bin Abudlaziz University and was conducted over two different semesters in the academic year 2022. The subjects of the study consisted of three different groups totaling 51 students. There were 14 engineering students in the first group and the health students were in the second and third groups and numbered 22 and 15, respectively.

The study was experimental. Two tests, a pretest and a posttest, were designed to be answered by the students. The pretest represented the Oxford Placement Test which is systemically applied by the university's English Department in order to place preparatory year students in the correct level according to their scores on the test. The university also uses this test at the end of each semester to track student improvement in English. The test was introduced to the university by OxfordPress book designers to assess the skills of the students before they start to study English using the *Q: Skills for Success* series' books. The second test was the same placement test used to measure the effects of skills gained from participating in learning reading topics of the *Q: Skills for Success* book. The researcher considered the tests appropriate data-gathering tools for the study.

The placement tests were taken by 51 students. After one semester, they sat again for the placement as a posttest to evaluate the effects of the *Q: Skills for Success* course book. The scores of the two tests were then analyzed by SPSS.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A. Group 1 Analysis

TABLE 1
THE PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

Pair 1	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mode
Pretest	1.5000	14	1.9115	0
Posttest	7.4286	14	2.3110	6

TABLE 2
THE PAIRED SAMPLES CORRELATIONS

Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre-Post	14	0.052	0.859

TABLE 3
THE PAIRED SAMPLES TEST

Pair	Mean	The Paired Differences				Df	T	Sig.
		Confidence Interval of the Differences 95%						
		The Std. Dev.	Mean Error of Std.	The Lower	The Upper			
Pre -Post	-5.929	3.075	0.822	-7.704	-4.153	13	7.214	0.00

A paired samples t-test was selected as an appropriate tool of analysis in order to determine if there were any variations in student performance from the tests. As a result, the tables show the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient at 0.052, the value of the t-test at -7.214, and the level of statistical significance sig. at $0.000 < 0.05$. This indicates that there is a slight variation between students' scores both before and after teaching the intervention. Additionally, there was evidence that teaching an intervention improves students' performance.

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, it was found that the T1 and T2 scores were weakly correlated ($r = 0.052$ and $p > 0.005$). Furthermore, there was a very slight difference between T1 and T2 scores ($t_{13} = -7.214$, $p > 0.005$). On average, the scores of the posttests were 3 points higher than the scores of the pretests (95% CI [-7.7041, -4.1531]). Due to the means of the two tests and the direction of the t-value, we can conclude that statistically there was very little improvement in student performance from 1.5000 ± 1.9115 points to 7.4286 ± 2.3111 .

Pretest and Posttest

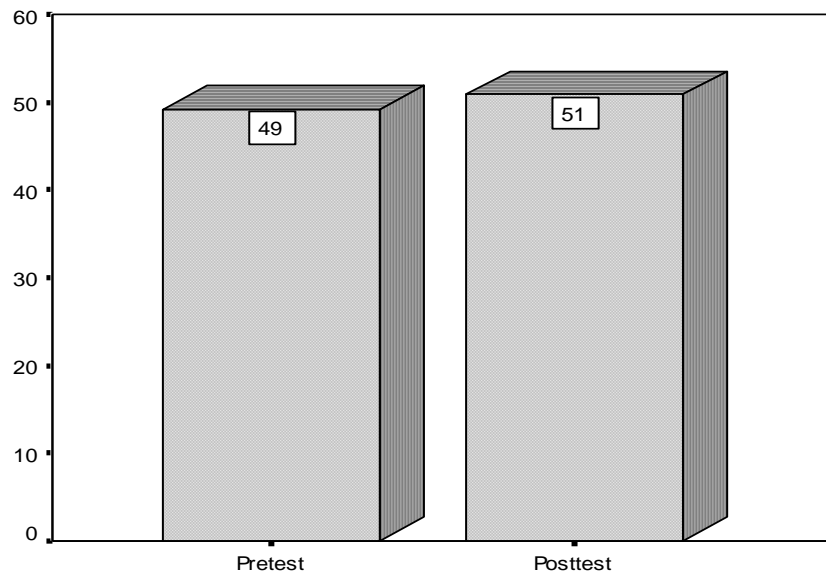


Figure 1. Pretests and Posttests Findings

B. Group 2 Analysis

TABLE 4
THE PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

Pair 1	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mode
Pretest	1.955	22	2.193	0
Posttest	10.273	22	2.225	8

TABLE 5
THE PAIRED SAMPLES CORRELATIONS

Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre -Post	22	0.453	0.034

TABLE 6
THE PAIRED SAMPLES TEST

Pair	Mean	The Paired Differences				Df	T	Sig.
		Confidence Interval of the Differences 95%						
		The Std. Dev.	Mean Error of Std.	The Lower	The Upper			
Pre -Post	-8.318	2.967	0.632	-9.633	-7.003	21	-13.153	0.00

A paired samples t-test was selected as an appropriate tool of analysis in order to determine if there were any variations in student performance from the tests. As a result, the tables show the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient at 0.453, the value of the t-test at -13.153, and the level of statistical significance sig. at $0.000 < 0.05$. This

indicates that there is a slight variation between students' scores both before and after teaching the intervention. Additionally, there was evidence that teaching an intervention improves students' performance.

As seen in Tables 4 and 5, it was found that the T1 and T2 scores were weakly correlated ($r = 0.453$ and $p < 0.005$), and there was a slight difference between the T1 and T2 scores ($t_{21} = -13.153$, $p < 0.005$). On average, the scores of the posttests were 9 points higher than the scores of the pretests (95% CI [-9.6333, -7.0030]). Due to the means of the two tests and the direction of the t -value, we can conclude that statistically there was very little improvement in student performance from 1.9545 ± 2.1926 points to 10.2727 ± 3.2246 .

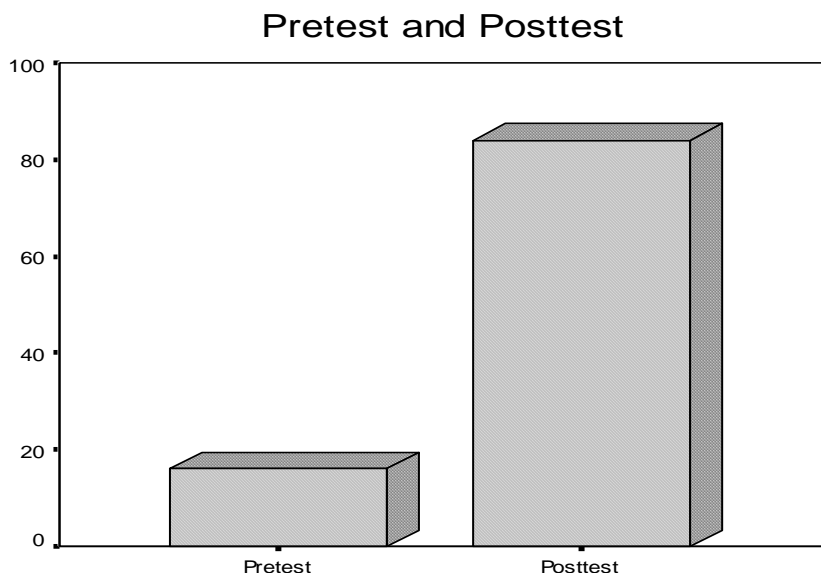


Figure 2. Pretests and Posttests Findings

C. Group 3 Analysis

TABLE 7
THE PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS

Pair 1	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mode
Pretest	4.867	15	3.889	6
Posttest	13.200	15	4.709	20

TABLE 8
THE PAIRED SAMPLES CORRELATIONS

Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre -Post	15	0.942	0.000

TABLE 9
THE PAIRED SAMPLES TEST

Pair	Mean	The Paired Differences				Df	T	Sig.
		Confidence Interval of the Differences 95%						
		The Std. Dev.	Mean Error of Std.	The Lower	The Upper			
Pre -Post	-8.333	1.676	0.433	-9.262	-7.405	15	-19.255	0.00

A paired samples t-test was selected as an appropriate tool of analysis in order to determine if there were any variations in student performance from the tests. As a result, the tables show the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient at 0.942, the value of the t-test at -19.255, and the level of statistical significance sig. at $0.000 < 0.05$. This indicated that there was a clear difference between students' scores before teaching the intervention and after teaching it. Moreover, there was strong evidence that teaching the intervention improved students' performance.

As seen in Tables 7 and 8, it was found that the T1 and T2 scores were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.942$ and $p < 0.005$) and there was a significant average difference between T1 and T2 scores ($t_{14} = -19.255$, $p < 0.005$). On average, the scores of the posttests were 9 points higher than the scores of the pretests (95% CI [-9.2616, -7.4051]). Due to the means of the two tests and the direction of the t -value, we can conclude that there was a statistically significant improvement in students' performance from 4.8667 ± 3.8889 points to 13.2000 ± 4.7086 .

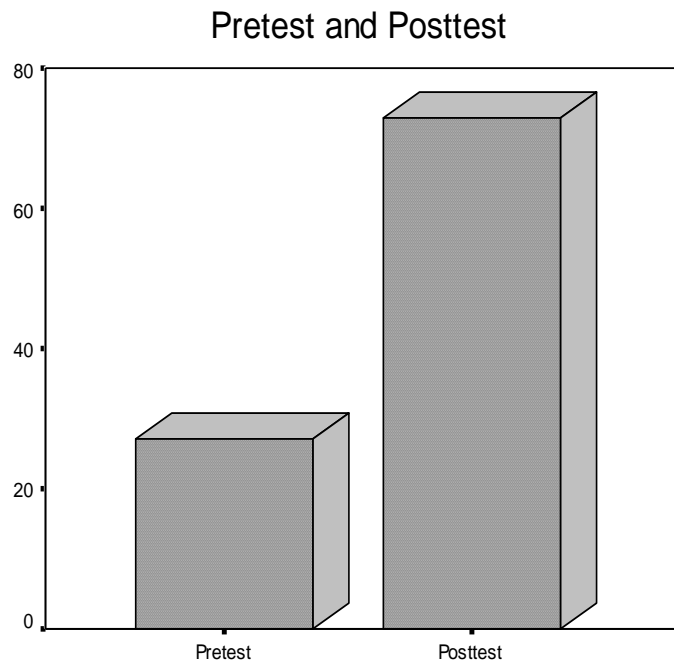


Figure 3. Pretests and Posttests Findings

V. FINDINGS

The findings of the study showed that there were positive effects of teaching *Q: Skills for Success* on students' English reading skills. Moreover, there were good merits in teaching from the *Q: Skills for Success* for students. Furthermore, the reading strategies found in *Q: Skills for Success* moderately improved students learning.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

It was recommended that periodical improvements were to be made to the placement test to regard the standards of students and their contexts. Also, teachers should exert efforts in teaching *Q: Skills for Success* to enhance reading skills.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Further studies should be conducted in the areas of language teaching skills and English instructors' awareness and proficiency concerning teaching these skills.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Oxford Placement Test seems to have a very slight, yet significant average difference of effect among the three groups of students. There were some positive effects on those students who made use of the strategies of learning reading. The studies of Yung (2014), Sari (2017), Eleman and Oslund and Ana (2020) coincided with the present study in the light of enhancing the strategies of reading to develop students' comprehension and enlarge the scope of vocabulary usage. Also, Farid et al. (2020) suggested four strategies to improve reading comprehension. Amini et al. (2022) added students' awareness enhanced learning reading. Although the test proved to be valid, improvements need to be made to deal with the real standards of students and context, Katwa and Sheik (2021). This was said to describe the *Q: Skills* Placement Test, but according to Wistner et al. (2009), the Oxford Placement test was valid and had acceptable reliability. Moreover, the Oxford Placement Test bulletin indicated that the test formed a validation perspective and was in line with the relevant CEFR profile. They also stated that the test was adaptive and was always subject to many modifications to match the real standards of the students and their contexts. Hence, the effectiveness of teaching is demanded to ensure the adequacy of knowledge gained by learners (Shivaraju, 2017). It is highly recommended that the teaching staff collaborate to teach effectively to improve student knowledge.

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